

Three minutes of silence: Thinking in duration in organization studies

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Abstract

In this paper I wish to make, or perhaps force a link between three very distinct sets of debates in organization studies. The first concerns the status of 'memory' in organizational terms, and how to best preserve shared knowledge, as defined by Walsh & Ungson (1991). The second deals with the repression and expression of emotion in organized settings, as exemplified in the classic work of Arlie Hochschild (2003). The third is a less well known methodological debate about the politics of 'giving voice' and 'remaining silent' (Morrison & Milliken, 2003). At first glance all three debates - concerning memory, emotion, voice - seem to share a common social psychological orientation. But exploring the character of this common thread is not primary what I want to set out to achieve. I wish instead to demonstrate that what is at stake in all three debates is how organization studies 'thinks with' and 'thinks against' its participants. I want to propose that what makes for the difference between these two strategies is taking seriously the temporal structuring of human action. To illustrate this claim I will work through an extended example - the use of public collective silence as a commemorative practice.

What would happen if all the members of my family disappeared? I would maintain for some time the habit of attributing meaning to their first names. In fact, if a group has affected us with its influence for a period of time we become so saturated that if we find ourselves alone, we act and think as if we were still living under the pressure of the group. (Maurice Halbwachs [1925]1992: 73)

Introduction

The term 'organizational memory' has been used by both organization theorists and information scientists for some three decades. In a review of the field, Walsh & Ungson (1991) define organizational memory as the distributed storage of shared knowledge in an organization across an number of separate 'retention facilities' or 'bins' (including 'individuals', 'structures' and 'cultures'). This conception of memory as the

retention of knowledge in discrete informational units spread across separate storage mechanism is taken direct from the 'standard' computational model of mind in cognitive science as it is applied to the study of memory (see Schachter, 1996; Baddeley, 1986). Seen in this way memory is a process of encoding and retrieving knowledge in the form of representations which are stored across multi-level cognitive architecture. As Corbett (2000) astutely notes, Walsh & Ungson merely transpose this logic, substituting organizational for cognitive structure. An unfortunate consequence of the transposition is that brings with it all that is problematic about the 'standard model', in particular the representational framework in which cognition and memory is analytically situated (for exposition see Coulter, 1979; Harré & Gillett, 1994; Shotter, 1990).

In cognitive terms, memories are treated as representations of past perceptions which are subject to bias and degradation during the process of their storage and retrieval. The analytic concern is

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then with the accuracy of a given memory relative to the original perception (and indeed with the representational coherence of this initial perception). But this approach treats remembering as a passive, near mechanistic process of managing information. This is starkly at odds with how remembering occurs in everyday settings, where it constitutes an active communicative practice of establishing the significance of the past to ongoing matters at hand (see Middleton & Brown, 2005; Middleton & Edwards, 1990 *passim*). Seen in this way remembering is a social practice rather than simply the exercise of a mental faculty. Persons invoke and collective negotiate versions of the past, drawing on the accounts of others as well as a potential host of other mediating objects, including common narratives, 'official history' and artefacts varying from mementos, diaries and photographs to public records. Indeed as Bartlett (1932) once famously observed, in most cases of remembering accuracy is not the main issue but rather what may be accomplished in the present as a consequence of having invoked a particular aspect of the past. An emerging counter-tradition of work in organizational memory has started from this position to study remembering as collaborative communicative process of reconstructing the past as a key part of structuring ongoing present activities (see Brown & Lightfoot, 2002; Bowker, 2006; Engstrom et al, 1990; Middleton, 1997; Orr, 1990; Tuomi, 1996).

The second debate I want to invoke stands in a very different relation to psychology. The study of emotions in organization draws upon a longstanding sociological tradition, notably the work of Georg Simmel and Norbert Elias, which has positioned the transformation of human emotional life as central to modern organized sociality (see Bendelow & Williams, 1997). In Arlie Hochschild's (2003) renowned study of air stewardesses, emotions are subject to careful management and repression (that is organized in relation to 'feeling rules') in order to create the required 'face work' and physical displays of 'caring'. Emotions are

then not merely recruited into organizational life as part of labour, but become the primary site where members work through their identifications with the organization, including feelings of ambivalence and (self)destructiveness (Gabriel, 1998). Whilst studies of organizational memory have tended to focus narrowly on cognition and information, studies of emotion emphasise the interdependence of the cognitive with the affective and propose an active model of the person as engaged in the search for meaning (see Fineman, 2003; 2006 *passim*).

Whilst this expanded focus and model of the person clearly has stronger face validity, it nevertheless also suffers from difficulties in its conception of psychological processes. Emotions are treated as individual properties located within psychic structure - a person 'becomes' angry, or 'suffers' from anxiety. In this way emotions are analytically reducible to the bond between a self-contained subject and the context offered up by an organized setting. They are the means by which the psychic life of persons is 'recruited' into labour. The alternative to such a view is to see emotions, and indeed subjectivity itself as having a relational basis that is irreducible to either the individual or the organization. Work on 'collective emotion' seeks to make sense of affect and feeling as marking the site through which subjectivity and social order are co-produced and intertwined (see Ahmed, 2004; Brown & Stenner, 2001; Massumi, 2002; Thrift, 2004). Emotions are not a bridge between the psyche and the world around it but rather the basis on which such a relation is itself thinkable.

The final debate has its roots in a piece by Morrison & Milliken (2000) which creates a dichotomy between the ability of employees to 'speak out' in organizations versus the tendency to remain silent, either out of fear of reprisal or because of the perceived 'unspeakability' of particular views within the local context. Morrison & Milliken view the inability of employees to 'find voice' as a 'barrier to change' and advocate

research aimed towards identifying the factors which inhibit voice and effectively 'silence' employees (see also Morrison & Milliken, 2003; Bowen & Blackmon, 2003). The significance of this work is that it clearly position the analyst as charged with responsibility to assist in facilitating 'voice' on behalf of the disempowered. Such a task is seen as central to critical dialects of management studies (see Wray Bliss 2004 and Jacks, 2004 for recent discussion). But this task is by no means as straightforward as Morrison & Milliken appear to suggest. Böhm & Bruni (2003) argue that the gesture of 'giving voice' fails to clarify which voice it is that eventually speaks, since it not only ignores the reflexive dilemmas which surround speech (i.e. 'why I am be asked?', 'what is it they want me to say?', 'what do they want with me?') but is also premised on a desperately contentious model of a subject who is self-present to her or his own consciousness and is able to report its contents outwith the power of some extraneous context such as discourse, culture, history etc. At the same time, 'silence' is reduced to the absence of voice, serving merely as a symptom of some blockage or inhibition within the organisation. Böhm & Bruni propose instead that 'becoming silent' be considered an active process, worthy of exploration in its own right.

By way of a quick summary, here we are confronted with three apparently distinct debates, with seemingly very different problems at stake in each - cognition and communication; the individual and the collective; voice and silence. It is certainly the case that each debate turns rival assumptions made about the 'psychological subject' and the difficult place the various versions of this subject have in organization studies. But that is not what interests me here. What I find striking instead is the manner in which each debate wrestles with the ontic status of its central object and with the consequential dilemma of situating it within either passive or active modes of being. For example, 'memory' is either something organizations 'have', and therefore in need of

better management, or it is something 'accomplished' in practice which continuously engages the present with the past. Similarly, 'emotion' is either a natural human response which will inevitably be 'repressed' by the demands of organized settings, or it is a set of relations which is 'expressed' in various forms which ultimately give rise to subjectivity and sociality. Finally, 'voice' marks the conscious expression of the self-present subject, with 'silence' its inhibition, or else 'voice' and 'silence' are complementary modalities in which claims to presence are established.

What is at stake in each debate is clarifying what is 'product' and what 'producer'. The rival positions in each debate offer resolutions by identifying the site from which analysis ought to proceed - the psyche, individual, the relation, the organization etc. Resolution comes through the assertion of ontological surety. That is, through a determination of the sorts of things which exist by right in the organizational worlds under study. I want to characterise this approach as a 'thinking against' participants because it is premised on an analytic gesture which has already, to some extent, sorted out the object of study into categories and relations which lend particular shape to nature of the 'problem'. The contrast I wish to make is 'thinking with' participants. Here no such claims to ontological surety can be made in advance, rather the 'problem' in question can only emerge by following the unfolding of a process which is, to some extent, treated without reference to a change in any given 'thing'. Such an approach places very different demands upon organisation theory. To illustrate this further I will turn to the extended example of commemorative silence. This is no arbitrary example, since it involves elements from all three of the debates I have previously reviewed - memory, emotion and silence.

The organization of grief

Grief and mourning are complex cultural performances. In their review of the

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rituals surrounding death, Metcalf & Huntington (1991) demonstrate not only that displays of grief take very different forms across cultures, but that the interpretation of such displays to find a common universal can be fraught with analytic difficulties. Weeping, for instance, can be public and highly demonstrative, yet subject to very precise rules (amongst the Andamanese, for instance), or alternatively relatively private with lapses treated as irrepressible spontaneous expression (an Anglo-American funeral tradition). Irrespective of the forms displays of grief take and the extent to which they are sanctioned, or even demanded, by local cultural conventions, the problem remains that of establishing the relationship between display and the 'real' experience thought to underpin it, and consequently of understanding how private experience becomes collectively organised when it is subsumed in public commemoration.

Take the following example, taken from a commentary on the immediate aftermath of the death of Princess Diana in 1997. Here Ian Jack describes the collective demand to participate in recollection and public mourning that was powerfully felt in England:

There then followed a famous week. The more the media showed the crowds, the more they multiplied. The Mall became a sea of people. People queued for up to eight hours to sign books of condolence. The price of flowers rose by 25% in the London markets and by September 9 about 10,000 tons of them had been dumped outside Buckingham and Kensington palaces. When cards, bottles of champagne, teddy bears, trinkets and crockery bearing Diana's picture were taken into consideration, the total weight of tributes was estimated at 15,000 tons. There was no end to grief. It is worth recalling some details. William Hague wanted Heathrow to be renamed Diana Airport, Gordon Brown was said to be seriously considering the idea that August Bank Holiday be renamed Diana Day. Three foreign tourists were sentenced to jail for taking a few old

teddy bears from the tributes heap. Newspapers instructed the Queen and her family to grieve, and to be seen grieving. Many people were recorded saying that they grieved more for Diana than for their dead mothers and husbands. Not to grieve was to be odd, cynical, wicked. Julian Barnes called it "look-at-me grief"; my own term was "grief-lite", as deep and meaningful as the readers of Dickens felt when the serialisation of *The Old Curiosity Shop* reached the death of Little Nell. (Jack, 2005)

Jack writes of a collective outpouring of grief, neatly encapsulated in the image of '15,000 tons of tributes'. But this collective will-to-mourn is treated as exceptional, as aberrant. Jack hints at a 'world turned upside down' where the usual norms of collective behaviour have become suddenly inverted - newspapers feel authorised to instruct monarchs, prison sentences are handed down for what would usually be counted as trivial acts, the death of public figure is felt more keenly than the death of a close loved one. Jack's description is then a critique of what we might call a 'hyper-organising' of grief, stoked by the popular media and opportunist politicians, where blanket media coverage has a self-perpetuating effect. Individuals take their cues for how they 'ought' to feel from the increasingly unbelievable images that surround them. And against the backdrop of this collective frenzy, those who do not grieve appear as 'odd, cynical, wicked', as morally culpable and outside the pale of decent behaviour. To be silent whilst others show their distress so publicly is to be guilty of not only the personal failing of not being touched by Diana's death, but also to compound this guilt by seeming to offer an implicit critique of those who are, by necessity, compelled to act out the intense loss they feel.

Collective grief of this kind then begs the question of how to understand the loop between public display and personal experience. In his well known analysis of the *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim renders the problem of the relation between

individual and collective experience as one of ritualisation. Private experience, such as loss, must be recruited into the ritual forms that are collectively prescribed in a given social-cultural order. To the extent that the individual is able to express their own experiences in the limited number of ritual forms made available to them, they find those experiences recognised, accredited and supported by others. Now the Diana example might be seen to display, in part, what occurs when there are no ritual forms properly adequate to the expression of personal distress. The desperate search for new or modified forms of ritualistic action - displayed in the ever growing mounds of rotting flowers which offer no succour - threatens momentarily to turn into a critique of existing social order itself, as the monarch herself is called to account.

But such an analysis would invite us to imagine that the psychological impact of Diana's death was felt with uniform force across the collective. To assume this is to withdraw from analysis precisely that which demands understanding - how can it be that a single event is experienced in such a homogeneous fashion by diverse social actors? Better then to assert a Foucauldian inversion. Public displays of grief recruit persons by acting as incitements for the shaping of private experience. We look to and participate in the expressive acts of others, and as a consequence retrospectively constitute forms of private experience that lend 'completeness' to our public acts. We feel the force of mourning because we publicly grieve.

If this is so, then the gap between participation and non-participation, between speaking the common discourse of grief and remaining silent demands attention as much as the gap between private and public experience. Silence is precisely what disrupts the recruitment of her or him who does not speak unto the collective memory. As Maurice Halbwachs (1992), one of the first theoreticians of collective remembering, makes clear, speaking the words that are

central to a group's collective identity effectively re-states the influence of the group, irrespective of their actual presence. To speak is to remember, and to remember in a way that is defined in advance by the collective frameworks of memory enshrined by the group. Conversely, to remain silent is to risk the appearance of having no place in what is being remembered.

For example, Allan Young's (1995) ethnographic study of therapeutic interventions for Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in a US veteran's hospital facility, shows how patients are incited to produce memories that fit into a clearly defined (in this case neo-Freudian) framework of 'working through' issues. Similarly, the contributors to Reavey & Warner's (2003) volume on recounting child sexual abuse display how competing frameworks (law, therapy, feminist-activism) vie to restore a particular kind of order and sense to adult recollections of childhood abuse. In both instances, what is at stake is the manner in which meaning, and consequently an orientation to a particular moral order, is accrued in the very act of beginning to speak of the past. Silence is then, once again, to be disqualified as either a failure to properly confront the past or as entirely without meaning. Silence ought not and can not be sustained in these circumstances.

Or so it seems. For silence, understood as the withdrawal of speech, as a form of ambivalence towards the complete recruitment of the past in the modalities of its current expression, is also a necessary gesture in maintaining openness toward memory. Silence is not simply the absence of speech, the backdrop against which speech naturally appears, but an action in its own right. But this action continuously runs the risk of its own disqualification because of the implicit challenge it offers to the collective sense-making that goes on by way of instituting shared versions of the past.

Silence then emerges as the

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paradoxical object within collective grief. To be silent is to risk the appearance of wilful non-participation. Or worse to indicate a moral and political failing through a refusal to acknowledge the legitimacy of what is being publicly discussed and commemorated (consider, for instance the significance of 'Heidegger's silence' in relation to the contemporary reception of his work). But silence may also betoken quiet reflection or a very public demonstration of being overwhelmed - literally reduced to silence - by the magnitude of events. Silence may then be a legitimate, perhaps even the most respectful means of bearing witness. To 'think with' the collective organization of grief and memory we must then follow silence as it unfolds. I propose to do so by looking closely at a commemorative practice wherein silence is central. In the next two sections I will look at the origins of 'minute silences' and their contemporary use. In the following section, I will make some proposals as to what might be occurring during those silent minutes themselves and argue that it is collective affect rather than quiet reflection which dominates. Finally I will return to the question of what it might mean to 'think with' rather than against silent participants.

Origins of commemorative silence

The largest recent example of silence used for commemorative purposes occurred on Weds 5th January, 2005. This constituted a public act of remembrance held across Europe to mark the tsunami disaster which devastated South East Asian communities two weeks before. The commemoration took the form of a three minutes silence. This form of the practice had been used in recent times to mark the aftermath of the 9/11 World Trade Centre attack (2001), whilst five minutes had been observed for Madrid train bombings (2004). During the three minute period in January participants were asked to abandon whatever they happened to be doing and to stand silently, reflecting on the tragedy in question.

The length of the silence that participants were asked to observe appears to be determined by a need to make these particular commemorations distinct from other. It is common for a short one minute silence to be requested at local events, typically to mark a bereavement which touches on the community or profession in question. For example, a one minute silence was observed at a great many UK football grounds in late November to mark the death of the former player George Best. The use of a two minute silence has been reserved, since the early twentieth century, as a commemoration for the signing of the Armistice which ended the First World War. Clearly the association with war and with militarism has rendered the two minute form of public silence inappropriate for marking natural disasters and, indeed, the complexities of the impact of modern terrorism, in Europe at least.

But it is the tradition of the two minutes silence which has shaped all recent instances of public silence. In the UK, Armistice day was first marked through the use of the two minute silence at 11 O'clock on the 11th of November in 1919. In his fascinating and detailed history of the practice, Adrian Gregory (1994) describes how the public commemoration was conceived very close to the actual event itself. The model which was used was suggested by a former imperial High Commissioner to South Africa, Sir Percy Fitzpatrick. In a memorandum submitted to the Cabinet office, Fitzpatrick described the practice in the following way:

In the hearts of our people there is a real desire to find some lasting expression of their feeling for those who gave their lives in the war. They want something done now while the memories of sacrifice are in the minds of all; for there is the dread - too well grounded in experience - that those who have gone will not always be first in the thoughts of all, and that when the fruits of their sacrifice become our daily bread, there will be few occasions to remind us of what we realise so clearly today. During the War,

we in South Africa observed what we called the "Three minutes' pause " At noon each day, all work, all talk and all movement were suspended for three minutes that we might concentrate as one in thinking of those - the living and the dead - who had pledged and given themselves for all that we believe in...Silence, complete and arresting, closed upon the city - the moving, awe inspiring silence of a great Cathedral where the smallest sound must seem a sacrilege... Only those who have felt it can understand the overmastering effect in action and reaction of a multitude moved suddenly to one thought and one purpose. (Fitzpatrick, 1919, cited in Gregory, 1994: 9)

Collective silence is here recommended as a strategy for managing collective memory. Events from the past are seen as emblazoning themselves on the 'minds of all'. But these vivid images exhaust themselves only too soon. They are replaced by myriad daily concerns. That which united the collective, which brought the thoughts of all together as one, cannot persist. There is a need to structurally recreate the moment when the collective focussed its thoughts on a single socially shared set of memories. 'The people' must invent a technique for 'overmastering' itself, for stilling the everyday bustle of life such that once again, for a few moments the collective re-emerges 'moved suddenly to one thought and purpose'.

The purpose of the silence is then divided between remembering the past - the dead who have sacrificed their lives - and marking the legacy of this sacrifice in the present. This doubling of attention between remembering past loss and the significance of the past for the present aims at creating a unity. As Gregory (1994) makes clear, collective unity was a very real concern for the British government in 1919, faced with the task of managing the return of a significant number of demobilised soldiers with legitimate grievances against the state, who might potentially be recruited to either far left or far right political causes. The two minutes silence was then an opportunity for the collective to

rediscover itself as such, to temporarily suspend disputes and become unified in common remembrance of loss.

This unity was brought about through apparently paradoxical means. The two minutes were intended to be occupied with private reflection, fashioned along traditional religious lines. However the aim of this private experience was to direct thought to a common end. Thus not only was this reflection performed collectively, in public, but the object and the very structure of individual thoughts themselves were supposed to be in concert. The assumption was that although each individual would seek to latch onto their own very personal losses, they would apprehend through this a common framework in which to install these losses. Gregory (1994) refers to this as an 'economics of sacrifice'. He describes this as a complex brew of national patriotism and the offering up of lives for the national good, which demanded 'payment' through both remembrance of what has been given and the prolonging of patriotic fervour into the present.

A further feature of the unity which was sought was the temporary erasure of social boundaries. Age, sex, class and religion were to be set aside for the duration of the silence. In this respect, the ritualistic aspects of the practice were of benefit. By encouraging the adoption of a reflective pose of stillness and contemplation - hands clasped, head lowered - the effect of a mass of bodies brought together for common purpose was produced. For the course of the two minutes at least the interactional order wherein differences are performed was to be suspended. It was the silence itself which enabled this, serving as a striking and uncanny interruption of ordinary events, and by metaphoric extension as a recreation of the silence that follows the clamour of battle. As Gregory describes it:

The silence struck individuals with an irresistible force. People were swept into collective emotion. A correspondent of The

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Times described how he had been travelling on a bus with friends through southwest London. In the minutes before the silence, they had been 'discussing with a forced cynicism of which each of us was secretly ashamed, some supposedly humorous sides of the proposed standstill'. Just before eleven o'clock the bus pulled to a halt outside a small factory. The correspondent saw, '10 or a dozen factory workers wearing their overalls but not their caps, standing rigidly at attention. Glancing along the road we saw at irregular intervals perhaps twenty people, mostly women ... some with children in perambulators. Without exception they stood still... it was then that we four cynics... realized that we too were on our feet with our heads uncovered'. At the end of the silence the factory workers gave three cheers for victory and the four 'scoffers' on the bus, three of whom, significantly, were ex-soldiers, joined the cheering (1994: 17)

Silence appears to function here through the serendipitous tying together of lives for a brief period of time. What is striking to the 'four cynics' is the way they are suddenly and randomly confronted by strangers who are visibly participating in the ritual. This offers up a complex experience - it 'shames' the cynics as a consequence of the apparent humility displayed by the factory workers, who have removed their caps, and simultaneously 'engages' their attention to the dignity of the women, many of whom will have lost the father of the child they accompany. The silence practically demands their participation, which they are surprised to 'realize' they have automatically given. But what is most telling is the conclusion of the silence, where the participants join together in cheering 'victory'. Although the episode that Gregory recounts is drawn from the very first enactment of the ritual silence in 1919, where victory would have had especial significance, it does point out that what follows the cessation, the 'breaking' of the silence, is at least as important as what occurs during the silence itself. For having stood together, unified, the participants are bound to various degrees into a common future (of sorts).

Here then is the particular paradox at the heart of the two minute silence. What happens during the silence is not so much a space for private reflection, but rather an act of clearance which is designed to directly anticipate the resumption of ordinary activities. In the episode above, it is the 'cheering for victory' which erupts at the completion of the two minutes which is the central object. This cheering marks the creation of a new unity out of the cynicism and dispute which followed the end of the war. Silence is a means to this end rather than an end in itself. Or put slightly different, what silence achieves is restitution of a common language of 'victory' which all are prepared to speak, despite their prior differences. Moreover this speaking of a common language is only possible once participants have first been confronted with the failure of speech. In this sense, silence is a powerful evocation of the failure of words to gain purchase on the enormity of sacrifice. No words will do justice to the full measure of the losses which are considered. But rather than consider this 'defeat of language' in itself, the bracketing of the silence into two minutes turns this experience into simple pedagogic exercise, where the speech which follows the silence appears endowed with a far greater rhetorical and emotional power than might otherwise have been suspected. How striking, how comforting it must have been to hear the victory cheers ring out, to latch onto a familiar discourse as a means of breaking the silence.

Silence as social technology

The origins of the current use of commemorative silence can then be seen in a series of governmental concerns that arose in the aftermath of the First World War. The two minute silence formed the core of a ritual commemoration that tied together a whole series of other projects and techniques for remembering, including the design and building of monuments, the formation of an dominant aesthetic mode of relating to the war (in the form of war poetry and novels) and the promotion of the overarching

discourse of an 'economics of sacrifice'. It is important not to overestimate the ritualistic aspect of the annual Armistice day two minute silence, since it sits in the middle of a whole series of other ongoing practices and artefacts. In this sense, Halbwachs (1980) usefully points out that collective memory cannot depend on ritual alone - groups must 'engrave their form' on the material environments they inhabit in such a way that the collective remembrances which define group identity seem to 'imitate the passivity of inert matter' (p.134). Armistice day participants in the 1920s and 1930s must have gazed at the cenotaphs and memorial statues that had recently appeared in every major town and city in the UK and imagined that the memory of the war dead and the patriotic cause for which they had given their lives would go on into eternity.

Recent uses of commemorative silence have not been able to draw upon such a dense memorial infrastructure. The three minute silence to mark the Asian tsunami, for instance, was not accompanied by the call to erect public monuments, nor has it yet been gathered up into a commonly recognised discourse. More importantly, the commemoration was not repeated on the same scale the following year - that January Wednesday was a 'one off'. It would then be inappropriate to understand the tsunami commemoration as a 'ritual'. I propose instead to consider it as an instance of the application of silence as a 'social technology'. The advantage of calling commemorative silence a 'technology' is that, in common with the prevailing wisdom in Science & Technology Studies (STS), it suggests that the meaning and very nature of the technology in question is determined by those who use and interact with it (see Grint & Woolgar, 1997; Bijker, 1997). What silence 'means', what it really 'is' then depends entirely on how it is 'used' in a given commemorative act, by a given collective.

For example, the five minutes of silence enacted in Madrid in 2004 were given a distinctly religious tone by the continuous

tolling of bells from the 650 churches in the city. The commemoration was structured around condemnation of the act, a rejection of 'fundamentalism' both abroad and at home. In this respect, the dead are constituted as victims whose legacy is to be determined by means of commemoration, rather than as having given up their lives in the service of a pre-established cause. Similarly, the two minutes of silence held in July 2005 to mark the bombings in London was overwhelmingly structured by a concern to 'send a message' that terrorism would not cower the local population. Interestingly, this use of silent commemoration is as much directed towards the future as it is the past. The general point is that silence as a social technology is not a unitary phenomenon, but is rather a practice that has different meanings and effects as a consequence of where, when and by whom it is enacted.

Nevertheless, it is possible to make some general contrasts between recent uses of commemorative silence and the Armistice day origins. As described earlier, by Gregory (1994), the first enactment of public silence did appear to be genuinely striking to participants. One reason for this is most certainly the innovative nature of the practice - to experience silence (or at least something which resembles silence) in a crowded urban centre must have been an uncanny event for most observers. But even more striking is the sense that this same event was being repeated across the country. The difficulties involved in co-ordinating such an event in 1919, long before the advent of networked instantaneous communication systems, were considerable. For the most part church bells were used, along with cannons and fireworks. The sense of participating in the same event, at the same time, as the monarch and population as a whole, was then unprecedented.

In comparison, the tsunami silence was a media 'event' that could be experienced without direct participation. It was possible to view uploaded images of the event on the internet barely minutes after the

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silence itself had concluded. Slideshows of images taken from across Europe could be readily accessed more or less immediately. What this suggests is that the 'unity' which is supposed to be brought about by the silence is not only diffuse (it is neither clearly bounded, nor constitutes an 'imagined community', in the sense of a collective which one could plausibly imagine oneself to belong in any direct way) but may also be experienced vicariously. Moreover, contemporary silences are often disconnected from any prior or successive events which lend meaning to the silence itself. The Armistice silence sat in the middle on a series of events occurring on that day, including the laying of wreaths, oration and prayers. In the evening, at least in the early 1920s, war veterans would attend dinners or other reunion celebrations (although as Gregory 1994 notes, such celebrations became viewed as unseemly towards the end of that decade). In other words, participation in the silence itself would be one part of a whole series of activities in which observers could partake, and thereby find different meanings for the two minutes. In stark contrast, the tsunami silence was for most participants completely decontextualised. The meaning of the three minutes is then to be found in reviewing the images of those minutes themselves on news broadcasts during the day. Indeed in some instances it was possible for participants to view themselves through live images fed onto huge display screens in public venues (I will return to this point in a moment).

The tsunami silence also differed in that the focus of the commemoration was on the loss and tragic death of the unfortunate victims. In this way the silence can be viewed as an act of witnessing, sympathy, or as a form of gift offered in tribute to the victims and the living who suffer still as a consequence of the disaster. Participants give up their time, their thoughts. They break their routines in tribute to the victims. The notion of silence as 'gift' is more complex with respect to Armistice day silence. Gregory (1994) points out that the silence was

intended to serve principally to honour and respect women widowed by the war, secondarily as a pedagogic lesson to children on the value of sacrifice, thirdly in tribute to the living veterans, and to mark their suffering over fallen comrades, and only finally in commemoration of the dead themselves. If the Armistice silence is a 'gift' it is one which has multiple recipients, many of whom are the actual participants. This complicates the structure of the gift, since many observers would be in the dual position of both 'giving' (by paying tribute to at least three of the classes of recipients) and 'receiving' (since the majority of observers would fall into one of the first three categories to whom the silence was dedicated). Similarly, the 'gift' aspect of the tsunami silence becomes more difficult to establish when one considers the temporal structure that is proper to gift giving. In classical terms, a gift is given without the explicit expectation of immediate reciprocity (i.e. a gift for which one pays, or which is given directly back to the sender in reciprocity is not really a 'gift' as such). But the tsunami commemoration and other recent uses of silence as social technology do 'pay back' participants immediately in the form of offering up near instantaneous images and reports which converts participation into instant social currency (not least in the experience for many of seeing themselves depicted in the images). Put in a slightly different way, we might say that whilst Armistice day silence became a ritual that made the value of attendance at the 'first' 1919 occasion increase over time (as a creditable and noteworthy experience), the occasioned and general use of silence nowadays gives each application a kind of 'firstness' (i.e. the first tsunami silence, the first London bombing silence, the first 9/11 silence). The opportunities to 'be there' at the 'first' event are now routine rather than exceptional.

Once again, it is the intersection of silence as a social technology with the instantaneous quality of modern communication technology which makes modern events so different to the original commemorations. I am particularly struck by

one image from the tsunami commemoration which depicts the silence being enacted at a football stadium. The two teams face each other in lines, arms linked around one another, heads bowed. In the background a colossal display screen shows a close-up head shot of two players, where their solemn expressions are thrown into sharp relief. The crowds in the terraces can then see, in close detail, how the silence is being 'felt' by the players on the pitch. The collective is not only visible to itself - their tribute is visible to themselves in the act of giving - but is, moreover, folded back on itself. I would argue that the experience of participating in the silence at the stadium is dominated by an awareness of the here and now, by the collective emotions which are felt and the presence of the immediate participants, not least the players on the pitch.

A very different image was produced in 1921 by Ada Deane, a well known 'spirit photographer', who took a photograph of the annual two minutes silence at the cenotaph in Whitehall, London. The result, which was widely reported in the national newspapers, was of an image of the event in which 'spirit faces' - taken widely to be phantoms of dead soldiers - were present. Now Deane's photography clearly has its place in the widespread interest in 'psychical research' which gripped the country at that time. But what this particular experiment demonstrates is the need to render visible something which is not directly present during the silence (i.e. the dead) but upon which the whole structure of the commemoration depends. I would contrast this image directly with some of the television footage of the 'Live Aid' concert held in 1985 in London. This concert, aimed at raising funds for and awareness of famine relief in Africa, is noteworthy as a media event. At one point in the proceedings, the procession of live music was interrupted by the showing of images of famine victims, soundtracked by especially maudlin soft-rock music. The television footage of this moment is interesting in that it focuses not on the images themselves - the famine victims, who are elsewhere, remote - but on the appalled

faces of the concert goers staring up at the video screen. In this way the focus, the subject of the event becomes not the victims themselves, but the participants, and their own emotional reactions. It would be simply unnecessary for a spirit photographer to be present here, because the participants at Live Aid lacked nothing, they became the subjects of their own commemorative acts. Similarly, in the image of the crowd at the football stadium, nothing whatsoever is lacking. In becoming directly visible to themselves, the participants are no longer dependent on absent victims to lend meaning to the silence. Everything that is needed is here, instantaneously.

The experience of silence

My argument so far has been that if we wish to follow the unfolding of silence in the collective organization of grief and memory, we must situate its formal use as a social technology. Considered in this way we can see that silence, as social technology, does not operate in the same manner as it did in the Armistice day commemoration. In particular, that the meanings that may be accorded to modern enactments are both unstable (in that silence is typically disconnected from other events) and no longer directly dependent on absent others (the victims, the dead). I now want to turn to look more closely at what may be occurring during the one, two, three or five minutes of public silence.

The most obvious point to make is that silence is not really silent. To participate in public silence is most definitely not to experience the complete absence of noise. It is rather to have the background level of ambient noise lowered to such a degree that noises that might otherwise have vanished stand out to the fore. Amongst the most typical of such experiences are the sudden booming of a voice from a passer-by who has stumbled unawares into the commemoration, the crying out of a small child, or the noise from a pre-set piece of machinery, such as the alarm of a road

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crossing. And, of course, that most modern of interruptions, the loud ringing of a mobile phone. The experience is not then akin to the shock experienced by the Armistice day participants in 1919, who could not have 'felt' such a silence before. This is no oasis of noiselessness found in the midst of the clamour of everyday life. Instead, the silence affords a kind of perceptual heightening which makes us intensely sensitive to the noises which are continuously punctuating and finally breaking the silence.

In this sense the metonymic connection of public silence to the spiritualist pause for silent reflection, and the metaphoric role of silence as re-enacting the aftermath of war or disaster (the 'calm after the storm') is lost. What public silence displays intensely is the immediate interactional order in which we are embedded, and something about the relative ability of those around us to comport themselves with the proper respect. We feel primarily not for the dead, but for the embarrassed parent whose child tugs at their sleeve and cries 'daddy' repeatedly. We sense not so much the unbearable sorrow of the bereaved and the living survivors, but the crass insensitivity of the person who allows their mobile phone to continue ringing or who even, shockingly, chooses to answer it. We experience not the torment and pain of memory, but the discomforting sense of our hearts beating, of the sound of our own breathing. For, as John Cage astutely reminds us, silence ultimately reveals to us the sounds made by the functioning of our bodies, from which we never escape. Silence brings us back to ourselves.

At the same time, the physical act of remaining still throughout the minutes of silence creates some physical demands, such as how to hold one's body, how and where to look. The averted gaze and clasped hands is therefore a solution of sorts to this problem. The hands clasped together provide for a kind of symmetry, a drawing of oneself into one's own physical presence that is, so to speak, affect-neutral. This is critical since, to draw upon a notion from Harvey Sacks

(1992), our participation in the silence comes with fairly rigid 'category entitlements'. The casual observer at commemorative silence held in the UK who openly weeps or expressly demonstrates great distress constitutes a problem for fellow observers, since only those endowed with very specific forms of 'membership' (i.e. as victim, as someone directly bereaved) are entitled to behave in this fashion. Participants then feel the obligation not to offer cues to others that may be interpreted as laying claim to entitlements they may not actually be able to lay legitimate claim to. In practice this means: do not cry tears, do not allow your solemnity to turn into public distress, do not appear overwhelmingly moved at the completion of the silence, on the moment of resuming usual activities.

The interactional demands of maintaining the silence also require that one must not be seen to be offering cues to others that require some form of response. The body has to stop emitting signs, or rather find a means of emitting only the most evacuated of signs ('you need not respond to my presence'). Nowhere is this more important than with respect to the face and gaze. To meet the gaze of another is of course to enter into interaction - to recognise and respond to possible invitations, requests or demands, to build upon or complete that which has been initiated by the other. The adoption of the bowed head then acts as a solution to the problem of the unintentional solicitation of interaction. This complexity leads, I would argue, not to the erasing of social boundaries, but instead to their intensification. For instance, when we perceive movement in our peripheral vision, we are faced with the dilemma of adjusting our gaze to judge whether this movement requires our attention (perhaps someone is about to faint, maybe a child has wandered from its parent), or of ignoring the movement and risking the failure to have responded appropriately. The agitation of managing interaction mediated by silence then leads us to orient all the more firmly to existing markers of taken for granted social order.

I have doubts, to some extent, whether the 'overmastering' of self which was claimed as the power of public silence, ever really was experienced as such. It might be better to render this instead as submission to the coding of silence by a dominant discourse. As I have argued earlier, whilst such a discourse clearly existed for Armistice day, there is no singular discourse in which modern silent commemoration is immediately captured. I would like to draw attention instead to the way that bodies themselves are ordered in silent commemoration. The prototypical form this takes is the standing to attention around a piece of memorial architecture (such as the Cenotaph in Whitehall). What does this standing to attention for two minutes achieve? We might say that it is a performance of militarism, but this is to ignore the contested role that militarism has traditionally played in such commemorations, and its complete absence in modern instances, like the tsunami silence. What it may perhaps do instead is, as Halbwachs (1980) puts it, to force the body to 'imitate the passivity of inert matter'. If memorial architecture stands for the indeterminate preservation of the past in the present, then making one's own body over as kind of 'temporary monument' may borrow something of this memorial power. For the minutes that the body stands still, it becomes as a monument for the preservation of the past into the future. In this respect, I am struck looking at images of the tsunami silence at how closely some of the arrangements of bodies appear to have 'statuesque' qualities. One image, for example, depicts a group of miners, standing in a semi-circle with their safety helmets clutched against their chests. The scene is highly reminiscent of the poses given to war memorials, where soldiers are typically posed to suggest a fraternal bond of sorrow (it is extremely rare for the actual business of killing to be depicted).

Connerton (1989) suggests that in enacting ritualistic gestures, remembering is performed more or less automatically or 'habitually'. For example, the salute made to

the Cenotaph by a soldier displays respect for the dead and the significance of their loss for the present in a single gesture. It is not necessary for words to accompany, nor explicate the act of making the past relevant for the present in this way. The standing still which forms such a central part of commemorative silence may then be seen to work in a similar fashion, to perform remembrance in an automatic fashion. To stand still, to make oneself into a 'temporary monument' is to have accomplished the act of making the past relevant without words. Again, this is not so much an 'overmastering of self' as allowing one's own bodily substrate to temporarily become a vehicle for the performance of the past in the present. But it seems to me that this also creates a further difficulty. Monumentalism is in many senses a 'failed' historical project, and contemporary architecture approaches such briefs with extreme caution (see Young, 1993; Huyssen, 2003). It is not enough to embed memory in a memorial form, because remembering is an activity rather than a substance (see Middleton & Brown, 2005 for the implications of this deceptively simple point). Memorials depend on interaction with those who find them relevant in some way in order to retain or transform their meaning. To makes one's body into a temporary memorial is to experience something of both the preservation and the disposal of the past. Because without words, without further action, the past becomes inert, complete, finished, ultimately bracketed off from the present.

Nowhere is this more powerfully evident than in the 'breaking' of the silence at the end of the few minutes. Bodies begin to move, orienting towards the resumption of normal activity. The 'temporary monuments' become bodies in motion, set off into their own individual trajectories. Nothing is left of the commemorative scene. Now in one sense this is a powerful metaphor in itself for the fragility of memory and the sheer effort which is required to preserve the past into the present. But in another sense, this is the very moment to which the minutes of silence have

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been leading. To stand in silence is to stand in anticipation of the cessation of silence. The very brevity of the ritual itself leads to a projection forward to its completion. Rather perversely, this effect becomes all the more intense with one minute silent rituals. It is common, for example, that one minute silences held at football grounds are punctuated by jeers and shouts from opposing supporters (particularly when the silence has been called for as a tribute to a figure associated with one of the two sides due to play). The comparative brevity of the one minute leads the future - the expectation of the match which is about to begin - to be projected back into the present. Here, as in many other instances of commemorative silence, the entire enactment becomes structured around the termination of the act, around the dispersal of the bodies collected together.

Gregory (1994) offers the example of Stanley Storey, who on Armistice day in 1937 famously 'broke the silence' by invading the ranks massed around the cenotaph with shouts against growing militarism and the spectre of the war to come. Storey's intervention may have been dramatic, but it demonstrates that collective silence is invariably cast around the potential for 'breaking', and as a consequence that differences are not so much dissolved as suppressed. The example of the Armistice day practices held in Ireland during the turbulent 1920s is also given by Gregory, where Irish nationalists were threatened against interrupting the silences by moral as well as literal force, but nevertheless often felt compelled to do so in protest at the role of English military forces. What this indicates, I think, is that rather than serve as a display of unity, the enactment of silence is also the enactment of difference. This is clearly the case with London and Madrid silences in the past two years, which are framed around a rejection of terrorism (albeit not necessarily 'for' the George Bush led 'war on terror'). But even in the case of the tsunami silence, difference is marked by the specificity of the call being made by the European Union in

memorial to events in South East Asia.

Difference haunts the three minutes. The difference between those who are present, who are bound up in the collective emotion of the silence, and those who are not, those to whom the minutes are dedicated, but whose presence is neither practically nor emotionally required in order for the enactment to function. Difference is also there in the form of the potential 'breaking' of the silence, whether accidentally, or intentionally. And does not each participant harbour within herself or himself some sensation, some temptation to experience what it would be to cry out, to break ranks, to shatter the silence? Rather than suppress such urges, the comparative brevity of the silence facilitates, even impels participants to do so. To have gotten through the minutes without having given in to this urge is as emotionally rewarding as the actual participation itself.

To summarise, the experience of participating in commemorative silence is certainly intense, but this intensity comes not from an 'overmastering of self' nor from the act of reflecting on the past, but rather from the affective experience of the here and now. It is the interactional and emotional dynamics of making oneself over into physical material for the enactment of remembrance that is most striking for participants. Silence leads not to a restitution of the past in the present, but to a massive underscoring of the significance of the present moment for the future. Whilst that is, in some sense, a memorial gesture, it is not one which silence, as a social technology, is traditionally supposed to produce.

Thinking with silence

A few liberties have doubtless been taken in this paper. I have forced a link between three wildly diverse debates in organizational studies - around memory, emotion and voice - and then sought to approach each debate simultaneously through describing the example of the 'three

minute silence'. I fully admit the peculiarity of choosing an example without obvious organizational structure, emotional labour or disempowered participants. And yet what I hope to have shown is that the contingencies of organizing hundreds of thousands of silent bodies in mass commemoration provides an exemplary object for organization studies since it renders especially acute the dilemma of distinguishing product from producer, outcome from process.

The approach I have taken here has been to 'think with' the participants in commemorative silence rather than impose a priori analytic distinctions. To think with means here to think from time, to see silence as the means by which past and present are provisional engaged, and moreover to see that this engagement has its own history. But it means, above all else, to situate analysis in the time of the three minutes itself. To think from within the three minutes is to become aware of the collective affect that the commemoration produces, and the contradictory impulses that it affords (to make oneself a temporary monument, to become hypervigilant over one's own body, to be drawn towards breaking the silence).

Ultimately, to think of silence in this way, is as Henri Bergson suggested long before the first Armistice day, to try to think in time rather than against the backdrop of time. Such 'thinking in duration', or openness to the past as such rather than simply projecting the concerns of the present directly onto the past, seems to me to be a critical aspect of what remembering is, how it operates in our lives. It is also a means of giving up too easy analytic demarcations.

Bergson (1998) once offered the apparently trivial example of waiting for a sugar to dissolve in water as a way of thinking time. The example is trivial so long as one situates oneself outside the scene. But to think with she or he who waits for the dissolving solution is to begin to experience something of what it is for one's time to be hooked into that of another, and thereby to be

exposed to time in its unfolding, where distinctions between producer and product, process and outcome, change and things that change no longer hold sway. We wait, we feel the intensity of the event, the qualitative differences that pass through us without being able to properly fix their limits or extent. Bergson (1992) sometimes referred to the 'method' he indicated with this peculiar example as 'intuition', or better still as simply 'thinking in duration'. Whilst I am scarcely the first to call for such process thinking in organization studies (see Chia, 2002; Chia & Tsoukas, 2002), I hope to have illustrated that such thinking-with participants allows for a way beyond the apparent trap of endlessly shuffling and trading ontological sureties.

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