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CHAPTER 8

THE STYLES AND THE STYLISTS OF ORGANIZATION THEORY

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> Marshalling one's tropes to go in unconventional ways may be difficult and perhaps lonely, but it is by no means everywhere and always unwelcome.
>
> (Van Maanen 1995*a*: 142 n. 13)

THE quotation above was chosen to replace the standard one from Nietzsche,[1] which by now must be well worn at the edges from overuse. It was also chosen because it expresses a very touching sentiment. It is the last sentence of the last note (the unlucky number 13) in an essay that was to be later described as 'utilizing an emotionally laden, explicitly political, heated-up, purple and provocative language' (Van Maanen 1995*b*). When all the guns are spent, the tired Van Maanen says, lapsing almost into *litotes*,[2] 'write well and you will be rewarded'. But what does it mean 'to write well' in organization theory?

The author thanks Christian Knudsen and Deirdre N. McCloskey for their comments.

[1] The one about truth being a mobile army of metaphors.

[2] Ironical understatement, especially when an affirmative is expressed by the negative of the contrary; see also *meiosis* (Lanham 1991: 95–6).

When Ricca Edmondson wrote her *Rhetoric in Sociology* in 1984, there was little reaction, but when Deirdre N. McCloskey published her *Rhetoric of Economics* in 1985, the uproar was great. Sociologists may well use literary rhetoric but, surely, isn't an economist but a will-less pen in the invisible hand of the market or a similar natural force? But the virus spread, and all disciplines rushed to examine their rhetoric. In 1987 *The Rhetoric of the Human Sciences: Language and Argument in Scholarship and Public Affairs* (edited by Nelson, Megill, and McCloskey) was published, followed by Herbert Simons's (ed.), *Rhetoric in the Human Sciences* (1989) and *The Rhetorical Turn* (1990). By 1988, Robert Solow was pointing out that it was time to move beyond the 'look, Ma, a metaphor' stage and speak about consequences of economic rhetoric (the book under this title has been edited by Klamer, McCloskey, and Solow). One began to speak of 'logic of inquiry', often in a daring plural, and the fact that scientists use a rich repertoire of persuasive instruments was no longer a startling discovery. If anything, the problem in organization theory, postulated Van Maanen, was the disciplinary attempts to put constraints on the use of this repertoire, so that our scholarly discourse has become 'impoverished, stiff, sanitized and humorless' (1995*b*: 687). Much as I agree with John Van Maanen, two things are worth pointing out in this context.

One is related to my favorite analogy between the detective story genre and the genre of organization theory (Czarniawska 1999*a*, *b*). The detective story genre was also judged to have become stale and rigid in the 1920s and the 1930s due to the establishment of canonical rules; these were used by figures such as S. S. Van Dine and Ronald Knox to discipline the new adepts (Hühn 1987). But, as it can be said that Impressionism was produced by the French Academy (which by consistent rejection of paintings not conforming to the rules provoked the opening of the Independent Salon), so one can claim that the rigidification of the rules of the detective genre made transgressions easier. Indeed, the attempts to impose discipline within organization theory seem to coincide with an explosion of textual experimentation in the field (for recent examples, see Harju 1999; Starkey 1999; and Westwood 1999).

The other point is that, although I share Van Maanen's appreciation of Karl Weick's style, organization theory has many excellent stylists, probably due to its much lamented plurality. In what follows, I shall quote several exemplars of such style-as-theory (or perhaps style-as-method, see Latour 1988*a*), to show younger readers that there is a vast repertoire to choose from and to expand. I hasten to add that this is a posteriori judgment: there are no 'styles that persuade', only 'styles that have persuaded'—some readers, at a certain place, at a certain time (Iser 1978). The institutional inertia allows us to extrapolate the audience's reactions, but these can never be taken for granted; institutions are always leaky and under transformation themselves. The grandiloquent style of yesterday is but a ridiculous mannerism today (of which Gabriele D'Annunzio, the Italian writer of the 1920s, is the best

example[3]). For this reason, I omit historical examples (they have been closely read by, for example, O'Connor 1996 and Monin, Barry, and Monin 2000).

An explanation is due before I embark on my task: why am I using this old-fashioned term 'style' instead of, for example, 'textual strategy' (Harrari 1979), 'rhetorical repertoire', and the like? I have chosen it simply because the old-fashioned notion of style can encompass all of these. True, it also drags with it some unwanted connotations, as 'old-fashioned' means, among other things, 'used for a long time'. In order to get rid of the most obnoxious ones, I shall try to delimit the way in which I shall understand 'style' in the present text.

Among many definitions offered by the *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, two are especially relevant: III11b 'A particular or characteristic way, form, or technique of making or producing a thing, esp. a work of art; a way of executing a task; a manner of performance' and III13a 'Elegance, refinement, or excellence of manner, expression, form, or performance' (*NS OED* 1993: 3112). Although it is the first meaning that I mostly intend, the second is alluded to—following the example of John Van Maanen's analysis of Weick's style, which was clearly intended to be laudatory. The notion of style points towards a personal character of a text—in a political sense ('style as voice', Megill and McCloskey 1987: 225–8) and in an emotional sense. Indeed, 'style is the man',[4] as literary theorists used to say unchecked for a good while.

The feminist perspective is not the only one expressing a new understanding of style. One clear change in relation to the ancient theory of rhetoric is the inclusion of structure ('Arrangement') into style, obviously due to the impact of structuralist and post-structuralist theory.[5] The second innovation is the collapse of the traditional distinction between the style and the content, or the form and the content, attacked ferociously and with success by Nelson Goodman (1978) in aesthetics and Hayden White (1987) in historiography. This change permitted Van Maanen to speak of 'style as theory'.

Umberto Eco said that style was 'a very personal, unrepeatable, characteristic "way of forming"—the recognizable trace that every artist leaves in his work and which coincides with the way the work is formed. Thus, the artist gives himself form in the work' (1989: 165). This has to do with an idea that a 'Model Author' is a creation in the text, an actant (the subject of sentences that begin with 'I'), and style is her sign of presence. The texts that do not have style build a Model Author out of

[3] See e.g. Wills (1999).

[4] A saying attributed to Count Buffon, French aristocrat and biologist, *Le style est l'homme même*. In 1753 Buffon was elected to the Académie Française in recognition of his great bestseller, *Histoire Naturelle* (Lepenies 1985/1988).

[5] However, even in traditional rhetoric, 'a certain slippage in the categories trope and scheme became inevitable, not simply because rhetoricians were inconsistent in their use of terms but because well-constructed discourse reflects a fusion of structure and texture. One is virtually indistinguishable from the other.' *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, <http://www.eb.com:180/bol/topic?eu=117403&sctn=4> [Accessed 14 October 2000].

an idiolect, 'distinguishing not an individual but a genre, a social group, a historical period' (Eco 1979: 10). The idea of Model Author as a character in a text, originating with Peirce but implied in the entire rhetorical tradition, is in tune with Barthes's (1979) postulates that the work be replaced by a text, and Foucault's (1979) that the author be replaced by a writer. It does not diminish the weight of the individual talent, but it emphasizes the institutional character of social life, where nobody can act in a void, and everybody interacts with a contemporary repertoire of actions, by imitation or by resistance.

Considering all these caveats, I am most comfortable with an unpretentious but informative definition by Lejeune, who says: 'I call here "style", for lack of a better term, everything that disturbs the transparency of written language, ... and makes the work on the words apparent whether we are dealing with parody, plays on meaning, or versification' (1989: 127). The 'transparency of written language' is of course a fantasy figure, a counterfoil: like there is no content without a form, there is no text without a style. Yet we speak of 'texts lacking style' that can be best described as compilations of words and phrases rather than as 'the work on the words'. Style is the writer's awareness of being engaged in writing, incorporated into the text itself (as opposed to lack of such awareness, but also to self-reflective or meta-reflexive texts).

The questions of style, whatever the definition, have been thoroughly discussed in the context of literary theory, aesthetics, and even history. Social sciences had to wait for a 'literary turn' to occur in the 1980s.[6] As usual, the great ancestors are best blamed for this delay:

> Not even his friends regarded Auguste Comte as a great writer. ... According to Comte, questions of style were of little importance in the sciences, if only because no two authors have ever been able to agree on what good style was. ... The way in which a scientist expressed himself ought not to be determined by artificial rules but must accord with the subjects under discussion. ... He employed no artifice but allowed himself to be guided solely by his thoughts—he could do no other than follow his inspiration. (Lepenies 1988: 19)

But even Comte, the enemy of artifice, had to admit that there were different ways of writing, so, in 1851, he set down the rules of style that were appropriate for a scientist.

> No sentence should be longer than two lines of manuscript—which, given his cramped handwriting, amounted to five lines of print. No paragraph should contain more than seven sentences; any hiatus had to be strictly avoided. The same word should not occur twice either in the sentence or in successive sentences—excepting only single-syllable auxiliary verbs. Apart from its introduction and conclusion, every treatise of Comte's would in future comprise seven chapters. Each chapter would be in three parts, each part in seven sections, and each section would consist of a leading paragraph of seven sentences and three further paragraphs each of five sentences. Rules of this kind would, he maintained, bestow on his prose a strictness of form previously possessed only by poetry. (Lepenies 1988: 20)

[6] Although there existed harbingers such as Gusfield's 'The Literary Rhetoric of Science: Comedy and Pathos in Drinking Driver Research', 1976.

Although it is easy to agree with John Stuart Mill's opinion that these rules of composition were a sign of a 'melancholy decline of a great mind' (ibid.), one should point out, in defense of August Comte, that he set those rules for himself. Many contemporary textbooks in scientific writing try to set such rules for other people. Social sciences in general, and organization theory as one of these, tend to oscillate between the idea that thoughts express themselves and the idea that writing can be meticulously prescribed. In between, great styles are born.

Before I attempt to quote and describe some of them, another caveat is necessary. Uncharacteristically, I hope, I shall focus on native English writers, not because they are the only ones to develop a style, but because a rhetorical analysis performed in English on a text written in another language borders on absurdity, and the same analysis applied to a translation from another language raises a host of doubts as to whose style is under description. All analyses are language bound, but a rhetorical one even more so.

8.1 Style: Scientistic

If a genre were represented by one style, the proper style for organization theory would be the scientific one. But what does a scientific style look like? Who has the right to decide, who is the arbiter of the scientific style? There were many attempts to establish a canon (in the sense of a standard of judgment), and there were many aspirants to the role of the arbiter. By the whim of the editors of the present volume, I was temporarily awarded an arbiter function; thus I shall quote an exemplar of my choice. It is James D. Thompson's *Organizations in Action: Social Science Bases of Administrative Theory* (1967). Short and concise, it aims at covering all relevant issues and formulating the proper science of organizations according to scientific ideals, i.e. as a set of formal (at least apparently formal) propositions.

Setting out to be exhaustive and to combine the incompatible (the rational system vs. natural open systems approaches), embracing an impressive range of schools and sources (where Parsons and Goffman sit side by side), it is a striking example of how the conviction that knowledge must accumulate leads to an attempt at a closure of an intellectual field which, if taken seriously, could put an end to the discipline. As I noted before in another context (Czarniawska 1999*b*: 33), if Thompson were to be taken literally, there would be no need for organization theory after him. The mechanical ideal of communication neglects to notice that a

perfect communication puts an end to the need to communicate; a perfect language puts an end to creativity, and a perfect knowledge, were such to exist, would put an end to development and innovation.[7] The alternative idea is that knowledge does not accumulate: science is a conversation that, in time, acquires more space and more sophistication, but needs not ever achieve a closure (Oakeshott 1959/1991).

Thompson did not seem to be eager to converse; his aim was to summarize all previous conversations. The rhetorical style he adopted can be best exemplified by an excerpt from his book:

> **Proposition 4.1:** Organizations under norms of rationality seek to place their boundaries around those activities which if left to the task environment would be crucial contingencies.
>
> The implication of this proposition is that we should expect to find organizations including within their domains activities or competencies which, on a technological basis, could be performed by the task environment without damage to the major mission of the organization. For the hotel, for example, provision of rooms and meals would be the major mission, and the operation of a laundry would be excluded; yet we find hotels operating laundries. On the other hand, provision of rooms and meals would not be within the major mission of the hospital, although hospitals commonly include these activities within their domains.
>
> The incorporation of subsidiary competencies along with major missions is commonplace in organizations of all types and is not a major discovery. But our proposition is not an announcement of the fact; rather it attempts to indicate the direction in which domains are expanding. (Thompson 1967: 39–40)

A translation of this organizationalese into English is usually necessary for a novice reader (I admit that I enjoy reading the propositions aloud to graduate students and watching their blank faces). Such translation, innocent as it may seem, already heralds the readings I intend to make next (for translations of economics into English, see McCloskey 1985). Briefly, Thompson says that organizations incorporate those activities that may be crucial to them in order to avoid dependency on their environment.

This is stated in the form of a proposition, i.e. 'a statement expressed in a form requiring consideration of its truth rather than its validity' (*NS OED* 1993: 2382). What is interesting is that the propositions concern not 'things' or 'facts', but tropes, of which the two most important are 'organization' and 'environment'.

'Organization' is clearly a *synecdoche*: that which is organized becomes an entity named after its attribute. The use of organizations in the plural, indicating an entity, appeared as late as the 1960s, with the advent of systems theory in the social sciences (Waldo 1961). In fact, Thompson still spoke of 'administration theory' (administration being the synonym of management, connected by usage with public authority rather than private enterprise). Even more interesting is 'environment': this central concept in organization theory is residual in character, meaning simply 'that

[7] These issues are discussed at length by George Steiner (1975/1992) in the context of translation and by Umberto Eco (1995) in the context of the story of search for the perfect language.

which surrounds organizations'. As Meyer (1996) put it succinctly, the environment is the Other to the Actor, as the environment of a modern organization consists increasingly of other organizations (see also Perrow 1991).

Thus Thompson's propositions suggest logical connections between tropes, and as they prompt a consideration of truth rather than validity, they do not have to be tested or proved: they can be illustrated. The illustrations are formulated in a way that resembles and repeats propositions, but the abstract tropes are replaced by generic terms like 'organizations that cross national boundaries', 'general hospitals', 'hotels'. The verbs remain in the gnomic present ('organizations tend to', 'organizations seek to identify'), that is, the tense used to express a general truth without implication of time (*NS OED* 1993: 1107).

In brief, gnomic utterances are the opposite of narrative ones: they are situated neither in place nor in time. Indeed, the land and the epoch of Thompson's stories is called Under Norms of Rationality.

What are the advantages of the use of the gnomic present? As pointed out by McCloskey, it is the tense favored by economists as a way of claiming authority (1985: 11). Partly, it has to do with *ethos*: both Bible and folklore wisdom favor the gnomic present. Partly, it is a matter of special kind of *logos*. There is no base on which to contest a statement in gnomic present. Any sentence situated in a real time and place can be contested as to its validity: there are other witnesses, or at least there are counter-examples from different places and times. Not so with the gnomic present, which is situated no-place in no-time and features abstract protagonists (e.g. 'market rules'). Even utopias are situated, but gnomic statements are not.

'But is this what Thompson intended?' a reader fond of deducing authorial intentions may ask. The text says (to be on a safe side and leave Thompson himself out of it) that 'our [*sic*] proposition is not announcement of the fact: rather it attempts to indicate the direction'. The suggestion seems to be that the proposition contained more than a mere fact; it contained a prediction. Thompson used *prolepsis*: 'the representation of a future act, state, etc., as already done or existing' (*NS OED* 1993: 2373). This strategy can be used to avoid factual statements concerning the past (which can be contested) and to build assurance by displacing them into an (incontestable) future, all with the aid of the gnomic present.

One could thus claim that Thompson's 'scientism' is but a stylization: the entities in question are tropes and could be connected only with one another, the postulated connections are achieved by the use of yet another rhetorical figure, and there are no factual statements that can be tested. It would be wrong, however, to conclude from this that Thompson's text fails to achieve the scientific style; on the contrary, this way of writing is considered 'scientific', nay, 'theoretical', in social sciences. Although Thompson's text is by now relegated to 'courses on classics', the style is by no means extinct. Texts peppered with propositions, speaking with rigor and discipline about abstract entities populating a nowhere in no time, abound. Few of them even try to achieve such a strict stylization as Thompson's.

If this is not a style but a stylization, what are the origins that are being imitated? Theoretical physics is my first guess, or at least a general idea of what such texts look like; the second probable source of inspiration is economics, which, in turn, imitates mathematics (McCloskey 1985).

One can point out, however, that, unlike economics, organization theory did not aspire to the heights of mathematics. The interest in the concrete practices of organizing, combined with influences from sociology and psychology, are probably responsible for visible traces of another natural science: biology. Life cycle theories, organic system theories, and evolutionary metaphors abound in organization theory. The man who used them with greatest skill created a style that hardly can be called scientistic.

8.2 Style: Poetic

Karl Weick has played a central role in shaping the discipline of organization theory in the 1980s and 1990s. This role is highly unusual in that he was never a part of the so-called mainstream, and yet his influence was not exerted from the margins of the discipline.

Weick himself was of the opinion that 'theorists often write trivial theories because their process of theory construction is hemmed in by methodological strictures that favor validation rather than usefulness' (Weick 1989: 516). Favoring usefulness, he suggested that theory-making is an organizing process, a sensemaking process that consists of 'disciplined imagination'. A desired result brings out 'a plausible theory, and a theory is judged to be more plausible and of higher quality if it is interesting rather than obvious, irrelevant or absurd, obvious in novel ways, a source of unexpected connections, high in narrative rationality, aesthetically pleasing, or correspondent with presumed realities' (Weick 1989: 517).

This can be taken as a self-description, points out Van Maanen (1995*a*) who argues that, instead of following methodological strictures, Weick has developed a unique style, which fulfills both the requirement of a high narrative rationality and an aesthetical satisfaction. In other words, one could say that it combines rhetoric with poetics.

Poetics, after some initial scuffles, went hand in hand with rhetoric until the Renaissance (Todorov 1990: 6). In modernity, however, the two have been set in contrast, where poetics stood for ambivalence, and rhetoric for authority (Höpfl 1995: 175). If writers would keep to their genres (as they should, according to modern prescriptions), the two could be easily set apart. The scientific theory

would stand for authority, and poetry for ambivalence: the one would repair the damages of the other. But the world does not keep still under categorizations, and the strength of Weick's style is that it blends the two: the ambivalence subverts the authority, while the authority critically examines the ploys of ambivalence.

Van Maanen (1995*a*) labeled this style 'allegoric breaching'. Perhaps it is worthwhile to dedicate some attention to those two terms. An *allegory* is usually described as an 'extended metaphor', which is correct, but this somewhat reduces its specificity ('*just* an extended metaphor'). A metaphor differs from an analogy[8] in that it creates a similarity that did not exist before (another way of putting it is, in Eco's vocabulary, contrasting *factual judgments* with *semantic judgments*; while the former vie for validity by referring to outside of the language, the latter claim similarity or difference within the language itself). Now, an allegory is an extended metaphor in that it goes further than just stating similarity between two objects—it describes one object under the guise of another. An example that has stuck forever in my mind appeared in an article on leadership (Weick 1978); it involved a Mexican sierra—a fish. Mexican sierra can be a metaphor for leaders, but it is also a metaphor for different approaches—to fish and to leaders, and it is a metaphor borrowed from John Steinbeck.

But Karl Weick needed neither John Van Maanen nor me to tell him what he was doing. He tells it himself: 'This entire book [*Social Psychology of Organizing*] is as much about organizational theorizing as it is about organizational theory.... The book is about ways of talking about organizations, and it is intentionally focused this way in the belief that as ways of talking and believing proliferate, new features of organizations are noticed. That's why the book is more concerned with metaphors and images than it is with findings' (1979: 234). In other words, organizing is an allegory for writing, but it is a reversible allegory: writing is organizing. In that, Weick seems to agree with Ricoeur, who claims a reversible analogy (that is, a much stronger connection) between action and text (Ricoeur 1981).

Breaching, on the other hand, concerns conventional textual practices of the field (Van Maanen 1995*a*). Weick's style favors an essay form, ambiguity of reasoning, dialectic reconstruction, and a rhetorical strategy of presence, all of which, and especially the last one, go against the textual strategy promoted by the founding fathers of social sciences (see Dorothy Smith on Durkheim 1999: 55 ff.). Much as these traits break with the recommended style of academic writing, the success of Weick's maverick style speaks most eloquently for itself. His influence on both form and context of theorizing organizations is profound. He turned the attention of organization students from structures to processes, from the relevance of academia to the relevance of the field, from mystification to imaginative interpretation. In

[8] It is common to equate analogy with metaphor, but I find it much more fruitful to differentiate between them.

brief, if Thompson's rhetoric seemed to aim at ending organization theory, Weick's started it anew.

Weick's frequent use of biological metaphors reveals high sophistication (he refers to 'requisite variety' rather than 'dying organizations'), which permits a seamless combination with cultural metaphors (see also Mangham 1996). As to how this unusual combination came about, one might find a clue in a quotation from Vonnegut inserted into *Social Psychology of Organizing*:

> My adviser smiled. 'How would you like to study poetry which pretends to be scientific?' he asked me.
> 'Is such a thing possible?' I said.
> He shook my hand. 'Welcome to the field of social and cultural anthropology,' he said. (Weick 1979: 234)

Vonnegut wrote this in 1975, shortly after Bateson published his *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* and anthropologists had become enchanted with cybernetics (Bateson is much quoted in *Social Psychology*). The more recent history is better known: after all, the rapprochement between organization theory and cultural anthropology that happened under the guise of 'organizational culture' studies was most likely given an impetus by people who wanted to study poetry that pretends to be scientific. But within social science, there are students of poetry who do not wish to pretend they are scientific. The label I put on them is 'revolutionary'.

8.3 Style: Revolutionary

The revolutionary style rejects authority, and yet it is not purely poetic. It promotes ambiguity in the name of an ideology, that is, a potential authority. Revolutionary style often uses a narrative; indeed, Todorov suggests ideological organization as one distinct form of achieving transformation in a narrative, where an abstract rule, an idea, produces the various peripeties (in contrast to mythological and gnoseological transformations, 1990: 36). 'The use of narrative' should be understood very broadly in this context, as the revolutionary use of a narrative can as often as not exploit an anti-narrative.

Such is the case of Gibson Burrell's *Pandemonium* (1997), with a subtitle 'Towards a Retro-Organization Theory'. Linearity kills, is Burrell's main message, on a battlefield and in the field of theory. *Pandemonium* is set against the linear narrative, and against the traditional, that is, modernist, humanist, and progressive organization theory. As a book, it is highly experimental (although not as experimental as

Burrell's foray into video-production, 'Eco and Bunnymen', presented in 1993 at a conference in Keele, a text that I would gladly analyze if the media permitted it). It has two parts running in opposite directions on the same page, bibliography in the middle, gothic-style illustrations, hypertext on certain pages, repeated references to Burrell's family, and, perhaps most revolutionary of all, it 'looks to the peasantry rather than managerial groups or those associated collectivities of blue-collar workers' (Burrell 1997: 5). Retro- though it is, Burrell's interest in the peasantry does not have much in common with the romanticization of the peasant in, for example, Germany, Poland, and Russia at the end of the previous century (Holmgren 1998: 19; Czarniawska 1999*b*: 49). The gothic stylization is as kitschy as it is ironic, and the peasantry is brought in in a somber recognition that it has been forgotten by the enthusiasm of industry-bound modernists. The reaction to this proposal, and to *Pandemonium* as such, will differ from one reader to another, but Burrell's book is important here to mark the difference between an isolated formal experiment and a style, a coherent (if often ambiguous) and reproducible (if often only by the author) approach to the text.

With what right, one may ask, do I put a label of a 'narrative' onto a text that pronounces itself hostile to narrativity? I am not suggesting that the authors do not know what they are doing (much worse, I suggest that the authors are the figments of the reader's imagination or the epiphenomena of the text). I want to point out that the hostility to a (conventional, linear) narrative may find expression in two kinds of forms: texts that ignore the narrative and texts that choose (in the sense of *intentio operis*, Eco 1992) to break the rules of conventional narratology, to bend them, or to play around with them. Burrell's book is one such example (it subverts linearity but it also evokes it, unlike Weick's texts, which ignore linearity); another is Marta Calás and Linda Smircich's use of deconstruction ('Voicing Seduction to Silence Leadership', 1991).

Calás and Smircich, inspired by textual analyses of Derrida and Foucault, reread three classical texts on leadership—Barnard, McGregor, and Mintzberg—in terms of seduction, juxtaposing them to works on sexuality, homosexuality, and narcissism. This particular choice of a reading perspective has been dictated by their standpoint, which is a feminist one. The deconstructive reading of the classics permitted them to disclose the supposed novelty of Peters and Waterman's *In Search of Excellence* as a pastiche of Barnard (where *pastiche* is understood as a parody without humor). They continued with three 'utopias', which were in a sense 'further' readings, moving beyond the edge of what is considered standard organization literature. The utopias took the form of narratives, although the deconstructions obviously did not. In this sense, the utopian narratives can be seen as *reconstructions* (on different ideological premisses) of what was deconstructed in the first part of the text. A narrative transformation has taken place by an exchange of the rule that was organizing the narrative. Todorov's example of an ideologically organized narrative is *Les liaisons dangereuses*, and such is, indeed, the title of

another of Calás and Smircich's texts ('Dangerous Liaisons: The Feminine in Management Meets Globalization', 1993).

Is the revolutionary style and the ideological organization of the dystopian/utopian narrative the same as what is often called 'critical management theory' (Alvesson and Wilmott 1992)? Indeed, it is a style belonging to this genre (Burrell is one of Alvesson and Wilmott's authors) although by no means exhaustive of it. I have chosen my examples for several reasons: they are stylistically distinct, that is, the work of shaping the text is visible and appreciable—indeed, it is a style as a method, or rather method as a style, because in the case of both Burrell and of Calás and Smircich the formal proceedings are far from a mechanical following of a prescription. This kind of critical style could be contrasted with the older kind, wherein there were two possible readings—one false and one authentic—and there was but a single utopia. For Calás and Smircich, the readings are endless, and the utopias many; the feminist standpoint is as much a claim to a voice as a humble indication of its limitations.

8.4 Style: Philosophical

The present text is yet another victim of linearity: the pages come one after another, and what was before cannot be after. In a 3D-space, however, new proximities could be established. I chose to go from the scientistic to the poetic to the revolutionary style. An alternative route would lead from the poetic to the philosophical style. Unlike the revolutionary, it takes the poetic style not to its extremes but to its fundaments; it tries to be general without being gnomic. The best examples of such a style in organization theory are, to me, the writings of James G. March.

From a myriad of texts that bear March's name on the cover, I have chosen, for obvious reasons, those written by March himself. (Although I think I could guess which parts in co-authored texts were written by March, I would rather not risk such a procedure.) Two articles in particular were oft quoted by young (especially Scandinavian) researchers: 'The Technology of Foolishness' (1971/1988) and 'Bounded Rationality, Ambiguity, and the Engineering of Choice' (1978/1988).

Calling a style 'philosophical' may be seen as a highly problematic enterprise, considering the number of philosophers in western philosophy alone, and the variety of their styles. I hasten to reassure those who might suspect that James March writes like Heidegger that, in fact, he writes like a pragmatist philosopher. In short, James G. March seems to fulfill most of the prescription given by Richard Rorty for 'science as solidarity'.

What do pragmatist philosophers have in common with one another and with James G. March? At least two things: an interest in everyday life with its petty and romantic angles, and an interest in, knowledge of, and skill in literature. They are practical and playful, a combination thought impossible by the venerators of the sublime at the expense of the beautiful.[9] One way in which March acknowledges his proximity to philosophy, poetry, and literature is by making frequent direct references to all three fields.

I shall try to demonstrate that March fulfills the prescription for the new philosophical rhetoric as formulated by Rorty (1987, that is, the prescription is retro-fitting) by doing a March on Rorty's text. One of March's favorite schemes is *enumeration* (called also *distributio*, dividing a subject into components), usually under the rule of one of the magic numbers,[10] such as 3, 5, or 7 (often strengthened by *alliteration*, but my English is not up to such a feat). So this is what Rorty says, sometimes in unison with March, sometimes seemingly explaining and commenting on March:

1. Rationality is one of the central values in our culture (both March and Rorty use 'we' sweepingly but consciously), and is conventionally connected to 'science', 'truth', 'objectivity', and 'method'.
2. An alternative word for 'rational' (a favorite topic of March's) would be 'sane,' 'reasonable', or 'civilized'. 'On this construction, to be rational is simply to discuss any topic—religious, literary or scientific—in a way that eschews dogmatism, defensiveness, and righteous indignation' (Rorty 1987: 40).
3. Truth should be a commendatory term for well-justified belief. And the 'best way to find out what to believe is to listen to as many suggestions and arguments as you can' (p. 46).
4. In a science that so redefined its related terms, there would be 'less talk about rigor and more about originality.... The new rhetoric would draw more on the vocabulary of Romantic poetry and socialist politics, and less on that of Greek metaphysics, religious rationality, or Enlightenment scientism' (p. 51). (These are the vocabularies often invoked by James G. March).
5. A science so redefined will give 'as little reason to be self-conscious about the nature and status of one's discipline as, in the ideal democratic community, about the nature and status of one's race or sex' (p. 52).

While the last is still a utopia, it is a utopia in which James G. March seems to live already. A hybrid product of political science, psychology, engineering, poetry,

[9] The modern version of this dichotomy is best known through Edmund Burke's contribution to aesthetic theory, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, 1757.

[10] The usefulness of enumeration has to do with the fact that a numerical structure has a mnemonic function; the preference for certain numbers has most likely to do with mysticism of numbers sedimented in many cultures (Chinese numerology, Jewish Kabbala, etc., Crump 1990).

literature, and philosophy, he seems to think that disciplines are idiolects (Eco 1979), i.e. no more and no less than dialects of different groups. Thus the texts written with Johan P. Olsen (e.g. 1989) resemble political science texts, and those with Guje Sevón (1984) or Zur Shapira (1987) resemble psychology texts. When March writes alone, he writes as a pragmatist philosopher, but also as an extremely accomplished orator. The two texts mentioned above could well serve as illustrations for a textbook in rhetoric.

In 'Technology of Foolishness', the *exordium*[11] 'Choice and Rationality' attracts readers' attention by suggesting, in an understated tone, that beliefs in choice and rationality amount to articles of faith, and that the theory of these topics is comparable to the Scripture (no capital in the original). Such faith is based on three unexamined ideas: pre-existence of purpose, necessity of consistency, and primacy of rationality (where alliterations would be too artificial, March uses *onomatopoeias*[12] and cross-symmetries). 'The Problem of Goals' introduces a *partitio* (division): March separates himself from the traditional theory of choice, pointing out its weaknesses and enumerating its justifications (three). Observe that March seldom uses the *antithesis*, the battlehorse of tired organizational rhetoricians, or black and white figures of speech, that is, *hyperboles* of any kind.[13] The section ends with *asyndeton*:[14] 'Not always. Not usually. But sometimes.' (March 1971/1988: 259), staccato trumpets announcing what comes next. 'Sensible Foolishness' and 'Play and Reason' both combine *probatio* (proof) and *refutatio* in one section; they have parallel structures. In both, refutation precedes proof, an inversion of classical structure. This structural parallelism is accompanied by frequent examples of syntactical parallelism used in enumerations ('Imitation is not necessarily a sign of moral weakness.... Coercion is not necessarily an assault on individual autonomy.... Rationalization is not necessarily a way of evading morality' (p. 260). *Peroratio*, entitled 'Intelligence and Foolishness', is as a peroration should be: short and rich in images. 'There is little magic in the world, and foolishness in people and organizations is one of the many things that fail to produce miracles' (p. 265).

That March uses classical oratory devices does not mean that his style is mechanical and the rhetoric predictable (with the exception of enumerations and alliterations, which are clearly his favorite toys). 'Technology of Foolishness' does not contain any *narratio* (indeed, it does not contain any reference!), whereas 'Bounded Rationality' contains two: the history of the field of decision theory, and the history of the concept of bounded rationality. Worth emphasizing is his

[11] The first part of a classical oration (Lanham 1991: 75).

[12] Use or invention of words that sound like their meaning (Lanham 1991: 105).

[13] This could be because his rhetoric is, in traditional Aristotelian terms, *deliberative* (directed towards the future) rather than *forensic* (judging the past) or *demonstrative* (praising or blaming), Burke 1950/1969: 70.

[14] Omission of conjunctions between words, phrases, clauses (Lanham 1991: 182).

awareness that references constitute narration, and not proof: multiple references are always ordered chronologically. 'Bounded Rationality' is more structurally complex and contains many reiterations of rhetorical schemes. Let me quote only the last sentence of its peroration: 'But though hope for minor progress is a romantic vision, it may not be entirely inappropriate for a theory built on a romantic view of human destiny' (1978/1988: 289).

8.5 Style: Educational (in Two Variations)

One could protest that 'educational' is a genre, not a style; I would agree to the point that educational style is obviously a style that produces the best textbooks, but not all, or even most, textbooks can be used as examples of educational style. Most textbooks can be classified under one of two categories: either they faithfully present a state of the art, a history of a topic, a discipline, etc., or else they present an interesting thesis of their author. The former tend to be mundane summaries, the latter, distortions or misrepresentations of other people's work to fit the thesis. The few that combine both purposes and avoid both dangers can be said to be the product of an educational style. Thus my judgment of David Silverman's style as educational does not originate in the fact that he is the author of excellent textbooks (e.g. *Interpreting Qualitative Data*, 1993) but is confirmed by it, and also by Silverman's clear interest in the workings of knowledge (*Reading Castaneda*, 1975). And although Silverman writes more than organization theory, I will limit myself to his writings within our field, most specifically, to his dissertation, which has become one of the most popular textbooks of its time without being intended as such: *The Theory of Organisations: A Sociological Framework*, 1970.

Todorov thus characterized 'a narrative of knowledge', or a *gnoseological* narrative, as exemplified by the story of the quest for the Holy Grail:

> The reader's interest is not driven by the question What happens next? which refers us to the logic of succession or to the mythological narrative. We know perfectly well from the start what will happen, who will reach the Grail, who will be punished and why. Our interest arises from a wholly different question which refers instead to the gnoseological organization: What is the Grail? The Grail narrative relates a quest; what is being sought, however, is not an object but a meaning, the meaning of the word Grail. And since the question has to do with being and not with doing, the exploration of the future is less important than that of the past. (1990: 33)

Thompson, Weick, and March rely on mythological narrative, where transformations concern organizing and organization, or writing on organizations. Burrell,

Calás, and Smircich organize their narratives ideologically, with a revolutionary standpoint as a transformative force. In Silverman's text the transformation concerns the status of knowledge, but as it is a quest for knowledge, it is neither the first nor the last transformation, it is one of the transformations that produce the chain of history of social sciences. The quest is for Organization, and Silverman proposes to achieve a new narrative transformation by an adventure consisting of placing the past studies of organizations into a new frame:

> The nature of [my] argument may be stated in four propositions: first, that the development of the study of organisations can be shown to have a certain pattern; secondly, that one of the directions in which it now appears to be leading [systems theory] has rather serious limitations; thirdly, that at this stage a statement of an alternative approach making use of certain parts of literature will prove more fruitful than another attempt at synthesis; and, finally, that such an approach may be usefully derived from an emerging sociological frame of reference [social action theory]. (1970: 1–2)

By 'social action theory' Silverman means a frame originating in phenomenology (Schütz, Berger, and Luckmann) and developed, on one hand, by Goffman, and on the other by ethnomethodologists (Garfinkel, Sacks, Cicourel). It is a frame characterized by its problematizing stance towards everyday life—in this case, everyday life in organizations. As in the case of Weick and his insight-engendering metaphors, the utility of this frame is far from exhausted in organizational studies thirty years after Silverman suggested it (Silverman's own example of its use can be found in *Organisational Work*, 1976).

Observe the difference between Silverman's and Thompson's use of 'propositions': in the quotation above, they are statements—suggestions—concerning the relationships between other statements. After all, the co-author of *The Material Word: Some Theories of Language and Its Limits* (Silverman and Torode 1980) knows better than to compare words with things, but also knows better than to perform logical operations on tropes.

A variation on the same educational style can be found in Gareth Morgan (*Images of Organization*, 1986). Instead of immersing past theories of organization in a new bath, Morgan places over them a grid of metaphors (if such an ugly metaphor may be provisionally accepted) which results in a narrative transformation. Note that neither of these two authors uses the time-honored device of educational narratives, which suggests a transformation from the state of ignorance (scholars before us and our enemies) to complete knowledge (we and our friends). Knowledge does not accumulate, the Grail will not be found, and the gnoseological narrative will continue.[15]

[15] However, it will not necessarily be carried on by the same writer. Unlike *Beyond Method* (1983), which was an exercise done before *Images*, later books by Morgan (1988, 1993) switched to a mythological narrative and are concerned with the future, not the past.

There are a great many small differences in the style of the two educators—Silverman's way of writing is terse, almost staccato, while Morgan's is flowing and ornamental, for example—but they share many similarities typical of educational texts: examples, enumerations, summaries, exhibits, etc. The central characteristic, however, is the one that I see as constitutive of the educative style: another step in a never-ending quest for meaning, performed either by setting the old material *into* a new frame, or else putting a new formative grid *onto* it. The first may be called 'framing' in the traditional sense of setting a picture into a frame (on the consequences of such an operation, see Simmel 1907); the second 'framing' in the sense used in photography or film-making (Goffman 1974, although he oscillates uneasily between the two). They are close enough to justify their inclusion into the same style (education by reframing), yet they are distinct enough to warrant separate attention.

8.6 Style: Ethnographic (in Two Parts)

> 'John, go get the goddamn light in the car. If we can see him, he'll come out.'
> I run toward the car to get the sturdy multicell flashlight, a copper's tool that gets more service as an effective truncheon than as a source of light. At the car, bumblebee policing—swarming—is in full glory. There are five patrol units plus the K-9 (canine) unit, whose driver arrives saying breathlessly, 'not bad time, eh?'
> I point the men in the general direction of where I'd left David and scramble around in the car to find the flashlight. I find it under the front seat and run back up the driveway to find a half-dozen cops stomping through the bushes, all with guns drawn. I'm standing in civie garb, trembling, and thinking, 'Don't shoot the fieldworker'. (1988: 112)

> By and large, however, the people-processing tasks of ride operators pass good naturedly and smoothly, with operators hardly noticing much more than bodies passing in front of view (special bodies, however, merit special attention as when crew members on the subs gather to assist a young lady in a revealing outfit on board and then linger over the hatch to admire the view as she descends the steep steps to take her seat on the boat). Yet, sometimes, more than a body becomes visible, as happens when customers overstep their roles and challenge employee authority, insult an operator, or otherwise disrupt the routines of the job. In the process, guests become 'dufusses', 'ducks', and 'assholes' (just three of many derisive terms used by ride operators to label those customers they believe to have gone beyond the pale). (1991: 71)

Although I neglected to put the name after the quotations, nobody versed in organization studies would hesitate to identify John Van Maanen as the author of both. This is because the specific fieldwork is a part of an ethnographic style: Van

Maanen studied the policemen on the beat, and Van Maanen studied the workers at Disneyland. And yet there is a difference between the two texts, which probably differ by ten years rather by the three indicated by their present quotations. What happened in between? 'An end to innocence', if I may quote Van Maanen on Van Maanen (1995*c*).

In ethnology and anthropology it would be impossible to speak about one ethnographic style, as there are, and were, a great many such styles. The two disciplines, however, did not spend much time on the analysis of its writing, until hit by the same literary turn as the rest of social sciences. Clifford and Marcus (1986), Geertz (1988), and Van Maanen himself (1988) paid a great deal of attention to how ethnographic texts were crafted. Consequently, they have influenced the very process of crafting, and this is why Van Maanen is speaking about lost innocence.

The first quotation, the Dashiel-Hammett-turned-ethnographer, is a clear-cut example of 'being there' (Geertz 1988) and of 'impressionist writing' (Van Maanen 1988). The second is something between 'the world in a text' and 'I-witnessing' (Geertz 1988). It is not certain whether the author and the observer are the same character; whoever the observer is, she/he is not going native; defamiliarization is clearly at work (Van Maanen 1995*c*). Dry touches of distancing irony replaced the self-comforting irony of the young (younger?) researcher: an end of innocence is also coming of age.

What remains, and what makes me propose this totalizing move of suggesting 'ethnographic' as a name of a style is a film-like quality of the text. Unlike most other organization texts, ethnographic style produces visual and aural illusions: one can 'see' and 'hear' the Other. In terms of rhetorical analysis, it could be said that ethnographic style favors *hypotyposis*: a rhetorical device 'giving a description so vivid that the reader envisages the event as happening before his or her very eyes' (Edmondson 1984: 24). Thus, the main effect is not so much of the researcher 'being there' but of the reader being 'shifted there' (Latour 1988*b*). The ethnographic style, as represented here by the writing of John Van Maanen and then in personal variations by Gideon Kunda (1992) and Michael Rosen (2000), has the power to transport the reader to other places, other voices.

8.7 The Styles, the Stylists, and the *Zeitgeist*

All of this leads unavoidably to questions such as: is style personal and idiosyncratic or can it be imitated? what does the existence of all these styles mean for the field of

organization studies? and what does it mean for how the field is perceived by those outside the field? This brings me to issues debated so fervently between John Van Maanen (1995*a*, *b*) and Jeffrey Pfeffer (1993, 1995).

It seems to me that in that debate, the two agonists leaned towards slightly different definition of style (in order to improve the debate?). While John Van Maanen was closer to the second *Oxford English Dictionary* definition, style as elegance, Pfeffer was more interested in the first, style as form. This influences the possible answer to a question of whether a style can be imitated: no from the Van Maanen's position, yes from Pfeffer's. Another question returns: if a style can be imitated (style is a text, not a person), can the stylists provide prescriptions on how to do so?

While styles are unrepeatable (in a manner of speaking, as writers form styles by repetition), they are highly imitable. At any rate, style as form can be imitated, although style as elegance cannot; elegance connotes the reception, an effect that a writer cannot foresee. Thus, it is possible to take courses in rhetoric, but nobody can guarantee that the course participants will become orators.

Is it a duty of the stylish writers, then, as one might deduce from Pfeffer's text, to prescribe how to achieve a style similar to theirs? Hardly. They need not know how they are doing what they are doing in order to do it brilliantly. They are, after all, their own figures of speech. It seems much more likely, as history shows, that somebody else can describe their style. Van Maanen's description of Weick's style can be an enormous help to many young readers in appreciating its elegance, so too has Joanne Martin (1990) made Derrida's style transparent to organization researchers, more method-like, so to speak. Still, while Calás and Smircich create their own style out of Derrida's model, many others who reach for deconstruction will end with a use of a contemporary idiolect, and I for one cannot see what is wrong with it.

Thus, style as form can become a paradigm (it is in fact paradigmatic by virtue of being repeatedly used by at least one person) and it can be helped by technical analysis and advice. Style as elegance cannot, because uniqueness forms part of what is perceived as elegant. It is a paradox, but unlike Van Maanen and Pfeffer, who wish to resolve it by espousing only one part of it, I would suggest that we maintain it intact. Style is closely related to fashion (certain meanings of the two words are synonymous) and it shares with fashion its paradox of striving for uniqueness *and* conformity, so well explored by Simmel (1907). A widely imitated style *becomes* an idiolect.

So the question becomes rather: how many stylists—and idiolects—can one field carry? Here again one has an impression that while Van Maanen was worried about the possible uniformization within the discipline, Pfeffer was worried about the discipline's image outside of it. To put it bluntly, why is organization theory, with its variety of styles and deep awareness of rhetorical demands, losing to economics, with its one-style-turned-idiolect and its avoidance of self-reflection?

Seen historically, economics has had many powerful stylists and this is perhaps what attracted public attention to the discipline in the first place. With time, one style—scientistic—won over the others and strengthened itself in a self-reinforcing cycle. According to many analysts, among others MacIntyre (1988), a field dominated by one canon is more endangered than a field that has many competing canons. Once that canon becomes delegitimized (as all canons eventually do), the field is in shambles. The weakness of organization theory is also its strength, although this may not be apparent in all those situations when it is confronted with a stronger field and is forced to stand aside. But '[t]o have passed through an epistemological crisis successfully enables the adherents of a tradition of enquiry to rewrite its history in a more insightful way' (MacIntyre 1988: 363). Was not such a crisis happening in the 1970s, and were not texts like Silverman's and later Morgan's and Calás and Smircich's, the 'insightful rewrites' of the field's history?

The issue is not only a matter of one style versus many, but also of what style it is. Style is the message, or form is the content, as White (1987) put it. And it is the *Zeitgeist*, or the spirit of the times, that chooses 'the style whose time has come.' Economics offers the complete (the last?) illusion of modernity, of certainty of the findings and transparency of the method. By carefully avoiding contact with the reality of everyday life, economics can offer the wider public an image of the world as it would be, were we all rational. As one of my Polish colleagues put it, reality is the mess in which we have to live in everyday life, and science should offer us a relief from it, not rub our noses in it even deeper. As long as organization theorists are determined to keep their noses deep in organizational garbage-cans, it is unlikely that they will choose to follow one style, no matter how attractive or elegant. Courses on rhetoric can produce orators, provided that they will always be speaking to the same audience, that is, an audience that never changes, never ages, and never learns. This is surely an even less realistic assumption than that of a profit-maximizing individual.

A small issue of not so small consequence remains. In the text above, I implicitly assumed that the rhetoric of organization theory finds its expression in the form of written texts. This is probably correct as far as the description goes, but the fact remains that, as in the case of Van Maanen and Pfeffer, sometimes people do talk to one another, as in ancient times (although the talk invariably gets inscribed). How do they talk when they do? There is no need to analyze the oratory styles of the two agonists because they have done it themselves. I wish to highlight a certain interesting paradox instead. In his first speech (1995*a*), Van Maanen praised conversation as a higher form of exchange than a debate: 'The object of debate is . . . to overwhelm or obliterate one's opponent: to prune, pare and discard. The object of conversation is to keep it going: to plant, nurture and cultivate. In the most uncertain domain of organization theory, the latter objective seems preferable' (p. 140).

In his answer, Pfeffer (1995) pointed out that he and Van Maanen agreed more than they disagreed, that many of the supposed antagonisms were the results of Van Maanen's hyperbolas, not to mention deliberate misunderstandings. In answer, Van Maanen said, 'one always yearns for the last word in the academic blood-sport called debate' (1995*b*: 687). And he continued in a footnote: 'As a genre of public discourse in an open community, debate is a cornerstone' (p. 691).

My intention is not to gloat over Van Maanen's inconsistency. Far from it—it is an inconsistency that I recognize and share. Like him, I intellectually espouse the ideal of science as conversation, launched in contemporary times by Michael Oakeshott (1959) and warmly spoken for by Deirdre N. McCloskey (1985) and Richard Rorty (1987), among many others. Like him, however, I was brought up in a male-dominated university culture where a duel is the highest form of sport, and a debate is fun. While proclaiming the virtues of a conversation, I turn to a debate at the slightest provocation. Like him, I have the whole western culture behind me, with its idea of agon as the main pattern for a drama. People fight: for freedom, for fun, and for a better world. They fight against enemies and against poverty. They fight for their countries and for their ideals. And while some—mostly intellectuals—choose to thrust and parry—a great many choose to kill. 'We all believe that negation and thus dialectics are the great masters of history, the midwives of our societies. Nothing is achieved, we all admit too quickly, without struggle, and dispute, and wars, and destruction' (Latour 1988*c*: 91). Yet *agon* was but one convention among many in the highly ritualized Old Greek comedy, and the Old (Aristophanic) comedy only one kind of drama. As genres delimit styles, and styles build genres, they are both important for organization theory. Much as I am for the proliferation and cultivation of styles, I am also for eliminating, or at least minimizing, the use of the genre of debate. There must be better things to do than see who bleeds first or who stays longer on his (yes) feet.

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