Centre for Philosophy and Political Economy (CPPE)
Research Symposium 2012 – 13th and 14th of September

David Wilson Library First Floor Library Seminar Room

13th September

11.00-11.15 – Welcome & Introduction

11.15-12.00 - Cargo Cult Finance
Geoff Lightfoot, Simon Lilley and Kenneth Weir

12.00-12.45 - Designing for the Anthropocene: Why a Global Planned Economy is Impossible, yet Essential
David Harvie and Keir Milburn

12:45 – 2.00 - Lunch

2.00-2.45 - Organizing Innovation through Ambiguity
Juan Cristia Espinosa

2.45-3.30 - The Ethics of Resistance to Managerial Control
Ozan Nadir Alakavuklar

14th September

11:00-11:45 - Reflections: Changing Warwick Business School
Martin Parker

11:45-12:30 - Gatekeeper or Bouncer? Peer Review and the Politics of Reception
Norman Jackson and Pippa Carter

12:30 - 2.00 - Lunch

2.00-2:45 - “The Geology of Morals” before Science, Art and Philosophy
Charles Barthold and Stephen Dunne

2:45-3:30 - A Marketing Theory of Value
Robert Cluley
Cargo Cult Finance

Richard Feynman’s witty commencement address to Caltech in 1974, where he coined the term Cargo Cult Science, has itself something of a cult following, particularly amongst those who consider it essential to mark the divide between ‘proper’ science and New-Agey pseudoscience. Feynman told of South Sea Islands where the inhabitants, hoping to entice back the airplanes that brought new and wondrous materials during the war, built replicas from bamboo of the airstrips, buildings and equipment that they had seen the Japanese and American forces use. ‘They're doing everything right. The form is perfect. It looks exactly the way it looked before. But it doesn't work. No airplanes land.’ He draws a parallel between this and pseudo-scientific enquiry, such as that into extra-sensory perception, for despite ‘follow[ing] all the apparent precepts and forms of scientific investigation, […] they’re missing something essential, because the planes don’t land’. Yet Feynman sought to do more than just mock Uri Geller and his ilk – he also took aim at the heart of the scientific establishment when he pointed out that cultishness in the history of physics was demonstrated by an unwillingness on the part of researchers to challenge the findings of some of the leading names of the day. At the heart of Feynman’s polemic is a simple plea – for scientists to rigorously strive not to fool themselves and others. Good science, for Feynman, means scrupulously showing contrary results and ‘bending over backwards to show how you are maybe wrong’. Lofty ideals, indeed, and we should not be surprised that many fail to live up to them even in the material sciences, let alone in disciplines that crave such quantitative certainty. Yet, as recent years have made clear, despite the violent unveiling of how we have been fooled and failed by the predictions and prescriptions derived from the study of finance within the academy, there has been little stomach for reconsideration of the contribution of the authors who defined the discipline nor for exploration of methodologies that do not rely upon the empty trappings of the routines of scientific inquiry. A cargo cult, indeed.

This paper makes no promises of scientific integrity in its approach. Instead it seeks to produce a narrative that catalogues and highlights aspects of cargo cult finance. These range from a deeply embedded institutional refusal to question the findings and pronouncements of the Masters of Finance (neatly collected in an archive at The American Finance Association), through its slavish adherence to failed and failing methodologies, to its inability to engage with the world beyond that which it has modelled. The South Sea Islands cargo cults, from which Feynman drew his analogy, seem mostly benign and almost charming. Cargo cult finance, less so, and the paper concludes by examining some of the linkages between finance institutions, key players and the academic system through which the cult has been promulgated.

Designing for the Anthropocene: Why a Global Planned Economy is Impossible, yet Essential

We live, quite literally, in epoch-making times. There is growing scientific consensus that Earth has now left the last stable geological epoch, the Holocene – which lasted for 11,000 years and
was remarkably hospitable to humans. Instead we and our planet have entered a new much less
stable epoch: the Anthropocene, so named because, collectively, humans are the dominant force
of nature. Yet, the paradox of the Anthropocene is that, although we are at the centre of the
world, we seem unable to solve some of the most basic problems we as a species face. A number
of fundamental Earth-system processes are severely out of equilibrium and threaten to cross
thresholds that will trigger dangerous state-change; at the same time, we are experiencing a global
crisis of social reproduction, unable to solve basic problems of hunger, shelter and preventable
disease. In this presentation we explore various attempts to analyse and respond to this situation,
considering proposals for ‘a safe operating space for humanity’ and ‘a safe and just operating
space for humanity’. We pay particular attention to the question of limits – both physical/
environmental and social – and ‘tipping points’, suggesting that the apparent empty set of exits
from our predicament force a problematising of the nature of the human and the limits of
‘human nature’. Finally, we turn to planning: we review both the critique of planning, before
criticising this critique and proposing our own conception of design as a tool for effecting our
escape.

Organizing Innovation through Ambiguity

The present paper discussed some of the results of an ongoing research project about innovation
practices in nascent companies. The theoretical background of the research is broadly located in
the STS literature on "devices" (Muniesa et al. 2007; Jensen 2004). Within this literature, devices
act as instruments and practices that transform their heterogeneous network and compose a
future based on the alignment of the actors and their domains (Jensen, 2004). The idea of this
research is to offer some new insights on how this future, as a collective existence, has come to
be assembled (Latour, 2005) by the use of those devices. This work also draws from a tradition
of inquiry that looks at how material devices participate as a substantial and crucial ingredient
driving and shaping the "accounts" of the organization participants (Munro, 1995 and Munro
and Mouritsen, 1996). Here the concept of "account" stems from the ethnomethodology
program (Garfinkel, 1968; Orbuch, 1997 and Warfield Rawls, 2008). So within the develop of
this research, objects like diagrams of potential distribution channels, spreadsheets of total cost
estimations and the specification hierarchy of a new product are being studied as a set of
particular devices that participate in the collective creation of this accounts and the future of the
organization.

The empirical data comes from a group of different sites, a Chilean biotechnology nascent
company and two nascent medical devices companies located in West Midlands of UK. What
these sites have in common is the condition of novelty of the technologies/products and the
organization itself. This empirical approach is supported by a methodology that tries to reflect on
the relationship between critique and notions like "performative disposition" common to post
Actor-Network methodologies. Such an approach does not take for granted notions like "utility"
and guides us to reflect upon how the foundations are constructed and reconstructed. In the
words of Casper Bruun Jensen's the research practice needs to "careful interrogate" some key
terms in the study of the technology development such as "usefulness", "relevance" between
others (Jensen 2010:103). The notion also echoes a "non foundational" line of work that is
present in the work of Stenner (2007) and Brown and Stenner (2009). In the practice, this involves a persistently analysis on the part of the researcher of the process whereby the founding premises of her or his own field of research are "constructed and reconstructed" and how this process reconnect with the phenomena that is under study (Brown and Stenner, 2009: 4).

Some of the preliminary results of this study show that a particular set of these devices, tentatively named as "organizing devices", are arranging and connecting the heterogeneous network of objects that permits the "management by ambiguity" (Munro, 1995) of the innovation phenomena in those nascent organizations. Crucially, this research offers data about some discursive-material organizing devices that could be present as "virtual objects" that contain "all the differences as real potentials" an object that is "several things at once" (Brown and Middleton 2005, p. 710) and permits the organization of the innovation phenomena.

The Ethics of Resistance to Managerial Control

Managerial tools to control the employees and their usage in directing the employees towards commonly accepted goals, is one of the fundamental discussion topics in management and organization literature. Employees’ resistance to this managerial control process has been discussed from a variety of viewpoints. Especially, with the contribution of critical perspectives, studies of resistance to managerial control began to develop as an essential part of the relevant literature.

This study begins by discussing the place of resistance in the organization studies. As there are a variety of approaches to resistance, the ethical position of resistance is questioned. Hence, the research question of the study can be stated as “what is the ethics of resistance to managerial control in organizations?” In order to answer this question, the relationship between the main assumptions of critical perspectives in the organization studies and the resistance concept is analyzed. Therefore, dominance of the critical approaches and critical theories in resistance studies is discussed. Following the discussions of main assumptions, conceptualization of resistance in terms of different epistemological and ontological standpoints in organization studies is examined. Afterwards, current expressions of resistance in the contemporary studies is given. In the following, concept of ethics is examined with a critical approach and a theoretical approach regarding the ethical assumptions of resistance is developed. In the discussion of ethics of resistance, utilitarianism and freedom ethics has been given special attention. Within this framework, it is stated that people resist to managerial control in order to reach justice and autonomy and it is claimed that this ethical foundation of resistance makes the resistance a righteous act. The theoretical development of a new ethical assumption regarding resistance constitutes the main contribution and importance of the study.

Reflections: Changing Warwick Business School

This reflections piece recounts two years in the change management of a major UK business school. Using evidence gained whilst the author was an employee at Warwick Business School, I reflect on the conditions and institutional mechanisms which allowed a 'seismic' change programme to take place. Crucially, this has involved discounting the past and claiming that anyone who is against change is either self-interested or doesn't understand the 'real world'. I
conclude with some observations on the relationship between the managerial business school and the idea of the university.

Gatekeeper or Bouncer? Peer Review and the Politics of Reception

A call for papers on climate change issued by a major journal declared that 'the question is not simply to ask how understandings of climate change can make a contribution to organization theory, but also how organization theory can actively contribute to responses to climate change' (our emphasis). Our submission in response to this argued that OT, both orthodox and critical, would be unable to make the 'active contribution' hoped for, because Anthropogenic Global Warming (AGW) represents an ontological threat to OT itself.

Reviewer response to our paper was uniformly hostile and, indeed, personal. One of the more startling comments came from Reviewer 2, who concluded 'the only thing I can say about [our paper] is that it is a potent argument AGAINST double blind review, as I think the authors should be named and shamed' (our emphasis). Reviewer 3 implied that we were racists.

Peer review is a notionally rational process for the expert evaluation of new knowledge claims. Ideally, reviewers make a reasoned assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of a paper and, hopefully, offer some guidance as to how an inadequate paper might, if possible, be improved. Clearly, there is wide discretion on the part of reviewers and editors about what constitutes an appropriate review. However, the idea of 'peer' (etymologically, 'equal'), in the context of reviewing, while masking inequalities of, for example, status and experience, denotes a relationship of trust in a situation in which there is, inevitable, an asymmetry of power. It implies that the writer and the reviewer are of a kind, that there is mutual respect and that each is acting professionally. How, then, are we to understand reviews whose target is, not the paper and its content, but the author(s)? A review that proposes to subvert the system of peer review in favour of a show trial? Should we see it as overstressed reviewers having a bad day? An abuse of power? Or what? How do we explain the editorial endorsement of these reviews? How explain the willingness of a critical journal to associate itself with such hysterical responses?

In reflecting on the reception of our paper we have been led into consideration of two further distinct but related issues: on one hand, the apparent institutionalisation of critical thinking in OT (and its, perhaps consequent, failure, so far, to 'change the world'); on the other hand, the 'climate' of denial of the existential threat of AGW, and of denial of the concomitant inadequacies of our responses to it.

The Geology of Morals before Science, Art and Philosophy

The third chapter of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s A Thousand Plateaus is an intricate treatise on the organic composition of the earth, its cellular-chemical and molecular structures, its people, its languages, its psychic phenomena and its underpinning strata. It is also a non-
verified witnesses' account of the idiosyncratic ramblings of a monstrous scientist – Professor Challenger - who fails to convince its audience as to the veracity of its stubbornly held eclectic opinions and so disgruntledly returns to the virtual world from which it came. Which of these contradictory accounts of the text is more convincing? The one which treats the text literally, so dwelling upon the ethical question of how to act in a world which is as Challenger describes? Or the other with treats the text literally, so dwelling upon the plot, its characters, and its hypothetical connections to the material world? Rather than rendering the plateau as either an instance of science, or art, we instead ask, along with Deleuze and Guattari’s later *What is Philosophy?*, whether Professor Challenger is better understood as a conceptual persona involved in the philosophical act of concept creation, or not. We suggest the latter, instead insisting that ‘the Geology of Morals’ reports upon an experiment in thinking which simply didn’t work. It is not an image of thought to be dogmatically replicated - it is rather an extremely hyperbolised account of the risks inherent to thinking – failure to think productively being the most frequent, failure to think beyond opinion being the most debased.

**A Marketing Theory of Value**

If you’ve used the internet in the last decade, there is a system that has been working around you - probably without you even realising it. It has been simultaneously collecting data about you and tailoring your experience of the internet on the basis of (the analytic modelling and mining of) that data. This system is based on two competing ideas which have won over the marketing trade: first, that targeting adverts is the most effective marketing strategy; second, that measuring the effectiveness of adverts is essential. These ideas are inconsistent because there’s no evidence that targeting consumers actually works and the systems we have to measure the effectiveness of targeting target as they measure. But ultimately, this inconsistency doesn’t matter because this system makes money and that is what I want to talk about. In this case, it is not data itself that is valuable but a particular way of using data within marketing that makes it produce value. It is this value, and the ability to produce and capitalise on it, which lies at the heart of businesses such as Google, Facebook and Twitter, not to mention the modern advertising industry.