Good Order:
On the Administration of Goodness

by Heather Höpfl

Department of Accounting, Finance and Management, Essex University, UK

ABSTRACT

This paper argues that conventional patriarchal representations of the organisation reduce the notion of "organisation" to abstract relationships, rational actions and purposive behaviour which always and relentlessly presents itself as a quest for the good. In this context, regulation and control is achieved primarily via definition and location. Administration then functions in a very specific sense to establish a notion of "good" order, to establish what is "ordinary" in administrative and managerial practice. In contrast, this paper seeks to explore ways in which it is possible to restore the (m)other to the text of organisation, to restore the body. Consequently, the paper considers the possibility of a discourse of maternity and moves from this position to examine conceptions of matrix reproduction and conditions of exile. The paper concludes with a challenge to conventional notions of "good" management and a consideration of the implications of this for the political in organisational life.

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There were several practitioner speakers but the most impressive was the young man from a large well-known multi-national. He was very good. He looked good. His talk was persuasive and his overhead transparencies colour co-ordinated with his tie. He was well groomed with a Kurt Russell haircut and an all-American smile. He demonstrated by reference to slide after slide that his company was doing well in Costa Rica. He showed us targets and how the company had exceeded them. He told us his corporation was good for Costa Rica and then showed us slide after slide to demonstrate how and why. His company was making things better for the local people. He was an emissary for good. He brought a commitment to corporate values.

He was very good at all this and he exuded charm, enthusiasm and professionalism. He was a real star. He wasn't only good, he was exemplary and outshone his fellow speakers. It was all so good, so wholesome, so well co-ordinated. It made you wonder where they produced such superb corporate models or perhaps I should say were they *reproduced* such accomplished missionaries.

A GOOD SET OF RESULTS

In organisational terms, the strategic direction of the organisation involves the construction of the organisation as a purposive entity with a trajectory towards a desired future. Consequently, organisational strategy as an indicator of movement towards this future is about the way in which such a desired state can be reached, targets set, achievements measured. In such movement towards better and better performance, it is inevitable that the purposive nature of the action takes precedence over the individual in the service of (Latin, ad-ministrare, to serve) desired results. The organisation constructs itself in textual and representational terms in relation to such desires. These representations range from the explicit use of rhetoric in marketing its products and images to the more subtle construction of the organisation as a fictive entity in the construction of statements, strategies and structures, and functions to regulate the organisation through definition

(Latin, de-finire, to finish, to finalise). The fundamental characteristic of the organisation as a purposive entity is its directedness and, clearly, there is a relationship between the direction (as orientation) and direction (as command) of the organisation and the rhetorical trajectory. In a specific sense, the organisation as a rhetorical entity *wants something* of the employee, of the customer, the competitor, the supplier, the general public and, therefore, what is not the organisation is always defined as deficient in relation to it: not as good. Therefore, representations of the organisation - images and texts - need to be received as convincing by its various audiences. For example, recent years have seen the elaboration of the rhetoric directed towards employees in the pursuit of greater commitment, improved performance, invocations to quality and in the construction of ornate narratives of organisational performances, in exhortations towards greater goodness. However, in such representations, the organisation is an abstract entity removed from the activities of the physical bodies of which it is made up. Without a body, the pain of labour itself becomes an abstraction so that embodied pain is exiled from the organisation as a site of production. Such an elaborate vision of goodness, truth and beauty cannot admit the possibility of what counter definition must construe as ugliness and dissent. Consequently, it is the abstract "good" which is venerated and administered and not the labouring bodies which are in need of ministry.

ADMINISTRATION AND MINISTRATION

The notion of a discourse of maternity subverts the dominant social discourse to challenge order, rationality and patriarchal regulation. What this contributes to organisational theory is the capacity to make transparent the effects of the production of meaning, to render explicit the patriarchal quest of the organisation, to make problematic the notion of trajectory, strategy and purpose, to question "ordinary" notions of the good. Therefore, by presenting the organi-

sation as maternal, this paper seeks to offend conventional definitions of the goods of organisation in order to allow the mother/ motherhood/ maternal body to enter. Thus, whereas the text of the organisation is about regulation and representation, of rational argument, perfect and perfectible relationships and rhetorical trajectory, the embodied subject speaks of division, separation, rupture, tearing, blood and the pain of labour. So good becomes defined in terms of a recursive seduction to the notion of order and what is not good, the physical, becomes the province of hysteria. Consequently, despite management desires to demonstrate success and achievement by recourse to metrics, comparatives, benchmarks and results organisations are more of metaphysics than of matter.

One might provocatively characterise this relationship in terms of the ways in which organisations as purposive and rhetorical entities define themselves in counter-distinction to notions of the feminine and madness. Lacoue-Labarthe (1989: 129) speaks of the major threats to representation as being women and madness and, in part, this is because in the hystera (Gk. *womb*) and the psycho*logical* condition of hysteria (as a disturbance of the nervous system thought to be brought about by uterine dysfunction) there is a common concern with the function of reproduction: a contest between representation and definitions of reproduction, between reason and body. In the organisational world, disorder cannot be badness or madness because the logic of organisation assumes that these conditions can be corrected by reason. In this sense, redemption and cure requires submission to *psychology* (regulation of the psyche by the logos). If that which is defined as deficient, the employee, the organisational member, will only submit to superior logic s/he will *realise* the extent of his/her disorder. S/he can be turned around (*converted*) and induced to "make a clean break between fantasies and reality" (Irigaray, 1985: 273). S/he can be converted by and conformed to psychology: "the wisdom of the master. And of mastery",

(Irigaray, 1985: 274). When organisations exhort their employees to specific standards of performance, behaviour, conformity and so forth, they hold up a mirror to the deficient condition of their members and confronts them with "reality". However, this is a reality which kills. The physical is destroyed by the reflection and as mere reflection, is rendered inanimate. All that is now permitted to be reflected back is the organisation's own construction, a sublime illusion, and so what the organisation member can reflect back to him/herself is mortification of the body. If the organisation can convert its members to the power of the logos, it is able to demonstrate control over hysteria and disorder and by, implication, over the physical and embodied reproduction. So defined, organisational members are infinitely reproducible and reproduced assured that goodness and an absence of madness are synonymous with order and sanity. However, *in order* to sustain this logic, the focus must remain on the organisational speculum so that a consistent reflection is maintained. The organisational member must be conformed to the rule of the logos and possessed by it, must become the property of that logos in the sense that as *property*, the member maintains what is *proper* to that construction. So organisations seek to *cure* their members of their disordered otherness and to offer alternative and convincing definitions of reality. All this in the service of good order.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF GOODNESS

In other words, the (hysterical) disordered state must be subjected to regulation by psycho-*logy*: regulation by (logical) discourse. Organisations thus construct themselves as means of salvation, as bulwarks against destruction and danger. So strong is the conviction that the right path of the organisation leads to good that the organisation believes it can serve to restore a *proper* way of *seeing* things. However, if this cannot be achieved there is no option, the organisational member must conform to propriety or be exiled from it. Mortified in the flesh and now annihilated even as mere reflection, a lack of propriety cannot be admitted. If the

organisational member cannot be cured or refuses to be conformed, this is a considerable challenge to the trajectory of the organisation and so the masculine identity of the organisation *hangs in the balance*. The improper must be eradicated to sustain the illusion of purpose, to preserve good order and *for the good of the organisation*.

So it seems, organisations have a purposive commitment to the pursuit of some notion of good, circumscribed and defined, logical and metrical. Jung has argued that the pursuit of "sterile perfection" (Dourley, 1990: 51) is one of the defining characteristics of patriarchal consciousness. Order and rationality function to exclude the physical. Whitmont puts forward the view that the *control* of passions and physical needs traditionally have been valorised because they idealise maleness (Whitmont, 1991: 243) and gives emphasis to the "*merely* rational" [italics added] (Whitmont, 1991: 243). Organisations then, as expressions of collective expectations, render physicality "dirty" corrupting and, by implication, not good. Indeed, the corollary of this emphasis on rationality is a distrust of natural affections and the loss of compassion (Whitmont, 1991: 245). Without compassion, the organisation cannot *admit* the suffering that is caused by the pursuit of rationality. Goodness it seems is self-referential and abstract.

COMPASSION

Without compassion, the paternal discourse of organisation, dominated by the rationality and the rejection of dependency, reduces the notion of the maternal to nurturing, domestic and servicing functions. For an organisation the loss of the maternal leaves the questing behaviour of organisations as unrelieved rationality and power motivation. Whitmont puts forward the view that historically it has been fear of the feminine, [as disorder or hysteria], which has led to the degradation of women but he also goes on to say that there is a contemporary problem of masculinisation. This he argues has resulted in abstract dogmatic mental attitudes

and a sterile and over-rationalistic social world (Whitmont, 1991: 200). It is precisely in this excessive rationality and the preoccupation with measurement that embraces goodness in order to exclude it. Consequently, organisations are given to producing totalising discourses which *seek to capture* all aspects of organisational life. These are totalising if only to provide comfort from the physicality which they lack. They can never offer completion but they need to be totalising precisely to preclude the possibility of otherness. Therefore, they seek to exclude and, more particularly, they seek to exclude the possibility of the maternal. This is because the maternal threatens to disrupt the discipline and sterility of the paternal logos. The maternal poses a threat to the logic of the self-serving and totalising narratives of the organisation.

At a simplistic level, this is one reason why organisations, as collective expressions of one-dimensional patriarchy, have been keen to turn women into homologues of men: a task greatly assisted by the equity feminists. However, they have also sought to turn men into ciphers of masculinity through the relentless pursuit of perfectionism and rationality. By containing the feminine within the purposive logic of futurity, organisations as directive entities have sought to defend themselves against the threat posed by their very presence, ambivalence, and physicality. Yet, the result of all this purposive striving and collective questing is, nonetheless, an inevitable sterility. This is because the patriarchal logos substitutes words and exhortations and their reproduction as text for bodies, physicality and embodied reproduction. In privileging constructions over physicality, the organisation comes to reproduce itself as text and understand itself in metaphysical terms as the product of its own reproduction. Within this logic, the organisation seeks to reassure itself of its own beneficence: the good is whatever the organisation says it is.

REPRODUCING GOOD

As part of the obsession with definition, organisations have been fanatical about metrics and monitoring. Elsewhere, I have examined the etymology and significance of the matrix as an organ and instrument of reproduction (Höpfl, 2000a, 2000b, 2002) and argued that embodied reproduction is replaced by the reproduction of text. The matrix is regulated so that its cells show location and defining characteristics on the basis of power relations. This power derives from the ability to define, to authorise and regulate the site of production. Understood in this way, the matrix defines what the organisation regards as good and what is worthy of reproduction. In the substitution of words for the natural products of the embodied matrix, reproduction of homologues is guaranteed. Men and women in the service of the organisation, reproduce themselves in relation to what is defined as good and, therefore, produce only sons.

The appropriated matrix deals on the level of the abstract alone. Despite the totalising rhetoric which it produces, it is not sustainable and therefore seeks to construct for itself icons of what it lacks. For the paternal matrix, perfection comes from striving. Consequently, the matrix gives birth into a world of obsessive reproduction and insatiable desire. Paternal reproduction arises from the sense of lack that only the acknowledgement of the maternal matrix could satisfy. However, so configured, the paternal matrix can only construct for itself representations of the things it lacks. Consequently, care, creativity, quality, ethics, emotions and so forth become the abstract products of the sterile matrix: acknowledged to be good but divorced from goodness.

NO GOOD AT ALL

In this context, it is not surprising that organisations function at variance to the bodies who work in and for them. Consequently, people in

organisations are always struggling with issues that arise from the substitution of textual matrices for physical ones. They are rendered abstract by loss of contact with their physicality as organisations reduce them to categories and metrics. But, from the point of view of the maternal, the position is more serious. In the relentless pursuit of future states, organisations as purposive entities seek to construct for themselves the empty emblems of the object of the quest: high quality standards, improved performance, an ethical position, dignity at work, care for staff and so forth. In part, this is because the purposiveness of organisations is without end - indeed *can* never end - and, therefore, the notion of any real completion is antithetical to the idea of trajectory. Strategy gives birth to more strategy, rhetoric to more rhetoric and text to more text and so on. The good is never attained. The construction of goodness as abstract organisational categories is intended to console in the absence of the hope of restoration. Moreover, the vicarious and representational has more seductive power than the physical and disordered other. These emblems function as an anamnesis to register the loss as representation. For this reason alone, the emblem of loss is melancholic and pervades the organisation with melancholy. It cannot offer consolation because ironically it can only recall that there is a loss. So, the emblem of the lost object provides a false reassurance that completion itself can arise from a construction. So, when an organisation lays claim to goodness, it constructs a notion of goodness which serves its strategic ends.

The argument presented here makes the case for a greater understanding of the way in which there is an organisational angst about the feminine as dissident, disorderly and disjunctive. That the feminine is not so easily seduced into the illusions of future satisfactions and abstract relations causes a number of tensions and oscillations. These occur between the purposive nature of organisational trajectory and progress into the future and the ambivalence of compassionate members of or-

ganisations as dissident. The paradox at the root of this argument is one of power. Those who are not easily seduced by corporate promises, by subjugation to futurity and by notions of perfectibility are dangerous and disordered. Such positions are equated with the feminine as hysterical and needing to be cured by submission to logic and good order. Where organisational members do not accept these definitions or merely pay lip-service to them, the extent of their participation is controlled and regulated. These positions cannot easily be reconciled because they pose the physical against the metaphysical and in doing so implicitly challenge the organisation's construction of good. Yet ambivalence and dissidence have important political significance for changing the nature of work.

In seeking to construct themselves both as sublime manifestations of male desire and as unattainable ideals, organisations lay themselves open to inevitable failure. The therapeutic project of *saving* the organisation via the rule of logic, via insistent authority, and via psychology, is a process of mortification. Moreover, it is founded on a masculine sublime fabricated to reflect the male ego, narcissistic and inevitably melancholic. The feminine has no place, no reflection, no role in this construction other than to the extent that, in an entirely selective way, it serves as an object within the construction. In this construction, the feminine is hysterical and has to be kept out because, by posing a threat to its mere representational form [to mimesis], it threatens good order. Only if the feminine is prepared to submit itself to the symbol of the masculine construction (the erection) can it even enter into reflection. However, even then it must show a *proper* reflection *appropriate* to its status as a *property* of that construction. Where the feminine lacks *propriety* it is reduced to nothing. The goodness of the organisation is textual and representational. It has nothing to do with compassion and virtue. These are the defences which protect psychology as regulation by the logos from failure and subversion. It is a phallocentric psychology which credits itself with initiative,

achievement and purpose and which defends its position by either relegation and cancellation. Clearly, part of this defence rests on power over the control of reflection, theorisation and discourse, and on the control of categories and their meanings.

THE HEROIC GOOD

Organisations want to create an heroic notion of the good, a confidant and bold representation of the future - and this is inevitably a masculine construction. The feminine is required to remain silent or to present itself according to its representation as viewed through the male gaze: to produce itself in a way which ensures its own annihilation. What then does the idea of the maternal contribute to an understanding of goodness and organisations? In part, it is to do with borders and their demarcation, exile and homelessness, strangeness, estrangement, the boundary of the body and sociality and love; it concerns ethics and motherhood. These are complex issues which deserve further elaboration. Certainly, the writings of Julia Kristeva are a good place to start (Höpfl, 2000a). Maternity, motherhood and the maternal body play a significant part in the dynamics of her psychoanalytical writing.

Kristeva sees the client-patient relationship as rooted in love and characterised by, what she terms, "herethics of love" (Kristeva, 1987: 263) an implicit ethical practice. These are writings from exile and according to Docherty (1996) there is considerable potential in this position. He argues that "the postmodern narrative of characterisation ... eradicates the distinction between the ethical and the political" (Docherty 1996:66) because it draws the reader into "disposition" [sic], in other words, it puts the reader into a suitable place, it inclines the reader, or to use the Greek word for this disposition, *ethos*, it establishes the place of the ethical by involving the reader in the search for *"the good"* so, Docherty argues, re-establishing the place of the political. Thus, for Docherty, "to read postmodern characterisation is to reintroduce the possibility of

politics, and importantly of a genuinely historical political change, into the act of reading" (Docherty 1996: 66,67).

WRITING FROM EXILE

Postmodern characterisation then involves "first, the confusion of the ontological status of the character with that of the reader; secondly, the decentring of the reader's consciousness, such that she or he is, like the character, endlessly displaced and 'differing'; and, thirdly, the political and ethical implications of this 'seeming otherwise', shifting from appearance to different appearance in the disappearance of a totalized selfhood" (Docherty 1996: 67). This has political consequence, that is, that there is "a marginalization of the reader from a centralized or totalized narrative of selfhood" which renders "the reading subject-in-process as the figure of the dissident" (Docherty 1996: 67). To support this view Docherty refers to Kristeva's identification of the experimental writer and, as Docherty says, *"crucially*, women" [original italics] as types of dissident. So, the argument runs, what these two "share is the impetus towards marginalization and indefinition; they are in a condition of 'exile' from a centred identity of meaning and its claims to a totalized Law or Truth" and, further, he adds that exile itself is a form of dissidence "since it involves the marginalization or decentring of the self from all positions of totalized or systematic Law (such as imperialist nation, patriarchal family, monotheistic language)". Hence, Docherty puts forward the proposition that postmodern characterization , "construed as writing in and from exile, serves to construct the possibility, for perhaps the first time, of elaborating the paradigmatic reader of these new novels as feminized" (Docherty 1996: 68) "always dispositioned towards otherness, alterity". Hence, postmodern characterization permits the ethics of alterity and the opportunity to explore what it means "to speak from the political disposition of the Other". Docherty's view of postmodern writing raises some important issues not least the problem of authorship and authority (Höpfl, 2003) but it does make

an important contribution to an appreciation of the role of exile and estrangement. Here is the possibility of the political and a challenge to grand notions of goodness. Here is the possibility of the ethics of the interpersonal, the encounter with otherness, the reconciliation of logos and physis. The idea of men accepting and valuing their feminine qualities would not be considered strange within a community of nurturing, which had a genuine concern for the other, which adopted an embodied notion of the good. However, there are broader issues here which require careful analysis.

Eagleton argues that against the "ideal of compassionate community, of altruism and natural affection…...(there is) a threat to rationalism" and says that "the political consequences of this are ambivalent" (Eagleton, 1990: 60). On the other hand, for the feminine, this site of ambivalence might be the very starting point of a political praxis within the discourse of maternity. And whereas Eagleton warns against "a fantasy of mother and father in one, of love and law commingled" (Eagleton, 1990: 263) it is perhaps this very conciliation which might bring the pursuit of ends and goodness together (see also Whitmont, 1983). In other words, to redefine the good. However, a serious caution must remain and that is one put forward by Baudrillard in his critique of rationality in which he argues that the reduction of male and female to categories has produced an artificial distinction which objectifies the feminine. By this line of argument, the feminine is now constructed as a category of the masculine and, by implication, the power of the feminine to manifest itself in ambivalence is lost. In other words, Baudrillard sees feminism, per se, as ensnared within the construction of a phallic order (Baudrillard, 1990). This is position with which Kristeva is familiar (Kristeva, 1984). As her biographer Toril Moi puts it, "The problem is that as soon as the insurgent 'substance' speaks, it is necessarily caught up in the kind of discourse *allowed by* and *submitted to* by the Law" (Moi, 1986: 10, emphasis added). The desire to confront this problem of inevitable capture is fundamental to Kristeva's work and yet she acknowledges that to attempt to use language against itself is to create an untenable position: a position which is all to familiar to women writers when they attempt to deviate from the notion of mastery and this piece of writing is itself not excluded from this judgement. Writing is inevitably about coming up with the goods and in academic life this is about producing good textual sons.

So after all, this paper is about *good* practice, about behaviour, gesture, ways of interacting, about the micro-politics of organising. It is not about abstract goodness and unattainable futures. These belong to the province of insatiable organisation. Here is simply the hope of a compassionate community and a invocation to the practice of goodness.

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