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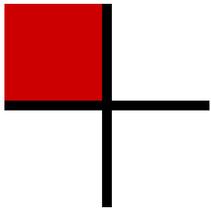
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Alternatively

Stephanie Schreven, Sverre Spoelstra and Peter Svensson

With their recent *The Dictionary of Alternatives*, Martin Parker, Valérie Fournier and Patrick Reedy (2007) attempt to show that “there are many alternatives to the way that many of us currently organize ourselves” (2007: ix). The dictionary, with entries such as ‘Atlantis’, ‘Robinson Crusoe’, ‘Ivan Illich’, and ‘Wikipedia’, seeks to remind us that there are many ways of organizing social life other than on the basis of and dictated by the kind of free market- or neoliberalism that reigns in large parts of the world. In other words, the dictionary attempts to delegitimize the notorious post-communist ‘There Is No Alternative’-logic of thinking,¹ nicely captured by Zygmunt Bauman:

‘our form of life’ has once and for all proved both its viability and its superiority over any other real or imaginable form, our mixture of individual freedom and consumer market has emerged as the necessary and sufficient, truly universal principle of social organization, there will be no more traumatic turns of history, indeed no history to speak of. For ‘our way of life’ the world has become a safe place. (...) From now on, there will be just more of the good things that are. (Bauman, 1991: 35)

Dismissed as obsolete and thus seemingly incommensurable with today’s prevailing or hegemonic ‘end of history logic’, alternatives nevertheless occupy a prominent place within it. As such, they have an appeal beyond the boundaries of critique or the position of marginality and their generation is not limited to only those who question or oppose neo-liberalism, contemporary capitalism or the status quo as such. For instance, by offering alternative paths to organizational success management gurus promise the kind of competitive edge that will bury the competition, usually keeping the belief in the superiority of the free market intact as well as keeping capitalism alive. As Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) show, these managerial innovative alternatives do change the form of contemporary capitalism (or at the very least the way capitalism is legitimized), perhaps more so than both defenders and opponents of TINA-thinking are willing to acknowledge.

We might also say that the production of alternatives lies at the heart of contemporary consumer capitalism. Only through the constant production of alternatives can capitalism realize the circulation of capital that is needed for its existence. The never-

1 The phrase ‘There Is No Alternative’ (also known as TINA) is usually attributed to Margaret Thatcher.

ending generation of alternatives is precisely that which drives the dynamic of the market. It is in this vein that propagators of free market economy establish the inferiority of what was long considered its main alternative, for example:

Shoppers in the former Soviet Union did not patronise retailers such as Moscow's GUM (State Department Store) because the 150 shops comprising Russia's largest department store offered the widest choices, highest quality and keenest prices. They did so because they had no alternative ... (Lewis and Bridger, 2000: 188)

Hence the logic behind the slogan 'There Is No Alternative' lies in the idea that the one feasible alternative left to us derives its supremacy over others precisely because of its superior capacity in generating alternatives *within its own system*. The viability of alternative social systems is, in other words, measured in terms of their capacity to create consumer choice. In this context the uneasy association of alterity with capitalism makes itself felt, namely because of the *conditions* under which its articulation and generation as such is presented: as a choice like so many others we make as consumers.

A certain caution towards an unwavering appreciation of the generation of alternatives is also well advised given the threat of commodification that permeates our (alternative) lives today. The business of alternatives seems to be very lucrative indeed, especially so in the culture and music industry where alternatives are anything but fixed. Their days are always numbered, and their alternative status, that is their status as an expression of our discontent with and disapproval of the status quo is ephemeral: alternative music, design, fashion, literature genres, political movements, philosophy, journals and magazines can easily be picked up by perceptive copywriters and brand managers, and drawn back into the circulation of consumer goods.

Academia should also be approached with a certain caution, for the practice of marginal writing, as discussed in the editorials of 7.2 and 7.4., at times coincides with the incessant search for alternatives. Writing from the margin can become a useful tool for the production of alternative research contributions, incarnated as 'the new' or 'the latest', qualifications so crucial, or so we have been taught, to constructing our academic careers. However, not only is the ephemeral alternative always on the verge of becoming the established, but given that mass academia always lurks behind the scenes, ready to get its hands on the brand-new alternative, alternative publications, as fuel for the academic publishing industry, also very easily turn into commodities.

In the social sciences we have already witnessed the growth and establishment of the enormous Foucault industry, and today figures such as Deleuze, Laclau and, recently Žižek are dangerously close to joining the rows of mass marketed and mass consumed alternative thinkers. The question is what this mass distribution and mass exploitation of for instance Žižek does to the alternative status of alternative organization studies. When do Žižek-references become mainstream and common sense in organization studies? When do they lose their alternative quality, and thus their critical edge: the potential for the break or difference they represent to actually make a difference. For, lest we forget, that is what is at stake here, not the pursuit of alternatives as an end in itself.

But now we have come full circle, and ended up where we started. While as a warning, the threat of commodification is real and as such should gear us up for action, in convincingly picturing it, we might end up feeling helpless and trapped instead. Consumer capitalism has become this terrifying machine in the face of which, as Frederic Jameson (2000: 192) points out about this kind of ‘winner loses’ predicament, “the impulses of revolt and social transformation are increasingly perceived as vain and trivial”, such that no one seriously considers alternatives to capitalism any longer. Thus, to make out commodification as this totalizing force is a process of abstraction that is not only politically paralyzing, but can even be construed as conformist, like any belief in ‘this is how things are’, like TINA.

One of the main tasks that critique has (to) set for itself is to counter political paralysis of any kind, construed by the right *and* left, by pointing at the false logic behind it, indeed, by means of the formulation and practice of alternative logics.

Before we discuss the contributions to this issue, which all deal with the problematic of alternatives in different ways, we will use this editorial to reflect briefly upon the concept of the alternative itself. We distinguish realistic alternatives from unrealistic alternatives.

Realistic Alternatives

In their most general sense, alternatives embody ‘that which is other’. They offer a way out of a present situation and open the door to and a way into another one, a promising as well as an alarming or unsettling thought. Insofar as we accept that the alternative is the outcome of a belief in that things can be otherwise, the shift of perspective – theoretical or ideological, if the distinction is meaningful at all – might be an important part of alteration (the act of producing alternatives). To see something alternatively entails seeing it from another or the other’s point of view.

The production of truth and common sense then becomes one of many attempts to pacify alternatives, to render them naïve, utopian or decoupled from reality (i.e. psychotic representations). Education, propaganda and news broadcasts (the distinctions are not always clear-cut here) are double-edged swords in this regard. These apparatuses, call them ideological if you like, have the potency to produce and distribute unquestionable Truths as well as questioning alternatives. Whether or not both of these potencies are realized is indeed open for discussion. In any event, the shift of perspective involved in the search for alternatives is more than anything else a certain break, a more or less stark one, with that which exists, with the truth that gives itself to us without questions asked.

One of the best-known versions of shifts of perspective is the *negation*. Arguably, negating the present, the current and common sense is the most violent (in the non-pejorative sense of the term) form of alternative. It entails the 180-degree-turn that enables the alternative to present itself in the sublation (the *Aufhebung*, the synthesis, the overcoming of contradiction). In the negation it becomes apparent that the alternative is within reach in the dialectically induced counter-position, which is also

the case for less violent alternatives. It is in this context of dialectical reversals that we can perhaps (still) appreciate Marx's comment when he wrote that

You can hardly say that I value the present time too highly; and yet if I nevertheless do not despair, it is only because of the desperate situation of this time, which fills me with hope. (Cited in Levin, 2004: 419)

Thus, as the negation the alternative is something more than just 'something other' or 'something different'. As the negation, the alternative needs to have something in common with that to which it claims to be an alternative: the problem to which it presents a solution. At the very least dialectical reversals need to share the language of the problem that is at stake. Thus placing the search for alternatives to free market liberalism in the context of the dialectic implies that free market liberalism is the wrong solution to the right problem, and other or better solutions can be generated from this tension.

Drawing on Deleuze (e.g. Deleuze, 1994) we might say that alternatives thus understood, as negation, resemble the actualized. They appear to be realizable precisely because they accept the problem or structure that underlies the actual state of affairs. Following this idea, we might question whether utopias are to be considered as alternatives exactly because of their utopian character: they are simply not realistic in terms of being within reach for any utopia is by definition and in its very structure the not-yet, and as such cannot testify to its realizability, except retrospectively. Nor are escapist or romantic fantasies easily understood as alternatives, not because they are not realizable but because they do not offer a different solution to an existing problem; they evade the problem itself, turning their backs on rather than facing it.

Given the status (quo) of the realized, that is, considering that the realized is never just that, and needs qualification for instance in terms of the limitations that constitute it and that bring it into relief as the realized, the question is whether alternatives should be assessed, appreciated and accepted (as realizable) on the basis of that which already exists. To do so is to engage and work within the limitations that constitute it, which places in question the kind of shift of perspective involved and the kind of change associated with their realization as *truly* different, giving us more of the same instead, if that is a concern at all. It is in this context, of rejecting working with(in) that which exists, that Žižek's otherwise unrealistic characterization of alternatives for an oppositional politics can be placed, namely for us to 'demand the impossible given that we are realistic' (*Soyons realistes, demandons l'impossible!*). This leads us to a second way of understanding an alternative. One that we think is more in line with *ephemera*.

Unrealistic Alternatives

So far we have stressed that the formulation of alternatives tends to be based upon the structure of the actualized, which is how alternatives appear as realistic. However, the formulation of an alternative might also obtain its realism from the very fact of being called 'an alternative'. In other words, the formulation of alternatives has a rhetorical

effect: if we present something as an alternative we suggest that it is realistic or realizable, which might or might not be the case.

It is in this sense that those who argue that the pursuit of alternatives equals the loss of a grip on reality, typically associated with the kind of youthful idealism that supposedly informs it (*'Looking for alternatives? Get real!' And: 'Grow up!'*), cannot simply be put into the category of the victims of the neoliberal logic of the end of history. They have a point: many of the alternatives that are brought forward *are* unrealistic.

Furthermore and rhetorically speaking, insofar as an alternative has to compel belief as an alternative so as to create an invitation to entertain the (im)possible that it represents vis-à-vis a public that needs convincing, alternatives have to seduce, not provoke, to use Baudrillard's distinction. An encounter with a provocation, "blackmail by identity" as Baudrillard refers to it (quoted in hooks 2000: 344), calls on you to shed any nuance in response as well, and stages your point of view as well-entrenched, which prevents you from opening up to the possible that alternatives embody. Seduction on the other hand, according to Baudrillard, allows "things to come into play and appear in secret, dual and ambiguous" (*ibid.*: 344) and creates a certain suspension of your point of view, the condition for alternatives to register and to be considered as such. To step into this space is to inhabit estrangement, to be unsettled, to leave behind dogma, ideology, the status quo and to embrace (unknown) otherness, the challenge alternatives pose.

Alternatives understood in this way do not function as different solutions but as different problems; not as alternative answers to the same questions but as alternative questions opening up for new answers. Whereas any alternative solution keeps the problem which it solves intact, an alternative problem breaks with and delegitimizes the existing solution. It divides, twists and thoroughly subverts established Truths as well as breaking the ground for new ways of thinking. As such, the moment of alteration transforms the horizon of the given by way of giving us new questions to ask. It is also in this sense that utopias and escape fantasies can be understood as alternatives insofar as they disrupt the existing problem. This is also what Parker, Fournier and Reedy point at when they approvingly cite Levitas (2004: 39, cited in Parker *et al.*, 2007: xi): "what is important about utopias is less what is imagined than the act of imagination itself, a process that disrupts the closure of the present".

And, what if, in the spirit of the revolutionary imagination we disrupt 'the closure of the present', not by imagining a different future, but by imagining a different past? Or rather, in terms of creating alternative problems, what if we imagine the past to be different, not as bygone, the longing for which can only be construed as sentimental, but as a lever for social change? As Crystal Bartolovich (2006) has suggested recently, drawing on Walter Benjamin, what if we imagine "revolution as radical nostalgia, the desire not for the 'lost' past as such, but for a world that might have been" and understand it as "a site of suppressed possibilities", that can be realized today for the future if we were to exercise our "weak messianic power" (Bartolovich, 2006: 65). It is also in this context, of redemption, that Zizek's most recent provocative, *or* seductive suggestion to reconsider, and 'defend', the 'lost causes', of for instance Stalin, Mao and Heidegger can possibly be placed.

To think of alternatives in this way offers a breath of fresh air that allows us to see things differently. They are not about different ways of organizing ourselves – they make us think and see organization in ways we had not before. Alternative problems create the conditions on the basis of which new forms can emerge without spelling out exactly what form the new could take. Of course, this is easier said than done: finding alternative problems is more arduous than finding alternative solutions to received problems. The problem provides the language needed for its solution, and solutions cannot transcend, at least not profoundly, the language of its problem. An alternative problem, on the other hand, is compelled to use another (indeed an alternative) language, perhaps even neologisms, in order to pose something hitherto unheard of.

Contributions to this issue

This issue of *ephemera* started off as an open issue, not as a thematic issue on alternatives. Still, we believe that each of the contributions deal with the problem of alternatives in their own way.

The issue opens with Adrian Mackenzie's article on productivity systems that are put forward in the self-improvement literature. He focuses especially upon David Allen's *Getting Things Done* (GTD), a book that proposes to break work *and* personal life – the distinction becomes trivial – down to a long list of projects which are further subdivided in 'next action'-lists. Mackenzie offers a critical, but also engaging reading of *Getting Things Done* and the large community of 'GTDers' it has given rise to. He argues that GTD offers an alternative way of dealing with uncertainty and change, one that attempts to come into grasps with the multiple. It also has its prize: thinking and the generation of ideas are in danger of being overshadowed the highly individualized production and execution of minute action-tasks.

In the second article of this issue, Simon Lilley addresses the problems that charity work encounters in times in which philanthropy is pressured to take the form of business. Through a case study of the charity organization 'Heritage' and a reading of Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain*, Lilley explores how charity organizations deal with the complexity brought by a hybrid and ultimately incommensurable logic of philanthropy and business. In the end, business and commerce are not capable to provide an alternative form of organization to the practice of philanthropy as an end in itself.

The issue continues with a note written by Matteo Mandarini on the Italian political thinker Mario Tronti, in particular his text *Politica e destino*, which deals with the relation between politics and fate. This is a relation that goes to the heart of 'the alternative'. Or as Mandarini put is: "How does one flee fate and – at the same time – bring the kingdom of the world to collapse?"

Insofar as the proliferation of alternative organizational forms and the associated plurality of struggles is concerned, their presence testifies to a belief in the limitations of socialism, and by implication Marxism as the only alternative to bringing about (a certain kind of) social change. Jason Del Gandio's note discusses the emphasis on

alternatives from this point of view. In addition, Del Gandio engages with alternatives from a rhetorical point of view, and asks us to consider how alternatives can best be communicated so as to realize the potential for and promise of change they embody. His suggestions put in play our qualifications of the different rhetorical registers in which the language of alternatives can be pitched, for instance as (un)realistic, provocative or seductive.

Alex Callinicos' book *The Resources of Critique* is reviewed by Michael Rowlinson. In this book Callinicos offers a critical reading of grand intellectual figures, indeed alternative names in some camps of organization and management studies, such as Jürgen Habermas, Jacques Bidet, Luc Boltanski, Eve Chiapello, Pierre Bourdieu, Alain Badiou, Slavoj Žižek, and Antonio Negri. In relation to Callinicos book, Rowlinson raises crucial questions concerning the alternative potency of critical management studies (CMS). Can CMS possibly provide a critical discourse within the walls of business schools? Can CMS remain political as it is being increasingly institutionalised as a research field and adopted in the curricula of business schools?

De Angelis' *The Beginning of History: Value Struggles and Global Capital* is reviewed by Peter Fleming. De Angelis suggests that the main concern for us today is not the end of history as delineated by Fukuyama, but rather the beginning of an alternative web of social exchange. The alternative way, the other way, is here conceptualised as *the outside*, already residing within the everyday struggles to go beyond the logic of market forces, and a paramount question, Fleming holds, becomes that of: "how is such an outside possible when the enemy is capable of such extraordinary feats of suppleness, when capital can even package and sell its own critique?". The boundaries between inside and outside, between *the way* and the alternative way, are anything but stable.

In his review of an edited volume that discusses the thought of Antonio Negri, Erik Empson engages, among other things, with the challenges in suggesting alternatives to received wisdom, as embedded in theory as well as practice, in this case Negri's dedicated attempt to renew the revolutionary spirit and imagination. He for one is appreciative and convinced of Negri's alternative oppositional politics and tries to convince us of their potential as well.

This issue concludes with a double review of the earlier mentioned *The Dictionary of Alternatives* (Parker *et al.*, 2007). The dictionary offers a rich list of alternatives to pursue, different paths to opt for in our search for the other and the better. The first review, written by Daniel King, focuses on the role that the book could play in the community of critical management-scholars. King sees the dictionary as both experimenting with what we have labelled 'realistic alternatives' and 'unrealistic alternatives'. The second review is written by Alan W. Moore and brings to the fore the utopian aspect of alternatives. The dictionary presents, writes Moore, "an inventory of the utopian abjects".

In Conclusion

Holding on to alternatives, i.e. always being on the look-out for the other, and by implication another, is rooted in hope and faith. When the hope for something else and better perishes, the alternative dies with it. Far from being (merely) the position of the assumed naïve and energetic teenager engaged in the adolescent's revolution and emancipation from the parent generation, the search and production of alternative questions and problems is the stance of the believer. However, belief is necessarily accompanied by doubt. Without doubt belief turns into conviction and blindness. Conversely, without belief doubts very easily develop into cynicism and dejection. The alternative thinker, writer, speaker and practitioner is one who is full of faith but far from faithful.

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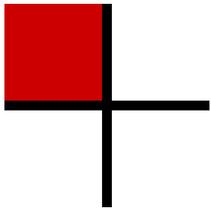
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The Affect of Efficiency: Personal Productivity Equipment Encounters the Multiple

Adrian Mackenzie

abstract

Many contemporary efforts to design and improve thinking target invention, creativity, and innovation. Others target productivity. The paper treats a well known personal productivity system 'Getting Things Done' as a technique of ideation or acquiring ideas. This personal improvement system has become popular across corporate, institutional and private domains. Personal productivity techniques marry quite prosaic techniques of managing email inboxes or filing systems with anxious concerns about the difficulty of finding ways of generating ideas or 'intuitions'. They promise a heightened capacity to think. While sceptical of claims of heightened thinking, the paper argues that 'Getting Things Done' can be seen as a form of 'modern equipment' (Rabinow, 2006) that practically re-thinks the relation between ideas and events as a problematic encounter with the multiple.

Many of the forms, techniques, practices and values of contemporary capitalism are concerned with increasing productivity through thinking more, better or faster. Cognitive capitalism (Corsani *et al.*, 2001) develops socio-technologico-corporeal-affective processes that tune, focus, refine and distribute thinking in the name of productivity, innovation and creativity (Osborne, 2003). Sometimes this means intensified cognitive work for individuals (programmers, designers, scientists, etc). Usually, it also entails re-allocation of memory, perception, or calculation to information, media and communication systems. Surprisingly little sociological or anthropological work investigates how mental effort or ideation (which I understand in a general sense here) actually occurs today for individuals. In contrast to psychological literature, "[w]hat is missing in the current [anthropological] literature," the anthropologist Linda Hogle recently wrote, "is a more nuanced view of self-improvement activities as they relate to varying models of productivity, work, and life management in different societies" (Hogle, 2005: 709).

The 'international bestseller' *Getting Things Done: How to Achieve Stress-free Productivity* (Allen, 2001) has much to say about thinking and ideas in the context of work, life, productivity, creativity and self-improvement. The personal productivity literature advocates methods of working that fill gaps between the worlds of enterprise, government, education and everyday life. As if these gaps were not forcefully collapsed

by demands for total commitment to work, personal productivity systems further enmesh work and life. *Getting Things Done: the Art of Stress-Free Productivity* (or ‘GTD’) (Allen, 2001) and *Ready for Anything: 52 Productivity Principles for Work and Life* (Allen, 2003) have become enormously popular over the last five years amongst people working in firms, universities, government, mass and new media. Several dozen articles in the last three years in UK newspapers alone review or discuss the transformative power of GTD. Many people who would not normally read project management or managerial literature, or heed self-improvement gurus, have taken up the book and become ‘GTDers’. GTD attributes to thinking, or at least certain kinds of thinking, the capacity to engender productivity. The book (and others like it such as Buzan and Buzan, 1994; De Bono, 1992) revolves around the possibility of feeling good about thinking under contemporary work conditions:

It’s possible for a person to have an overwhelming number of things to do and still function productively with a clear head and a positive sense of relaxed control. That’s a great way to live and work, at elevated levels of effectiveness and efficiency. (Allen, 2001: 3)

The “great way to live and work” promised in the personal productivity media (books, websites, seminars, software, videos, supplemented by television, newspaper and radio attention) depends on both an intense centring of thought as mental work, and a distribution of thought across a spectrum of inscription systems. As we will see, it relies on practices that isolate certain high-value thought processes by setting in place infrastructures and processes that absorb the weight of everyday events. It attributes high value to thinking, particularly to the kind of thinking that can be organised into hierarchical sets of projects and actions. The methods, techniques and prosthetics supplied in this literature do not work for everyone. As we will see, the techniques have most purchase in the lives of people whose path through cognitive capitalism already winds through information systems and network-organised structures.

I will argue that personal productivity literature and its ‘how-to-relax-and-control-your-life’ techniques are a response-in-denial to the competitive pressures of the informational economy. It promises somewhat a delusional and probably short-lived self-satisfaction to individuals keen to keep abreast of the waves created by their own careers and their own enthusiasm for more communication and more speed. Therefore, much of this paper can be read as a critique of GTD, and particularly of its rather stultified ‘Image of Thought’ (to borrow Gilles Deleuze’s term). I would suggest, however, that something more is at stake in developments such as GTD. The personal productivity self-improvement literature and its audiences inhabit situations in which inconsistent yet powerful forces intersect. Personal productivity systems, with their intense valuation of thinking and ideation, are generative of something: they are forms of equipment developed to connect events and thinking, to better cope with uncertainty and rapid changes in circumstances. At core, they are practical *encounters with the multiple*. A critical study of a productivity system could explore ambivalences and uncertainties around the value of thinking in the context of information systems and mobile work. Personal productivity systems might provoke thought about the contemporary conditions of thinking, not least because many academics, myself included, take a keen practical interest in them in their own attempts to think more, think less, think better or think differently. In presenting versions of this paper to academic audiences, and in many discussions about GTD, I have frequently seen very

ambivalent reactions, reactions that combine distrust and scepticism with interest and the hope that GTD might solve problems of too much to do, and too little time. The discussion that follows takes the risk of beginning to ‘ontologise’ this ambivalence. It argues, in a fairly preliminary way, that GTD forms part of a developing sensibility concerning thinking and things. In making this argument, I draw (fairly lightly) on both Deleuze’s critique of the dominant ‘Image of Thought’ (Deleuze, 2001) and his affirmative account of the sub-representative forces and processes that comprise the essentially obscure life of Ideas. In this respect, the paper responds to a key question posed by Paul Rabinow. GTD is an example of the ‘modern equipment’ described in (Rabinow, 2003). Much of GTD fits with the equipment as defined by Rabinow: “a taught, learned, repeated and assimilated logos” that can become “the spontaneous form of the acting subject” (*ibid.*: 10-11). Rabinow asks “how it might be possible to transfigure elements of the equipment of modern method into a form of modern meditation” (*ibid.*: 12), a form of self-constituting exercise that connects “thought to ethos” (*ibid.*: 9). Attempting to ‘transfigure’ GTD, could we see the popularity of personal productivity system as a contemporary symptom of vexation about thinking and ideas, as an event in thought (Foucault *et al.*, 2005: 22), and, tentatively, as a practical answer to the question, what is an idea today? In attempting this exploration, an analysis of GTD might heed a suggestion made by Rabinow, who, with Michel Foucault in mind, suggests how concrete situations can be taken up:

There is a lineage of major work in the twentieth-century human sciences that has succeeded in bringing philosophical learning, diagnostic rigor, and a practice of inquiry that operates in proximity to concrete situations into productive relationship. Such inquiry proceeds through mediated experience. (Rabinow, 2003: 3)

Without going very far a field, a mediated experience of personal productivity systems is open to academic researchers who function as typical knowledge or information workers in some ways. My hope is that it might be possible to ‘operate in proximity’ to the concrete techniques of self-management, motivation and ideation to develop a philosophically productive account of contemporary practices of thinking. Such an account would take into account both the material-corporeal conditions of thinking and personhood, and the historical situation of thinking as material practice in knowledge or information-based cultures.

Where is Thought Today? Inside or Outside?

The personal productivity literature addresses people who work and live in the extensive service sectors of the informational economy. Books by Bossidy (2002), and Allen (2001) and a host of variants (Ackermann *et al.*, 2005; Allen, 2003; Andrews, 2005; Covey, 1990; Fletcher, 2005) are mainly concerned to show readers how to work with information flows and other people in order to generate ideas and knowledge. The desire to produce knowledge increasingly guides policies, practices and technologies of economic and sovereign power (Mumaw and Oldfield, 2006; Noir and Croisile, 2005; Sammons, 2004; Tsoukas, 2005; Tsoukas and Shepherd, 2004; Turner, 2001a; Turner, 2001b), including academic life (Strathern, 2004). It is not surprising that the informational economy should take a particular interest in cognition and in particular in the process or labour of thinking. Informational or knowledge economies demand

practical answers to the question of why thinking is hard and why ideas are difficult to acquire.

In one way or another, all of persona productivity literature acknowledges that thinking is a contested, seemingly intangible and irregular activity. It hardly ever happens. While the elusiveness of thought has long obsessed philosophical search for foundational truths, contemporary notions of problem-solving, applied intelligence, effective thinking, experiment, creativity, intuition and invention have different motivations. They stem from the difficulties in producing high-value knowledge. At the core of these practices, lie uncertainties, sometimes half-unsaid and sometimes highly elaborated, about where thinking takes place, how to do it reliably, and especially how to value it.¹ Not far in the background, intellectual property rights pivot on making thinking legible or tangible, rather than truthful. The production of economic value relies in some way on intellectual effort or thinking. As Strathern (1999) suggests, Euro-American cultures increasingly allocate value in terms of mental effort or invention. Until an owner documents thinking as invention, algorithm or expression, property claims cannot stabilize.

David Allen's *Getting Things Done* (2001) represents one symptomatic attempt at resolution of the uncertainties about whether thinking is something that takes place inside the head, between people, in things, whether it is personal or impersonal, cognitive or non-cognitive. GTD ostensibly works at an individual scale to give a sense of inner mental space, but it implicitly has external, institutional and collective dimensions. It very much tends to individualise thought rather than render it, say, dialogical. At the same time, it strives to enmesh ideation (the process of having ideas) with feelings of efficiency and living well. When David Allen speaks of GTD as a 'great way to live' (Allen, 2001: 3), he promises a feeling of attunement attained through a more or less reproducible technology (lists, reminders, flow charts and other mnemonic systems).

Described schematically, GTD provides a 'great way to live' by granularising work and personal life into a set of projects. Each project embodies an encounter or relation to the

1 If capitalism has developed new divisions of labour around thinking over the last thirty years, this transformation in thinking needs to deliver self-evident reasons and ways of acting to those whose commitment the expansion of networked capitalism needs. It needs to legitimate acts, encourage individual development, and allow people to project themselves into a re-structured future. The personal productivity literature sets out to make thinking in business, organizational and everyday life situations more productive. It shows little concern for the content of thought, let alone a relation to truth or any value traditionally associated with thought. Boundaries between general and strategic, creative and deductive, entrepreneurial, logistic or modelling thinking sometimes blur. In itself, personal productivity is not a specialist or technical practice. There are many specialist books and indeed whole professional sub-disciplines dealing with technical thinking in design, modelling or management. Hundreds of popular how-to-think books have been published in the last few decades (see for example De Bono, 1968; 1985; 1991; 2000). Contemporary trends in cognitive makeover literature include quite technically onerous contemporary 'mind hack' books such as Hale-Evans (2006: 245) and relentlessly aerobic 'mind gym' books among which Mack and Casstevens (2001) *Mind Gym: An Athlete's Guide to Inner Excellence*, as well as books that seek to shift self-conception by revealing hitherto unknown wellsprings of thought. In addition, there are also books dedicated to thinking *less* such as exemplified by Nolen-Hoeksema (2003) *Women Who Think too Much: How to Break Free of Our Thinking and Reclaim Your Life*.

world that has a multiple character. GTD projects cut across every aspect of work and life and they re-constitute any situation as a set of actions. The GTDer externalizes many markers of these steps on paper or electronic lists, and follows rules for organising these lists. In its temporal and spatial organization, GTD seeks to provide a master filter or clear and distinct expression for all events, wherever they occur in the world or in thought. This filter relies on an algorithmic decision tree that determines the 'next action step' for any event. Finally, GTD solicits a somewhat manic commitment to total and constantly renewed review of how the system is implemented. Importantly, all the methods, techniques and tricks marshalled by GTD are aimed at clearing space for thinking to take-off. GTD tries to allow thinking to 'take flight' (metaphors of runways, flights, and flight-levels occur throughout Allen's writing), without specifying exactly what will occur in this mental airspace. So, while GTD is firmly committed to a mentalist image of thought, it practically points in a different direction: thinking relies on reorganising the world so that it does not intrude too much.

Who Thinks: Suits or Geeks?

Who becomes a GTDer? Practically, GTD requires individuals to develop a 'personal infrastructure' for processing contingencies. This infrastructure replicates at an individual level the organizational strategies of project management techniques several decades earlier. Management proper, according to Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello (2005), dates from the early twentieth century. As operational control of large firms shifted from owners to salaried administrators, management began to develop as a profession with its own rules, educational pathways and literature.² The late 1980s productivity literature concentrated on motivating managers. Books such as the million-selling *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (Covey, 1990) and its successors (e.g. Covey, 1997; 2005) focused on vision, leadership, and management of self and others through exhortation such as 'Be Proactive', 'Think Win/Win' or 'Synergize'. At that time, corporate re-structuring and 'horizontalization' were rife. In criticising egoistic corporate individualism of the 1980s, the early 1990s productivity books called for new kinds of thinking:

We need a new level, a deeper level of thinking – a paradigm based on the principles that accurately describe the territory of effective human being and interacting – to solve these deep concerns. This new level of thinking is what *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* is about. It's a principle-centred, character-based, "inside-out" approach to personal and interpersonal effectiveness. (Covey, 1990: 43)

The new deeper level of thinking posits ethical principles coupled with practice as the foundation of non-egoistic leadership. Ten years later, effective people seem more pragmatic. The fiery critique of egoistic interests has died down. Practical hands-on work, at least in GTD, replaces principles as the foundation.³

2 See Chandler and Hikino (1994) for a more extensive review of the literature on this dating.

3 In post-1990s organizational ethos, lack of hierarchical control feels good because it fosters creativity and invention. Supposedly vision rather than hierarchy leads business. Enterprises value intuition, snap judgments, holism, and certain forms of non-specialist and pre-conscious intelligence. Although the productivity literature often presents these forms of intelligence as innate or natural, people need

Getting Things Done dates from the late 1990s and contrasts with personal productivity literature of ten years earlier in several ways. It moves beyond the management cadres. The book heavily foregrounds conventional ‘great men’ such as executives, generals, chiefs-of-staff and judges, and it urges change on its readers through their example. However, judging by its sales and the online popularity, ‘little people’ read Allen’s book. It now addresses large groups of people in business, media, government, or education who encounter and inhabit the fluidities and contingencies of networked capitalism. GTD tries to take short attention spans, the limits of human intelligence and the multiple information streams and fast temporalities of networked life into account. It stresses the need to alter one’s immediate ‘outer environment’ to afford mobility within an ‘inner environment’ where thinking is thought to occur. The outer environment encompasses notebooks, diaries, software (email clients, schedulers and calendars), communication and computing devices (mobile phones and PDAs), desks, and filing cabinets. In a properly designed environment, a knowledge worker can move and acquire ideas more readily. As Allen writes:

Having a total and seamless system of organization in place gives you tremendous power because it allows your mind to let go of lower-level thinking and graduate to intuitive focusing, undistracted by matters that haven’t been dealt with appropriately. But your physical organization system must be better than your mental one in order for that to happen. (Allen, 2001: 138)

Intuitions represent the highest level of ideation or thinking in GTD. The thinking organism pushes lower-level, organizational thinking away through the off-loading or outsourcing techniques and methods that comprise GTD.

The system does not, it hardly needs saying, claim to apply to work focused on caring for other people’s needs, such as washing patients in a hospital, serving in a shop or counselling. However, it has definitely moved well beyond its original audience in North American corporations, government and military. The migration of GTD from suited management to T-shirted knowledge workers in Europe, South-east Asia and the Americas began with programmers and new media designers. In late 2004, on the highly popular blog *boingboing.net*, Cory Doctorow (2004) publicised this transfer:

Merlin Mann’s 43 Folders weblog is a site where he has been chronicling his efforts to adapt the lessons of the stupendous productivity book *Getting Things Done* (I’ve bought and given away 10 copies since reading it earlier this year) to a technological workflow: in other words, he’s porting suit productivity to geek lifestyle.

Like any productivity literature, GTD describes and inscribes transformations in practices and values of work. It seeks to inform individuals of the latest developments in organising their own lives and information, and to create a feeling or affect of

coaching to activate them. The literature describes at great length solutions, work-arounds, and escape routes for the bad habits created by previous inflexible management methods. Knowledge workers in networked settings, even senior managers, still need control. New control methods need to be invented to replace older rigid ones. External control is outmoded because it reeks of vertical hierarchies and bureaucratic organization. As Boltanski and Chiapello (2005: 80) write, “the only solution is for people to control themselves [sic]”. By making external constraints internal, people control themselves. This affords great advantages and cost-savings in many different work settings. Personal productivity systems play a central role in this self-control.

efficiency. However, adapted to ‘a technological workflow’, or ‘ported’ to ‘geek lifestyles’, GTD has other resonances. It fits in a general way with the valorisation of tagging and lists that has mesmerized network economies in recent years (for instance, in the naming and promotion of Web 2.0).

As the promises of ‘a great way to live’ and ‘intuitive focusing’ suggest, personal productivity literature today cannot afford to focus on productivity alone. Otherwise, it will fail to engage people who realize, with some ambivalence, that they might not directly benefit from any increase in organizational productivity and efficiency. It must offer some other justification for productivity. It needs to give individuals ideas and arguments to counter the objections and resistances that may arise from within themselves or from others when they implement practices that in the main benefit organizations.⁴ In the value it attributes to thinking, GTD delivers an ethico-political injunction, stating what should be the case, not what is the case. For instance, Allen (2001: xiii) writes:

The power, simplicity, and effectiveness of what I'm talking about in *Getting Things Done* are best experienced as experiences, in real time, with real situations in your real world.

The literature must make productivity or efficiency desirable, exciting, valuable or commendable. Personal aspiration or the common good offer some help here (as they do in older motivational literature). References to lyrical and ancient sources of wisdom such as Buddhism abound. Quotes from Buddhism or Sun Tzu's *Art of War* vie with maxims from Leonardo da Vinci, Albert Einstein and Ralph Waldo Emerson (e.g. “the ancestor of every action is a thought”, quoted in Allen, 2003: 67). Quasi-scientific appeals to neurology and psychology also occur. For instance, Allen appeals to an article on the ‘reticular activating system’ from the May 1957 issue of *Scientific American* to provide some very rough neurophysiological footing for arguments about outcome focusing (Allen, 2001: 68).

Importantly, GTD offers a way for individuals to differentiate themselves. GTDers do more than their friends, partners and colleagues. Enhanced efficiency only matters if some other people appear to be less mobile. If everyone became just as productive or creative, then the value of productivity would collapse. In the many responses and comments on GTD that circulate around different groups of people on the web today, gains in personal productivity always remain greater than those of other people. But this is a zero-sum game: personal productivity only matters while the situations we inhabit

4 In the practical effort it puts into thinking as acquisition of ideas, GTD re-activates an older sense of the word ‘ideology’. For the late eighteenth century French philosopher Destutt de Tracy, ideology referred to a science of the acquisition of ideas. As Georges Canguilhem (1988: 29) writes of De Stutt: “[t]he *ideologues*, as their followers were called, proposed treating ideas as natural phenomena determined by the relation between man, a living, sensitive organism, and his natural environment.” Practically, the older sense of the word applies to contemporary personal productivity techniques. However, we know ideology has another sense. Ideology came in the nineteenth century to mean ‘any system of ideas resulting from a situation in which men were prevented from understanding their true relation to reality’. Ideologies prevent certain things from being thought. As well as acquiring ideas, personal productivity systems divert understanding from its environment in some ways.

have structural differences or gaps in them. It flattens competitive advantages, even in the productivity of thinking.

Project-thinking

Regardless of who takes it up, GTD invokes a quasi-universal image of thought as highest good. Personal productivity offers individuals a different mobility or speed of thought. In particular, it promises the individual that henceforth he or she can move more freely amongst ideas than others. It presupposes the high value of mental space. As Boltanski and Chiapello (2005: 361) write,

in fact, in a connexionist world, mobility – the ability to move around autonomously not only in geographical space, but also between people, or in mental space, *between ideas* – is an essential quality of great men, such that the little people are characterized principally by their fixity (their inflexibility).

However, in GTD, all mental and non-mental space is gridded by projects. Within its tight framing of events as projects, GTD organises movement through project space in two dimensions. It has two “behaviour sets”, namely “vertical” and “horizontal” focus (Allen, 2001: 20-21). It mostly foregrounds ‘horizontal focus’. Horizontal focus ranges across projects, and seeks to keep many things in view. ‘Vertical focus’, although ostensibly vital to thinking, creativity and idea acquisition, gets much less attention in the book and in discussion of GTD. In *Getting Things Done*, a single chapter entitled ‘Getting Projects Underway: The Five Phases of Project Planning’ covers vertical focus. The follow-up volume *Ready for Anything* gives scattered tips and maxims for thinking vertically. Of 6.5 million references to GTD supplied by google.com (on 05-06-2006) only 250 (0.4%) refer to ‘vertical focus’. The GTD description of how to think vertically sounds familiar and somewhat generic. It describes the need to be clear about purposes, to achieve explicit outcomes, and counsels the use of brainstorming and organizing ideas. It loosely combines the literature of brainstorming (Clark, 1958), mind-mapping (Buzan and Buzan, 1994), lateral thinking (De Bono, 1967; De Bono, 1971) and a few fragments of neurophysiology and cognitive science. Somewhat surprisingly amidst all the techniques, algorithms, rules and systems of GTD, ‘vertical-focus’ thinking itself figures as something ‘natural’:

The good news is, there *is* a productive way to think about projects, situations, and topics that creates maximum value with minimal expenditure of time and effort. It happens to be the way we *naturally* plan when we consciously try to get a project under control. (Allen, 2001: 55)

Actually, natural planning cannot be very natural, unless projects themselves have been already naturalised as the primary mode of existence of events and encounters in the world. Hence, vertical focus is a pastiche of ideas from earlier management and motivational literature. The way we ‘naturally’ plan projects seems much more likely rooted in the nature of older project management literature in engineering, business and government. By calling project planning ‘natural’, GTD streamlines or bypasses many of the formal techniques and technologies of project management literature. It replaces project planning systems, often supported by special software or diagrams (e.g. spreadsheets and Gantt charts), with a sheet or paper or the outliner function in

Microsoft Word. It shifts from vertically integrated project planning and management control systems to informal brainstorming sessions.

Management methods and literature have long emphasized projects as a way of structuring relations between actors and actions in time. However, in the last decade and half, projects have taken on new salience. Projects offer a way to shift and re-structure hierarchies into flatter, temporary or ad-hoc forms of collaboration. They allow individual mobility and autonomy to be valorised, and differences to be formulated in terms of outcomes. Project work offers autonomy rather than career development and structured advancement in organizational hierarchies. In consequence, more value accrues to people who can switch projects, work with others readily and always adapt to new circumstances. As Boltanski and Chiapello comment, “since each project is the occasion for many encounters, it offers an opportunity to get oneself appreciated by others, and thus the chance of being called upon for some other project” (2005: 93). GTD could be understood as an extreme version of project-thinking. Projects shrink in scale to encompass the minutiae of life, anything that needs to be done. The vast architectures of modern projects spanning years and peopled by large hierarchical teams are miniaturised by GTD into many small, mobile, portable projects, crowding in together, vying for individual attention. Time scales down to days or weeks instead of months or years. Like other productivity methods such as extreme programming (Mackenzie, 2006), projects compress in scale as individuals seek greater guarantees of finishing them. Down-sizing project planning to the personal scale allows projects to be personalized. This personalization complements changes in organizational life as corporations move toward horizontally networked structures of production, staffed by flexible, temporary teams.

However, parcelling personal reality as a set of projects has a cost: a proliferation of projects. From a GTD perspective, we all have many projects, perhaps many more than we can know. Accepting that anything you do or want belongs to a project or a ‘maybe-project’ immediately generates a large number of projects. Most people, it turns out, have several hundred projects. In establishing horizontal focus, listing all current projects becomes an absolute priority. Allen supplies a list of approximately 250 items as triggers to help readers recognise their existing projects (2001: 114-117). They range from cleaning the garage, promising something to a partner, designing a new product or writing an article.

Confronted with a proliferation of projects, the other, more significant ‘behaviour set’ in GTD, ‘horizontal focus’, takes over. Horizontal focus attempts to maintain an overview of all the different things (‘projects’) a person may want to get done. Most of the ‘stress-free productivity’ the method promises comes from detailed implementation and intricate adjustments of horizontal focus. GTDers mainly invest themselves in horizontal focus. Any shift from vertical to horizontal focus necessarily pivots on a single construct: the project. However, this construct is intrinsically multiple. By definition, any situation that calls for multiple actions or steps is a project. Allen writes:

I define a “project” as any outcome you're committed to achieving that will take more than one action step to complete. (Allen, 2001: 136)

The simple act of defining everything in terms of projects unleashes changes that cascade throughout GTD. It delineates encounters with the world as projects, and every project is a set of action steps. Practically, an ‘action step’ means a couple of minutes of doing something. Like projects, action steps, ‘The Absolute Next Physical Thing to Do’ (2001: 130) have profound importance in GTD. Action steps constitute the elements or components in the event of getting something done. Projects enumerate finite action-steps to yield an outcome in a finite time.

Thought Starts ‘Outside the Head’?

While I think GTD’s horizontal focus techniques respond very directly to the exigencies of cognitive capitalism, they also offer interesting terrain on which to begin to explore the ambivalences I mentioned earlier. This ambivalence turns on how encounters with the multiple are figured in GTD. In practice, GTD vacillates between open and closed versions of the multiple. There is a deep difficulty around open and closed multiples in GTD’s project ontology. As Alain Badiou writes, “[e]very multiple is indeed actually haunted by an excess of power that nothing can give shape to, except for an always aleatory decision which is only given through its effects” (Badiou *et al.*, 2004: 79). While a fuller exploration of Badiou’s claim would take us far afield, we can track some of the practical difficulties in actually holding in the surging tides of multiple contingencies. In the aftermath of a GTD implementation, one’s world begins to seethe with projects, and projects themselves are intrinsically multiple, sometimes frighteningly so. In the GTD set ontology, projects subsume and categorise every encounter of mobile intelligence with ideas, information, intuitions and imperatives. Flows of information – e.g. several hundred emails every day – can swamp even the most well-organised. In some ways, GTD explicitly recognises this difficulty:

We’re allowing in huge amounts of information and communication from the outer world and generating an equally large volume of ideas and agreements with ourselves and others from our inner world. And we haven’t been well equipped to deal with this huge number of internal and external commitments. (Allen, 2001: 7)

The “large volume of ideas” and the “huge number of internal and external commitments” all belong somehow to projects. The “huge amounts of information and communication” come from encounters in the networked world ‘we’ move through. Unfortunately, information does not always arrive when or where we want it. Ideas effervesce in the wrong place, time or order. GTD advocates equipment, techniques and disciplined habits as ways of handling the inconvenient paroxysms of information, commitments and impulses.

However, this equipment must both process what streams in from outside and what wells up inside. ‘Things’ come from the subject, from others, and from the world. Such equipment will not be simple. It needs to reliably connect flows of media and events to thought processes (‘ideas’) in ways that engender a sense of individual agency. Personal productivity systems therefore offer hybrid paper, electronic, architectural and cognitive-behavioural assemblages that extract and isolate projects and actions from the streams of information, ideas and commitments. The assemblages help the GTDer sort cognition, memory and thought on paper into sets of projects, sets of next action steps

and checklists. In order to supply the “missing piece in our new culture of knowledge work” (2001: 9). Allen furnishes “a system with a coherent set of behaviours and tools that functions effectively at the level at which work really happens” (*ibid.*). Much of the contemporary personal productivity literature seeks to engage at this level – ‘the level at which work really happens’. Otherwise, it risks slipping into the different, more exhortatory genre of motivational literature.

A Feeling for Personal Totality

Any feeling of elevated levels of effectiveness comes at a cost. It opens a door to excess. We can see this excess at work in GTD. Whether software or paper-based, the support systems must form an intimately embodied component of GTD. GTD demands a complete mapping of an individual's work and personal life. It places great stock on the completeness and all-encompassing scope of an external support system based on this mapping. For GTDers, a “total and seamless system of organization” buoys up high-level or higher-value thought: “[g]ive it to a system superior to your mind, so your mental energy can move on to its bigger and best work” (Allen, 2003: 27). The desire for totality often becomes almost manic. In order to generate ‘tremendous power’ Allen attaches precise behaviours to material supports. Behaviour must become strictly reliable and predictable. Otherwise seams and gaps will appear in the system, and a kind of cognitive corrosion will ruin it. Rules and injunctions directed at sealing the system multiply. For instance, GTD provides firm rules on how to move materials, papers, ideas and information around the desk. An in-basket, for instance, must be emptied in a strict top-down or bottom up order:

You may find you have a tendency, while processing your in-basket, to pick something up, not know exactly what you want to do about it, and then let your eyes wander onto another item farther down the stack and get engaged with it. ...This is dangerous territory. (Allen, 2003: 123).

The system might come unstuck if you do not take the top item from the in-basket. What could happen? GTD derives ‘tremendous power’ from physical actions, and from gestures that strictly iterate certain boundaries and thresholds in the system. In GTD, every cognitive act worthy of the name must begin from and leave a trace in the world, not only in the head. If, as Gilles Deleuze (1988) following Henri Bergson remarks, the brain complicates the relation between perception and movement, in GTD the complications of the brain have turned themselves inside out and re-made certain parts of the world.⁵ Projects only complete (that is, achieve closure) over time if the knowledge-worker, in thinking of them, makes decisions about them. You might have an overwhelming number of things to do, and respond by forgetting them. Only the rule-governed act of set-making and set-based iteration guarantees complete forward motion and hence the sensation of movement. Decisions must be recorded and organised otherwise the boundaries of projects blur, and the sensation of totality decays. GTD compels decisions by linking thinking to physical actions. By moving through

5 “Thus, the brain does not manufacture representations, but only complicates the relationship between a received movement (excitation) and an executed movement (response). Between the two, it establishes an interval (*ecart*), whether it divides up the received movement infinitely or prolongs it in a plurality of possible reactions” (Deleuze, 1988: 24) .

regulated physical actions that bring each and every relevant thing to light, the worker will be compelled to decide something.

A key diagram, reproduced in *Getting Things Done* at least 4 times on full pages with only slight variations (see Figure 1), encapsulates the compulsion to decide, organise or act. A flowchart, a quintessential 1960s organizational diagram, stands at the centre of GTD. Management techniques and productivity literature have long relied on diagrams, forms, lists and tables to organize work. These documents usually help label and program what people do as they work.

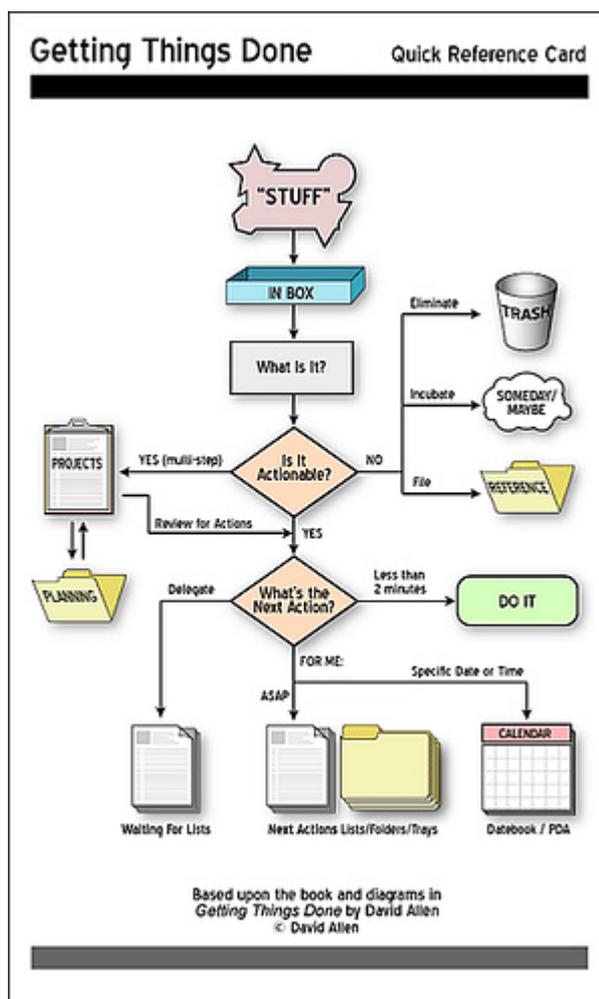


Figure 1: David Allen's flowchart [http://www.douglasjohnston.net/weblog/wp-content/uploads/gtd_quickref_rc1_01.png]

Flickr.com supplies several dozen versions of the diagram. The diagram performs several critical functions. It lays out the central operating rules and connects them to different materials of the system. It links different behaviours and material supports together in tightly sealed totality. The system has only one input point. It has no outputs since it absorbs everything that comes into it, for all time. As Allen writes,

[T]he methods I present here are based on two key objectives: (1) capturing all the things that need to get done – now, later, someday, big, little, or in between – into a logical and trusted system outside of your head and off your mind; and (2) disciplining yourself to make front-end decisions

about all the “inputs” you let into your life so that you will always have a plan for “next actions” that you can implement or renegotiate at any moment. (Allen, 2001: 3-4)

Outside the system lies chaotic ‘stuff’. Inside the system outlined on the flowchart, “stuff becomes ‘things’ that flow along the paths of the diagram. The ‘knowledge worker’ [Allen’s term] clarifies its meaning” (2001: 17) by transforming stuff into actions belonging to projects through a set of ordered behaviours prescribed by the flowchart. The boxes on the edge of the flowchart map onto physical or electronic containers and places. The inbox means intrays and email inboxes. The calendars, file systems, waiting lists, next actions lists together make up the expandable limits of the system. Allen first instructs users to re-organise their workspace so that all the containers represented by the boxes on the edge of the diagram lie within arms reach. As in the case of the inbox or intray, the system regulates the use of these components. A diary page, for instance, should not be used for non-time specific commitments. A particularly important stratum of the system runs across the bottom of Allen’s workflow diagram. In practice, the Next Action list comprises between 4-8 sub-lists that queue actions up for execution in specific ways or places: on the telephone, in the office, at the computer, at home, etc. The fact that people put thousands of photographs of these lists on flickr suggests that they invest the workflow diagram and their own versions of it with great significance. In the photostreams on flickr, for instance, people often detail how they have adapted the workflow diagram in their notebooks, software system or stack of index cards. Many blog entries discuss slight modifications of Allen’s instructions.

The ‘Affect of Efficiency’ and Others

From the perspective of the manic demand for a closed and total mapping in GTD, there is something melancholic in the thousands of images of GTD-organised workplaces on websites such as flickr.com. They usually show immaculately organised desks, notebooks, and in-trays in rooms empty of people. The feelings of effectiveness promised by GTD specifically concern thinking, decisions, intuition, creativity and, above all, the connection of ideas to actuality. It is a technique of thinking about doing and not-doing, and a set of practices to engender feelings about thinking about doing and not-doing. Rather than discussing what a worthwhile idea would be like, Allen concentrates quite candidly on “feeling good about what you are doing and not doing” (2003: 48), and promises “an unmistakable release of pressure and a surge of self-esteem” (*ibid.*: 30). It hones in on a specific feeling that we might term the ‘affect of efficiency.’⁶

The affect of efficiency certainly does not come from working with others more closely. The book and its massive secondary commentary have little to say on that score. One co-operates and makes agreements primarily with the self. The thousands of images of GTDed workplaces rarely show anyone else there. At most, getting more done streamlines interactions with others, or allows one to execute tasks more quickly. Personal productivity systems bind primarily to a fairly narrow field of labour centred on symbolic manipulation. Moreover, even the value or purpose of these symbolic

6 Term suggested by Anne Galloway, personal communication.

manipulations counts for little in themselves. GTD may accelerate the production of ordinary, banal, stupid or false solutions to problems. This may indeed burden or importune others. For instance, in the GTD system, the 'Waiting List' has particular importance. It lists all the people from whom the GTDer expects something. Regular weekly review of the Waiting List guarantees that no-one can slip out of the personal workflow. The inaction of others becomes more and more visible each week.

Working on the self and feeling good about personal commitments counts for more than working with others. One works on feeling good about getting more things done. A self that does more than others has a better chance of 'feeling good'. That feeling hinges on action, or on seeing that you have acted. As mentioned above, the 'next action step' refers to "the next physical, visible activity that needs to be engaged in, in order to move the current reality toward completion" (2003: 3). Writing the 'next action step' in a list, doing it, and then crossing it off generate the affect of efficiency. The process has a slightly circular feel to it: an action is a discrete activity that can be written down or done in less than two–three minutes. This understanding of action lays weight on atomic displacements of some reality towards completion. It assumes that "[t]here's always some physical activity that can be done to facilitate your decision-making" (2001: 130). Personal and organizational productivity systems all seek to move reality to desired completion, but suggest different ways of doing this. GTD concentrates on building a total map of the visible, physical activities needed to make or implement a decision. Every action should be tracked somewhere in the map. The affect of efficiency depends on total commitment to collecting, ordering and reviewing:

So how will you decide what to *do* and what *not* to do, and feel good about both? The answer is, by trusting your intuition. If you have *collected, processed, organized, and reviewed* all your current commitments, you can galvanize your intuitive judgment with some intelligent and practical thinking about your work and values. (Allen, 2001: 48)

GTD anchors thinking through total commitment to the algorithmic cycle of collecting, processing, organizing and reviewing commitments as finite sets of projects. It promises that a person can alter his or her sense of urgency, of having too much to do, by switching off the cognitive noise of thinking out of order. Allen says

There is no real way to achieve the kind of relaxed control I'm promising if you keep things only in your head. (Allen, 2001: 21)

The promised change in feeling depends on substituting different practical arrangements. Thinking no longer concerns its object directly, but orients itself towards a generic schema of operations and indicators of progress embodied in sets of projects and actions. The 'relaxed feeling of control' stems from the familiarity of this system rather than the action itself. The affect of efficiency comes from learning the habits of the system itself rather than any other reality.

Hence it is not surprising that the material specificities of the equipment matter to GTD and GTDer. Allen's *Getting Things Done* supplies very specific instructions about how to label, list, sort and store information and ideas. The instructions include things to put on the desk, how to organise filing cabinet drawers, how to set up the inbox on an email program, or choosing the size of paper for note-taking. For instance, Allen suggests: "Label your file folders with an autolabeler. Typeset label change the nature of your

files and your relationship to them” (2001: 100). Much commentary on GTD fetishizes the actual pens, notebooks, in trays, and desktop arrangements. Several thousand GTD-related photographs on flickr.com show paper, notebooks, cardboard, folders and pens, as well as pictures of and from David Allen’s books. Similarly, countless photographs and blog entries describe minute details of implementation of GTD. Such detailing can be subtle, for instance it often concerns physical qualities and forms of paper. Many online reports, discussions, developments and modifications of GTD highlight the value of paper over screen. The ‘Hipster PDA’ pages on the website www.43folders.com (Mann, 2004) for instance describes how to implement the GTD using index cards and a paper clip. The D*I*Y Planner supplies very detailed printable templates at various sizes (Johnston, 2005). Finally, and not least, certain brands of notebooks (Moleskine) are omnipresent in GTDers accounts of their implementations.

Why would typeset labels or a notebook of a particular size change the knowledge workers’ relation to her projects? One answer, drawing on science and technology studies work (STS), would be that a feeling of agency, of being able to do something, only arises in the presence of the very docile, tractable materials. As John Law writes, “if there is self-reflexivity, consciousness, the formation of a dualist effect, this is because they are at one end of a gradient of materials. They’re in a place where they deal with docile and tractable materials” (Law, 1994: 158). In some ways, paper is more tractable than a screen. It is less tractable than sound, yet more durable. GTDers display ambivalence about software and electronics. On the one hand, many people have implemented the GTD workflow model in software systems. Roughly sixty different software systems implement or directly support GTD, including many plug-ins for standard Microsoft email software (Fipps, 2006). It is hard to tell how much use they enjoy, but they begin to violate a basic precept of GTD: any ‘equipment’ must be completely portable and available at all times. On the other hand, although much networked-derived information flows through it, GTD does not depend on electronic information stores and software systems. Allen himself offers only desultory advice on using electronic PDA’s and email client software. He mentions that some of his best ideas have come from playing with his PDA in airport departure lounges, but he does not endorse them enthusiastically. Information networks have so heavily amplified and automated flows of information that it seems better to re-externalize information onto a different substrate. The Hipster PDA and the Moleskine notebook offer a separate, highly disconnected yet portable alternative to the wirelessly connected PDA. People use the convenience of paper to reduce their exposure to flows of information. They also use paper to heighten the value of their own thought and render tangible their own intellectual effort. The only solution is to take up heterogeneous materials (Law, 1994: 139).

Can anything about the mode of existence of an idea today be learned from GTD? If the system of folders, in-trays, lists, reminders and decisions steer actions, ideas should begin to flow more smoothly, nimbly and in greater numbers. Is not the GTD promise to liberate thinking heavily undermined by all the lists and rules that buffer impediments and distractions, that filter out, above all, any ‘shocks’ to thought? Indeed, the hope that thought will be free from problems, distractions or difficulties runs into many small obstacles and shocks. Judging from many GTD-related postings on the web, people have constant difficulties in identifying or carrying out the next action step. The

problem of finishing or doing the next action attracts a lot of attention. Merlin Mann, a prominent geek GTD proponent, writes:

I've noticed that there are often items on my "next actions" list that hang around a lot longer than they should. I scan and rescan and sort and add and delete, but there's always a few stragglers who hang out there for a week or more. Eventually this starts to vex me, and I try to debug why things aren't getting done. (Mann, 2004: 1)

In response, he develops a hermeneutics of the 'hang around' next-action:

It is not a single, atomic activity;
It is not a physical action;
It is not really the very next action I need to take;
It is not something I've actually committed to;
It is poorly defined or just badly worded;
It is nothing I can act on now; I have no idea what this means. (Mann, 2005: 237)

Ornate work-arounds and supplementary techniques such as this festoon the postings and websites on GTD. Small modifications and variations sometimes take Allen's methods a step further, or implement them differently. Like the many software implementations of GTD, people expend great effort on intricate descriptions of how they manage to perform next actions. This effort to get things done in the right way often seems to take on a higher priority than getting things done at all. The feeling of being in control becomes more important than what is controlled.

The overwhelming triviality of many next-actions also dampens any shock to thought. Sample next action lists found on the web bear this out. For instance, here is a sample next action list whose relentless interest in buying, owning, marketing, and report-writing seems a long way from the 'elevated levels' of intuitive focusing promised by GTD:

Search online to find different potential Palm Pilots to buy
Phone John to arrange next marketing meeting
Look in car manual to find qualified mechanic for car
Phone Apple Reseller and buy new Apple Mac
Phone and cancel magazine subscription
Print out the financial report for the department meeting (Fletcher, 2005)

This list, if typical, suggests that GTD could stultify rather than taking anyone to "to a whole new level of creative thinking and doing" (Allen, 2003: 5). With its focus on making all projects and next actions visible, perhaps GTD arrives a bit too late. GTD fractures and collapses processes of thought in practical sensing. In perplexity, it tries to piece together a puzzle or an idea that it cannot contemplate directly.

Conclusion: Transfiguring?

Where would an 'Idea', in Deleuze's sense as a problem-setting imperative, or a differential multiplicity actualising itself across series of differences, occur in a GTD-like world? This paper has sought to place itself within the midst of GTD, and to inhabit an uncomfortable ambivalence about its equipment and practice in the interests of 'transfiguring' them into a form of meditation. It has argued that GTD harks back to

past organizational and management techniques and attempts to re-implement them an individual level. It imprints organizational routines into individual forethought. This is a significant transformation. The 'horizontal focus' of GTD personalizes infrastructures of decision and innovation. It brings organization-wide management techniques down to an individual level. In doing so, GTD hopes to free individuals to attune themselves more sensitively to relevant problems. It promises a positive sense of relaxed control.

GTD cannot offer any way to ideate, or to produce ideas, apart from the generic techniques of brainstorming or mind-mapping, collecting, sorting, and deciding. Moreover, others appear in the system only at the inputs, through the negotiation of project commitments, or perhaps in conversation, that supplies candidates for next actions. For all its flattening of control hierarchies and distribution of cognition across brain-world boundaries, ideas or concepts retain a massively subject-centred hierarchical character. They come from the subject and its representations. David Allen supplies a model of ideas based on flight patterns. Each altitude supplies a different level of perspective, ranging from life-changing ideas down to what to do right now. The 'vertical focus' behaviour moves up and down these levels. Yet thinking at the highest level, the 50,000 feet level ("ambling around your koi pool with a glass of chardonnay at sunset", Allen, 2001: 189), seems little different from thinking at the runway level. As ideas, washing a bedspread, ordering a new computer, or fixing a bug in a Perl script hardly shatter the world. Nor do the next-action criteria provide much chance of ideas being eventful, of generating errors, contradictions or paradoxes, of failing, breaking up or fragmenting in ways that communicate between heterogeneous series (Deleuze, 2001). Thoroughly useful and productive, it mires thought in relentless action. Actions swarm across a life.

Should we conclude then that personal productivity systems thwart understanding of the realities they relate to? GTD answers the actual needs of the new social groups inhabiting the networked places. Netizens, elancers, cognitarians, swarm-capitalists, hackers, produsers, and knowledge workers feel the need to cogitate faster to keep ahead (as individuals engaged in essentially outsourceable, downsizeable work, as participants in economic activities subject to local and global competition). GTD's mania for totality and its constant imperatives to decide the next action answer the uncertainties and instabilities of newer divisions of labour. If the contemporary division of labour constantly re-distributes knowing to other persons and things, particularly through software and communication networks, GTD too tries to move lower-level thinking to the outside. At an individual level, it mimics the re-distributions of work in networked workplaces. It binds the knowledge worker in tightly woven exploitation of their own mobility. Indeed, a personal productivity system could well lead to the internalization of a rationale of self-exploitation, and block the emergence of any understanding of its own cost. By building 'physical organization' systems that absorb all possible materials, GTD coaches people into a high-level feeling of freedom ('intuitive focusing') coupled with lower-level rigidity ("the Absolute Next Physical Thing To Do", 2001: 130). It practically reinforces an affective sense of an efficient Self who cannot see the impossibility of the demand for useful thought.

However, I have also suggested that something more is at stake, and this is most evident in the febrile modifications and variations of the system in practice. Even if many of

these quickly lose themselves in recursive intricacies, they point to a set-based encounter with the multiple whose ramifications extend well beyond GTD. This suggestion, that GTD can be read as problematic encounter with the multiple, stands in my mind as an ineradicable potential of what Rabinow (2006) calls 'modern equipment' to transfigure method into 'meditation'. Understood as modern equipment, as a thing that thinks about the multiple, GTD responds to a problem: the problem of how to create a space for thinking in the midst of flows of events that have become increasingly unmanageable, that crisscross any established boundaries between subject and object, and that are essentially excessive. There is too much to think about. GTD can be read as a practical expression of an Idea of inhabiting the multiple. No doubt, its set-based constructivism risks becoming entirely generic, and its acting out of thinking will fail to the extent that it diminishes events and singularities. However, we should not dismiss failures lightly. Even a collapse of thought can be quite powerful. At the heart of any attempt to think lies failure: "[t]hought is also forced to think its central collapse, its fractures, its own natural 'powerlessness' which is indistinguishable from its greatest power – in other words, from those unformulated forces, the *cogitanda*, as though from so many thefts or trespasses in thought" (Deleuze, 2001: 147).

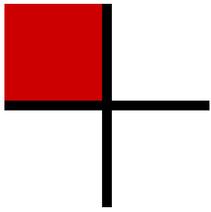
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Pre-paring Philanthropy: The Mimesis of Business and the Counterfactual Construction of Care^{*}

Simon Lilley

abstract

Through consideration of the content of interviews conducted with senior managers in one of the UK's top ten charities, Heritage, this paper explores the present and possible futures of philanthropy in a world in which legitimate forms of organization seem increasingly limited to that of the business. Through a reading of Elaine Scarry's (1985) *The Body in Pain*, the paper explores the ways in which the relationship between, and indeed existence of, self and world is mediated by objects that enable the body to extend itself through culture. This capacity for extension is seen to be under threat in the demographic group for whom Heritage seeks to care and it is to the ways in which Heritage seeks to ameliorate this threat, in a context that demands business of organization, that the paper's attention is devoted. It is a key contention of the argument deployed here that the mimesis of business, whilst perhaps of short term legitimacy benefit to organised charities, will be ultimately fatal for philanthropy as an end in itself.

'We Care... The Work of Heritage'¹

The modern charity is very different to the traditional charity... which was based on philanthropy in one form or other... It was basically funds and money available... to direct charitable works, giving money to the poor in some shape or form, ... doing work for poorer people... Government... is increasingly providing that sort of bottom line net. So really in many ways it's taken away the... original market for charity... Charities are looking, having to look, for other reasons to be...

* The collection of the empirical material upon which this argument draws was made possible by the generosity of both the Economic and Social Research Council and the many *Heritage* managers who so kindly allowed me to speak to and observe them. The majority of the data was collected during 1996 – 1998. The research formed part of a wider project investigating informational practices in 'non-conventional' organizations (ESRC Award R0002218592197). Names, including *Heritage*, have been changed to protect the innocent. The current paper has benefited from comments provided upon earlier versions of the same argument presented at the International Workshop on *The Consumption of Mass*, Prince Rupert Hotel Shrewsbury, 27-28 November 1998 and at a departmental seminar at the School of Business and Economics of the University of Exeter in January 2005. I am also particularly grateful for the careful readings provided by Mihaela Kelemen, Valérie Fournier, Rolland Munro and Bob Cooper. Inadequacies that remain are, of course, all my own work.

1 The quote in the subtitle comes from the 'special newsletter', provided by *Heritage* OR (1996, issue 3: 2), to "people who in the past, have requested our Will Information literature" (p.1). It forms the banner above a section of the newsletter which outlines a number of activities funded by 'donations and legacies' to *Heritage*. The page's tableau is completed by three suitably varied, uplifting and consonant images.

I think charities are looking for things to do, because a lot of them, their original objectives don't exist anymore or somebody else is doing them. The government is doing them. (Interview with Finance Director, Heritage, 10-10-1996)

This paper is the product of research conducted in the Head Office of Heritage, one of the UK's most successful charities. Heritage 'aims to improve the quality of life' of its target demographic group – the elderly – and particularly the 'quality of life' of those amongst this group who are deemed most vulnerable, or most impoverished in 'quality' terms. The potential beneficiaries of Heritage's work, according to this demographic definition of target sector, are extremely numerous and they constitute an ever increasing proportion of overall population, at least in the western, industrialised world.

My own interest in Heritage was not however sparked by such lofty and topical concerns. Rather the opposite. I was looking for research sites in which to trace the content and direction of information flows in organizations which were somewhat 'oddly' embedded in capitalist relations of production² and a close relative worked at Heritage's Head Office. I was aware that Heritage's activities increasingly encompassed 'commercial' ventures but clearly approached the site with a 'traditional' view of charity as 'philanthropy', albeit late-modern, organised, philanthropy. Indeed, such a view had informed my selection of the site. But as the quote above makes clear, and it was a view offered to me very early in my contact with the organization, I was very much mistaken. This paper is the product of that mistake. It examines both the extent of my error and Heritage's managers' attempts to correct it. And hopefully, in so doing, it also examines how 'care' is constructed and consumed in conditions, at least as seen by those charged with the administration of its provision, of a relative absence of 'need'. For charities, and Heritage has been at their forefront, have not been slow in taking up the challenge that concludes our preceding quote.

I've heard figures for the size of the charitable sector ranging from about six or seven billion to twenty-five billion, maybe something around fifteen or sixteen is right. (Interview with Finance Director, Heritage, 10-10-1996)

Yet despite this huge level of activity, apparently in the face of Government policy that has 'taken away the... original market for charity', Heritage's Finance Director (FD) was able to assert that there was still 'tremendous growth potential here'. It is to an explanation of this somewhat curious contradiction that this paper is devoted.³

2 Either through virtue of their ownership, the status of their participants, or their espoused purpose.

3 It is important to note that at the time when the research reported here was undertaken there was considerable uncertainty concerning the future legal status of charities, given lengthy and ongoing consultation process on the matter instigated by the UK's government. Whilst the new legal framework that eventually emerged from this process is seen by some as one which 'radically overhauls' preceding law in the area (MacLennan, 2007: back cover) for those of more cynical and sceptical bent, not looking for a market need into which one can sell advice, the changes appear much closer to general perpetuation of the status quo. That said, the existence of uncertainty about the precise nature of the future legal framework in which charities would operate is clearly a contributory factor to the extent of reflection on the nature of the beast that our informants have engaged in here.

From 'Need' to 'Care'

Heritage was formed some thirty years ago, by one of the key players in *Oxfam*, to meet the needs of a newly defined target group, drawing upon capital – both funds and property assets – and individuals who had been involved in previous, organised, philanthropic activity. This preceding, generalised practical benevolence, directed towards a relatively undifferentiated 'poor', was apparently seen by those responsible for Heritage's formation to be too broad to meet the particular needs of a particular segment of world society. Heritage sought to fill this gap by explicitly devoting its relief of 'poverty' to an explicitly delineated section of the 'poor', a section defined demographically. At its inception the main focus of Heritage's work was overseas, but over time the balance of activity has shifted, with national programmes and initiatives taking an up ever greater proportion of resources, an issue to which we return. Heritage is currently both the largest and oldest charity in the UK serving its target demographic group.

Our Finance Director's comments require then a little further unpacking when arrayed alongside even such a superficial account of the 'facts' of Heritage's past. For they seem a little at odds with this history. For example, we see that Heritage as charity emerges not as 'traditional... philanthropy' that seeks to ameliorate unconscionable social conditions attendant upon a capitalism that has not yet geared up a state to provide the 'welfare' required to ensure the reproduction of labour. Rather it is a progressive response to the failure of such a project to adequately represent and serve the needs of a particular demographic group whose particular needs have been in some senses submerged amongst those of others who are themselves more 'adequately' served by state welfare and voluntary sector provision. The absolute needs of such individuals are undoubtedly more pronounced in the overseas markets that form the initial focus of Heritage's work, whilst their relative need may be seen to be greater in the home market that Heritage has increasingly come to serve. These subtleties of shifting emergence may in part be due to the fact that members of Heritage's target group are often excluded from, or unable to contribute to, the productive side of capital's circuits of exchange. But they may also be partly the result of the group's status as implicit *other* for many of our images of a dynamic and productive, modern world.

This issue of timing then is worthy of a little more attention. For we realise that from its inception Heritage has been a 'modern charity', coming into being, as it does, at a time when 'Government...' has already 'taken away the... original market for charity....' Indeed, the inception of Heritage occurs at a time when the rhetorical power of claims on state resources to support the less well off was arguably much greater than it is today. And thus we must see the Finance Director's comments not as a detailed and reliable account of the history of his own organization, for such an account thoroughly contradicts the implicit aims of his commentary. Rather, we must focus upon its own rhetorical dimensions, upon the reality it seeks to *structure* rather than that which it seeks to report, if we are to understand its purpose and utilise it to understand shifting priorities at Heritage.

Heritage is not alone in the charity world in having made a shift away from justifying itself and orchestrating its activities with the aim of meeting the needs of 'the poor'. Mellor (1985) tells a general story that is consistent with the beginning of our Finance Director's line. He notes that whilst

little examination has been made of the history of the development of associations in modern societies (although histories of individual associations have been written), ... it seems likely that it was not until the 19th Century that specialised groups began to emerge in Britain. Previously organizations were diffuse, arising substantially from commercial or religious interests, though there were numerous charitable trusts. (Mellor, 1985: 9)

According to Chesterman (1979), prior to about 1600 ecclesiastical courts administered land left to the church in accordance with the wishes of the departed donor. However, increasingly from this time "wealth was committed through innumerable gifts and endowments... to the control of secular trustees and administrators for specific welfare purposes in such areas as education, health and poverty relief" as "the charitable trust emerged as a major mechanism of institutionalised private philanthropy and several key features of the modern law of charities were established" (Chesterman, 1979, quoted in Mellor, 1985: 9). The process continued through the Victorian era with many more charities being established, particularly in the area of poverty relief, as the notion of poverty took on increasing salience in public discourse. However, the 'modern' shift from concentration upon 'doing work for poorer people' to 'other reasons to be' seems not to be as recent as our Finance Director suggests, at least at the general level of Mellor's story. Mellor quotes Murray (1969) with approval, if also with some reservation, who noted in the late 1960s (in Mellor's words), "that in all voluntary organizations there is distinct movement from concentration on the pathology of society to its positive health" (Mellor, 1985: 11). Heritage was born at the moment of this apparent realisation and thus we may see the Finance Director's dramatisation of shifting focus as much as a continuing reflection of initial aims as of any 'recent' shift in conditions and their understanding. Nevertheless, being initially an organization that focused primarily upon the 'absolute needs' of those members of the overseas poor who fit the demographic template, and currently a home focused organization catering more to 'relative need' relief through 'care', we may note that this general history may have been entirely played out, albeit in an abridged and concatenated form, during Heritage's relatively short past. Whichever focus we take on the reality of the Finance Director's comments, it is clear that rhetorically his description of the past is intended to function as a foil (Haber, 1991; Lilley, 1995) that will allow us to better see the radiance of the present against it.⁴ Although arriving at a time when 'positive health' was, for many,

4 Indeed, there is certainly no shortage of effort deployed, in a variety of burgeoning literatures, to both the problematics of defining and grasping the myriad organizational forms that constitute that portion of activity seemingly not well captured by the notions of the private and state sectors of the economy (including, *inter alia*, the overlapping notions of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the voluntary sector, the charity sector, the aid sector, the social economy and the seemingly more all encompassing notion of the 'third sector') and articulating a variety of periodisations of 'its' shifting history in relation to notions such as philanthropy, generosity, benevolence and beneficence and the imagined greater clarity of definitions and instantiations of institutions such as the private and state sectors (see, for example the contributions of Anheier and Kendall, 2001; Kendall and Knapp, 1996; Harris, 2001; Lewis *et al.*, 2000; Amin *et al.*, 2002; Dollery and Wallis, 2003; Evers and Laville, 2004; Bremner, 1988; Sogge *et al.*, 1996; Frankel *et al.*, 1987; Cunningham and Innes, 1998;

emerging as *the* issue in the home based charity market, we are meant to see that it is only now, with its current range of managers and managerial techniques, that Heritage has really been able to shine as an exemplar of such an ethos. We explore the activities deemed to constitute the modern Heritage in a later section. For now we take a theoretical detour in order to examine how a limitless care which contributes to 'positive [and hence ever increasable] health' can emerge out of a concern with the theoretically limited 'needs' of pathology. And to do so we draw upon Elaine Scarry's (1985) magnificent consideration of pain as a source for our making of the world.

Pain and Making

Scarry's account of our making of our "mental and material culture" (1985: 326) takes as its origin the *aversiveness* and *unsharability* of physical pain. She notes that in physical pain we witness both certainty and its absence.

For the person in pain, so incontestably and unnegotiably present is it [pain] that 'having pain' may come to be thought of as the most vibrant example of what it is to 'have certainty', while for the other person [the co-present, not herself 'in' pain] it is so elusive that 'hearing about pain' may exist as the primary model of what it is 'to have doubt'. Thus pain comes unsharably into our midst as at once that which cannot be denied and that which cannot be confirmed. (Scarry, 1985: 4)

Pain, in its essence, is *aversive*: it makes us want nothing more and nothing less than bring about its, ideally, total amelioration through removal. It is, in this sense, the most pressing challenge we face. But it is also, as we noted above, in the very primacy of its nature *unshareable*. This unshareability is seen, in part, as a result of pain's "resistance to language" (*ibid.*: 4), a resistance which may be seen to be at least two-fold. At a deepest level, at its most painful,

[P]hysical pain does not simply resist language, but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned. (*ibid.*)

And even when less intense it is incredibly difficult to express convincingly. Scarry (1985: 4) quotes Virginia Woolf (1967: 194) in this regard:

English, which can express the thoughts of Hamlet and the tragedy of Lear has no words for the shiver or the headache... The merest schoolgirl when she falls in love has Shakespeare or Keats to

Whelan, 1996; Coles, 1997). There have even been attempts – to follow the logic that we might discern in our FD's comments – that have sought to articulate lifecycle stages in the histories of individual charities that are seemingly relatively common to all and might be seen to reflect a more general history of the sector as a whole being played out at the level of each of its constituents (see, for example, Tapp *et al.*, 1999). Needless to say, here, as elsewhere, such 'ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny' arguments, whilst superficially attractive, are far from easily sustained when confronted by the complexities of empirical detail. However, as the main body of the paper indicates, the veracity of the stories of the managers at *Heritage* is not our central concern. It is rather the work that such narratives do in establishing the plausibility of the present and the desirability of particular futures that is of most interest to us in the current context.

... speak her mind for her, but let a sufferer try to describe a pain in his head to a doctor and language at once runs dry.

Part of the problem here is the *objectlessness* of pain as sentience, its lack of a referent. When in physical pain, even the localised pain of a headache, it is our body as a whole, or more precisely the entirety of the sentience associated with that body, that is consumed by pain. We feel pain not *for* or *of* anything, or perhaps better, not *for* or *of* anything other than our bodies. Pain is thus incredibly difficult to objectify, in language or other material culture, because it has no object (outside of the sentience of which it may be seen as limit case, as pure exemplar). Pain, of and for the body's sentience (of and for itself), can only enter into shareability of language through the *as if* of metaphor. When for example, we gather some words to express our pain, when we attribute to it a nature, when we talk of a 'stabbing pain', we invoke an 'as if' which states, 'my pain is like being on the point of a knife'. Metaphor moves, or better 'carries' (Hopfl, 1997), pain by giving it a cause, an object, *outside* of the body, in this case a knife. It takes the agency of sentience acting upon itself, perhaps creating itself, and attributes it to an object that, by being outside of the body, is more open to transformation by the body, is more amenable to the body's *work*. This *imagined* cause of pain is not of course 'absolutely' *real*, but it is more real, more graspable than pain *qua* pain. And it is just what is required if pain is to allow the sentient body to achieve its defining aim when in pain, the removal of aversiveness. For if we can imagine pain as stabbing, and hence imagine a knife (or something similar) as causing that pain, then perhaps we can imagine that knife moving away from the body and not immediately returning.⁵ By *objectifying* pain in the object that (imaginarily) causes it, we have made pain external, moveable, sharable. In short we have rendered it as something that may be acted on by both our sentience (some of which is now freed from its limit state of complete aversiveness) and the sentience of others. By *making* our pain sharable, we have begun to *unmake* our pain. And we have also begun to make our shared world, our verbal and material culture.

Scarry then draws our attention to two limits, two causes, of our making⁶ of verbal and material culture. Our pain – that through its objectlessness makes sharing difficult (if not impossible at the extreme) but through its aversiveness demands externalisation as a first step towards removal – and our imagination⁷ – our ability to make objects appear when there are none, to create, to *make up* objects. Together pain and imagination define the scope of our making, the scope of what we can *make up*, which itself provides the limits within which we can *make real* material objects that extend the

5 Indeed, we may even find a 'thing', perhaps internal to the body, that is responsible for the 'stabbing', a thing which we can perhaps remove to remove the pain.

6 Scarry's notion of making here is obviously sympathetic to Arendt's (1958) mobilisation of the term, but it is also important to note that her usage is not identical.

7 It is worth noting here the sympathy between pain and imagination as modes of being. Both are extreme privacies "both pain and imagining are invisible to anyone outside the boundaries of the person's body" (Scarry, 1985: 170), which nevertheless imbue their holders with something close to absolute certainty, yet both are to be seen as essential bases for the sharing that constitutes culture, a sharing that itself is initially so fragile, so difficult for the companion to believe in, that it is remarkable to see them as the source of the 'distinctly human form' of "sentience become.. social" (*ibid.*).

sentience of the body by making in and out of the world of objects that exist, new ones which previously did not. Pain – pure, objectless sentience; and imagination – objectness, or intentionality at the greatest remove from the particularities of our bodily modalities of sentience; define the space of our creation. The ways in which we ‘take in’ existing, ‘dead’ objects of the world and re-make that world by ‘putting back’ new objects imbued not only with new forms but also with the marks of human intentionality and the ways in which we make our world both meaningful and expansive beyond the limits of our bodies.

Philanthropy and its charitable twin requires, at least in its ‘traditional’ relief stage as it is narrated above by our informant, a way of sensing the need of others. ‘Need’ must be shared. And we may see here, following our detour into Scarry’s pain, that this need is pain that is well on the way to being removed.⁸ If we consider say, hunger as a ‘need’ for food, we may see this more clearly. We know that intense, unsatisfied hunger may ‘cause’ pain, but we have already noted the myriad ways in which pain, objectless sentience, becomes objectifiable via metaphorical substantiation which makes pain the consequence of a causing object. So as well as saying that hunger as “a state of consciousness...” which “if deprived of its object” will “begin to approach the neighbourhood of physical pain” (Scarry, 1985: 5) we may also say that hunger, as “objectified state” (*ibid.*), may be apprehended as partially transformed pain, pain in which some aversiveness has been removed in the process of objectification. Whilst pain demands nothing but its own removal but gives no clues over how to go about meeting this demand, the ‘need’ of hunger is much more amenable to (re)resolution through the specificity with which its objectness endows it. Pain as surfeit of (pure) objectless sentience is entified, fleshed out, as surfeit of ‘hunger’, a lack of an object, but not any object, an object of a particular type: food. Pain, substantiated as hunger, is further substantiated as lack of food. A lack which can itself be further substantiated, further outside the individual body in pain, as need for food, or in the empowering argot of most charitable enterprises, the need for access to food, which turns again into a need to be able to produce food from the existing objects of the ever more expansive world outside. Need thus appears as substantiated pain that has ‘gone out’ from the body in pain to the world of verbal and material culture, a process that involves the removal of that pain through ongoing transubstantiation. And as should be clear, such transubstantiation makes responses to pain, and need in its turn, both potentially and practically limitless.⁹

Scarry grasps this ongoing transubstantiation, our ability to make a world imbued with our sentience and to take back that sentience from the world not as pain but as practical power, through a bifurcation of the term *work*. As we have seen, this work is the combine of imagination and pain.

That pain and the imagination are each other’s missing intentional counterpart and that they together provide a framing identity of man-as-creator (sic) within which all other intimate

8 This is, of course, not to say that it will complete its journey.

9 We could instead perhaps suggest that such moves are not limitless, but limited only by the limits of imagination. However, in common sense parlance the meanings of these seemingly different renderings are interchangeable.

perceptual, psychological, emotional, and somatic events occur, is perhaps most succinctly suggested by the fact that there is one piece of language used – in many different languages – at once as a near synonym for pain, *and* as a near synonym for created object; and that is the word ‘work’ ... The more it realizes and transforms itself in its object, the closer it is to the imagination, to art, to culture; the more it is unable to bring forth an object, or, bringing it forth, is then cut off from its object, the more it approaches the condition of pain. (Scarry, 1985: 169, original emphasis)

It is thus through work that pain and imagination become expressed and the world is made sentient through acculturation of material which is consequently imbued with sentience. It is the practice through which personhood is realised in a humanly realised world. And this world, and the personhood it substantiates, is precisely what is unmade in the victims of the decivilizing practices of torture and war to which Scarry (1985) attends. We explore the general significance of ‘work’ in more detail following consideration of the specifics of the work in which Heritage is currently engaged.

Heritage characterises its current work as ‘caring’, its interest in and regard and concern for its target group, a transubstantiation of need that preserves its limitlessness, while adding emphasis upon creating ‘positive health’ rather than eliminating ‘pathology’. It does so by identifying its target group as one for whom there is deemed to be insufficient amounts of our triptych – interest, regard, concern – in the absence of Heritage’s work. And in the process it finds for itself a new and indeed endless ‘reason to be’.

Needs and Care

Heritage’s international division apparently continues to carry out the apparently traditional work of apparently traditional charity. It meets immediate, absolute need, as and when it emerges, with immediate relief. And it does so primarily in those parts of the world where ‘government...’ has not, through unwillingness or incapacity, ‘taken away the... original market for charity’. In the process, it (potentially) nullifies itself for when we imagine that there is no more (immediate and absolute) need we might also imagine that there is no more need for traditional charity.¹⁰ However, as we have noted, such activities currently represent an ever dwindling proportion of the totality of Heritage’s engagement in the world. Within the UK, *direct* provision of services is limited to housing of members of the target demographic group, with such services being run at a profit which is ‘gifted’ back to the charity. And it is this latter point that enables us to grasp the more central *raison d’être* of the current Heritage. For Heritage now sees itself as primarily a fund raising and campaigning organization in the UK. It gathers money, through gifts, bequeathments and its associated enterprises (of which more later) and then in a reversal of role,¹¹ makes such monies available, in the form of grants, to those who work for and with members of the target group to improve the

10 Given the appalling living conditions of many people in many places, such potential is infrequently realised to say the least. The logic of the point however remains.

11 Transubstantiation is a dangerous and slippery beast, as our following discussion should make increasingly clear.

'quality' of such members' lives. Indeed, this is what it has always done. It also consumes some of the raised money itself, both in supporting its own administration and hence continued being and in a first pass meeting of its central objective: care. For care *of*, as we have noted, entails the generation of interest in, and concern and regard *for*. Heritage, by positing a lack of care of and for its target group, simultaneously posits an under-representation¹² of its target group in the centres of (both governmental and non-governmental) calculation, a 'lack' which may partially be filled, made up, by Heritage's campaigning and policy directed activities. In this regard, Heritage may be rendered as mirroring the development of the modern charity world as a whole, for as Mellor (1985: 15) notes:

Of recent years, the type of voluntary body that has been much in the news has been the kind that seeks to influence public policy – the 'pure' pressure group or, more commonly, the organization that whilst having practical work for certain kinds of client to undertake, has a well-developed 'social advocacy' role too.

Heritage then, through its care, its concern and regard for, and its interest in, its 'clients' acts to enhance visibility of its clients, to increase 'care' for them, by enhancing its own visibility in places (such as government) where such matters may be seen to matter. Here needs, but also desires, wants, aspirations and concerns, of its clients are made more real in policy by being made more present in the places in which policy is made. Such a role is very much in line with expectations that might be generated by an extrapolation of Scarry's arguments. But that is not our sole concern here. Rather we also focus upon the action of increasingly commercial managers at Heritage's UK head office, which is, following our brief history of Heritage, where we can see that the action now is. And we dwell upon it for two related reasons. Firstly we examine the ways in which Heritage managers account for their activity: for their accounts of themselves in their accounts of their activities that were provided to me during interviews are mimetic (Scarry, 1985; see also Taussig, 1993)¹³ to the central rationale that they provide for their organization. Secondly we examine in more detail the content of the activities themselves, the things for which our (commercial) managers are responsible. For in the choice of activities through which to raise funds, Heritage again displays pain – in this case the pain associated with a loss of being needed and thus a loss of legitimacy; pain which is *worked* away through the transubstantive *making* of the new activities and their apparent delivery of renewed legitimacy – and becomes trapped in an odd mimesis of its own making. To begin this journey we return to the quote which began our exegesis of Heritage's work, for we are now able to interpret its meaning in a much richer context.

12 This notion of underrepresentation is also central to Scarry's project, as our notes on pain's resistance to language have already hinted. As she expresses the point: "the relative ease or difficulty with which any phenomenon can be verbally represented also influences the ease or difficulty with which that phenomenon comes to be politically represented... It is not simply accurate but tautological to observe that given any two phenomena, the one that is more visible will receive more attention" (Scarry, 1985: 12, original emphasis).

13 It is interesting to note that much of Taussig's account of mimesis is also derived from an account of the pain of torture.

'This is My Ideal Job'

The majority of my interviews at Heritage were conducted with senior managers who were often termed 'directors' and who certainly held levels of responsibility consonant with those who share their titles in the (more) commercial world. This was not the only strange thing about them. They had also, not quite without exception, joined the organization in the recent past, usually in the preceding ten years, after some form of disillusionment with the particular bit of the (usually) private sector from which they had just come. Such disillusionment manifested itself in different ways and was also differentially attached to different aspects of private enterprise. For some a partner had worked as an intermediary here, with one director, for example, telling a story of how his partner had dramatically presented him with the recruitment ad for his present position whilst reminding him that the work he was currently doing was turning him into a 'bastard' and an 'arsehole'. Others had been confronted by the cruelty of the market more directly, having 'been let go' by their employers during the last recession. Regardless of these differences in origin however, each of these managers/directors shared a strikingly similar initial orientation to Heritage. They had seen it as something of an easy life, lower reward option that would act at worst as a stop gap in, and at best as temporary relief from their ongoing career in the wider world. Few had envisioned themselves as working in the charity sector, until circumstances reduced their other options, and few pictured themselves, once they had taken the decision to enter, as staying in it for very long. All however did seem to expect that it would provide a simpler, easier life than that which they had experienced in the 'real world' of (private sector) commercialism. As our finance director remembered this complex of motivations:

When I came into the, this job, between you and I, I thought to myself well okay, you know, this is probably a bit narrower than what I'm used to and, you know, it'll be good. Because my previous job to this one was as Financial Director of [a] business information company..., I was Financial Director for their UK and some of their European subsidiaries and I also ran some of their businesses and... it was quite a big job. I thought well I'll, that, that sort of came to a natural conclusion as many jobs in that sector did in the early nineties and I thought well I'll do this, this on an interim basis and I thought well in the meantime, you know, I'll sort of, I'll have plenty of, plenty of time in the afternoon too (laughs).

However, for this informant, as for many others, such a view soon proved to be, at least in part, without foundation. For he

quickly found that not only were my mornings but my afternoons and my evenings and some of my weekends were well accounted for and, and also equally soon found that, you know there was much more to this, there was much more excitement than I might have ever imagined before.

This shift in understanding was not solely dependent upon the increased amount of work that was required compared to expectations. It also drew upon what were rendered as real differences found between the worlds of commerce and charity, in contradistinction to those differences previously assumed to exist. In the view of this informant, in the world of commerce,

most problems had occurred at least two or three times if not ten times before. But here I find virtually everything, you know, you're so frequently breaking new ground and that's exciting, it's different and, you know, it actually allows you to stir the grey matter.

Indeed many of the new managers said that after the initial work shock, they had come to love their new jobs, seeing them as perfect vehicles for the deployment and development of their skills. Comments such as ‘Although I didn’t realise it when I first started, or come here for that reason, if I were to sit down and design my ideal job, this would be it’ (Senior Manager), along with variations upon this theme, were incredibly common from the new managers interviewed. Through deploying the standard skills – ‘it’s just retail management’, ‘systems is the same everywhere’, ‘its basic marketing really’ – that they had learnt elsewhere to the, from their purview, virgin territory of the charity, they provide both the latter and themselves with enhanced ‘reasons to be’ at just the time when other such potential sources for allegiance and its associated legitimation are in retreat. Given the lack of apparent need on the part of the other two sectors of the economy for our managers they had glimpsed the pain associated with the lack or loss of identity and visibility attendant upon a lack of use for their work, only to be saved by the assumption of a working role within an organization that was similarly seeking to remove the pain associated with an increasing lack of need for its services, seemingly brought about by an increasing lack of (absolute) need on the part of its clients. And whilst we may explain the disjuncture between expectation and subsequent experience away in terms of cognitive dissonance, such an account seems insufficient to cope with the extent of identification we have uncovered. However, it is just such a story that we need to give us some purchase on our starting quote. For as we have noted, Heritage was born at a time in which ‘traditional charity’ was already giving way to ‘modern charity’ and thus our first quote cannot, as we have already noted, be merely a ‘factual’ description of changing circumstances. Rather we must see it as a sign of an attempt to utilise and trammel the (near) limitless power of transubstantiation (see also, Burke, 1969) that work entails. For what is also and more importantly being rendered as new here is not ‘modern charity’ but the bodies of our new managers and their roles within such a beast. Such managers were very keen to advertise their difference to one (myself) who had approached them with a traditional view of charity and its bodies firmly in mind. Indeed, they were also keen to show their difference from the usually unnamed but seemingly clearly inferior others who co-populated their organization but lacked the appropriate background to engage in its ongoing transformation. The new managers sought to show that it was they, with their ‘professionalism’ and ‘businesslike’ orientation who were the drivers qua non of an organization that was moving beyond the stewardship of assets to meet specific needs with imagined limits, to the explosion of activity that is ‘care’. And in the process they mimed the move towards social advocacy of their clients in a society that devoted insufficient attention to them, in their self advocacy as under-represented parts of an organization whose self image had yet to catch up with the changing realities of its own constitution and practice.

Their narrated histories and those of ‘charity’, regardless of their veracity, are important precisely because of the difference and distance between past, present and future that is carried them. Charity as unprofessional and unbusinesslike, the charity of the past, is required to act as a foil for the charity of the future, the modern charity in which business and professionalism are assured by the presence of professional and businesslike bodies that can substantiate these ideals. Charity, whose work and identity are threatened by removal of need, eases the pain of apparent inferiority to the market – as the contemporary exemplar of ongoing need – by engaging in the work of mirroring that market and its handmaidens in the process of redefining the need both for itself and

its clients in terms of care. Heritage thus comes to be seen to meet the need for care for its clients through the actions of its (new) managers who come to care for the organization by making it work in a professional and businesslike way as they simultaneously assuage their own pain – of fear or remembrance of redundancy – through their work in and for an organization that comes to be seen to need such work of care if it is to survive. For as Mellor (1985: 14) notes:

It must not be possible in the 1980s [or in the here and now, wherever that may be] for someone to write, as occurred in the 1950s that voluntary societies ‘are unscientific¹⁴ in their approach and unbusinesslike in their methods’ (Roof, 1957).

In the penultimate section which follows we focus specifically on the nature of Heritage’s target group for it allows us both to reconnect with Scarry’s account and to explain the nature of the enterprises that Heritage engages with in order to sustain the flow of its funds into grants and advocacy. As such it provides us with a path for reconsidering the final act of mimesis at Heritage which is of concern to us here.

‘Only the Good Die Young’

The title of this section rehearses a familiar yet little remarked upon comment concerning our view of the elderly, the group that Heritage takes as its target ‘market’. Yet it is a very strange notion that ‘only the good die young’. It is a notion that performs a huge variety of representational, or transubstantial conjuring tricks within and between its parlous assembly of words. For we say that it is only the good that die young to indicate both the anti-Panglossianism of such common senses as ‘Murphy’s or Sod’s Law’ and the reverse. We note that unfairly and unjustly it is only the good who seem to have life taken from them ‘early’, but also and somewhat contradictory (for what is good about having one’s life terminated?) that this must be so, that ‘good’ cannot survive the passage from youth to age, indeed, that *only the young are good*. The moral high ground, in our infantilist imaginings of society, is tied to youth, as Hinchliffe’s (1997) deconstruction of the cinema ads that sell us ice cream makes clear. And it is against such pressures that Heritage struggles, or better, it is *within* such pressures that Heritage finds need of its work, in the (new) social advocacy role that it has taken on.

Scarry too pays attention to the ‘problem’ of age. For as she sees in pain a mimesis of death, so she sees in aging, in the approach of death, both the mimesis and reality of pain. Pain mimes death through inversion: in death the body remains as sentience departs, removing the world from person and person from the world, whilst in pain through sentience’s manifestation in its total form, world and self are removed as the aversiveness of the body, in and of itself, comes to dominate all.

As in dying in death, so in serious pain the claims of the body utterly nullify the claims of the world. (Scarry, 1985: 33)

14 Science being the exemplification of professionalism.

According to Scarry, the process of perception through which one realises not the relative comfort of generalised mortality but the horror of the certainty of one's own specific, individualised mortality – a process that is itself close, if not identical, to pain, as we noted above – is one which “belongs anywhere where death is near and so belongs to aging” (1985: 32).

Sometimes assisted by younger human beings, the body works to obliterate the world and self of the old person. Something of this world dissolution is already at work even in the tendency of those in late middle age, no longer working, to see their former jobs, their life actions, their choices as wrong or trivial ... As the body breaks down, it becomes increasingly the object of attention, usurping the place of all other objects, so that finally, in very, very old and sick people, the world may exist in a circle two feet out from themselves; the exclusive content of perception and speech may become what was eaten, the problems of excreting, the progress of pains, the comfort or discomfort of a particular chair or bed. Stravinsky once described aging as: ‘the ever-shrinking perimeter of pleasure’. This constantly diminishing world ground is almost a given in representations of old age. (Scarry, 1985: 32-33)¹⁵

Thus we see that it is not only *the* good that is restricted to the young but also the goods that make up our made world, the objects of our work that form the basis of our extension into and consumption of that world. And it is just such a facet of the life of the elderly that ‘is almost a given in our representations of old age’. But *not* in the representations of old age that are provided by Heritage. For Heritage, the ‘givenness’ of ‘diminishing world ground’ is a call to action, a demonstration of the need to *make up* images that show the perseverance of personhood into old age. In, for example, Heritage’s ‘special letter’ to those who have shown an interest in ‘remembering’ Heritage in their wills, we see a hospice¹⁶ that is thoroughly connected with the wider world – ‘there will be family support workers and... [a] special wing... devoted to service training and education, spreading the hospice’s philosophy to NHS professionals’; an elderly lady radiantly enjoying her usage of a telephone; and another one ‘enjoying a break at the Day Centre’ with a younger companion, perhaps one of the ‘unsung heroes’ of volunteering. Such images must be *made up* through the work of inverting ‘given’ representations of old age, in order that they can subsequently *make real* a world in which diminishing world ground is at the very edge of experience, if allowed a place at all.

And it is here that we witness the second sense in which the work of Heritage ‘makes’, ground for the expansion of the world of the elderly, in a world otherwise diminishing. For the services that Heritage provides, in collaboration with ‘commercial’ partners, may all be seen as attempts to mitigate the diminishing of world that is increasingly the lot of the ever longer lasting elderly in an ever more modern world. It is to the nature of such services and of the final act of Heritage’s mimesis (at least in this account) that we turn in our conclusion.

15 See also Caillois (1984) on the relations between moving in and out of the body, death, and the life force of love. See Shakespeare (2000) and Warnes (1993) for accounts of the ways in which those who might benefit from care can consequently risk representation as problematic objects of, in the case of the elderly, increasing incapability. See Bettio and Plantenga (2004) for comparative consideration of care for the elderly in relation to the different historical and institutional contexts of different states.

16 Although ambivalence is retained: the hospice is also described as a ‘long-needed haven’.

Enterprising Bodies and the Marketing of Assurance

Heritage, as fund raising organization, has adopted many relatively standard practices to enhance giving that have strong traditions in the traditional charity sector. It has, like many other similar organizations, also ventured into the field of (social) enterprise, priding itself on a large retail (of largely second hand goods) operation, enacted by both paid staff and volunteers, with an annual turnover of millions of pounds. But it is in its second type of enterprising fund raising that we witness the most interesting and imaginative exchanges. For Heritage, partly as a result of the contacts held by its new managers, partly to give them something to do as they create their own new and expansive working worlds, has entered into an ever-increasing array of 'partnerships' with commercial organizations to provide services to its target consumers. Such services, including the housing we encountered earlier, are profit making with such results being 'gifted' from nominal trading companies to Heritage *qua* charity. Heritage offers its commercial partners access to a self-defining mass market segment, a market made comfortable by Heritage's involvement. It can offer its clients a magic portal to the market through which cheaper, but not inferior or substandard products flow, through its arrangements with its partners. In extreme cases, and they are rare, Heritage will arrange the pricing structures of such services to reflect redistributive aims. But even without the exceptional presence of this last 'good', the situation is seemingly seen by all concerned as 'win-win'. In these relationships, which cover the supply of services such as legal and financial advice, home maintenance, 'secure' housing provision (whether Heritage run or not), travel and transport and telephone advice lines, to name but a few, Heritage sees itself as not endorsing but 'branding' that which it seeks to help make available to its clients.¹⁷

We're not in the endorsement business. There is a serious significant difference between branding something and endorsing something. We are very much in the branding business, we are very definitely not in the endorsement business... if you haven't got the brand, you don't control the brand, you don't, you can't control the sale of the product. (Finance Director, 10-10-1996)

Strict and detailed service agreements are constructed and monitored by Heritage to ensure provision of what is required. Heritage, through such arrangements, is able to 'sell' the confidence it can provide its client consumers to producers who, in their turn, can supply these clients with cheaper services than they can attain elsewhere. But crucially, precisely the sorts of services that hold off the body's obliteration of the world and self of the older person as work and its made products become unavailable and the transubstantiations of pain that they carry are undone. An obliteration that as we noted is often assisted and facilitated by the infantilism of our modern world. Heritage can slow, even on occasions reverse, the diminishment in the world ground and selves of its target client market by making available services which not only see *them* as special, as the *real leads*,¹⁸ but also make available to them a world beyond the service, *because of and through the service* (see also Kam, 1996). Telephone Advice Lines connect their users widely, 'secure' housing at best stops the boundary of the extended

17 See Bruce (2005) and Tapp *et al.* (1999) for examples of the logic behind the increasing colonisation of the charity sector by the discourse of marketing.

18 In the sense deployed in the film *Glengarry Glenross*.

body being seen as the fragility of home, at worst extending it at least as far from the body *as* the boundary of the home, whilst insurance and assurance take some of the pain of death, some of what may be left behind, and transubstantiate it by dealing with it now.¹⁹ They are goods to be sold at a profit, goods that themselves extend the elderly and goods that allow further extension beyond themselves. In the context of Heritage's espoused aims, they are very good goods indeed.

But they are also, in the final instance, goods provided through 'the market', and it is here that we witness our final set of bizarre mimetic turns for the market and business function as 'strange attractors' in Heritage's work. At one level, as Hinchliffe (1997) reminds us, the commercial market functions as exemplar of a modern world that has no time for the aged. For it is the market that fails, on its own, to adequately serve this segment (many of them do not have very much money) and it is the market that in part instantiates the very category of the elderly through its pensioning of those whose work(s) can, or should, no longer be sold. It is the *sine qua non* of our modern, cultural exacerbation of the tendency of age to diminish, to shrink, the world ground of those that experience its march. We don't have time for the elderly – to extend our worlds to theirs, to keep the latter alive – and it is in large part the market that makes this the case. But the market is also the realm of choice and within cultures increasingly oriented to consumption, the place where personhood is continually expressed in the endless making and remaking of the (cultural) world. Relations to the market must thus be carefully managed.

Which leaves us where? Well, we can see that the *particular* markets made available to clients by Heritage carry limited market 'bads' and predominantly market 'goods', and very good goods they are too. This market is a safe market, a 'benign' market (Scarry, 1985), and attributes that traverse it do so through their authorisation by the mirror of charity that is Heritage. This new Heritage, the Heritage that can move from pathology to the positive health of society, is, as we noted at the start, a modern, not traditional, Heritage. And this is a modernity that is sustained by the presence of our new managers, *as* market products, working in a marketised world, in part as consequence of their preceding history in, their acculturation to, the commercial world. For this is a strange mirror: Heritage must not just show its charitable side to its *clients*, it must also show its business side to its *customers*. Transubstantiating the new Heritage through the body of the market is a difficult business.

One of the great difficulties with charity I think, is there isn't the natural competitive phenomenon or, to make them efficient for example. Charities tend not to go out of business because they don't make profits and they make services, they don't have shareholders who are looking for a return on equity, looking for a dividend on their shares. At the same time, you think alone about the concept

19 We could also usefully add to this list the volunteering that goes on in the shops which make up Heritage's 'retail' operations. The demographic profile of such volunteers is extremely consistent with that of Heritage's target 'market'. And whilst in 'many ways it would be much easier not to use volunteers, just paid employees' such individual are 'employed' for 'other reasons' (Senior Manager). Primary amongst these, one might say, is the mimesis such arrangements provide of the 'employment' from which the elderly are largely excluded, the world of work. See also Fyfe and Milligan (2003) and Parsons and Broadbridge (2007) for reflections on the complexities of volunteering, with the latter focusing particularly on these within charity retail outlets, apprehended via attention to broader regimes of signification, including that of gender.

of the customer, if you believe as I tend to believe that the customer is the person who pays the money, in charity parlance the customer is the donor. However in most businesses the customer receives the value of the product which he's given the money for. That is not generally the case in the charity world, in fact some would say legally it can't, cannot be. So the, the recipient of the service, they might live ten thousand miles away in, somewhere in darkest Africa or wherever, or South East Asia or something and, you know, so the customer, the donor, probably has very, very little experience of the value which is being provided for his, for the price, and therefore cannot make that judgement... So therefore the normal economic competitive forces that are, that are there in private and commercial business are not there in a charity and that I think leads to different ways that charities have, charities might be managed.²⁰ (Finance Director)

Such difficulties can however be completely overcome when customer and client can be merged in an act of transubstantiation of immense worth to our new managers.

I'm most excited about [Heritage] because I think one of the things that it can do as a business is to utilise its brand franchise with older people in terms of developing products for older people which it can sell and sell at a profit and I don't think there's anything wrong with that at all. Then it can utilise those profits for the purposes of older people who can't afford perhaps those same products or it can supplement the funds for the charitable services, and I think that's the way charity is going to go. (Finance Director)

Through 'branding' rather than merely 'endorsing' products, Heritage becomes a market maker in its own right, making good its promise to the customer side of its mirror as it simultaneously satisfies its clients' ongoing need for care. But as should be clear by now, market makers are by their very nature mimetic to the market. Think only of the market in seats on the world's commodity, financial and futures exchanges. And we are therefore left in a very curious position indeed. Or, as our finance director put it, as words began to fail him:

I think... certain parts of the charity sector and I include [Heritage], is probably breaking ground to a new..., I think you know, we're leap-frogging part of the twentieth century in a way and I think you know, the roots of charity are very much in the eighteenth century or something, but I think where we might get to might be a, very much a twenty first century model...of organization.

This 'new organizational form', the combine of 'social capital [which] is non-monetary, ... basically good will, and... entrepreneurial capital[,],... financial equity' as observed by the Finance Director, is as rhetorically seductive as it is mimetically complex and fragile. And in consequence it enhances and jeopardises Heritage's identity as *carer* in equal measure. For the whip of the market is not always benign. Boots, the UK chemists, utilised the advertising strapline "We care because you do" in an apparently extremely successful campaign in the early 1990s.²¹ The three words of the conditional, 'because you do', appear as but a minor addition, a mere rhetorical invite to the second

20 *Heritage* is far from alone in experiencing the confusion of role and its perceived impact upon legitimacy. And the managers at *Heritage* who have informed this paper are far from the only ones to have reflected upon it both with regard to relations to the market and indeed relations to the state (see, for example, Amin *et al.*, 2002; Sogge *et al.*, 1996; Parsons and Broadbridge, 2007; Nettleton and Hardey, 2006; Gaskin, 1999; Held, 2005; Zimmerman and Dart, 1998; Lynn, 2002). Nor are these managers alone in seeing the potential of business, particularly in its association with marketing, as a potential solution to this problem (see, for example, Bruce, 2005).

21 A 'sign off with style ... that says it all', according to the laudatory mention given to the campaign in the dti endorsed 'practical guide to advertising' [<http://www.adassoc.org.uk/guide/creat.html>] (consulted 25th January 2005).

person of the reader, to the seemingly similar notion that Heritage deploys. But their impact, if untrammelled, is enormous. For they occlude a system of intermediary transubstantiations of immense importance. Given our knowledge of the operation of capitalist relations of production and consumption that take their place in a world too-often characterised by an impoverished sense of 'making' (Arendt, 1958),²² it is clear that the strapline's warm and fuzzy appeal is but a chimera that eighteenth century philosophy could easily disintegrate for us. Boots cares not simply because *we* do but because *they* are also aware that *we* act on *our* cares. That if *they* can attend to *our* cares with *their* products and services, and do so better than *their* market competitors, or at least create a robust impression of so doing, then *they* can also attend to *their* own cares, or rather the cares of the principals for whom *they* act as agents. As the popularity of Friedmansque misreadings of our legal framework makes clear, *they* care because the shareholders of the company do. Through this instrumentalism, in the most pejorative sense, through this chain of equivalencies in which the cares of the customer become unproblematically synonymous with the cares of the company and those of its owners, the possibility of a rich world of 'action' (Arendt, 1958), of a 'kingdom of ends' (Kant, 1996) is lost. Heritage currently cares for the person, as well as his or her representatives in the conduits of capital, but it is far from clear for how long it can continue to do so if its mimesis of business remains unchecked. Which is not, of course, to say that we currently face an either/or in such organizations, between the business like, professional pursuit of the ends of capitalist accumulation and the presumably more shambolic and amateurish pursuit of those of philanthropy.²³ We *currently* do not. Heritage and its ilk are able to do a great deal of good, for a great many varied constituencies, precisely because they are able to oscillate within different modes and levels of mimesis of various legitimacy ideals, as they articulate various works that make, maintain and expand the world ground of their beneficiaries, of those who seek to provide for their beneficiaries and of those members of the organization itself that mediate the two. It is the hybridity and complexity of these shifting arrangements that deliver their strength and enable their perpetuation. But when the range of legitimacy modes and models shrinks and, moreover, when that shrinking is embraced in the interests of the presumed powers of consistency, the elegance of simplicity and the comforts of familiarity then the price to be paid for that which is gained is too high to compensate for that which is lost. For Heritage to continue to care and to continue to matter to all of those whom it is able to expand (or at least ameliorate and slow the contraction of) it must continue itself to be drawn in, attracted to, multiple directions and ideals. It must accept and embrace a future of "both radical change and radical continuity in the relationship between market, state and society" (Amin et al, 2002: xi). A lived future in which action can take place within the labyrinthine world ground made through the extension and realisation of disparate and irreconcilable ends rather than the dead, endlessly elongated present of a world made through the extension and realisation of the means associated with one end alone.

22 A term that Arendt deploys in contradistinction to a richer conceptualisation of 'action'.

23 Or indeed between pursuit of the formally agreed public good ends of the state and those of accumulation or philanthropy.

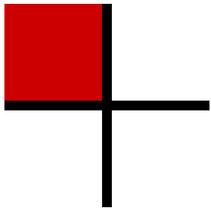
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Not Fear but Hope in the Apocalypse

Matteo Mandarini

Mario Tronti is best known in the Anglophone world – if he is known at all – as the originator of the heretical Italian Marxist tradition of *Operaismo* (Workerism) and, for that very reason, in this time of immaterial, creative labour, somewhat *passé*, of another era. Whatever one's judgment on the Tronti of the 1960s, the author of the hugely influential *Operai e Capitale* (*Workers and Capital*)¹ is one of the most important and incisive political thinkers alive today. His books and essays continue to trace the principal contradictions of contemporary society and its dynamics; always manage to fix upon the central antagonisms that uncover the tendencies of the contemporary work of excision of the political that defines contemporary capitalism and contemporary liberal democracy; and he does so in a beautiful, surgically precise language so alien to the rhetorical character of written Italian. If Nietzsche makes German dance, Tronti makes the florid Italian language into a piece of precision technology for the careful labour of discernment of friend and enemy.

The character of Tronti's thinking cannot be divorced from the complex – and dangerous – operation that has always informed it: taking – following Marx's advice – reactionary thinkers seriously and putting them to work by *fusing* bourgeois thinkers with Marxist thought; making them work within a Marxist framework at the same time as allowing them to inform that framework, for it is largely in the reactionary tradition that the centrality of the political – the pivot around which Tronti's thought turns – is most profoundly thought. Thus in *Operai e Capitale* Marx is supplemented with Nietzsche – the proletarian subject becomes the principal agent of the Will to Power; and in Tronti's writings of the 1970s, Marx and Lenin are supplemented not only with Nietzsche but Weber and, still more problematically, Heidegger and Schmitt as well. In his thinking of this period, the question of 'the Political' comes to the fore, and more specifically that of 'the Political decision', of politics as the *techné* that organises conflict. All these figures, both of revolution and of reaction, surface from these engagements transformed, uneasy in their previous incarnations, in the qualities that had

1 Tronti's most famous texts, which took the form of articles originally published as editorials for the journals *Quaderni Rossi* and *Classe Operaia*, and then published as part of the seminal *Operai e Capitale* in 1966, remain largely unread outside of Continental Europe and South America – despite the fact that a number of these texts have been available since the 1970s in English, and can easily be found online today with a simple Google search. Incidentally, these editorials will be published by mayflybooks (www.mayflybooks.org) in 2008, translated by Peter Thomas.

characterised the various orthodoxies – as do the categories of politics that have dominated modernity.

In Tronti's most recent series of articles on the 'critique of democracy', these figures have been joined by that of Alexis Tocqueville, the author of *Democracy in America*.² In these texts, which develop some of the darkly pessimistic themes of his *La Politica al Tramonto* (1998), he traces the coming together of *homo oeconomicus* with the *homo democraticus*. With the end of the working class subject, which Tronti argues is the ultimate terminus of the struggles that followed the events of May 1968, we have the collapse of all political thought, of all politics. Politics requires qualitative difference, marking out friend from enemy; democracy, on the other hand, ignores quality in favour of quantity – and, as Tronti points out in his presentation at *La sapienza* in Rome, the "cipher of capitalism is quantity", adding for good measure: "to adopt democratic practice is to declare the revolutionary process closed ... the majority is the enemy". This does not mean that we should develop *anti*-democratic solutions. He is well aware of the possible totalitarian results that can issue from such solutions. He calls instead for an 'a-democratic' practice, what he calls a 'great theory of the minority', a 'non marginal' 'minoritarian agency' – asking us to draw our lessons from the great tradition of the partisan working class, which was never quantitatively a majority, but was so qualitatively. Today, his most recent reflections work towards the separation of the notion of freedom from that of democracy – to understand freedom a-democratically – and to grasp the unfreedom that marks our democracy, in which politics has become the mere 'management of consensus'.³

The following short series of reflections⁴ is not an introduction or summary of Tronti's thought from its beginnings to the present, or even an account of his most recent deliberations.⁵ Instead, it focuses specifically on some of the themes and texts of his *Lectio magistralis*, '*Politica e destino*', held at the University of Sienna in December 2001 – which marked the end of his teaching career (2006).

2 See, for example '*Per la Critica della Democrazia*' (2001), '*Per la Critica della Democrazia Politica*' (2005), and the talk with the same title, '*Per la Critica della Democrazia Politica*' at the department of political science at the university *La Sapienza* in Rome, 12th December 2007 (unpublished).

3 It is interesting to see how Tronti's critique of democracy, democracy as the locus of the end of revolutionary politics, as the ultimate enemy of a left politics, is also developed by Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek. But Tronti's claim here is perhaps more categorical than either of these thinkers, in that for him democracy signals the death of politics *tout court*; for politics is only the direct confrontation between subjects in struggle that refuse the quantitative reduction effected by democratic practice. The quotations in the final part of this paragraph are drawn from the article and the presentation entitled '*Per la Critica della Democrazia Politica*' cited in the note above.

4 This article was originally presented in July 2007 at SCOS in Ljubljana, Slovenia. It has been partly revised for publication here.

5 An account of Tronti's thought is sorely missing, and it is hoped that this thinker, unaccountably ignored in the Anglophone world, will receive a proper critical appraisal – although it is even more important that the imminent publication of the first part of his *Workers and Capital* instigates the publication of some of his most important recent works, especially his *La Politica al Tramonto*.

The question with which Tronti is concerned in this text – whose parameters he sketches out – and upon which I want to focus, is that of the relation between politics and fate.

In the history of political thought, the connection between these two terms is not at all obscure and – yet – what was obvious to the political thinkers of modernity, has become progressively less so. In saying ‘obvious’ I mean that it was precisely in respect to the unfolding of fate that politics, as we have come to know it, was formulated.

Italy likes to think of itself as *the* country of politics – where politics was, if not invented, at least first most rigorously theorised. If René Descartes is the ‘father of modern philosophy’, then the self-styled *cittadino e Segretario fiorentino* is the father of modern political philosophy. The incisiveness of his political thought is nowhere more evident than in his opposition of *fortuna* and *virtù* – on which Niccolò Machiavelli reflected so profoundly in *The Prince*, *The Discourses*, *The Art of War* and in practically all his political and historical texts. For Machiavelli *virtù* marks the specificity of the political: it is with *virtù* that one confronts *fortuna* and bends it to one’s will.

To contrast this paradigmatic instance of modern political thought with today, in which what is obvious is – rather – that fate or destiny is the immediate, the objective, which calls instead upon a practice of administration or management, is to highlight the distance travelled from this modern notion of politics.

Heideggerians will notice a somewhat easy slippage between ‘fate’ and ‘destiny’ in what I have said so far – for which Heidegger uses distinct terms with clearly distinguished meanings. *Schicksal* is usually translated as ‘fate’ whereas *Geschick* by the neologism ‘destining’. In the later philosophy, it is *Geschick* that becomes predominant, displacing what Heidegger sometimes suggests is the more or less implicit remnants of ‘humanism’ – that is, metaphysics, in the earlier work. Although I will be unable to engage Heidegger here – this question of fate and destiny, *Schicksal* and *Geschick* is crucial for a proper treatment of the question of the relation between politics and fate.

So, instead of to Heidegger, we shall turn to another German philosopher. In the early essay, *The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate* [*Schicksal*] to which Tronti draws our attention, Hegel articulates politics and fate in a remarkably concise form:

Thus the earthly life of Jesus was separation from the world and flight into heaven; restoration, in the ideal world, of the life which was becoming dissipated into the void ... yet at times [his earthly life was a] practical proof of the divine and therefore a fight [*Kampf*] against fate, partly in the course of spreading the Kingdom of God, with the revelation of which the entire kingdom of the world collapsed and vanished, partly in the course of immediate reaction against single elements in the fate as he came up against them. (1971: 271)

Before turning to another unavoidable and disturbing presence within the modern thinking of the political, I want to spell out some – perhaps obvious – ideas in this passage.

What we find in it is a dichotomy within immanence: the earthly life of Jesus involved both an ideal transcendence and a practical, an engaged practice, within and with the world. It is worth noting that the movement of transcendence is defined as a 'flight' [*Flucht*] – a fleeing from – that separates Jesus from the world and it is as such so as to refuse being 'dissipated' in the 'void' – the void, I take Hegel to mean, of the world. Thus, part of Jesus' earthly life was to flee the world – understood in some sense as void, that is, as corruption. And yet, his earthly life was sometimes the 'practical proof', the activity of the divine itself within the world and, therefore, the transcendent or divine as an earthly struggle [*Kampf*] against the objectivity of fate or the immediacy of the void that the world as fate is.

I shall say no more about this passage, other than to make two remarks. Firstly, although I have no desire to call upon Jesus to represent modern politics – messianism with a messiah, to reverse Derrida's well-worn phrase – it seems to me that we are presented here, in concentrated form, with the possibilities and difficulties for all attempts to think politics and fate together. Some questions that arise in this respect are: What is the relation between transcendence, the ideal and concrete struggle? What might one mean by linking world, void and fate and – at the same time – to remain within the 'earthly life'? How does one flee fate and – at the same time – bring the kingdom of the world to collapse? Secondly, I wish merely to point out that we discover here – in Tronti's words – the 'Hegel of political theology' (2006: 13), to use a term from the third great – and also somewhat problematic – German thinker I shall discuss: Carl Schmitt.

There are two phrases that spring to mind when thinking of Schmitt: "Sovereign is he who decides on the exception" (Schmitt, 2005: 5) and "The specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy" (Schmitt, 1996: 26). Schmitt's definition of the "specific political distinction" provides us with one way by which some of the problems emerging from the conjunction of politics and fate – as condensed in the Hegel passage – can be thought.

I shall briefly summarise some of the most relevant aspects of Schmitt's *The Concept of the Political*:

- 1) The friend-enemy antithesis is that which distinguishes the properly political element from other antitheses and provides it with its autonomy.
- 2) "The friend, enemy, and combat concepts receive their real meaning precisely because they refer to the real possibility of physical killing. War follows from enmity. War is the existential negation of the enemy" (Schmitt, 1996: 33).
- 3) Schmitt argues that who the enemy is "can neither be decided by a previously determined general norm nor by the judgement of a disinterested and therefore neutral third party" (*ibid.*: 27).

Two main points should emerge from this very schematic summary. The friend-enemy distinction is both existential and formal. It is existential, in that it is determined concretely, such that only the participants in the struggle are able to judge whether "the adversary intends to negate the opponent's way of life" (*ibid.*: 27); and the participants are 'public enemies', i.e. 'fighting collectiv[ies]' organised as nation states (*ibid.*: 28). The distinction is formal, in that – as Karl Löwith writes in his trenchant critique – "for Schmitt it is simply a matter of securing the nonnormal right of decision purely as such, quite apart from what is decided upon" (Löwith, 1995: 142). The 'right' of decision

exists only on the basis of authority as such. Right is not the condition of authority but follows from the existence of authority, i.e. of the state. Through this curious, formal articulation, decisionism and existentiality are knotted together.

It is obvious that this is a very different formalism from Hans Kelsen's. Instead of the decision following from a formal system of law, the law follows from a decision over the exception: "In the exception the power of real life breaks through the crust of a mechanism that has become torpid by repetition" (Kelsen, 2005: 15). The form of law follows from the decision over the norm and the exception, but the peculiar formalism at work here stems from the fact that the decision is a "pure decision not based on reason and discussion and not justifying itself, that is, [it is] an absolute decision created out of nothingness" (*ibid.*: 66).

But what has all this to do with politics and fate – the subject of our discussion? We might want to point to the importance of the (political) decision – over the exception, over friend and enemy – that 'breaks through the crust of mechanism that has become torpid by repetition', i.e. that breaks with what Hegel names the 'void of the world', Machiavelli calls *fortuna* and we might simply call fate. It also breaks with the fixity of the (external, objective) system of norms, reasons and any understanding of natural teleology precisely by being founded on nothing – and so the kingdom of the world, the void, is destroyed through a flight to the transcendent nothing which founds decision.

But is this not too easy? Does all this not depend upon the possibility of a Nothing from which the decision precedes? What is the status of this Nothing? And furthermore, what furnishes the conditions for a decision – according to Schmitt these conditions cannot be normative nor carry content in any way, since any such conditions would degrade the autonomy of the political by suturing the decision to something other than Nothing.

Let us try and answer some of these questions by considering Schmitt's "high points of politics [that] are simultaneously the moments in which enmity is, in concrete clarity, recognized as the enemy" (Schmitt, 1996: 67). His favoured example is Cromwell's enmity towards the Spanish. Schmitt presents us then with an example of what for him is the highest recognition of enmity. But it is hard to un-problematically situate this example within Schmitt's analysis of decision. As Löwith persuasively argues, Schmitt is forced to "seize upon a substantiality which no longer befits his own historical situation and from which enmity derives substantive content" (Löwith, 1995: 151). That is, can this enmity towards the Spanish be understood outside of a specific position taken on Catholicism by Puritan England? Is not the work of fate working at the heart of the political decision on enmity? In that sense, the flight to the empty place of transcendence, to the 'nihilistic ground', the flight to the Nothing which is the formal condition of the autonomy of decision, is filled in the concrete instance in which enmity is decided upon. In that sense, Löwith is entirely correct to point to this unresolved 'ambiguity' at the heart of Schmitt's definition of the political: enmity cannot pre-exist the decision on the enemy and yet any decision on the enemy can only be understood on the basis of a pre-existing antagonism.

In ‘Politica e destino’, Tronti concludes his talk with Mao’s famous phrase, ‘It is right to rebel’. To conclude this note, I would like to reflect on this path and hopefully shed some light on the path Tronti gestures towards.

How are we to understand the ‘it is right’? It seems clear that ‘right’ here is meant both as ‘it is justified’ and ‘it is correct’. More philosophically, perhaps, we could say: rebellion is true. In Alain Badiou’s gloss on this phrase from his 1975 text, *Théorie de la Contradiction*, he writes:

Every truth is ... essentially destruction. Everything that simply conserves is simply false. The field of Marxist knowledge is always a field of ruins. (2005: 676)

As for rebellion, it is taking sides but, as Tronti points out, it is a side to which we are destined, which a certain history has transmitted to us. Rebellion then is the decision on this destiny that affirms that part – that *partisanship* – as truth.

And yet, Tronti argues, such a choice of a part is only for those who have the “Machiavellian [good] *fortuna* to act within the state of exception” (Tronti, 1998: 17). Only [alternatively: in such circumstances] can politics exist at all; only there [alternatively: under such circumstances] is rebellion true. Outside of the state of exception, there is no politics, and we are left – instead – with the fate ordained by technical-economic rationality. In such a condition, Tronti argues, we should be driven not by “fear but hope in the Apocalypse” (*ibid.*: 27). For until nothingness – from transcendent – reappears within the “objectivity of destiny” (*ibid.*: 13) as the part which refutes it, it will remain abstract, ineffectual, irrational and unable to “lacerate the fabric of the being-towards-death of history” (*ibid.*: 21).

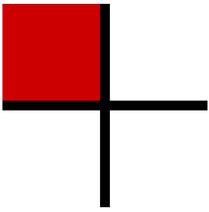
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Global Justice Rhetoric: Observations and Suggestions*

Jason Del Gandio

abstract

This essay provides observations of global justice rhetoric and suggestions for improving it. First, I outline the scope of this paper by defining my understandings of global justice and rhetoric and then situate myself as an activist and communication scholar. Second, I provide ten observations of global justice rhetoric. These observations are not intended to be exhaustive and I am not trying to speak for other activists. Instead, these observations are intended as contributions to global justice thought and practice. At the very least, these observations can serve as a point of discussion among activists, and at the very most, help activists become more aware of and reflective about their rhetorical practices. Third, I provide five hands-on suggestions for improving activists' rhetoric and communication. These suggestions are of course relative to each activist and each situation. There is no one way to improve one's communication. However, concrete guidelines can help activists negotiate their speeches, essays, conversations, media relations, cross cultural dialogues, direct actions, etc. Fourth and last, I close this essay by encouraging other activists to make further observations and suggestions. More activists can and should collect, systematize, and share their experiences with rhetoric and communication. To start such a dialogue is the purpose of this essay for it will help to improve global justice discourse.

Defining Global Justice

This initial section does three things: first, it defines my understanding of global justice, second, it outlines my positioning as a global justice activist and a communication scholar, and third, it defines my understanding of and approach to rhetoric.

By global justice activism, I am referring to those activists, organizers, workers, peasants, teachers, students, staffers, farmers, and people in general who fight for a more humane and socially just world. Such a fight is by no means new, but it has definitely changed since the early 1990s. That time period witnessed the end of the Cold War and the rise of neoliberal global capitalism. Rather than being divided into capitalist and communist blocs, the world suddenly became open to an unfettered capitalism driven by neoliberal ideology. The foundation of neoliberalism was actually set after the Second World War with the establishment of the World Bank, the

* Much of this essay is adapted from my forthcoming book, *Rhetoric for Radicals: A Handbook for Twenty-First Century Activists* (Fall, 2008).

International Monetary Fund, and the General Agreement of Tariffs and Trade, which eventually became the World Trade Organization. Then, in the 1970s, economic recessions and debt crises affected many of the world's countries. The United States and Western European countries began adopting neoliberal policies in order to increase international trade, which, in theory, would boost economic wealth for both developed and developing countries. Once the Cold War ended, these policies were applied the world over.

In brief, neoliberalism is a form of worldwide capitalism based on the deregulation of free markets and the privatization of wealth. It seeks to subordinate State control to the interests of private wealth accumulation. The State becomes an extension of economic activity with the sole purpose of increasing capitalistic competition and private wealth. Neoliberalism thus provides tax breaks for the rich, reduces social spending and social wealth fair, expands corporate control, and erodes labour rights, environmental protections, and even national law. This neo *laissez faire* approach allows private interests to own and control every aspect of the human, social, and natural world. Such things as food, water, farmland, forests, healthcare, education, prisons, militaries, political processes, and mass media are targets of neoliberal control. Even individual thoughts, plant seeds, mothers' breast milk, and human DNA are intended to be owned, controlled, bought and sold by free market capitalists (Mander and Goldsmith, 1996; Shiva, 2002). In theory, this private ownership allows for maximum efficiency, production, and exchange of products and services. In reality, it maximizes profitability for private interests. This latter perspective is evidenced by some basic empirical statistics.

- From 1960 to 1980, the rate of economic growth for all countries (excluding China) was somewhere between 5.5 percent and 3.2 percent. From 1980 to 2000, those numbers were somewhere between 2.6 percent and 0.7 percent. In other words, the general lot of economic growth has actually slowed during the age of globalization. (Navarro, 2007: 13)
- However, from 1980 to the mid-1990s, there was dramatic economic growth in 15 countries, raising the incomes of about 1.5 billion people. Over the same time period, approximately 100 countries experienced a decline in economic growth, lowering the incomes of about 1.6 billion people. In 70 of those countries, the average income fell below the 1980 level. Thus, some countries got richer while others got poorer. (Castells, 2003: 436)
- According to data from the year 2000, 1 percent of the world's richest adults own 40 percent of global assets and the richest 10 percent own 85 percent of the world total. (UNUWIDER, 2006)
- According to a 2007 study, the pay for the average American CEO was 364 times higher than the average American worker. In 1980, that difference was only 40 times higher. (Anderson, et al, 2007)
- At the turn of the twenty first century, approximately 1.2 billion people live on less than \$1 per day and approximately 2.8 billion people live on less than \$2 per day. There are about 6.5 billion people in the world, which means that close to half the world's population lives on \$2 per day or less. (Kerbo, 2006: 1)

These inequalities are not solely attributable to neoliberalism, but neoliberalism no doubt plays a major role. It's no coincidence that gaps in wealth have increased during the 'golden age of globalization'. Neoliberalism's sole purpose is to make money for the world's most powerful people, institutions, and constituencies.

These problems have not gone unchallenged. For example, on January 1st 1994, the Zapatistas of Chiapas, Mexico stepped onto the world's stage by publicly announcing their direct – and if need be, militant – opposition to neoliberalism. This was the same day that Canada, the United States, and Mexico ratified the North American Free Trade Agreement, a neoliberal policy that threatened the livelihoods of the workers, farmers, citizens, and indigenous populations of those three countries. Other populations and actions encompassing various ideologies and spanning different geographical locations also emerged. In 1998, international activists, spearheaded by Canadian and French activists, challenged and defeated the Multilateral Agreement on Investment. In 1999, a broad coalition of activists shut down World Trade Organization meetings in Seattle, Washington. From 2000 to 2001, numerous international actions were taken against the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Economic Forum, the Free Trade Area of the Americas agreement, and G8 Summit meetings. These few years were the 'peak' of what became known as the Global Justice Movement.

The visibility and fervour of the so-called 'movement of movements' has lessened since September 11th 2001 when terrorist attacked the United States. After 9/11 many activists focused less on global capitalism and more on George W. Bush's global war and the United States 'Empire'. The usefulness of the phrase 'Global Justice Movement' is thus questionable; it may or may not be appropriate nowadays. However, that doesn't mean that global justice issues have withered and the activists have disappeared. Instead, the Global Justice Movement has given rise to a new, decentered culture of activism: Indymedia news networks, World Social Forums, People's Global Action, No Border Camps, *Ya Basta!*, *Tutti Bianchi*, Black/Green/Pink Blocs, Reclaim the Streets, Critical Mass, the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army, festivals of life, parades of resistance, *consultas*, convergence centres, neighbourhood assemblies, new types of anarchism, cyber Marxists, a do-it-yourself ethic, antiracist workers, militant researchers, activist philosophers, radical cheerleaders, postwave feminists, and experiments in direct democracy have all emerged from and in response to global justice. This essay is written for these activists and it is intended as a contribution to rather than as a study of global justice.

Positioning

I started participating in the Global Justice Movement in the spring of 2000. I happened to be watching the evening news and caught the coverage of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund protests in Washington, DC. Something hit me in that moment and I suddenly realized that I needed to be out there in the world, trying to change things for the better. I became an activist soon after. Since then I have worked on free/fair trade issues, antiwar campaigns, anti-Republican National Convention protests, Latin American solidarity actions, and have travelled to Venezuela to witness the Bolivarian Revolution. I have also contributed workshops on communication,

rhetoric, and radical theory at conferences, meetings, and local bookstores and free spaces.

My activism is coupled with my academic trainings. I was in graduate school as I began my activism, not earning my doctorate until May, 2002, approximately two years after becoming an activist. I was in the Department of Speech Communication and have since held university positions in similar departments. My academic trainings not only attune me to people's communication, but also follow me into the world of activism. I can't help but analyze the speeches, discussions, arguments, signs, symbols, and effects of our rallies, meetings, conferences, presentations, and actions. Because of this, I constantly see activists trying to articulate messages, audiences trying to follow along, petitioners trying to solicit attention, passers-by trying to avoid eye contact, the communicative effects of direct actions, the communicative dialogues of teach ins, and the embodied power relationships between activists and bureaucratic authorities. But I don't simply see areas for possible improvement. I also see people trying to evoke different realities; people trying to communicatively create different worlds. This is due to my professional interests, which involves the philosophy of communication.

The philosophy of communication argues that communication is not simply a conveyor of information; instead, communication actually creates our perceptions and understandings of that information. And, more profoundly, those perceptions and understandings are not derivations of or extractions from, but actually create, our lived-through realities.¹ Thus, I see activists' communication as the attempt to create new and preferably better realities. The very large majority of activists (and people in general) don't readily see this relationship between communication and reality. Communication is seen as a tool for talking and reality is understood as a cold, hard fact. People in general and activists in particular obviously believe in social change. But communication and reality are often excluded from the equation. It's more common for activists to talk about people's movements and social change or coordinated action and structural change. I totally agree with these equations, but I also see another equation: communication is the creation of reality; change the communication and you change the reality. This equation directly influences my approach to rhetoric and global justice activism.

Defining Rhetoric

The Euro-Western study of rhetoric began more than two-thousand years ago with the Ancient Greeks. Aristotle is sometimes considered the first rhetorician. He defined rhetoric as the ability to observe in any given situation the available means of persuasion. In other words, rhetoric deals with a person's attempt to persuade an audience. This association with persuasion anchored the study of rhetoric for the next two millennia. This began to change with the advent of twentieth century thought. Rhetoricians began incorporating ideas from such thinkers as Sigmund Freud, Friedrich Nietzsche, Jean-Paul Sartre, and later on, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and others. This is neither the time nor place to detail all these changes. Suffice it to say that the

1 For helpful overviews of the philosophy of communication, see Arneson (2007) and Radford (2005).

theory and practice of rhetoric has been altered, debated, expanded, and updated over the years.² Nowadays, rhetoric can be understood in at least three ways.

First, rhetoric can be understood as the study and practice of persuasion. This is obviously related to Aristotle's definition, and involves a rhetor's use of emotional appeals, logical appeals, credibility, and various other methods of persuasion. This definition allows us to study any form of persuasive communication.

Second, rhetoric can be understood as the science of discourse – in other words, rhetoric focuses on what people say, how they say it, and the effects thereof. This approach focuses on oral, written, and linguistic communication and may or may not address issues of persuasion. So, within this framework, we can study everyday, non-persuasive conversations, people's attempts to convey basic information, the voice intonations of speakers, the authorial voice and style of writers, the coordination of a teach in or direct action, the usefulness and effects of cultural labels like Asian American or African American, the political implications of 'second wave' and 'third wave' feminism, etc.

And third, rhetoric can be understood as the practice and study of how human beings create their realities. This approach helps us understand how human beings materialize their realities through immaterial means. Here, rhetoric is no longer concerned with persuasion, only, and it moves beyond basic analyses of oral, written, and linguistic communication. This definition involves both verbal and nonverbal communication and it approaches rhetoric as an 'immaterial labour' (Greene, 2004). In other words, our use of such *immaterial* means as language, signs, symbols, stories, ideologies, discourses, perceptions, worldviews, and understandings, as well as our gestures, movements, and bodily actions, *materialize* our lived through and socially shared realities.³ Rhetoric thus studies how human beings use communication to create, maintain, alter, change, dissolve, and recreate their environments. Within this framework, everything and anything is a possible site of rhetorical study: speeches by Subcomandante Marcos, books by Naomi Klein, the decentered communication of spokes councils, the open publishing system of Indymedia, the self organization of smart mobs, and the spontaneous uprisings of Argentina, 2001 and Oaxaca, 2003 are all approachable as rhetorical phenomena.

In the observations below, all three definitions of rhetoric are used. I do not detail which aspect of rhetoric I am specifically using at a given time; such details would be too bulky and complicated for this essay. But the idea that rhetoric functions within persuasion, oral, written, and linguistic communication, and communicatively created realities permeates my observations.

2 For a concise overview of rhetoric and its history, see Herrick (2004).

3 I need to make two clarifications. First, these immaterial means are grounded in the human body. The body is obviously material, but the symbolizations and communicative effects are immaterial. Thus, my hand gesture is literally material, but what that gesture communicates is immaterial. This whole process materializes – in other words, evokes and creates – reality. And second, very few if any rhetorical scholars use this exact wording of 'creating reality'. However, many do point in this direction (Scott, 1967; Charland, 1987; McKerrow, 1989; DeLuca, 1999).

Observations of Global Justice Rhetoric

Social movements, political cultures, and even small groups of activists exhibit rhetorical commonalities. For instance, the United States' Civil Rights Movement was laden with religious symbolism, expediency of the moment, and calls to racial justice. European antinuclear autonomous groups of the 1980s embodied counter-cultural and anti-capitalist sentiments and prefigured the Black Bloc tactic. And third wave feminism emphasizes anti-essentialist arguments, diversity of female identities, and the micropolitics of gender and sexual relations. The following section makes similar observations of global justice rhetoric. These observations are by no means exhaustive and I am in no way trying to speak for anyone. Instead, I am offering these observations as a contribution to global justice discourse. If these observations resonate with the experiences of other activists, then those activists can use these observations to improve their own rhetorical practices. If other activists happen to disagree with these observations, then this essay can be used as a point of discussion and debate. I believe that either scenario advances global justice discourse. Also realize that this is not a formal ethnographic study in which I go out into the field and collect research data. Instead, I am drawing from my own lived experienced with global justice activism, relying upon my absorption within that world. That absorption involves direct experience with organizing, activism, and direct action, as well as intimate knowledge of books, videos, magazines, websites, movements, etc.

Here is a preview of the ten observations:

- Global justice rhetoric is anti-authoritarian.
- Global justice rhetoric promotes diversity.
- Global justice rhetoric is idealistic and pre-figurative.
- Global justice rhetoric is multi-historical.
- Global justice rhetoric is anti-representational.
- Global justice rhetoric privileges complex interrogation.
- Global justice rhetoric is symbolically powerful.
- Global justice rhetoric is confrontational.
- Global justice rhetoric is visionary.
- Global justice rhetoric is self-righteous and self-critical.

Global Justice Rhetoric is Anti-authoritarian

Global justice activism is heavily influenced by antiauthoritarianism. This is not to say that all global justice activists are self-described antiauthoritarians, but many do at least borrow antiauthoritarian ideas and practices. For instance, social forums, conferences, protests, affinity groups, spokes councils, neighbourhood assemblies, and website clearinghouses often use bottom up, consensus type structures allowing individuals, groups, and organizations to create large, decentered networks. Rather than leaders and dominating ideologies, there are affinities of people coordinating themselves toward social change. Such antiauthoritarianism is not necessarily new; it has been long used by anarchists, autonomists, anti-capitalists, feminists, and counter-culturalists. But global justice activists have revived and updated anti-authoritarianism. David Graeber, an anarchist and Ivy League anthropologist, provides some excellent accounts of this revival, arguing that anti-authoritarian practices are the heart and soul of global justice

activism (2002; 2003; 2004). Similar arguments can be found in Starhawk's *Webs of Power* (2002) and Richard Day's *Gramsci is Dead* (2005), and in the anthologies *From ACT UP to WTO* (2002) and *We Are Everywhere* (2003).

While I wholeheartedly agree with these accounts, I want to make an additional argument, namely that the anti-authoritarianism of global justice activism engenders a unique form of rhetoric that is non-hierarchical, decentred, and dialogical. For instance, within global justice activism, no speaker, author, organizer, activist, or person is seen as more or less important or powerful; everyone is given the opportunity to communicate, is asked to respectfully listen, and is invited to respond and contribute; and people commonly dialogue (and feverishly debate) until mutual understanding and even consensus are reached. This type of anti-authoritarian *communication* occurs at spokescouncils, social forums, conferences, teach ins, organizational meetings, protests, and on websites, LISTSRVS, and blogs. This type of *rhetoric* is at the heart of global justice; subtract this antiauthoritarian *communication* and global justice activism disappears. Antiauthoritarian rhetoric, in addition to antiauthoritarian ideas and structures, underscore global justice. Take away that communication and global justice activism becomes something altogether different.

Global Justice Rhetoric Promotes Diversity

It is difficult to find a global justice publication, talk, speech, video, protest, or movement that does not in some way mention or at least imply diversity appreciation. There are at least three reasons for this. First, global justice *necessitates* diversity. Global justice, by its very nature, involves a plethora of actors, agents, and agendas all working toward global liberation. Because of this, no centralized command, ideology, tactic, or struggle is possible. Instead, there are multiple and overlapping struggles involving decentred points of resistance and liberation. This helps explain the different and even seemingly contradictory groups, ideologies, identities, and issues present at global justice protests, conferences, and forums. Different people have different understandings of and different methods for achieving global justice. No understanding or method is necessarily better or worse than another. Instead, each understanding and method is simply a different way of doing and accomplishing what we all want: liberation for all.

Second, global justice activists recognize that different people embody different politics. Because of that, no particular experience, standpoint, orientation, or identity is valued more or less than another. So, for instance, early twentieth century labour movements emphasized class identity, assuming that the working class proletariat is the rightful vanguard of the revolution. No such assumption exists today. While class is an important issue, so too is race, gender, sexuality, religion, culture, abled and differently abled bodies, etc. Rather than foregrounding one particular issue, global justice activists recognize, appreciate, and accentuate a plethora of experiences, standpoints, orientations, and identities.

And third, global justice activists believe that a multiplicity of individuals standing in relation to one another is the most productive and powerful way toward social and global change. Global justice activists have come to believe that single individuals

standing alone lack powerful numbers and that many people marching under a unitary ideology lack critical debate and discussion. Global justice activists thus recognize the importance of individual difference but also act in solidarity with one another's struggles. This approach of individualism *and* collective action has many precursory roots: it can be traced, in a preliminary way, to the New Left of the 1960s; it was significant in the feminist and LGBT liberations of the 1970s; and it became prominent with the identity politics of the 1980s and 1990s. Nowadays, this difference *and* solidarity is practiced through smart mobs, flash mobs, Black/Green/Pink Blocs, international days of resistance, festivals of life, and is an underlying motivation behind *consultas*, neighbourhood assemblies, and spokescouncils. It is also theorized by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's concept of 'multitude' (2004), the Latin American concept of *specificismo* (Starr, 2005: 87) and Richard Day's interrelated concepts of groundless solidarity and infinite responsibility (2005). These concepts and practices highlight activists' ability to act together while maintaining their individuality. This approach often structures the look, feel, style, and content of activists' communicative interactions.

Global Justice Rhetoric is Idealistic and Pre-figurative

Global justice rhetoric is idealistic in two ways. First, global justice, by its very name, espouses social justice for all. It is an unspoken understanding that global justice confronts all forms of oppression and seeks liberating and egalitarian relations among all people. This idealism may or may not be overt and explicit. But at the very least, it is an unspoken assumption permeating global justice protests, demonstrations, writings, talks, symbols, and languages.

And second, global justice activists often privilege pre-figurative politics. In other words, activists try to use and/or create egalitarian structures, practices, relations, and values that do not currently exist. For instance, feminists prefigure gender equality and matriarchal values while living in a patriarchal, gender exclusive society. Racial justice activists prefigure equal appreciation and opportunity for all races and racial backgrounds while existing within a racist society. And 'fregans', who combine veganism and autonomism, prefigure non-capitalist consumption while existing within a consumer capitalist society. In each of these cases, activists are trying to evoke an alternative world; they are trying to create something that does not yet exist on the societal level. While such pre-figurative politics are based on what people do and how they live, I want to argue that these actions and lifestyles are also communicative and rhetorical phenomena. For example, pre-figurative actions and lifestyles obviously communicate outward to the world, effecting how others see, think about, and orient to, for instance, gender norms, race relations, and consumerism. Pre-figurative activists also craft their actions and lifestyles, trying to continually improve their attempts to evoke and embody alternative structures, practices, and relations. Such 'crafting' is inherent to rhetorical practice. Effective rhetors craft their communication over and over until they get it right. If these insights are accurate, then pre-figurative activists are ongoing, full time rhetors seeking to communicate new realities into existence. Global justice is thus personalized, concretized, and *communicated* by embodying pre-figurative actions and choices.

Global Justice Rhetoric is Multi-Historical

Global justice rejects the idea that any single history can encapsulate the antecedents of all people, of all places, and of all times. Global justice activism replaces the 'history' with multiple and diffuse 'low stories'. Each culture, movement, and idea emerges from a diversity of people, experiences, and narratives. This perspective obviously relates to the above issues of antiauthoritarianism, diversity, etc. There is too much going on to rely upon or refer to a single story, author, or speaker for understanding social justice and global revolution. This multi-historicism helps explain the difficulty of answering commonly asked questions: Where's your representational text? Who is your spokesperson? What is your goal? Who and what do you represent? These questions are difficult to answer from a multi-historical framework. This is because global justice activists commonly search for the intricacies and cross relationships and then seek to 'complicate' such questions. Global justice activists reject the idea that one narrative, or one person, or any *one*, can tell *the* story of worldwide decentred struggles.

For instance, Marina Sitrin's *Horizontalism: Voices of Popular Power in Argentina* (2006) collects many different narratives from many different people about Argentina's post 2001 popular uprising. She recognizes that even a single event within a single country encompasses many different 'low stories'. This desire for inclusion rather than exclusion is an underlying theme to such anthologies as *Globalize Liberation* (2004), *A Movement of Movements* (2004), and *Another World is Possible* (2003). These anthologies draw upon different authors, ideas, and perspectives in order to widen rather than narrow global justice discourse. A similar sentiment even applies to Indymedia. Indymedia, strictly speaking, deals with current issues rather than history, but it still recognizes that no single story can capture the totality of an event. People are thus invited and even encouraged to relay, report, and post what they see and experience. This decentred practice transforms the monolithic *history* into a variety of *low* stories.

Global Justice Rhetoric is Anti-Representational

Global justice rhetoric is anti-representational in two ways. First, most activists recognize that no rhetoric can fully represent another's experience; all personal, cultural, and political representation is inherently limited. Activists thus avoid representing others and allow others to represent themselves. That's the whole point of direct democracy: to allow people to speak for themselves and to make their own political decisions. At meetings, people of traditionally underprivileged or marginalized backgrounds are invited to speak first and longest; meeting responsibilities like facilitation, stacking, and note taking are commonly rotated; and everyone's concerns and ideas are heard and respected. At large events like protests and social forums, many different groups, agendas, and ideologies are invited to help organize, speak, and participate, ensuring that no single voice dominates. These directly democratic procedures consciously resist totalizing representations.

And second, global justice rhetoric seeks to create rather than merely represent socially just realities. In other words, global justice activists often seek to personalize, concretized, embody, and evoke global liberation in the immediate moment. This is the basic idea behind pre-figurative politics and it is exemplified by the array of decentred,

antiauthoritarian, directly democratic procedures and structures of spokescouncils, cooperates, squats, community gardens, free stores, free spaces, and the ‘really, really free markets’ in which everything is shared and/or freely given away. These practices do not simply represent but actually create, in the moment, ‘global justice’. And, similar to my comments above, I argue that these practices are communicative and rhetorical.

First, activists must communicate with one another in order to coordinate their activities and practices. This is true even if there is only a single activist coordinating a single, individual action. That activist must communicate with him/herself in order to plan, execute, and follow through with the action. This is known as *intrapersonal* communication, which is different from *interpersonal* communication. Second, activists discuss and then decide upon the nature, look, title, slogan, duration, time, place, and effect of actions, protests, conferences, meetings, and so on. These organizational concerns parallel basic rhetorical considerations, such as: Who’s your audience; what’s your message; and, what are the communicative effects? These questions are continuously addressed either explicitly or implicitly while organizing events and activities. And third, these events and activities create alternative realities. Such alternatives realities are often referred to as ‘temporary alternative zones’, a phrase attributed to anarchist Hakim Bey (2003 [1985]). While I am definitely sympathetic to this phrase, I prefer to use ‘alternative realities’. This latter phrase, I believe, places our alternative realities on equal footing with all other realities. In other words, spokescouncils, community gardens, and free stores are not simply liberated zones. Instead, they are actual *realities* that are communicatively created into existence and that stand in contradistinction to other, more widely accepted realities like top down representational democracies, wars, strip malls, consumerism, etc.⁴

Global Justice Rhetoric Privileges ‘Complex Interrogation’

Global justice rhetoric privileges complex interrogation rather than simple answers. This is evidenced by many different practices. For example, activists often challenge one another to reflect upon their own taken for granted assumptions; teach ins, spokescouncils, and organizational meetings commonly end with temporary and tenuous consensus rather than final answers; and rigorously informed, substantive analyses are often preferred over quick, pre-packaged answers of corporate media. Such ‘complex communication’ is not necessarily cumbersome, indecipherable, or over-intellectual; in fact, most activists prefer to communicate in ways that are clear and accessible. But global justice activists see the world as a complex process involving interconnected systems and they seek to break open and interrogate these complexities. This helps explain the often long and laborious nature of meetings and spokescouncils and the many debates that occur on LISTSRVS, blogs, and Indymedia sites. A single issue leads to a web of relations, a simple assertion leads to a whole set of questions, and a basic inquiry leads to discussion and debate. These complex interrogations can often be tiresome and difficult to deal with, but there’s an underlying political point: to challenge

4 I fully recognize that I am splitting hairs here, and that much more can and should be said about the differences and/or similarities between ‘temporary autonomous zones’ and ‘alternative realities’. Suffice it for now that I am simply trying to use a phrase that accentuates the communicative and reality creating nature of global justice activities.

all taken for granted assumptions that may (or may not) lead to oppressions, inequalities, and injustices. Patrick Reinsborough, a global justice activist, makes a similar point when discussing the need for ‘post issue activism’. As he states:

[Post issue activism is] the recognition that the roots of the emerging crisis lie in the fundamental flaws of the modern order and that our movements for change need to talk about redesigning the entire global system – now. Post issue activism is a dramatic divergence from the slow progression of single issue politics, narrow constituencies, and Band Aid solutions. . . . Post issue activism is the struggle to address the holistic nature of the crisis, and it demands new frameworks, new alliances, and new strategies. We must find new ways to articulate the connections between all the ‘issues’ by revealing the pathological nature of the system. (Reinsborough, 2004: 163–164)

Reinsborough nails it on the head: global justice activists recognize the manifold entanglements of the current global order and seek to change it piece by piece. No stone is left unturned and no issue is left unchallenged. That is complex interrogation.

Global Justice Rhetoric is Symbolically Powerful

Global justice activists seriously consider the use, effects, and oppressive and liberating powers of symbols. For instance, it is common to critique and reject particular logos, labels, brands, and corporate symbols. It’s also common to practice culture jamming, ad busting, and billboard liberation, and to investigate and explore the nature of mental ecologies, psychological environments, and art and protest. Naomi Klein’s *No Logo* (2000) and Kalle Lasn’s *Culture Jam* (1999) have been best sellers. The ideas and activities of Guy Debord and the Situationists, with their emphasis on cultural/aesthetic detournement, are commonly referenced. And demonstrations are saturated with symbolic significance: signs, placards, puppets, colours, costumes, drums, dances, slogans, and chants are strategically chosen in order to communicate particulate messages. The same is true for direct actions. Any good direct action strategically plots its symbolism: What is the action, where will it take place, at what time, for which audience, and for what purpose? A direct action often seeks to physically intervene in the daily operations of an institution or group of people. Activists might clog a traffic intersection, occupy a building, or shut down a business district. Such actions directly interfere with systems of power. But such actions are also symbolic, and that symbolism may be more important than physical interference. A direct action will last for a few hours, maybe even a few days. During that that time all operations cease. But the operations will most likely resume. However, the symbolic force of that action carries on, circulating through the communicative engines of society. That message hopefully catches wind, motivating other people to take similar actions. This is one of the motivations behind Stephen Duncombe’s book, *Dream: Re – Imagining Progressive Politics in the Age of Fantasy* (2007). Duncombe is a professor of Media Studies at New York University and a hands-on activist oriented to global justice issues. In his book he argues that ‘spectacular communication’ speaks to the public imagination. In other words, rhetorically powerful symbols can mobilize people’s dreams and desires toward radical endeavours. I believe Duncombe’s argument both reflects and contributes to the practice and theory of global justice rhetoric.

Global Justice Rhetoric is Confrontational

Global justice rhetoric is often confrontational, involving yells, screams, shouts, stomps, claps, drums, fists, Black Blocs, exclamation points, loud slogans, passionate manifestos, and declamatory speeches. A now defunct post 1999 Seattle magazine, *Clamor*, said it well: “An iconoclast among its peers, *Clamor* is an unabashed celebration of self-determination, creativity, and shit stirring”. While this passionate and unapologetic attitude permeates global justice rhetoric, it should not be reduced to negativity or militancy. Activists might be loud and angry at times, but activists are also quite, solemn, cheerful, romantic, happy, celebratory, and even festive. Many activists use silent die-ins, peace vigils, pacifism, meditation, and humorous antics. Many activists are also approachable and inviting, preferring dialogue over verbal duel. These subtler attitudes are confrontational, too, but in different ways. So, for instance, the protest tactics of global justice activists range from militant direct action to petition drives; from property destruction to spoken word poetry; from building occupations to humorous street theatre. In the end, confrontational rhetoric is about speaking truth to power and eradicating all forms of oppression. The tactics used to accomplish these goals are relative to each activist and situation. Sometimes activists are upfront and aggressive while other times they are laidback and subtle. Regardless of the approach, it is confrontational, and such rhetoric is a marker of global justice activism.

Global Justice Rhetoric is Visionary

Global justice rhetoric is driven by visions of a better world. Most activists realize that what they do now creates a better and presumably more democratic future. But it must also be noted that very few activists think of themselves as actual visionaries. Such loftiness contradicts the antiauthoritarian, diverse, and multihistorical aspects of global justice. Most activists are also sceptical of utopianism. No one thinks we can right *all* the wrongs and live happily ever after. But activists do believe that we can do better; that we can replace current systems and structures with better ones; that we can become more ethical and humane social beings; and that we can do a better job of respecting ourselves, each other, and our social and natural worlds. These are not simply ideals, but envisioned realities of the future. We can see these realities in our hearts and minds. Many of us have even caught fleeting glimpses during protests, conferences, gatherings, forums, and festivals. Those glimpses may be brief, but they are there nonetheless – momentary experiences of something new, exciting, and radically democratic. These experiences point to a different world, one composed of self determination, interpersonal and collective support, and egalitarian relations. This visionary rhetoric helps explain the privileging of prefigurative politics: global justice activists intuitively sense an improved social world and they walk toward it by embodying alternative ideas, structures, and relations. That walking embodiment is not perfect, but it is the first step toward something better. I believe that the following quote by Irish anarchist, Andrew Flood, captures this sentiment well. He is describing his experience of the ‘Second Encounter for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism’:

Those on this road have gathered from all over the world, over 50 countries in all. They have come here [to Spain, 1997] to dream of a new reality together. Here the weather-beaten features of a male campesino from Brazil are found beside the sunburned face of an 18-year-old female squatter from Berlin. Do you feel you are imagining something impossible, something from a Hollywood

blockbuster, or the past? Then add one more detail: a gasp goes up from those on the road, for overhead a shooting star briefly appears. Were it not for the collective gasp each of us might have imagined this was a vision we alone were seeing. But no, we look around and realize we are marching, seeing, and dreaming together. (Flood, 2003: 75)

This statement, and many others like it, underscores the visionary rhetoric of global justice activists.

Global Justice Rhetoric is Self-Righteous *and* Self-Critical

Global justice rhetoric is simultaneously self-righteous and self-critical. Everyone wants to change the world and everyone thinks they know how. Such righteousness is common to most activists, organizers, and social movements. That's understandable: people obviously need to believe in themselves if they are going to try to change the world. But such righteousness resists over inflated self importance. There are no easy answers and there are no straight and narrow paths. Social justice takes many forms and posits no final or foreclosed utopian results. Global idealism is coupled with a brutal realism: we are everyday people fallible and subject to the whims and mistakes of being human. While we are calling out injustice, we also realize that we might be perpetuating other injustices that we have not yet understood or recognized. It is common to look back upon previous social/political movements and reveal and analyze particular wrongdoings: the self destructive tendencies of North America's Weather Underground and Italy's Red Brigades, the sexism of anti-Vietnam era organizing, the racist exclusions of second wave feminism, etc. This leads to the realization that future generations will look back upon the movements of today and make similar assessments. They will ask, 'How could they not have realized that they were...?!?' We cannot foresee how future generations will assess us, but such critical awareness humbles us nonetheless. So yes, global justice activists are self-righteous, but they are also self-reflective. This critical righteousness is one reason why vanguard parties are met with scepticism. We all want a revolution and we all think we have the answers, but we realize that our answers are locally specific and temporally based. We thus conclude that each person and each community must revolutionize their own realities. We can and often do help each other whenever and however possible; but no one person, group, or rhetoric beholds the answer for all people of all places and times. Self righteousness is thus buttressed against a self reflective criticality. This sentiment is evidenced by some concrete examples: John Holloway's *Change the World Without Taking Power* (2005 [2002]); Starhawk's distinctions among power over, power from within, and power with (1987: 8-27; 2002: 607, 174); and the call by Subcomandante Marcos to listen to rather than lead the indigenous populations of Chiapas, Mexico (Jordon, 2004). Critical righteousness obviously overlaps with many of the tendencies mentioned above: antiauthoritarianism, diversity, multihistoricism, anti-representational, complex interrogation, etc.

Suggestions for Improving Global Justice Rhetoric

This section provides hands on suggestions for improving the rhetoric of global justice activists. Such suggestions are awfully difficult with such a brief essay. A thorough account would provide suggestions for a variety of situations and outline different

strategies for persuasion, speaking, writing, direct actions, street theater, and of course for 'creating reality'. Such details are not possible within the framework of this essay. The following suggestions are thus limited to five broad considerations and are grounded in the previous ten observations. In other words, the suggestions help global justice activists improve their antiauthoritarian communication, their promotion of diversity, idealism, and multihistoricism, etc. My hope is that activists will discuss and adapt these suggestions as needed, learning the 'strategic ins and outs' as they are applied. The suggestions include the following five points:

- Understanding the Three Basics of Message, Audience, and Craft.
- Using Rhetorical Categories to Manage Connections.
- Using Rhetorical Frames for Clarity and Accessibility.
- Strengthening Intercultural Awareness and Understanding.
- Taking Personal Responsibility.

Understanding the Three Basics of Message, Audience, and Craft

Good rhetoric begins with a message that is being communicated to other people. People cannot be moved if they cannot understand that message. Communication is not always about sending specific messages or about moving people to action. But messages and action are common goals for activists. It is thus important to create clear and articulate messages that others can understand and respond to. This can be done through four steps. First, articulate your message into a single sentence that clearly expresses your thoughts and intentions. Second, be able to clearly and confidently explain your message in the equivalence of one or two paragraphs. Third, be prepared to have an extended conversation about your message in which you explain your thoughts and intentions and are able to address questions and debates. Fourth and last, turn your message into a catchy soundbite. This last step may seem backwards, as if it should come first. But saving the soundbite for last ensures that you truly understand your own message before you condense it into a couple of words. Doing the soundbite first may actually hinder the clarity of your message. Generally speaking, these four steps formalize your message, preparing you for multiple situations and audiences.

Good communicators always construct their messages for specific audiences. This involves at least two things: identifying your audience and then adapting your message to that audience. First, identify your audience to the best of your ability. Figure out who you are trying to communicate with. Be as specific as possible and avoid generalizations like 'the general public'. Such generalizations are too broad and thus unhelpful. For example, large antiwar protests often target four particular groups: policy makers, supporters of the war, people who are undecided about the war, and people who are against the war but not active. These four targets *do* include just about everyone and, in a sense, then, the protest *is* targeting the 'general public'. But that classification is too loose and undefined; it doesn't help you create a rhetorically effective protest/message. You can concretize your rhetoric by specifying those four target audiences. This gives you something concrete to work with, allowing you to fine tune your message and to address actual people rather than amorphous masses. And second,

adapt your message to the identified audience(s). In other words, create a message that fits the wants, needs, and perspectives of your specific audience. For example, a group of young, moderately liberal college students is very different than a group of older, more conservative military veterans. There's no way that the same exact message will work for both of these audiences. You are thus forced to adapt your message to the demands of these two audiences. This is not about selling out or falsifying your intentions. Instead, it's about considering the biases of your audience and seeking to effectively communicate across barriers and differences. That's good rhetoric.

These comments about message and audience highlight the need for rhetorical craft. In other words, you want to craft your communication for maximum effectiveness. Most activists do this to some degree already. For instance, there are plenty of debates about the look and designs of demonstrations and direct actions; the wording of slogans, speeches, and communiqués; and the usefulness of ideologies, philosophies, analyses, and manifestos. Such debates help activists choose the most effective means of communication. This process can be enhanced by carefully adapting your message to specific audiences. It can also be enhanced by improving your speaking and/or writing skills; learning to communicate across cultural barriers; finding ways to adapt your rhetorical style to different communities; asking people to translate your message into other languages; improving your ability to defend your ideas and actions in adverse or chaotic situations; learning to adjust to the situational constraints of busy street corners, large auditoriums, or a strong police presence; etc. Developing these skills and abilities involves time, thought, practice, and patience. In other words, it involves craft. That craft is laborious, but it improves your ability to create social change.

Using Rhetorical Categories to Manage Connections

Global justice rhetoric often highlights the connections among diverse people, ideas, voices, issues, etc. There are three common pitfalls when highlighting those connections. First, it is easy to forget to highlight the connections for others. We, as global justice activists, see the connections and (falsely) assume that others will, too. But not everyone sees the world through decentred, interconnected eyes. It is thus imperative that activists highlight those connections for everyone else. Literally explain how the different issues are connected. Second, it is common to *over* emphasize the connections. This is problematic because the audience gets confused; they're not clear on the purpose or focus of your message. Too many connections obscure the clarity and accessibility of your rhetoric. And third, highlighting connections can take up a lot of time, thus testing people's patience and attention spans. People won't listen forever. They will tune out and walk away if it's taking too long. This can be avoided by sticking to the *major* connections and cutting out all the secondary or minor connections. This shortens your time, keeping people interested and mentally alert. These pitfalls of over highlighting, under highlighting, and taking too long can be solved by using 'categories'. These categories, also referred to as 'rhetorical topologies', help highlight and manage the connections.

For instance, addressing corporate globalization can be organized into the following categories: multinational corporations, transnational institutions, free trade agreements, and political/economic ideologies. These categories can help you structure speeches,

essays, workshops, or teach ins. These categories can also be used to organize protests, with different participants focusing on different aspects. This can obviously be done with speakers. But it can also be done with different groups creating different signs, performances, or mini actions that symbolize the different categories. While organizing the protest, put out a call asking affinity groups to take on different categories. These categories help onlookers get a better sense of the different connections that drive 'corporate globalization'. These categories also ensure that 'all the issues' are covered during the protest. And perhaps most importantly, this approach creates a more readable and thus audience friendly protest, which potentially attracts more people to global justice issues and actions.

Using Rhetorical Frames for Clarity and Accessibility

Generally speaking, good rhetoric strives for as much clarity and accessibility as possible. What constitutes clarity and accessibility is of course relative to each audience, community, culture, activist, situation, and goal. Clarifying the intentions of a sanctioned demonstration is different than clarifying a three-point logical essay, which is different than a teach-in, which is different than a militant action, etc. This is all true, but the bottom line is the same: Confusion alienates people, and due to the variety of issues involved with global justice, activists should work against confusion and work toward clarity.

Rhetorical frames are one way to clarify your communication. A rhetorical frame is a slogan, statement, theme, phrase, title, or word that ties all the pieces together. A frame gives people an anchoring point for understanding the issue, action, or conversation. It also sets the conditions for discussion, conversation, and debate. You thus want a frame that highlights your political orientation to the issue. For example, neoliberalism can be framed as economic globalization or as economic imperialism. These two frames establish different conditions for discussion. The first is benign and non-political while the second is politically charged. Depending upon your audience and the purpose of the situation, either frame will be more or less effective and useful. Identify the audience and situation, and then choose a frame that helps you accomplish your goals.

Larger events such as forums, conferences, and protests are inherently framed – the framing is created by the stated purpose or title. For example, the World Social Forum of 2001 used 'Another World is Possible!' And the United States Social Forum of 2007 used 'Another World is Possible, Another U.S. is Necessary'. These slogans inherently frame the forums, allowing people to understand the underlying relationship among individual workshops, talks, and speeches. There is always room for improvement, but generally speaking, large collective actions are usually well framed. However, individual presentations don't always fair so well. This is not always the case; rhetorically oriented activists know how to frame their works. But less experienced activists can miss the importance of framing. Below are two suggestions for creating a good rhetorical frame.

Rhetorical frames can be created by summarizing the underlying aspects of an issue and choosing a single word, phrase, or title that highlights your own political orientation to that issue. This is similar to the use of 'rhetorical categories' mentioned above.

However, framing refers to an overall ‘lens’ that emphasizes particular aspects of the issue. So, for instance, speaking about U.S. foreign policy, international relations, war, capitalism, and the Middle East can be summarized into ‘The Geo-Politics of Oil’. This frame helps people understand the underlying connections of your presentation and it implies some type of left leaning critique. Such a frame should be created before the presentation begins. That helps structure your talk, speech, essay, teach in, meeting, etc. Then, during the presentation, continuously emphasize the relationship between the individual issues and the overall frame. This helps others follow along.

A good rhetorical frame is also concrete, catchy, and general enough to attract wide audiences but narrow enough to highlight the important aspects. A good frame is like a good title – it helps prepare the audience and it keeps both the audience *and* the presenter anchored in something specific. Drawing upon different ideas, debating various issues, and making political critiques can get confusing, especially for people who are unfamiliar with the intricacies of the issues. A good rhetorical frame makes your rhetoric more intelligible and accessible and it favours your political orientation.

Strengthening Intercultural Awareness and Understanding

Global justice activism involves transnational alliances with people from different regions, nations, cultures, and communities. These alliances raise issues of intercultural awareness and understanding. Most activists are already aware of this and consciously work toward intercultural sensitivity. That’s great, but such sensitivity must become a primary aspect of global justice activism and organizing. This can be done by conducting more workshops and teach ins on the following issues: intercultural exchanges, intercultural communication, culturally specific rhetorics, translation issues, and creating transnational rhetorics.

- *Intercultural Exchanges*: Inviting activists from different cultural backgrounds to share their histories, traditions, and forms of resistance broadens our horizons and allows us to understand how different people live, love, and struggle.
- *Intercultural Communication*: Holding workshops on how to communicate across cultural differences helps us understand how certain words, languages, actions, symbols, and gestures mean different things for different cultures. This increases cultural sensitivity and helps activists work past cultural tensions, confusions, and barriers.
- *Culturally Specific Rhetorics*: Asking activists from different countries to share and explain their culturally specific rhetorical tactics expands international dialogue. This helps activists understand what’s occurring outside their own immediate communities and generates ideas for creating more interesting and effective rhetorical tactics within their communities.
- *Translation Issues*: Teaching one another the proper etiquette of translation is extremely important nowadays. This involves at least two sides. First, teach one another how to translate from one language to another. It’s one thing to speak two languages, but it’s another thing to be able to translate between two languages. Instructing one another on how to do this obviously aids cross cultural communication, thus strengthening global justice endeavours. And second, we need to teach one another how to speak in the presence of a translator. People

often speak too fast for the translator to follow. Much of the translation is then lost. Becoming more sensitive to the translator is not only an issue of respect and appreciation, but also strengthens cross cultural solidarity.

- *Creating Transnational Rhetorics*: Creating transnational rhetorics is not a new endeavour. Transnationalism and internationalism have been ongoing themes for well over a century and have been revised and updated with the rise of globalization. But balancing autonomy and connection within and among diverse movements is a fairly new challenge. The trick is to emphasize both the uniqueness and similarity of each movement. This is not simply a political issue, but also a rhetorical issue. We need messages, slogans, languages, and ways of communicating that maintain, express, and create the balance between autonomy and connection. The Latin American concept of *specifismo* is a great example (Starr, 2005: 87). *Specifismo* denotes the creative tension between diversity and unity, between autonomy and solidarity. Basically, each movement is autonomous, but each movement also works with other movements. Together, all the movements work for collective gain. This type of rhetoric captures the spirit of twenty first century global justice and helps activists better frame and explain their movements, actions, and politics. Such framing and explaining can attract more people to global justice, thus creating an even wider and more diverse 'movement of movements'.

Taking Personal Responsibility

The communicative backbone of contemporary activism is now networked through the tiny capillaries of diffuse and decentred movements spread across the world. The era of *the* rhetorical leader is thus over. No single person, speaker, face, idea, or movement can or should represent the diversity of global justice. However, for this approach to *rhetorically* succeed, each activist must assume personal responsibility. We don't have to agree on every issue, message, or tactic. But we can (and should) make concerted efforts to continuously improve our own rhetorical labours. The rhetorical successes and failures of London based activists travel the media channels and affect the successes and failures of Argentina based activists. Global justice activists are thus called to rhetorical responsibility. This is disputable, of course. Some activists may reject everything that is being said here. That's fine and simply enriches the discussion. But many activists will agree, and I encourage those activists to take responsibility for their communicative effects. This is not a conservative, go it alone logic, far from it. Instead, it is about activists sincerely considering and seeking to improve their communication in the service of social and global change. This approach eliminates the need for rhetorical leaders and moves us one step closer to a decentred, leaderless world.

Conclusion: Making more Observations and Suggestions

The observations and suggestions of this essay are by no means finalized. Much more could and should be said. I also admit that I personally struggled with the contents of this essay. For instance, what should I include and exclude and what phraseologies should I use? How do I characterize and frame the different aspects of global justice rhetoric? What suggestions are most helpful and what can I fit into this essay? I could

have easily described global justice rhetoric as processual, meaning it seeks no final answers or destinations, and as interpersonal, meaning it privileges the personal and subjective voice over the scientifically detached voice. I could have given guidelines on public speaking, argumentation, street theatre, and the use of credibility and emotion as rhetorical strategies. I could have done several things differently, but I didn't. This admittance highlights the relativity of my observations/suggestions and implies the need for other activists to go out, look around, and reflect upon what they and others are doing. Then, together, we can share our insights, helping to improve the general lot of global justice rhetoric.

Some individuals and groups are already doing this. For instance, the U.S. based *SmartMeme* Collective provides instruction on narrative storytelling, culture jamming, and media relations, helping grassroots organizations to create and package messages of social change. As mentioned earlier, NYU professor Stephen Duncombe, discusses the relationship between communication and social change in his book *Dream* (2007). He argues that costumes, humour, popular culture, bright lights, and media spectacles strengthen rather than contradict or dilute radical causes. David Graeber, who was also mentioned earlier, argues that such famous slogans as 'all power to the imagination' and 'be realistic, demand the impossible' need updating. We need not only new slogans, but also new ways of communicating our political desires (2007). This relates to the work of Alex Khasnabish, a Canadian based sociologist of political imaginations. He argues that successful political insurgencies involve political struggle *and* collective imagination (2007). I completely agree, and add only that the collective imagination is created, altered, and communicated through effective rhetoric. Good rhetoric is thus part and parcel of successful political struggle. The Argentinean based group, *Colectivo Situaciones*, tries to do this by liberating thought and experience from the abstractions and constraints of language. They often use open ended, unfinished, and entangled aphorisms, metaphors, and theories to break past reified understandings (2007). And of course there are the small pockets of discussions and debates that occur at conferences and forums, in coffeehouses, bars, and basements, and through emails, blogs, and websites. These discussions and debates *are* rhetoric and often involve issues *of* rhetoric. That is to say, activists are rhetorical practitioners always and already. It's simply a matter of systematizing these practices into 'formal' observations and suggestions.

To aid this process, I close this essay with some very brief guidelines for collecting and sharing your observations and suggestions.⁵ As usual, these are not exhaustive but rather beginning points. The actual practice of observing and suggesting must be grounded in the demands of each situation.

First, try to be as respectful as possible. This means respecting your fellow activists whom you are observing as well as respecting the fact that other activists may disagree with your observations. Realize that your observations are just that – *your* observations. Thus, be reflective and cautious and recognize that other people are affected by and implicated in your observations. Second, spend time in the world you are observing. Be an activist who observes rather than an outsider who simply watches. This is probably

5 For related guidelines, see Uri Gordon (2007: 276 – 287).

not a problem for most activists, but it is good to keep this in mind when writing and/or discussing your observations and suggestion. Try to reflect upon and discuss your own experience of activism, rhetoric, and communication. This grounds your observations and suggestions in personal experience rather than the objectification of other people. Third, be honest and avoid over exaggerating what you see. We sometimes want to romanticize our experiences. Such romanticism is helpful for creating radical mythologies and mobilizing the collective imagination. But here, you're trying to improve our hands on practices. Thus, tell it like it is rather than how you imagine it. And fourth, provide *supportive* criticism. There's nothing wrong with providing feedback, debating the utility of a message or rhetorical approach, and commenting upon what you see. But be supportive. Realize that most activists make sincere attempts to do the best they can. Sometimes those attempts succeed and sometimes they fail. But the effort is there, nonetheless, and that must be acknowledged. Such recognition usually creates more supportive rather than judgmental comments and provides constructive rather than destructive criticism. This approach helps global justice activists become better communicators, thus increasing the possibility of social and global change.

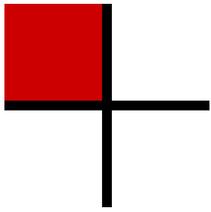
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From Marxism to Critical Management Studies

Michael Rowlinson

review of:

Alex Callinicos (2006) *The Resources of Critique*. Cambridge: Polity. (PB: pp. 328, £16.99, ISBN: 9780745631615)

Nearly twenty years ago, just when many of our colleagues in the emerging field of Critical Management Studies (CMS) were immersing themselves in the work of Baudrillard, Derrida, Foucault, and Lyotard, Alex Callinicos came up with an essential guide and antidote, *Against Postmodernism: A Marxist Critique* (1990). Now, having produced innumerable essential texts on social theory in the meantime, Callinicos has come up with ‘an immanent critique’ of another set of contemporary theorists in *The Resources of Critique* (2006), namely Jürgen Habermas, Jacques Bidet, Luc Boltanski, Eve Chiapello, Pierre Bourdieu, Alain Badiou, Slavoj Žižek, and Antonio Negri. As I discovered when I attended a workshop organized by the Centre for Philosophy and Political Economy at the University of Leicester in 2005, Negri in particular, or rather Hardt’s and Negri’s *Empire* (2000) and *Multitude* (2004), have a set of self-styled ‘autonomist’ devotees within British business schools who see themselves as too critical even for CMS. And now that there is an English translation available, Boltanski’s and Chiapello’s *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (2006) is also acquiring a following amongst the ‘critters’ of CMS. I have no doubt that the acolytes of these (non-management) gurus will dismiss Callinicos’s *The Resources of Critique* as a predictable reiteration of orthodox Marxism, which in many ways it is, although, as I will show, when he sets out his own position Callinicos concedes that there are significant weaknesses in classical Marxism.

Part I offers more or less self-contained critiques of each author. For example, Callinicos provides a neat summary and critique of Boltanski’s and Chiapello’s *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, which he warns is “too long and at points disorganized and repetitive” (p. 63). He sees Žižek’s ‘torrent of books’ as brilliant, but also derivative and repetitive, which makes Žižek more difficult to summarize and critique. Callinicos claims to show how each theorist has “failed in their own terms to provide a sound philosophical basis for social critique and, more broadly, for transcendence, understood as our ability to go beyond the limits set by existing beliefs and practices” (p. 243).

Given that this reads much like a collection of extended book reviews, there is little point in me reviewing the book chapter by chapter. Instead I will pick out some themes that strike me as most relevant for CMS.

In 1990 Callinicos claimed that postmodernism represented a response to the retreat of the left since 1968. In *The Resources of Critique* Callinicos reiterates his earlier diagnosis more forcefully by suggesting that the defeat of the left runs even deeper. For example, he maintains that at the start of the 21st century “the ideological influence of Marxism and of the classical left was far weaker than it had been perhaps since the Revolutions of 1848” (p. 5). He acknowledges that “Marxism has been relatively marginal to the contemporary revival of social critique and anti-capitalist contestation” (p. 9). And he sees it as unsurprising that Walter Benjamin has found favour in the new forms of social critique, given that:

His “Theses on the Philosophy of History”, written after the Hitler-Stalin Pact of August 1939, resonated with a new time of historical disillusion, as the crisis in the Western left that began in the second half of the 1970s climaxed in the collapse of the Soviet Union and the eclipse of “historical Communism”. (p. 85)

Callinicos acknowledges that what is distinctive about the “new styles of social critique” is that they “go beyond exposés of specific institutions or policies, to offer, among other things, what amounts to philosophical justifications of their own existence” (p. 5). But he does not offer any such justification for his own position. How is it, we are entitled to ask, that if the Marxist left is in worse shape than it has *ever* been before, comparable with the time of the Hitler-Stalin Pact, that Callinicos can expect us to believe that Marxism alone offers the prospect of ‘transcendence’? And arguably the reference to transcendence represents a terminological or rhetorical retreat from the classical leftist insistence on the need for revolution. I can imagine many of Callinicos’s comrades in the Socialist Workers Party wondering whether transcendence is simply an academic philosophical euphemism for revolution.

In trying to understand the development of Badiou’s arcane ontology, Callinicos maintains that it is important to give sufficient weight to “the background of what must have seemed to most participants to have been the death agony of French Marxism in the late 1970s and early 1980s” (p. 90). Not only does Callinicos fail to specify the exact nature of this crisis or its magnitude, but he also fails to explain his own immunity to the all-pervasive disillusionment of former Marxists. Of course the cognoscenti do not need any explanation, because they already know that any kind of Marxism that was identified with so-called ‘historical communism’ in Stalinist Russia or China was always doomed to failure, thus vindicating their own adherence to Trotskyism. *The Resources of Critique* is marred by Callinicos’s smug sectarian celebration of the alleged crisis of just about every other branch of Marxism except his own, even if his political commitment makes for a readable polemical style.

The importance of defeat comes to the fore in Callinicos’s critique of Negri. According to Callinicos, Hardt and Negri fail to recognize the importance of the waves of defeat suffered by the organized working class from the late 1970s onwards (p. 137-138). Instead they actually claim this process as a victory for the working class. Callinicos returns to this theme when he tries to locate class conflict within the structural

contradictions of the capitalist mode of production. He maintains that Negri's reinterpretation of Marx's *Grundrisse* reduces history to a "clash of antagonistic collective wills" and that in *Empire* and *Multitude* Hardt and Negri "deny the possibility of labour being defeated and make every restructuring of capitalism a victory, an affirmation of the creativity of the multitude, but this is tenable neither intellectually nor ethico-politically" (p. 205-206). Against this Callinicos reiterates the need to acknowledge the structural constraints within which the working class has endured defeat:

The victory of capital over labour in the 1970s and 1980s no doubt had something to do with the relative qualities of leadership on the two sides, but the kind of hegemonic articulation that, for example, Thatcherism represented in Britain possessed structural advantages deriving from the global restructuring of economic relations that began in the second half of the 1970s and from the profound ideological malaise of the left produced by the collapse of post-1968 militancy, the crisis of the Keynesian welfare state, and the death agony of "existing socialism". The indeterminacies inherent in ideological and political struggles don't require us to say that it is indeterminacy all the way down. (p. 207)

But it is difficult to see where ideology and contingency end and structural constraints begin in this passage. Was the 'global restructuring of economic relations' the cause or effect of monetarism and liberalization? Was 'the crisis of the Keynesian welfare state' ideological or economic? And did the Soviet Union collapse under the weight of its structural contradictions, or because it lost its legitimacy? Inevitably Callinicos falls back on the labour theory of value and the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall (TRPF) as an irrepressible structural contradiction of capitalism (p. 125-126). Even though Callinicos acknowledges that the TRPF is "a highly controversial subject" (289, note 48), his defence of it rests on an exegesis of Marx's *Capital III* rather than any attempt to explain the crises and defeats since the 1970s in empirical terms such as changing rates of profit in capitalist economies. In other words, for Callinicos any crisis must be related to the underlying structural contradictions of capitalism as identified by Marx in the 19th century, and there is no requirement to explain the mechanism whereby these structural contradictions are manifested in specific crises at particular times.

Although Callinicos is open to criticism for failing to account for the existence of his own position, he does raise an issue of relevance for CMS when he highlights Habermas's liability to collapse into contextualism:

At stake here are not simply philosophical issues in epistemology and ontology, but also the fundamentally political problem of the tenability of critical theory. Is it possible for philosophy and social theory to establish sufficient distance from prevailing beliefs and practices to provide a vantage point for social criticism? (p. 36)

Given the prevailing contextualism within CMS, it must be doubted whether CMS can establish sufficient distance from the prevailing beliefs and practices in business schools to provide a vantage point for criticising business and management. If the pressures to teach would-be managers something useful, or to produce research 'for' management that conforms to the constraints of research assessments and journal rankings are even half as bad as many of the more radical adherents of CMS would have us believe they are, then it is puzzling how the critters, autonomists included, came to be teaching and doing research in business schools in the first place. And if they can stand those

pressures, then it is doubtful whether the critters can really be critical. Callinicos argues that in the work of Bidet, and Habermas, modernity has been substituted for capitalism as the target for social critique, and arguably the accommodation of CMS in British business schools and the American Academy of Management is also predicated on a substitution of modernity for capitalism. After all, if critters see their role as drawing attention to the potential excesses of management in modernity, such as the Holocaust, then it is unlikely that anyone but a Nazi will raise any objections to them. In other words, CMS has become increasingly depoliticized as it has been institutionalized. The implicit challenge from Callinicos is for CMS to explain how its rise seems to be in an inverse relation to the strength of the left and the working class.

According to Callinicos there was a significant shift in the 1990s, with the triumph of liberal capitalism, the end of the Cold War, and the Washington Consensus, which meant that “the great *querelle* of moderns and postmoderns was no longer at the cutting edge of theoretical debate” (p. 51). In this context he praises Boltanski and Chiapello both for the richness of their research and for their “explicit problematization of *capitalism*” (p. 53). Callinicos endorses their argument that contemporary managerial ideology is indebted to the anti-capitalist discourse of the 1960s, and on this score his only complaint is that:

The incorporation of *soixante-huitards* into a capitalism that adopted a mellow libertarian rhetoric isn't by any means a purely French phenomenon. (p. 63)

In this context it is worth noting that whereas Callinicos recognizes *The New Spirit of Capitalism* as a “major work”, even if Chiapello is a “management theorist” (p. 53; 63), Anglo-American CMS has obviously completely escaped his attention. Again, when disposing of Hardt and Negri's confusing concept of immaterial labour, Callinicos cites a labour process study of call centre workers (p. 144), rather than any of the research on subjectivity at work from CMS. But if neo-management relies on an ‘artistic critique’ that is attractive to aesthetic rebels, rather than a ‘social critique’, which means that awkward questions about inequality are neatly avoided, where would CMS be located? The CMS complaints against ubiquitous managerialism in the form of research and teaching audits echo the resistance of corporate management to government bureaucracy and regulation. And the aspirations from the self-styled radical autonomist wing in CMS to realize the full possibilities of therapeutic radical pedagogy, along with their desire to eroticize the business school, amount to little more than wacky versions of the ‘experiential’ learning that is popular in business education. Thus, CMS for the most part consists of an artistic critique that is all too easily accommodated in business schools.

In the end Callinicos tires of Boltanski and Chiapello because although they acknowledge that capitalism exists independently of its discursive justifications, their reliance on management literature is “insufficient to support a critique of capitalism” (p. 70). Callinicos endorses Bidet's conclusion that Boltanski's and Chiapello's sociology, “presents itself, strangely, all at the same time, as the critique of capitalism, and as its therapy” (quoted on p. 71). It is hardly surprising that *The New Spirit of Capitalism* resonates with CMS, which is similarly absorbed by critiques of management as a discursive formation, and where it is never clear whether those who are anti-management are really for or against management because it is all just a semantic game

of defining management rather than analyzing the real structures of capitalism that are, for Callinicos, “constituted by exploitation and class antagonism” (p. 70).

Callinicos turns to Bourdieu for a social critique that puts more emphasis on a theory of social structure, focusing on Bourdieu’s analysis of the role of intellectuals. Bourdieu’s critique of ‘scholastic reason’, of the way in which intellectuals fail to acknowledge the very particular and privileged social conditions that allow them to pursue their work applies all too well to the whingers in CMS, as do the epithets Bourdieu uses to characterize the “fallacies produced by the failure to recognize these social conditions of intellectual work”: “scholastic epistemocentrism”, “moralism and egoistic universalism”, and “aesthetic universalism” (quoted on p. 75). But more seriously, it is difficult to see how CMS could possibly deliver the kind of “scholarship with commitment” that Bourdieu called for, “a politics of intervention in the political world that obeys, as far as possible, the rules in force in the scientific field” (quoted on p. 74), because according to CMS the rules in force in the management field preclude anything that is not ‘for’ management. If management academics have to establish reputations in their field by producing research *for* management in order to gain the requisite authority to intervene in politics as intellectuals, they can hardly then use that authority to attack capitalism and management. This suggests that the rise of business schools has undermined the scope for autonomous intellectuals to mount a universalistic critique of capitalism from the study of management that might formerly have emanated from sociology or politics. But more than that, CMS is hardly well placed to critique that undermining process when its own existence is largely predicated upon claims that critical management is good for management, and practising managers who come into business schools and claim that critical perspectives make the most sense of their management experience are hailed as vindicating CMS.

Callinicos’s own position, set out in Part II of *The Resources of Critique*, consists of a critical realist ontology, “a Marxist theory of structural contradiction, and a freestanding normative conception of egalitarian justice”, which he maintains “cannot be found in any of the theorists discussed in part I” (p. 243). Callinicos’ overview and endorsement of critical realism will be welcome for its would-be adherents in CMS, as will his denunciations of various theorists, e.g. Deleuze, Laclau and Mouffe, and Boltanski and Chiapello, for their “anti-realism” (p. 175, 180). Callinicos sees critical realism as the basis for practically effective social critique that sets out the possibilities for transformation within “the limits of the possible” (p. 181). But my impression is that critical realism within CMS represents a retreat from the aspirations for social transformation in Labour Process Theory into a purely explanatory theory of organizations.

One of Callinicos’s themes is “the relationship between explanatory social theory and normative political philosophy” (p. 217). But it is not until the Conclusion that Callinicos makes an explicit concession that his position in relation to this theme represents a significant departure from classical Marxism:

Marx tried to develop an explanatory theory that exposed the mechanism of capitalist exploitation and crisis without appealing to normative conceptions and ideals. This was, in my view, simply a mistake induced in particular by the influence of Hegel’s critique of Kant. (p. 247)

Some mistake! But at least it opens up a field for debate. Callinicos engages with a range of philosophers concerned with equality and normative principles, including G.A. Cohen, Amartya Sen, Ronald Dworkin, Robert Nozick, and, at some length, John Rawls. According to Callinicos, admitting this mistake in Marxism means that:

A theoretically consequent Marxist critique of capitalism requires articulation of ethical principles in terms of which capitalism is condemned as unjust. How else can it succeed as *critique*? Pursuing this insight demands a genuine dialogue between classical Marxism and egalitarian liberalism – i.e. a mutual engagement that does not take the form of one discourse imperialistically absorbing the other. In other words, the pursuit of normative issues does not require one to abandon the explanatory social theory that has been Marxism’s great intellectual strength. At the same time, Marxism may pose some challenging questions to egalitarian liberals about how their conceptions of justice can actually be realized. (p. 221)

But what’s in it for egalitarian liberals? Since Callinicos uses the territorial metaphor of imperialism, this sounds like a vanquished nation suing for peace on favourable terms with its arsenal intact. Besides, Callinicos is probably in danger of exaggerating the common ground between classical Marxism and Rawlsian egalitarian liberalism. A recent biography “emphasizes that Rawls is not a defender of a capitalist welfare state, as he is so commonly taken to be. Rather Rawls favours a ‘property-owning democracy’ in which ownership and control is widely dispersed” (Wolff, 2008).

What is striking is that whereas Callinicos explains the shifts of position by every other theorist in terms of the political and intellectual context he offers no such explanation for his own shift, which is presented as if it is a purely intellectual progression. But it seems likely that his retreat from classical Marxist positions can also be explained in terms of the defeat of the working class and the retreat of the left in advanced capitalist countries since the 1970s. If it is only the depth of defeat that has compelled the likes of Callinicos to reconsider the basic tenets of Marxism, then there is little reason to suppose that egalitarian liberalism, or others strands of thought that were the targets for Marxist vituperation at times when the left was stronger will have much interest in trying to revive what remains intact of Callinicos’s Marxism.

There are several seemingly unnecessary irritants in *The Resources of Critique*. For example, Callinicos is sceptical about Badiou’s invocation of mathematical logic and he rejects Badiou’s “metaphysical baggage” (p. 96; 104). He sees Bhaskar’s “espousal of New Age spiritualism” as a sign of his “intellectual decline” (p. 158). But unfortunately that doesn’t stop Callinicos “from formulating and defending an explicitly dialectical conception of nature” (p. 215). According to Callinicos chaos and complexity theory “include highly dialectical conceptions”, and “sometimes scientists reflecting on their finding explicitly recognize how they resonate with the idea of a dialectic of nature” (p. 214). Well maybe they do, but every social theorist who invokes chaos and complexity seems to find in them confirmation for his or her views. And if Callinicos really requires these mystical allusions to science and nature to demonstrate that the market is not preordained, then the arguments for a preordained market must be stronger than I ever imagined. To me all this just confirms that many Marxists have yet to free themselves from pseudo-scientific mumbo jumbo.

More importantly, Callinicos makes another major concession in his Conclusion when he states that:

It is undeniably a serious weakness of classical Marxism that it tends to portray the management of a communist society as a purely technical problem... As long as resources aren't infinite – namely forever – the result will be conflict among individual or groups with different projects. (p. 254)

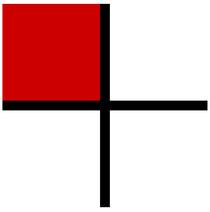
Taken together, Callinicos' two major concessions of weakness in classical Marxism imply that Marxists are mistaken if they believe that ethical concerns in relation to business and management in contemporary society can be reduced to considerations of capitalism and that management theory will be redundant once capitalism has been transcended. This vindicates critical studies of management, even if, for reasons implied by Callinicos, the institutional location of CMS in business schools is problematic. I have little doubt that Callinicos would be surprised to find that *The Resources of Critique* is being favourably reviewed in a journal based in a school of management. But if he is serious about Marxists being prepared to debate issues of ethics and management more widely then it would be worth finding out if he could be persuaded to debate these issues with us in Critical Management Studies.

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We Are All Communists Now... But What Kind?

Peter Fleming

review of:

Massimo De Angelis (2007) *The Beginning of History: Value Struggles and Global Capital*. London and Ann Arbor: Pluto Press. (PB: pp. 320, £22.50, ISBN: 9780745320359)

In a well-known passage, Marx argued that human history could only truly begin when the bonds of capital have been cast aside, an event that is ironically precipitated by its own internal contradictions. It is not history's end that ought to concern us now (since this merely hypostatizes the horrors of late capitalism), but history's beginning, the emergence of an alternative set of social relations that take us beyond the horizon of global capital. Such a beginning already haunts us today as a half-hidden 'outside' residing within the relentlessly inventive machinations of accumulation. According to Massimo De Angelis, in this perceptive and fascinating book, this outside is insinuated in the myriad acts of co-production and co-operation that people struggle to create beyond the pull of market forces and waged labour. Perhaps, then, capitalism is not superseded by a brazen gesture of revolutionary replacement, but through the everyday struggles that amplify the common already among us. The urgent question this book seeks to address is thus: how are we to map the boundaries and frontlines of this *a priori* commons, since capital both fears and parasitically feeds off it in order to maintain its innovative expansion? And could we not add, isn't this especially pressing today when even the most garish management gurus are celebrating anti-managerialism and 68 style radicalism in order to entice suspicious generation-Y employees into the post-industrial workhouse? As De Angelis aptly puts it:

The problem of alternatives therefore becomes a problem of how we disentangle from this dialectic, of how within the social body conflict is not tied back in to capital's *conatus*, but instead becomes a force for the social constitution of value practices that are autonomous and independent from those of capital. (De Angelis, 2007: 42, *emphasis in original*)

In order to understand the limits of capital and co-optation, De Angelis argues we first need to know what exactly we are 'up against'. The book develops a theory of capitalist hegemony that is impressive in scope, detail and inclusiveness. According to the author, capital accumulation enters the political realm when it endeavours to normalize the protocols of profit seeking. Towards this end, measurement is one of the more powerful

instruments of capitalist domination since it moulds the commons into its own likeness. As increasing aspects of social life are subordinated to the forces of disciplinary measurement, De Angelis suggests it is no wonder some critics have represented capital as a boundaryless, almost infinitely smooth plane. While understandable, the notion of totality misses the constitutive importance of the 'outside' that is incessantly forged by struggles around counter-grammars of social life. Again, the question must be posed: how is such an outside possible when the enemy is capable of such extraordinary feats of suppleness, when capital can even package and sell its own critique?

To find an answer, according to De Angelis, we must recognize the crucial importance of *value practices* underlying such struggles. More precisely, measurement involves the brutal normalization of capitalist values (profit, consumption, private property, exploitation, management, surplus, etc.) as well as a method for tallying them up. The ultimate aim is to define the parameters of 'good and bad', 'right and wrong' in a way that privatizes profit and socializes loss. How these values are measured is especially important. This largely consists of linear and loop socio-logarithms, an effective mechanism for sucking the self-determined industry of the social body back into the sphere of wage relations. The timing of the commons is neither linear nor looped, but *phase* oriented. The dreamtime event of the phase determines the outside in a vocabulary that cannot be easily co-opted or absorbed by the pratico-inert rhythms of capital. Echoing the concerns of the Italian autonomist movement, De Angelis maintains that the relationship between normalization and phase-time struggle is not mutually exclusive. The couplet forms a dynamic that propels capitalism in counter-intuitive ways. In a telling introductory passage, he writes:

What might seem a paradox, the contemporary presence of normalization and struggle, is in fact the lifeblood of capitalism, what gives it energy and pulse, the claustrophobic dialectic that needs to be overcome. Phase time is the time of emergence, of 'excess', of tangents, 'exodus' and 'lines of flight', the rupture of linearity and circularity redefining and repositing the goals and telos, as well as norms and values. It is the time of creative acts, the emergence of the new that the subject might experience in terms of what Foucault calls the limit experience, the experience of transformation. (De Angelis, 2007: 3)

This certainly resonates with the arguments of post-workerist (*operaismo*) theorists like Hardt and Negri. An indispensable 'elemental communism' (involving mutual aid, co-operation, gift-giving, etc.) lies at the heart of capitalism: how else can we account for the wealth in society that is qualitatively above and beyond the surplus harnessed by financial markets, wage-labour relations and private property? In this sense, we are all communists to some extent, but cannot fully enjoy the benefits of the common since its value is absorbed by capital. For sure, if the common were taken to the *n*th degree then it would surely spell the demise of its parasitical hegemon. De Angelis is keen, however, to differentiate his analysis from Hardt and Negri's, developing points of distinction that are significant for how we understand 'the outside'. First, he does not buy their argument regarding the multitude and its universalizing nodes of singularity. Rather than being a plane upon which the commons might break through proper, it is today riven with contradictions that corrosively pit producer against producer. Any realized commons must overcome these internal points of antagonism. And second, the frontline of the accumulation process is not the immaterial worker of Western Europe or the United States, but the third world peasant, the Machiladoras wage-slave and other

desperate labourers who confront capitalism as a life and death problem. This proletariat has nothing to lose and is therefore more likely to make manifest the shadow-world of the global common.

At this crucial moment in unpacking the boundary demarcating outer and inner political spheres, De Angelis surprisingly turns on the resources of critique themselves – sometimes with recourse to rather tired post-modern clichés regarding the shortcomings of classical Marxism. In quick-fire succession, Hardt and Negri are criticized for their notion of ‘communism in waiting’ since it does not fully grasp how the multitude is internally divided. Orthodox Marxism is dismissed for its simplistic understanding of revolutionary transformation – party hierarchies, vanguard intellectuals and political programmes breach the phase-time imaginary of the commons. Indeed, the last part of the book avers: “The outside is not an academic category. It is a theoretical construct that is given life, texture and relevance by concrete life practices and struggles at the frontline” (De Angelis, 2007: 226-227). A kind of ‘realism’ regarding what is pragmatically possible and impossible underlies this understanding of the outside. However, the key limitation with the inside/outside dichotomy is that the everyday politics of immanence often becomes co-habitation. To be cheeky for a minute, isn’t the way in which the ‘frontline’ is commonly lived out in Western Europe simply far too tame, almost a matter of participating in G8 protests and other fashionable pastimes of an increasingly marginalized left? The spectre of appropriation must once again concern us since the radical potential of the ‘elemental communist’ is always in danger of becoming what Žižek (2008) recently called the ‘liberal communist’ – those anti-globalist leftist radicals who are championed by Bono and Bill Gates since their diffuse criticism of world poverty is easily translated into a reformist language, no matter how many times the words ‘revolution’ and ‘anarchism’ are spoken. We must remember that today even hard-right management consultancies are recognizing the benefits of liberal communism, through a process Ross (2004) terms the industrialization of bohemia (also see Frank, 1998).

In this sense, then, it could be said the book falls short of articulating exactly how the commons might be decoupled from the ever-parasitical clutch of capital accumulation. The value struggles proposed in *The Beginning of History* can still potentially be lived in London or Berlin in a manner that lends itself to the liberal communist ethic. What some have called the ‘new spirit of capitalism’ is ceaselessly searching for congruencies and connections with critique. One can only conclude that the decoupling event De Angelis is looking for has to be something *radical* if it is not to contribute, however vicariously, to the capital accumulation process. Such radicalism will not be born in any semi-autonomous enclave endeavouring to co-exist within capital, hoping to one-day win the battle. Even if we are not interested in the accumulation process – turning our backs on it – the accumulation process is interested in us. Perhaps Žižek’s ‘school boy’ radicalism harbours a serious message after all. He does not describe transformative change in the parlance of geographical distance. Instead, the figure of the ‘impossible’ is used to map the genuine limits of commodification. What kind of radical gesture would be considered *impossible* in our current milieu, and simply couldn’t be accommodated by the circuits of profit-seeking behaviour? To paraphrase Žižek (who develops the idea in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict), perhaps the reason why the problem of global capital has persisted so long is that we all know the only viable

solution. Like a neurotic symptom, “everybody sees the way to get rid of the obstacle, and yet no one wants to remove it, as if there is some kind of pathological libidinal profit gained by persisting in the deadlock” (Žižek, 2008: 104). Thus, the problem cannot be resolved in any ‘realistic’ way. He continues:

what is utopian is the very notion that such a ‘realistic’ approach will work while the only ‘realistic’ solution is the *big* one, to solve the problem at its roots. The old motto from 1968 applies: *Soyons réalistes demandons l'impossible!* Only a radical gesture that appears ‘impossible’ within existing co-ordinates will realistically do the job. (Žižek, 2008: 104, *emphasis original*)

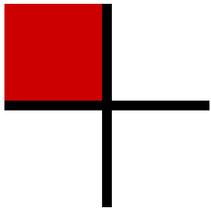
Maybe this radical gesture of impossibility is a better way to understand the problem of boundaries and emergence. The concept of a half-hidden outside of co-production runs the risk of unwittingly playing into the hands of a savvy and increasingly innovative business ideology (much like the term ‘networks’ has). In broaching these very issues, De Angelis’ book is admirable and, it goes without saying, essential reading for anybody interested in the critique of contemporary capitalism. As the autonomists remind us, we are all communists now given the unvalorized labour that yields global wealth today. But what kind of communist do we choose to be? And when it comes to the political grammar that intellectual interventions inspire, perhaps there is still something to be said for taking it all the way?

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The White Elephant at the Dinner Table

Erik Empson

review of:

Timothy S. Murphy and Abdul-Karim Mustapha (eds.) (2007) *The Philosophy of Antonio Negri: Revolution in Theory, Volume 2*. London and Ann Arbor: Pluto Press. (PB: pp. 248, £19.99, ISBN: 9780745326092)

Negri is enormous. For a long time something like an uninvited dinner guest in political circles, he is now more likely to be the celebrity after dinner speaker. And why not? Consistently innovative in thought and steadfast in action he is now so well known that from being an author whose groundbreaking studies of Spinoza and Marx could rarely be seen on the shelves other than in the odd decent Anarchist bookshop, he has, perhaps almost in spite of himself, become a point of focus for that rather nebulous politics of social change of the global multitude's struggle and a new configuration of power in the form of Empire.

However, has this shift from notoriety to popularity resulted in a dilution of the real strength and import of his social analysis, his many-layered workerist reworking of the philosophical discourse of modernity? What is behind the acute sensitivity to the politics of 'class composition' that is trumpeted as the lynchpin of his periodisations and continued belief in man's ability to shape his world? It is a mammoth tradition of philosophising that Negri, among his peers (some of whom are contributors to *Revolution in Theory*) has rescued and resuscitated from its intellectual glaciation during the years of capitalist triumphalism.

So what of this revolution in theory? To talk of 'revolution' today, when it can label the most ordinary things, seems outlandish. It is difficult to think of it in a meaningful way. Revolution, whether political, cultural, sexual, has – and one wonders if Negri would object to this Shibbolethian term – become 'over-determined'. In a world where everyday social action is so heavily embedded in mortgages, careers, families and the rest of it, where people seem to have no choice but to entrench themselves in the systems that limit their freedom, talk of revolutions seems far-fetched as a useful political concept of the ongoing foundation of the modern state or an affirmation of new forms of political constitution. Our ideas and ideals are encoded into the structure of our

being, they no longer lie outside as future hopes or nostalgic regrets. Indeed, whether deliberately, foolishly, or both, Continuum had already tried their luck by publishing the thick-skinned author's dense 'Rebibbia Prison' philosophical writings as *Time for Revolution*, thus short-changing more than a few starstruck, post-Genoan, would-be initiates to the Negrian cause who, reviewers included, simply couldn't get their heads around it.

Thankfully most of the essays in this volume do not simply regurgitate what are fast becoming empty maxims of Negrian politics, nor shade themselves in his weighty theoretical shadow. They engage with the analytical traditions that Negri draws on, and whilst often problematising his interpretation, show that there is no single philosophical lineage to which he belongs, but a broader project of anti-modernity that he is just one representative of. This is an important emphasis, one that is significantly enhanced by Judith Revel's essay which situates Negri in respect to the reception of Nietzsche in post-war Europe. Important because it should not be possible to dismiss such a tradition of political action and thought by easy swipes at one of its theorists, which is happening all too often in academic circles where attacking Negri is a substitute for genuine engagement with the body of ideas within which his thought is situated. If you take on Negri, be prepared to take on a body of thought that includes Althusser, Nietzsche, Spinoza, Foucault, Deleuze and a richly woven fabric of at times connected, at times discontinuous challenges to liberal and socialist apologetics for the market and a state that, hiding behind the mantras of individual liberty and collective austerity, subjected individuals time and time again to broadsides against the exercise and realisation of their social being.

For Negri 'the Spinozian metaphysician', politics are inextricably connected with philosophy. However, our age is Pleistocene, homo erectus has emerged victorious (albeit dressed in cyborgian garb), and the attempt to think the ontology of the real horizons of being as opposed to their abstract ideal version is a project that no longer leads to impasse, crises and caesurae as it did, necessarily, for Spinoza. In our postmodern times, thought is immediately productive, inherently practical, and embedded in the process of economic valorisation. And here, a revolution in *theory* begins to make sense.

The first contribution in *Revolution in Theory*, is that of Pierre Macherey, himself a veteran of the extraordinarily fertile theoretical struggle in the 1960s to sever the deep existential and humanist links between materialist philosophy and its speculative idealist apron strings. He argues that Negri "breathes new life into thought" in his attempt to find an authentic philosophy of constitution considered on the plane of action whilst recognising that the political acts within the philosophical. Or, as Jason Read poses it in the second essay in this volume, Negri develops a new practice of philosophy where "being is not fixed but determines its own outcomes and is the measure of its own limits". It certainly sounds good so far but is this just a white elephant, a gift of wonder that is merely taxing our intellectual surplus? Can Negri's philosophy be put to use? For many, compared to *Empire's* pachydermic stomp, *Multitude's* tusks were far from penetrating.

The challenge is to think both class composition, the state of the struggle over the social

surplus, and political subjectivity at the same time. What makes Negri so attractive to the initiated is the idea that evolutions in the global division of labour can be periodised politically as the result of a dynamic relationship between power and resistance. Our post-diluvian situation is one where both the means and relations of production have been de-stabilised by the very same force. The architect of this would have to be particularly powerful. So, can we rightly speak of a new political subject?

By comparing Negri and Arendt's reading of Machiavelli, Michel Vatter's contribution helps to rethink the relation between 'the people' as a sovereign constituting power and the attempts to turn that political will into a transcendent self-subsisting (through constitutional and juridical norms) power that ultimately circumscribes foundational freedoms. Political action need not be considered solely as an affirmation of the new but instead as the exercise of a sovereign resistance or intrinsic indifference to power, that – seen alongside the idea of the return to the beginning in Machiavelli – is a permanent revolution against politics from within the social. The idea of a separate autonomous political realm is counterposed to a kind of power that is constituted from below in communes: local self-organised forms of power organically built upon communist cooperation.

I agree, but how does this multitude, which in Virno's terms shuns political unity, square with what on a number of occasions Negri has trumpeted as its power to act and take decisions? Why is the multitude more than the age old pre-modern figure of the recalcitrant populace's refusal to form itself into a people? How does it come to pass that the multitude has the power to decide the exception? If it can be found, the answer must lie in class composition, and how we act within it.

Directly taking up Negri's theoretical relationship to Michel Foucault, in respect to his theorisation of bio-power and bio-politics, Alberto Toscano takes quite a scathing swipe at Negri's attempt to mark an epochal shift in the form of capitalist and state power in the modern world. Counterposing Negri's attempt to build up these oppositions in an all-too-convenient systemic manner to what he calls Foucault's 'methodological nominalism', the ambivalences behind Negri's claims for a postmodern form of politics and his reliance upon simple dichotomisations are further drawn out by engaging in the differences between him and other heirs to the radical traditions of anti-modernity in the form of Virno, Agamben and others. The crux of the debate is the appropriateness of Marx's critique of capitalism's reduction of living labour to abstract labour. Either we have genuinely entered into a new state of affairs where capitalism no longer needs to perform this reduction in real terms and can profit from the self-valorising power of labour, or this latter has always been a latent aspect of concrete labour which established power is finding new ways to manage in the face of new found political subjectivities based around it.

The same criticism then can be levelled at both the idea of multitude and immaterial labour. They turn a latent recurring feature into a predominant form of the new order. But maybe Negri has been trying to say something more. Recall the alleged congruities of philosophical critique and political action. Perhaps Negri, by naming a movement – by expressing it – is merely alerting us to a possibility within an existing process, something about which we can make choices that will influence the outcome. After all,

isn't that the kind of thing, iron laws of historical necessity notwithstanding, that lured us to the idea of revolution in the first place? Maybe in our hyper-critical times we've not listened enough to the injunction to act. Ted Stolze clearly has and looks at Negri from quite a different angle by means of the latter's writings on the book of Job. Though not central to Negri's thought, being more like the pointing done to a building once the main edifice has been constructed, Job's suffering, his refusal to accept his friends' exhortations that he accept his lot, is not just a figure for the struggle of the maligned Marxist theoretician, but can be recast as an example of how we might not submit to the inevitable, to our fate or to God's will, and instead continue to believe in the immeasurability of the future.

If the attempts to critically engage with Negri as part of a wider tradition is a high point in this volume, its nadir is surely found in the asinine contribution by Alex Callinicos. But the latter's criticisms – the jealous nitpicking, the venom and bile – help elucidate, in respect to the criticisms that Negri's intellectual motifs belong in the past, just how far he has really travelled. Callinicos' main gripe is the role of the unionised professional worker in social struggles over the wage, antediluvian bread and butter pure and simple. He invites us to wonder how poor and destitute miners in Wales suffering with drugs and despair would respond to the idea that they were the architects of their misfortune. Bless! He consigns those that he attributes with the power to affect change to the status of being the enduring impotent, victims of it. Presumably Callinicos would still have his meths-drinking miners chipping away at the blank face of profitability, chanting 'coal not dole' and mining material for Ken Loach movies.

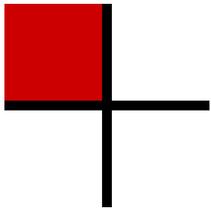
You can take or leave Negri's periodisations, coming as they do from the peculiar admixture of Italian and French workerism mixed with North American management theory, but criticising Negri for failing to provide a strategy for working class revolution is to entirely miss the point. It amounts to claiming that he is outside the very struggles he has been part of forming anew. It seeks to tie the intellectual back into a straitjacket of political correctness, of obedience to the present, from which he had originally struggled so hard to escape. The melting of the boundaries between communicative and constitutive action in today's world means that taking up the new institutionalisations of old forms of power is as important, nay *more* important than agitating for generalisable points of class solidarity following an outdated model of political leadership. To create crises at the constitution of meaning is to de-stabilise the consolidation of political authority around new axes of power, and that is worth untold banner waving Sunday strolls through police-lined London streets. As Charles T. Wolfe puts in the final chapter of *Revolution in Theory*: "Materialism is a theory of action for Negri, not a theory of science or of truth". To force a dichotomy between intellectual and manual labour is invidious.

Negri is huge and has, as a result of that, recently, the volume in hand included, been prodded and poked in all sorts of awkward places. However, understanding his politics is not to examine how he measures up to other skeletons in the closet but to concatenate with a project of a temporal non-reductionist materialism – probably best done after a drink or two. To their credit, the authors of this book have by and large done so. The common must be expressed rather than merely stated, and that entails a process wherein (to reiterate Wolfe's quote from Empire), 'knowledge has to become linguistic action

and philosophy has to become a real re-appropriation of knowledge'. Hear, hear! Let's not expect a stampede, but if more figures of this calibre step up to the plate, a genuine political language that speaks of real alternatives will become stronger.

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Is Another Way Possible?

Daniel King

review of:

Martin Parker, Valérie Fournier and Patrick Reedy (2007) *The Dictionary of Alternatives*. London: Zed Books. (PB: pp. 256, £16.99, ISBN: 9781842773338)

It is often said that *Critical Management Studies* is devoid of hope and alternatives. Whilst offering an informative and lucid critique of society, many consider CMS impotent when it comes to suggesting ways to tackle our disciplining and conditioning (Parker, 2002a). Through its constant pursuit of “the dark side of organizations” (Willmott, 1993) (fittingly as I write this an email comes through as a conference announcement with this very title), and purposeful avoidance of blueprints (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996), CMS is seen as a council of despair (Adler, 2002), unable, and possibly even unwilling, to aid resistance and transformation (Thompson, 2004). Little wonder therefore that many feel downhearted and cautious of what can be achieved (Fournier and Grey, 2000; Grey and Willmott, 2002).

This is certainly the view I took when first introduced to the subject. As a final year undergraduate student introduced to critical interpretations of management, I was fascinated and excited but also despondent and confused about what I encountered. Whilst the CMS concepts (Knights and Willmott, 1999) provided greater explanation than the mainstream management education I had previously received, like most of my fellow classmates, I wondered what could be done with this knowledge. I accepted the basic premise of CMS that the current form of organized capitalism has destructive and dehumanising effects that perpetuate social inequalities, but I felt that without any guidance or even indication of other ways of acting it was difficult to see a way forward. I have witnessed this same reaction countless times by students I have taught *Critical Management Studies* to. Without any indication of alternatives to orthodox management practice, many resign themselves to the status quo and conventional management. *Cynical Management Studies* might thus seem a more suitable title for our discipline.

This despondency is not restricted to the academic community. Many consider that since the collapse of the Berlin Wall there is little alternative to free market capitalism, that consumerism has triumphed and managerialism dominates society. As politicians battle on the head of a pin for the centre ground, Marcuse’s dystopian vision of a one

dimensional society (Marcuse, 1964) now appears truly with us. As the radical politics of the 1960s has faded from the collective memory, neo-liberal free-market capitalism increasingly appears ubiquitous and few alternatives seem to exist.

The Dictionary of Alternatives provides a timely and thoughtful repost to those who say that this is the only way society can be organised. Its primary purpose, as the authors state in the introduction, is to demonstrate that despite appearances there are many alternatives to the current hegemony of contemporary capitalism and “to show the massive diversity of ways in which human organization can be imagined”. This argument is constructed through presenting 237 alphabetically arranged entries, detailing alternative ways of living, thinking and organising. The breadth of these entries is wide-ranging, including contemporary and historical, factual and fictional accounts, all aiming to encourage the questioning of current societal arrangements and open the possibilities for future action. Acting as what they call an “almanac of possibilities” the dictionary is thus a chocolate box of alternative and radical ideas, all neatly presented and arranged. Users are thus free to pick and choose their ideas, build their own perspectives and broaden their worldview.

The Dictionary of Alternatives is therefore, as the back cover states, intending to be more than simply a reference text but also a polemic and source-book. The following section will assess it against these aims, exploring subject matter, style and format of the text. The dictionary also offers an indirect challenge to critical thinking and presents the need for alternatives. This review will therefore reflect on the nature of this challenge to current debates in CMS.

As a Reference Text

Martin Parker, Valérie Fournier and Patrick Reedy, alongside their team of 20 contributors, have provided a wonderfully engaging collection of alternative thinking and practice. The text is at its most immediate level a reference book of alternative thinking, providing factual accounts of theories, social movements, historical situations and practical examples of alternatives to neo-liberal capitalism and managerialism. Consisting of entries between one paragraph and four pages, the text introduces and discusses subject matter as diverse as intellectual heavyweight Karl Marx to the modern practical concern of sustainability. In common with other features of Parker’s work it has a strong interest in Utopia (1998, 2002b) as well as organizational theory.

As a reference text the dictionary functions extremely well. It is rigorous, well researched and can act as a reliable companion to introduce and deepen one’s understanding. It is certainly comparable with reference texts such as Jary and Jary’s *Collins Dictionary of Sociology* (2000) and arguably is written in a more direct and accessible style. The book successfully introduces subjects to the uninitiated without the dual dangers of being patronising or exhibiting pedantic bookishness. Each subject is stripped down to its essentials whilst still providing enough understanding and embellishments to provide context and interest. The dictionary has an informative tone whilst remaining light and entertaining enough to be a good read. Whilst obviously well researched, this knowledge is worn lightly. The result is that the dictionary functions as

somewhere between a well written textbook and a journalistic text, avoiding the arid tone of the former and the hyperbole of the latter.

The dictionary is particularly helpful to those who are already engaged in alternative thinking and practice but find they regularly come across theories, historical or practical examples, be it in academic texts, conferences or meetings that require further background information. It acts as a reliable source of cultural information about the alternative scene, which is advantageous not only on an individual level by aiding personal learning, but significantly, by opening up and explaining these traditions, it can play a vital educational role deepening and extending cultural awareness of these radical traditions. Whilst this book will appeal most directly to a CMS-style audience – many of the references cited as supporting evidence are more familiar to the academic community than activist networks – it has the potential to have a far broader scope. Not only are the topics covered of considerable interest to voluntary sector practitioners, activists, anarchists, social campaigners and those engaged in alternative lifestyles, but the manner in which it is written enables it to be an interesting and engaging read.

The dictionary is more than merely a reference text as many entries critically analyse their subject matter. In an approach that simultaneously acts as a dictionary and academic debate, the authors examine some of these alternative perspectives, identifying their possibilities and flaws. This prevents the dictionary, despite its avowed political agenda, from becoming a hagiography; sycophantically or dogmatically promoting alternative perspectives. Moreover, this approach allows the editors to select from some less automatically radical perspectives that otherwise may have been excluded. This critical edge therefore enables the dictionary to offer a distinctive approach and sustained argument.

Polemic

However, to judge it as a reference book alone would be ungenerous. The dictionary's chief concern is to construct the polemic argument that there *are* alternatives to free market capitalism and the current organization of society. This is achieved by providing a wide range of alternative ideas, drawn from many different social movements, experimental societies and even new technology innovations. The alternatives they offer are not exclusively anti-capitalist as it includes movements as diverse as Focolare, the Slow Food Movement, Web 2.0 and Friendly Societies. This polemical approach also enables the dictionary to bring to light particular features that conventional tomes would ignore. Robinson Crusoe, for instance, may not initially be seen as a topic for an alternative dictionary, but through their reading, placed in connection with the works of Marx and Rousseau, a critical and alternative perspective is drawn out. This helps give the book a distinctive edge and despite the wide ranging subject matter and multiple authorship enables it to maintain a certain coherence and regularity.

The argument is thus constructed not through lengthy exposition but through the plethora of examples the dictionary offers and is consequently polemical simply through its function as an almanac. The sheer number of entries collected in one volume acts as a reminder and testament to the great variety of alternatives which exist to conventional society, both the familiar and long forgotten. By immersing oneself in the

text for an hour one cannot help but be persuaded by their central argument that there are many alternatives to neo-liberal thought, even if one is not persuaded by the applicability to current situation.

The Dictionary of Alternatives could thus be seen as a dictionary of the possible. As a polemic, many of the entries are encouraging and quite a few are inspiring. The question becomes how one puts them into practice.

Source Book

Whilst it would be overstating the case to suggest that by itself the dictionary has transformative possibilities, by revealing these various alternative concepts it can provide vital cultural knowledge that can help free one from the hegemony of modern society and allow a fuller and richer participation in alternative theory and practice. This has three primary benefits. Firstly, the dictionary demonstrates the wealth of alternatives that exist. Secondly, through the description of these alternatives, it can aid understanding and awareness, equipping the reader with cultural knowledge and discourse embedded in these traditions. Thirdly, through the acquisition of this discourse it can provide an alternative way to think and act in the world. The text thus works best if it could be thought of as a primer, alerting and sensitising the reader to alternative social movements, political theory and history that conventional media do not often present.

However, the question arises what one does with this knowledge. It is at the level of sourcebook that the dictionary is least successful. Whilst as a reference book and polemic it might provide useful background information and awareness of alternative perspectives, as a means of acting on these insights both the format of a dictionary as well as its content are limiting. It is notable that the only further information section is for further reading rather than engagement and action. Whilst there is a danger of obsolescence with this approach – website links break down, postal addresses and key information about organizations change – in performing its function of a sourcebook these features are essential. There are other ways that this could be catered for. For instance by means of an accompanying website kept up to date with further sources of information, web links and even the potential for blogs and interactive features where those inspired by the book can discuss their experiences. Whilst the editors state that websites are easy enough to find, this is still based on the premise that the reader is sufficiently informed to do such research. Given that the focus for the book is on alternative perspectives more information would certainly have been beneficial. Different readers will have their own take on how useful such an approach would be but for this reader certainly some form of practical advice as to how to get involved in these alternative projects would have been useful.

Having described the benefits of the dictionary against the criteria they offer there are a number of further questions that need to be asked about the content and format of the dictionary as well as the wider project the authors have engaged in, to which we will now turn.

Focus and Omissions

A dictionary explicitly about *alternatives* represents a number of opportunities and challenges. Whilst it may not contain the number of entries as in Jary and Jary, given its subject matter it is considerably broader in scope and arguably more interesting. This, however, represents a double-edged sword. On the one hand it is an interesting read, covering diverse topics from novels through to eco-villages. On the other it lacks focus which makes the dictionary an interesting, although somewhat erratic companion. It is thus not always consistent in the type of entries it carries and therefore cannot be depended upon to have the particular entry one is looking for. Moreover, as a reference text one needs a degree of familiarity with a particular issue to know if it is *alternative* and therefore likely to feature in *The Dictionary of Alternatives*. It is difficult to imagine how one might encounter an entry such as the *Llano del Rio* without some form of prior awareness about its existence and alternative credentials. Therefore, the dictionary will not necessarily be the first port of call as a reference text.

As indicated above, the subject matter of the book is at times slightly erratic and limited. The bias of the book appears to be towards theoretical and historical conceptions rather than practical or lifestyle forms of non-conformist modes of living. There are many alternative ways of living and thinking that fall below the radar of this dictionary, such as small scale community and arts projects, protest movements and alternative lifestyle options that are simply not incorporated in this book. This unfortunately creates a bias towards more established or visible groupings. There is also an absence of writing about artistic and creative projects that involve art, music and film, alternative non-conformist folk traditions and underground movements. Consequently, the book has a certain white, middle-class and western bias. Although the editors admit to these limitations in the introduction, little, it appears, was done in the establishment of the writing team to rectify this omission. They are almost exclusively drawn from UK universities hence the narrow subject matter.

There is also a preference for large scale masculine theorisation rather than a focus on the domestic quotidian alternative ways of living. This is unfortunate because often change can begin and be sustained through these small scale processes of *Buycott* and *Boycott*. Whilst not necessarily deserving of entries on their own some discussion on the relative merits of such consumption patterns as bio-nappies, mooncups, wind-up radio and eco-balls might have engendered at the very least some debate. In a similar vein there is a heavy focus on theorists rather than practice inventors such as Trevor Baylis and Buckminster Fuller, social entrepreneurs like Anita Roddick or social campaigners like Edwin Chadwick, Bolivian activist Oscar Olivera or social theatre creator Augusto Boal. Again, these do not necessarily have to be glowing endorsements but like other features of this dictionary could have been the focus of interesting insight and critical analysis. In a similar vein recent social business processes such as 'Triple Bottom Lines' and 'Carbon Trading' could have been analysed for their potential and pitfall alternative credentials.

Another area of major omission is on alternative building and technology, particularly those that involve and address the climate change agenda. Whilst self-sufficiency is mentioned as are eco-villages, little is made of more scaled down projects such as self-building, straw bale building, bee-keeping or the revival of older artisan processes

which increasingly are a part of broader social movements and alternative lifestyle projects. Groups such as the *Low Impact Living Initiative*, *World-Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms* and *Radical Routes* do not receive a mention. These alternative perspectives are significant not only because of their environmental credentials but also because of the alternative cultures they create and sustain. Moreover, with its focus on the conceptual side of alternative thinking the format of the book does not allow its authors to touch on the experiential benefits of participation in these alternative forms of organization. Had a broader range of authors been utilised, then a more wide-ranging set of sources could have been employed that may have made the text richer in content and more appealing and accessible to other groups.

Format

Although cross-referencing is good (if not slightly erratic), alternative indexing would certainly increase the usability of the text allowing for the organising of the entries in different forms and groupings and thereby opening up the dictionary to other possible readings. By placing the entries by name it also makes it difficult to find information when one does not have an exact subject in mind.

The dictionary might also not be the first port of call as a reference text due to its format as a book. In these interactive times of Wikipedia and other web based reference resources, a book, as a reference guide, has a certain old fashioned feel. There are certainly advantages to publishing in book format but as we increasingly look to the internet as the starting point for reference material there is a danger that *The Dictionary of Alternatives* might miss out on some opportunities. Due to its editing process and direct acknowledgement of authorship it is a more scholarly or reliable source than web based references such as Wikipedia. However, the format limits the number of entries it is able to make (they had to cut some 5000 words) and links to other sources of information often will relegate the dictionary to a secondary, although useful, point of reference.

Moreover, and arguably more significantly, the format limits the audience that the book would be available to. A paid for dictionary seems an oddly conventional approach, and at RRP of £16.99 relatively expensive for those with a passing interest which, if the agenda the book pursues is to be realised, is vital. A web based approach would have enabled it to connect with a broader audience, give more instantaneous access and a collectivist production process (albeit with the accompanying challenges of editorial control and reliability) and would have provided the opportunity of being continually updateable. As a reference text therefore the key benefit is that it is reliable but also comes from an alternative viewpoint.

The Need for Alternatives?

Ultimately the publication of *The Dictionary of Alternatives* raises a number of questions for the field of CMS. The very fact that the book has been written is testament to the struggles and tensions which exist in the field and the responses that academics, students and practitioners face when confronted with CMS.

There will be those who will see the production of the dictionary as a welcome step forward for critical thinking. They will be craving for answers, as I was when I initially encountered CMS, and welcome the opportunity to put some of the ideas into practice. Many see that CMS, if it is to have any impact on organizational practice needs to move in this more pragmatist direction and needs to be involved in dialogues which open up other ways of seeing. The authors state that if CMS can put forward a positive research agenda, it “just might emerge as leaders of the Academy of Management (and management education more broadly). A move to the core is quite possible. But this move requires a departure. CMS must add construction to deconstruction, problem-solving to problematizing, and prescription to reflexivity” (Walsh and Weber, 2002: 409).

Many others, however, will see this dictionary as a backward step for the critical project. The role of the academic, they argue, is not to be involved in the production of solutions, or the presentation of alternatives but the creation of more profound and stimulating questions. They suggest that alternatives rather than opening up possibilities might in fact close down the capacity for critical thinking as it leads to the assumption that the solutions already exists (Boje *et al.*, 2001). They argue that to advocate alternatives would be merely another imposition of power and domination by ‘the critical academic’ (Fenwick, 2005), a tendency too much in evidence already in CMS research (Wray-Bliss, 2004; Clegg *et al.*, 2006).

This is a dilemma that has been evident ever since the inception of CMS (see for instance Alvesson and Willmott, 1996), and has acted as a fault line throughout the project (Fournier and Grey, 2000). In my view, however, *The Dictionary of Alternatives* does not fall neatly into either side of this divide and is doing something slightly different. Although the dictionary may be read as a ‘solutions book’, its actual intention is to demonstrate that there are alternatives rather than stating these are necessarily the right ones. Parker, Fournier and Reedy are not placing themselves as grand intellectuals, formulating solutions for the masses, but neither are they retreating from the question. As Alvesson and Deetz argue:

It can easily be claimed that critical writings in both the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment traditions have placed too much attention on awareness and understanding and not enough on enabling alternative responses. The implicit faith – that if people knew what they wanted and the system of constraints limiting them, they would know how to act differently – has little basis. (2000: 20: see also Fay, 1987; Alvesson and Willmott 1996; Fenwick, 2005)

By bringing together a range of alternatives, the dictionary helps people imagine other ways of doing things, drawing on numerous histories and traditions that embody the potential that people *can* formulate their own solutions. Social movements and radical forms of action do not originate from nothing but neither should we have slavish adherence to a particular perspective as *the* solution to our troubles. It depends upon how we use it. The academic thus exists as a node within a network, linking theories and ideas from one domain to those that exist within another domain, and thus opening new opportunities for thought and action (Grey and Willmott, 2002).

Conclusion

Overall *The Dictionary of Alternatives* is a success. From an academic viewpoint *The Dictionary of Alternatives* fits comfortably within the canon of Critical Management Studies and should become a mainstay of texts within the field. It certainly is useful to academics who are seeking to broaden their understanding of CMS and the social and cultural traditions in which it sits. It also provides an excellent supplementary text to those studying critical studies of management at 2nd, 3rd and Masters level who wish to broaden their knowledge and understandings. For activists and social campaigners it also provides a useful companion to thinking about and engaging in social transformation. It is a good starting point but naturally has its limitations.

Whilst *The Dictionary of Alternatives* might contain some flaws it does present a timely and important challenge to those who say there is no hope for transforming society. To students and practitioners it gives much food for thought about different ways of organising which can aid imagination within their own situation. For activists and academics it can plug gaps in knowledge and lead to an expansion in understanding of different perspectives. And for *Critical Management Studies* it provides an important challenge to how we think about critique and the possibilities of changing practice. Whilst it may not completely satisfy my next cohort of students and practitioners, it is a useful tool to present when they reach that moment of questioning existing society and thinking about alternatives.

The Dictionary of Alternatives will happily sit on my bookshelf and regularly be pulled off to answer questions, provide alternative ways of thinking or keep alive the hope that another way is possible.

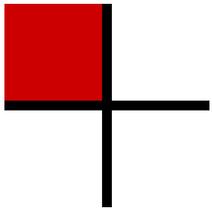
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The Objects of Utopia: New Lamps for Old

Alan W. Moore

review of:

Martin Parker, Valérie Fournier and Patrick Reedy (2007) *The Dictionary of Alternatives*. London: Zed Books. (PB: pp. 256, £16.99, ISBN: 9781842773338)

In a 1997 talk in Prague, Cornelius Castoriadis described capitalism as the largest kind of utopic imaginary, an ‘absurd’ illusion of endless expanding material consumption (Castoriadis, quoted in McLemee, 2004). What system then is realistic? Whatever it is, in its past or embryonic form, its description is sure to be found within the *Dictionary of Alternatives*.

This is a reference book of differences – ideas, movements, leaders, economies, communities. It is a guidebook to the kingdom of mammals scurrying unnoticed in the brush behind the dinosaurs of today.

It is also an inventory of the utopian objects. This dictionary lists that which has been largely unthinkable, unnameable, that which has been prohibited from mainstream discourse and consigned to the covert realm by the institutional regimes of the postmodern era.

This *Dictionary* is a clear sign that the wind is changing. As Immanuel Wallerstein observes in the catalogue of the 2003 Venice Biennale, ‘utopistics’ is a “study of the better” not the perfect. In a world in structural crisis, marked by a struggle between hierarchical and democratic systems “history is on no one’s side” (Wallerstein, 2003). A book like this *Dictionary* can serve as the kind of tool box Wallerstein says can help move us towards a model.

A pre-eminent world systems analyst, Wallerstein was speaking in a catalogue for an art exhibition, in the section called Utopia Station. It is clear that this *Dictionary* is about function not fiction. These authors teach in schools of management and business. Just as critical cultural studies migrated into communications departments, so the study and understanding of different modes of social and economic organization seem to have become essential for the pursuit of business in the era of globalized communication.

This institutional academic turn is certainly part of capital's own adaptation to the emergent forms of economic and political organization that may be understood to lie 'beyond' it.

This book may foreshadow an intensification of the subducted conflicts within capitalist economy between the knowledge/information and the extractive/destructive industries. The recent history of this quiet struggle includes the dot com crash, the strategic denial of the 'green' and the global war on nothing.

The *Dictionary* is a tight and useful little book. The entries are gem-like marvels of concision. My problems with it are mostly pedantic. The bibliography is separated into sections, so it's tricky to run down citations which are by author and date. The bibliography is cursory; but as the authors point out, 'the many websites relevant to entries' are easy to find. The *Dictionary* is a new kind of book, one intended to function as a reference supplement to an ever-changing and enlarging body of knowledge online.

It would be easy to critique it as an insufficient academic product, one that rehearses the inadequacy of most books one sees about business. Yet the bibliography this book requires would fill another and far larger volume. Instead, the *Dictionary* is a handful of hard-shelled seeds thrown upon bare ground, confident that the air – that is, the internet – will provide sufficient nourishment for further growth and development.

A more substantial issue concerns the UK-centric nature of the work. For example, under 'Intentional Communities' the list omits the invaluable work of Timothy Miller on American communes. But arguments between Brits and yanks aside, the work seems insufficiently post-colonial. Developments in the lands beyond the West are understood mostly through the lens of their effects on the centre.

But again I remind myself how recent this renewed attention to lost forms of utopic striving is. Despite its authoritative form – as 'dictionary' – the book is really a set of questions rather than answers.

So then: Does the very western idea of utopia have explanatory or rhetorical force outside the birthplaces of capitalism? Is it not even in its very homeland perhaps a profound conservatism, straining to hold on to the half-remembered practices of smaller moieties that were existent before modern nations and capital. The new empowered all-devouring world system as ever tramples local arrangements. Obsoleted in the face of the new circumstances, these are forgotten.

Is that not what is happening now in regions where traditional societies have remained strong? (at least until the neo-colonial wars of the postmodern era tore them apart), as the apostles of neo-liberal capitalism seek the as yet unconverted to commodify, while demonizing and destroying the indigenes and traditionals who stand in the way.

The brief entry here on the women's Chipko movement – the original tree-huggers of India – is an instance of the extraordinarily inventive forms of resistance to gluttony developed in 'developing' countries.

The global anti-capital resistance movement, inspired as it was by Zapatismo, may still be in some early phase of relation to these practices of resistance rather like the primitivism of modern artists looking at African sculpture.

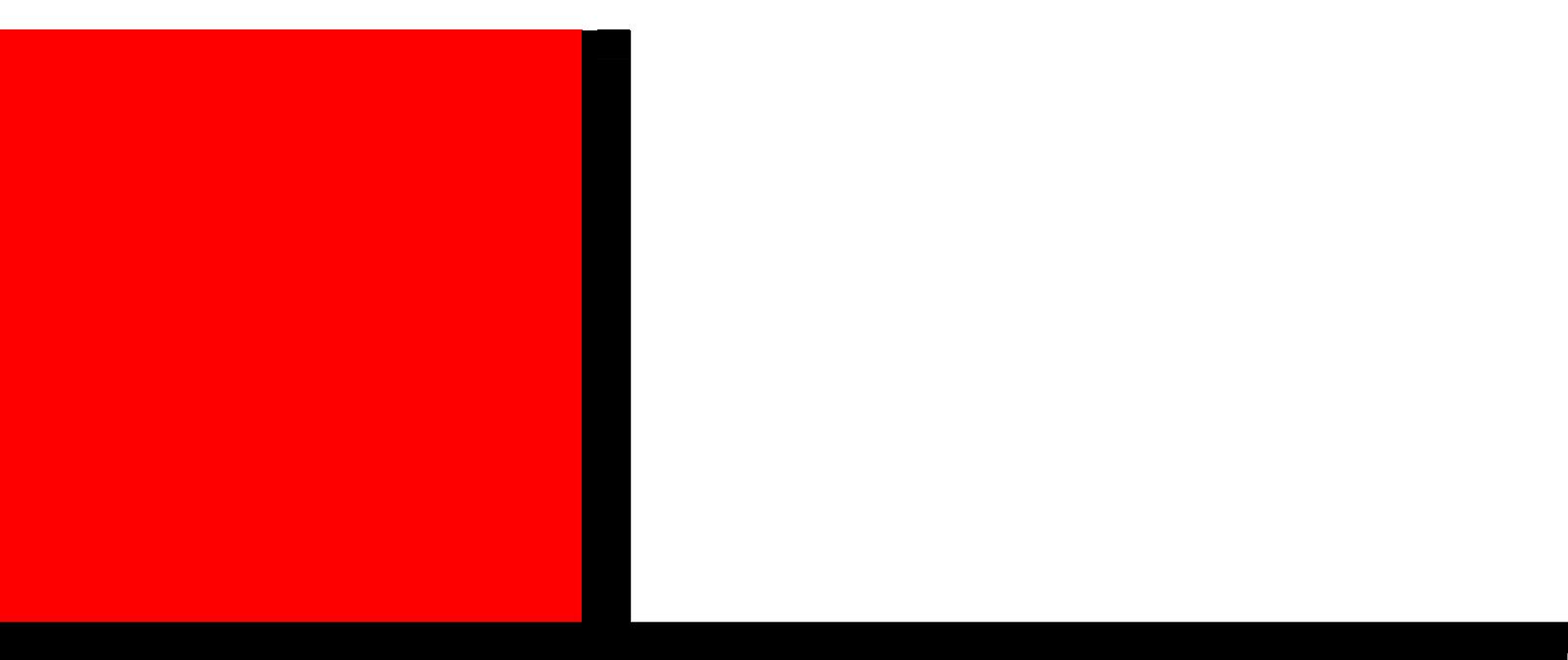
This is all great – it’s fun to think differently, given here such abundant information about the possibilities. And the *Dictionary* shows clearly that this is not a question of initiating doomed starts from half-understood premises, but rather remembering those forgotten – new wheels for old chassis.

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Alan W. Moore does not write the comic books. (Sigh.) He is an art historian who has visited recently at University of South Florida and Kennesaw State University teaching contemporary art and critical theory. He has written on artists’ groups, cultural districts and cultural economies. As a young punk he worked with the artists’ groups Colab and helped start the cultural center ABC No Rio. Secret services take note: Now that his contract is up, he is looking forward to resuming his career as a nomadic revolutionary. Stop him before it is too late...
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