Stories of the Subaltern

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Introduction

In line with many other disciplines, organisation theory has taken the 'narrative turn' in recent years – an almost inevitable move after the sustained assault on positivistic research, with researchers increasingly using story-telling and folklore to understand organisational politics, culture, and change (see e.g. Gabriel 2000, Boje 1995, Czarniwska 1995; 1997).   Concurrently, folklorists have become interested in work and organisational lore and have begun to engage with the literature on organisation theory (see e.g. McCarl, 1978; 1985; Santino, 1990; Tangherlini, 1998, 2000).   These two movements suggest that organisation theory and folklore might fruitfully engage with one another more intensively and extensively, especially since a number of research themes are shared by and overlap both disciplines. This seminar and paper focuses on one of these themes, namely the subaltern.

Folklore is well known for its long association with the subaltern. Traditionally, '...folklore belonged to the 'others'', although in recent years, there has been an attempt to transcend this association (Ó Giolláin 2000).   Subaltern theory has generated an substantial historical literature on the often silenced experience of oppressed and colonised people. It explores not only the themes of domination and resistance, but also the process through which history is written and subaltern experiences are appropriated and marginalised or conversely romanticised. Some of these ideas have recently found their way into gender, race and literary studies

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(Gabriel 2002). Organisation theory too has a tradition of research on the subaltern that runs counter to much of the management literature wherein the view from above is prioritised. For example, research in labour process theory (see e.g. Braverman 1974), feminist writings in management, critical management studies (where Gramsci's writings on folklore has had some influence), and the nascent discussion on postcolonialism (see e.g. Mir et al, 1999). This interest in the subaltern in organisation theory, has not however, been articulated through storytelling, an opportunity that this seminar provides.

In their speculative paper on organisation theory's future, Calás and Smircich (1999) identified 'four contemporary theoretical tendencies – feminist poststructuralist theorising, postcolonial analyses, actor-network theory, and narrative approaches to knowledge – as heirs (apparent) of the postmodern turn for organisational theorising past postmodernism'. For us, 'subaltern storytelling' roughly maps on to two of these theoretical tendencies: narrative approaches to knowledge and postcolonial analysis. Of course this is at best a crude isomorphism, given the breadth and complexity of each of these domains and the contested nature of terms like 'postcolonial' and 'subaltern'. To begin, therefore, it is probably useful to scrutinise and elaborate some of the central constructs, context and ideas wrapped up within the term 'subaltern storytelling'. The meaning of the term 'subaltern' is especially ambiguous – there are even two pronunciations – which makes it at once intellectually attractive but also confusing. We begin, therefore, by distinguishing and discussing some of these meanings before proceeding to examine subalternity in the context of storytelling and folklore. This meta-theoretical approach might seem anomalous in a seminar about story-telling, although we believe it to be both appropriate and necessary.

The Subaltern

The dictionary tells us that the word 'subaltern' is derived from the Latin word *subalternus* (*sub*, under, *alter*, another) and means 'ranked successively: subordinate ... : under the rank of captain'. The military understanding of the term informs one of the papers in this seminar, although more generally it refers to groups or individuals who are marginalised, oppressed, or subordinated in some way. We begin our discussion by reprising Gramsci's understanding of the concept of the subaltern as it

provides an important basis for the 'subaltern studies' literature and, more widely, for contemporary debates about subalternity, popular culture and folklore.

To discuss Gramsci's concept of the subaltern, we must first explain his more well-known concept of hegemony.   By hegemony, Gramsci does not mean dominance as such, but rather the leadership which a particular group, a social class or a part of it, exercises in society through the winning of influence over other groups. For Gramsci the basic problem of hegemony was not how a new group came to power, but how they came to be accepted, not just as rulers, but as guides that most people looked up to, exercising a moral leadership.   Before gaining state power, before which hegemony cannot be completely achieved, the group must be able to give intellectual and moral leadership, and hegemony rests primarily on that. A hegemonic group, in other words, is hegemonic because it has gained the consent of other groups to its leadership of society. It may use coercion as a last resort in order to maintain its dominant position, though the more coercion there is the less the hegemony. The term subaltern is used to refer to the groups who are not hegemonic, and means lacking in autonomy, being subject to the hegemony of another group. The nature of hegemony presupposes that the ruling group in society has taken account of the interests of the other groups. It has been argued that the strongest element in hegemony is the ruling group's ability to go beyond its own narrow and selfish interests. Its strategy is to ensure that its own interests can become the interests of other groups as well so that the whole of society, the whole nation, seems to share a common purpose. In other words it 'universalises' its own interests.

Hegemony is an accomplishment whereby the hegemonic class, through a network of alliances with other groups[1], achieves national leadership and furthers its own class interests through constructing a 'national' perspective. This is what Gramsci means by the concept of 'national-popular'. He does not mean that the first term (national) is imposed on the second term (popular) in a series of oppositions: language and dialects; philosophy and common sense (or folklore); high culture and popular culture; intellectuals and people; party and masses. Rather, it means constructing an

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[1] Laclau and Mouffe (1985) have reworked this 'network' idea in the Gramscian notion of hegemony to articulate an effective strategy for subaltern groups to effect what they refer to as 'radical democratic politics'.

educative alliance between them, since hegemony involves an educational relationship (Forgacs 1993). What distinguishes the bourgeoisie from previous ruling classes is that it is not closed, unlike the aristocracy, to which entry was possible only by birth. Instead it represents itself as being in continuous expansion and capable of absorbing the entire society (with obvious implications for popular culture). Hegemony then has cultural, political and economic aspects and is not to be understood simply as a particular dominant social class using the state for its own interests; indeed it can be said that 'all domination is strengthened insofar as it ceases to be so by converting itself into hegemony' (García-Canclini 1993: 68). In other words, the dominant groups in society maintain their dominance by securing the 'spontaneous consent' of the subordinate groups, through the 'negotiated construction of a political and ideological consensus which incorporates both dominant and dominated groups" (Strinati 1995: 165).

Gramsci sees two realms within the state: *political society*, which is the state apparatus of administration, law, services, and so forth; and *civil society*, which consists of all those organisations that are usually called private, from political parties, trade unions and the media to religious and cultural organisations. Civil society is crucial for the concept of hegemony. It is the voluntary sector of society, the realm of *consent*, whereas political society is that of *coercion* and intervention, most visible through the role of the police and armed forces. The state needs the consent of the governed in order to function properly, but it educates that consent. It is not neutral. It has a worldview of its own and it sees itself as an educator.[2] In this sense the school has a positive educational function and the courts a repressive and negative educational function.

Gramsci's thesis is counter-intuitive and yet compelling: increasing coercion means less dominance, and conversely the absence of coercion implies 'hegemonic' dominance. The role of the subaltern within this hegemonic structure is equally contradictory. In one respect, the subaltern individual (peasant, worker, indigenous person) is subordinated when s/he accepts the immediate reality of the power relations that dominate and exploit him/her; in another respect s/he denies those

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[2] In their well-known book, *Manufacturing Consent*, Hermand and Chomsky (1988) advocate a very similar argument although they focus mainly on the role of the mass media in creating this 'consent'.

conditions of subordination and asserts his/her autonomy (Chatterjee 1993: 167). Spivak ([1985] 1988) made an important contribution to Gramsci's – and others' ideas – when she asked whether the subaltern subject can speak if there is no space from which she can express herself that is not already determined by a discourse designed to silence her. Drawing on post-structuralist theory, Spivak argued that the subaltern *cannot* speak, in so far as, in the particular case of subaltern individuals or groups, there is no possibility of an authentic exchange between a speaker and a listener (which is a basic requirement of speaking). In a later contribution she clarifies that "within the definition of subalternity as such there is a certain not-being-able-to-make-speech acts that is implicit" (Spivak et al. 1996: 290). Spivak also railed against the inappropriate use of the term subaltern and its appropriation by marginalised but not 'subaltern' groups. 'Subaltern,' she argues, is not 'just a classy word for oppressed, for Other, for somebody who's not getting a piece of the pie' . . . Many people want to claim subalternity. They are the least interesting and the most dangerous. I mean, just by being a discriminated-against minority on the university campus, they don't need the word 'subaltern' . . . They should see what the mechanics of the discrimination are. They're within the hegemonic discourse wanting a piece of the pie and not being allowed, so let them speak, use the hegemonic discourse. They should not call themselves subaltern' (de Kock 1992).

Neither does the subaltern need an advocate or representative to speak for her or special regulation to protect her. Along with Ranajit Guha and others in the 'subaltern studies' group she is distrustful of attempts to critique colonialism since such 'liberal' forms of secondary discourse inevitably inscribe a form of 'counter-insurgency' in their prose (Guha 1983). The problem for and with the post-colonial intellectual is that, notwithstanding her honourable desire to depict the reality of subaltern peoples, she retains an inappropriate nostalgia for the universal position occupied by the intellectual in the narrative of representation. This, for Spivak, is the kernel of the *problem* – the inevitability of employing Western modes of knowledge – and hence it cannot form any part of a 'solution' for subalternity. Thus, so-called 'radical' historians are faced with the difficult task of trying to retrieve a sense of colonised peoples as subjects of their own history, while at the same recognising that the understanding of those subjects and their histories depends upon colonial texts. Or, as Spivak ([1985] 1988: 286) put it, 'Whether or not they themselves perceive it

[i.e. the subaltern historians] ... their text articulates the difficult task of rewriting its own conditions of impossibility as the conditions of its impossibility'. Spivak has developed her argument into a substantive and influential critique of representation and the Western project of 'theorising'. One practical implication from her argument is that one should work against subalternity rather than seek to represent it.

Spivak's critique leaves us with a potential conundrum. If the subaltern cannot speak then surely a seminar, organised by university academics, on 'subaltern storytelling' is ill conceived. The counter-argument is that Spivak's intellectual pyrotechnics cannot hide the fundamental flaw in her argument: the ontological essentialism – Spivak admits to 'strategic essentialism' – that she accords to subaltern individuals, subaltern groups, dominant group, hegemonic discourse, etc. The difficulty is that ontological essentialism creates a static theoretical architecture that axiomatically houses counter-factual conclusions and anomalies, which, in turn, can be 'exposed' through deconstructive projects such as Spivak's. The notion that the subaltern cannot speak is one such conclusion, which is in a sense true if one does not allow for the possibility of escape from the ontological categories prescribed and inscribed by Spivak. The irony is that Spivak, who is heavily indebted to Jacque Derrida, reaches conclusions that are at odds with Derrida's notion of *différence*: i.e. the possibility/ inevitability of ontological escape, of different or deferred meanings. A case in point is Spivak's attempt to fix and police the meaning of the term 'subaltern' – to counter *différence*, as it were – when she tried to ensure that marginal groups in a university campus would not transgress her meaning of the word: 'They should not call themselves subaltern'. Similarly, the papers presented at this seminar demonstrate the impossibility of corralling the meaning of the word 'subaltern'. Notwithstanding this point, Spivak provides a set of important ideas relevant to any discussion on subalternity.

Folklore and Subalternity

We now consider the relationship between folklore and the subaltern which is an important theme of this seminar. Some folklorists, such as the Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp (Propp 1984), have argued that folklore is fundamentally the genre of the oppressed classes. Peasants and the proletariat produce folklore as an expression of their defiance and opposition to the dominant classes who, in contrast, express

themselves through art and literature. 'Folklore then is in a true sense a form of counter-culture and cannot by its very nature become institutionalized or domesticated into a hegemonic culture' (Gabriel 2000: 111). In accord with this perspective, Gramsci locates folklore in socio-cultural terms, 'in the framework of a nation and its culture', but opposed to official conceptions of the world. As a conception of the world and life, Gramsci's view its that folklore is characteristic of certain strata of society, namely the 'people', who may be understood as 'all the subaltern and instrumental classes in every society that has existed up to now', and hence a heterogeneous group. Folklore must be understood as a reflection of the conditions of their cultural life. Cirese (1982) outlines Gramsci's fundamental proposition in the following terms:

> Folkloric conception is to official
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> as subaltern social class is to hegemonic
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> as simple intellectual category is to cultured
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> as unorganic combination is to organic
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> as fragmentary internal organization is to unitary
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> as implicit mode of expression is to explicit
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> as debased content is to original
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> as mechanical opposition is to intentional
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> as passive conflict is to active.

This list of negative qualities, he argues, comes 'by deduction from the very concept of "people"' since, as Gramsci writes, 'the people... cannot *possess* elaborated and systematic conceptions which... are politically organized and centralized'. Cirese adds that '[e]laboration, systematicness and centralization are in fact expressions of hegemony (even if not only of hegemony), which is precisely what those classes which are still subaltern lack'.

Thus, folklore provides a form of 'popular morality' which Gramsci sees as

> that mass of beliefs and opinions on the subject of one's "own" rights which are in continual circulation amongst the popular masses, and are for ever being reviewed under the pressure of the real conditions of life and the spontaneous comparison between the ways in which the various classes live.

Some, 'the fossilized reflections of the conditions of days gone by', are conservative and reactionary, but others consist of

often creative and progressive innovations, spontaneously determined by the forms and conditions of life as it is developing, which go against, or merely differ from, the morality of the ruling strata of society.

This points to the oppositional value of folklore, and, as Cirese says, 'the way is opened to a recognition of its ability both to produce its own autonomous culture and to select products handed down from above for its own, opposing, ends'. Hence folklore can provide a spontaneous form of 'the spirit of cleavage', which Gramsci elsewhere defines as the progressive acquisition of a class instinct. Gramsci tends to establish 'a constant relationship between cultural phenomena and the social groups by which they are conveyed'. His notion of spontaneous conceptions of the world is backed up again and again by reference to concrete social situations.

The relationship between folklore and the subaltern is complex in Gramsci's writings. The notion of subaltern denies the autonomy of the 'folk', thus standing firmly against the Romantic notion, and sees it as the product of a historical process, firmly within the framework of the state and in an unavoidable relationship with a hegemonic culture. And folklore cannot be understood outside of this context. The notion of the subaltern, too, is larger than the folk, because the Romantic notion referred to the peasantry only. Folklore, then, in Gramsci's formulation, is part of the culture of subaltern groups. They may be very different from one another, and their culture is very heterogeneous in origin, consisting of elements generated from within the group as well as elements borrowed from hegemonic groups, but what all these groups have in common is that they do not exercise hegemony. Thus the 'popular' does not reside in any inherent quality: it is a question of position.

Lombardi Satrini (1997), who was very much influenced by Gramsci, sees folklore as part of a mental heritage that is stable, collective, and specific to the underprivileged and 'hence culturally subaltern' classes of a society (1997: 91). In folklore, he identifies four levels of challenge to the dominant culture. The first is immediate challenge with implicit or explicit rebellion against the status quo: here he gives the example of folk songs that make a clear opposition, pre-political though it may be, between rich and poor, lords and commons, strong and weak. The second is immediate challenge, with implicit or explicit acceptance of the status quo: here he finds a text, for example, where the division between rich and poor is pointed out, but it leads back to God and the inevitability of poverty. The third is implicit challenge

('or by position'): here are phenomena – such as beliefs, practices and artefacts – which, by their otherness and their very presence, are an implicit opposition to the dominant order. In the last level, acceptance of the hegemonic culture, he finds three categories. The first are hegemonic cultural phenomena shared with popular culture – examples being the oppression of women or the notion that authority is necessary. The second are products of the hegemonic culture successively passed on to popular culture – such as some of the peasant material culture of the South of Italy which derives from that of the bourgeoisie of the end of the nineteenth century. The third are products of the hegemonic culture elaborated for and imposed on popular culture. He finds here a huge field since it includes much of the products of industrial society, such as popular prints, clothing and furniture. He also identifies various themes in folklore which fulfil 'anaesthetizing functions' (*funzione narcotizzante*): the necessity of contenting oneself with one's lot; the need to have patience; fatalism; the necessity of authority; ignorance being better than knowledge; the merits of being attached to one's own district. He gives various examples from Italian folklore (Lombardi Satriani 1997: 132-201).

García Canclini finds Lombardi Satriani's analysis too extreme, arguing that '"anaesthetizing" or "challenging" qualities are too easily attributed to cultural phenomena that are neither one nor the other, but a combination of experiences and representations whose ambiguities correspond to the unresolved nature of contradictions among popular sectors'. He contends that Lombardi Satriani treats domination and challenge 'as if we are dealing with two phenomena foreign to each other, whose existence came before both cultures became part of a single social system' (García-Canclini 1993b: 26). His point, argued elsewhere, is that the key issue is not whether folklore survives, disappears or is dominated by the hegemonic culture, but how it interacts with it.

He points to the popular need 'to hold history, to repeat security even though this creates a process of exploitation and domination'. Hence 'the overcoming of the most critical situations (serious illnesses, death, catastrophes, etc.) is obtained through the dehistoricization of their processes', through the use of magical techniques. He refers to De Martino's observation that the continuity of subaltern traditions can perpetuate domination (Martino 1981; García-Canclini 1993a: 80-1).

The Subaltern at Work

We have discussed subalternity as a concept as well as the relationship between folklore and the subaltern. Now we need to look more specifically at the subaltern in an organisational context, and at the stories within and around the subaltern's world. It is not necessarily clear who the subaltern is in this context, especially in contemporary organisations. It is useful, therefore, to start with the portrayal of the subaltern in the nineteenth century, since work was a recurring theme in this century and since the distinctions of that period – such as nation and class – are more in harmony with Gramsci's theoretical frame.

In this section we will draw especially on Bradshaw and Ozment's (2000) The *Voice of Toil*, which is a collection of nineteenth century writings about work including poems, stories, essays, and a play that reflect ways in which the subject of work was addressed, especially work as oppression. As Bradshaw and Ozment (2000: xvii) highlight, concern with work was pervasive in nineteenth century England and the social activism of prominent upper-class individuals found its most characteristic expression in enterprises associated with work. Protecting workers from abuse, ensuring improved working conditions for oppressed groups, adequate living conditions for workers, ensuring training and educational opportunities for the underprivileged or marginalised, were very much the causes to which idealists of the period, such as William Morris, committed themselves (reminiscent of some contemporary writers like David Boje).

As already discussed, one should be cautious about ascribing fixity to subaltern status and this was certainly the case in the 19th century when individuals could escape deprivation through hard work, as exemplified in the 'rags-to-riches' of the American dream. In particular, Marx's ontological connection between work and human identity meant that work came to be seen as a major if not a primary mode of achievement and status. As Smiles wrote in *Thrift*, "without work, life is worthless; it becomes a mere state of moral coma." However, this view of work as opportunity or motivation was counterbalanced by the anger and dismay at the conditions of those whom Robert Owen, in 1817, first called the "working class." The following texts, discussed in Bradshaw and Ozmet, can easily be classified as stories of the subaltern from this period.

In 1843, a seamstress named Biddell was arrested for pawning some of her employer's possessions. Court testimony revealed that Biddell was attempting to support herself and her two young children by sewing trousers for seven shillings a week, which moved Thomas Hood to write his enormously popular poem "The song of the shirt".

The Song of the Shirt

…With fingers weary and worn,
  With eyelids heavy and red,
A Woman sat in unwomanly rags,
  Plying her needles and thread-
  Stitch! Stitch! Stitch!
  In poverty, hunger and dirt,
And still with a voice of dolorous pitch,
Would that its tone could reach the Rich!
  She sang this "Song of the shirt!"

The *Song of the Shirt* as well as an array of other works, dealing with harsh treatment of women in the clothing trade, abounded and drew attention to the contrast between the life of the seamstress and that of the socialites for whom they worked. Henry Mayhew (journalist and social historian) published 76 interviews with low income workers, describing his work as 'the first attempt to publish the history of people, from the lips of the people themselves - giving a literal description of their labour, their earnings, their trials, and their sufferings, in their own unvarnished language.' (Mayhew quoted in Bradshaw and Ozment, 2000 p. 558). Mayhew offers rat catchers, street sweepers, street performers and prostitutes the opportunity to tell their stories. The following extract is from *A Watercress Girl* which is the story of an eight year old girl who has left childhood behind and become hardened as she struggles to earn a living selling watercress on the streets:

"I go about the streets with water-cresses, crying, "Four bunches a penny, water-creases.' I am just eight years old-that's all, and I've a big sister and a brother and a sister younger than I am. On and off, I've been very near a twelve month in the streets … I am a capital hand at bargaining-but only at buying water-creases. They can't take me in. If the woman tries to give me a small handful of cresses, I says, "I ain't goin' to have that for a ha'porth and I go to the next basket, and so on… (quoted in Bradshaw and Ozment, 2000, p. 559 #3663})

The above illustrates that the subaltern in work were reasonably identifiable in nineteenth century society and their stories articulated albeit through the voices of literary figures (some themselves of working class, other well-to-do) of the time. But what of the subaltern in a contemporary organisational setting?

Certainly there are recent writings in organization and management which parallel with the previous stories. For example, the stories of sweatshop workers and underage workers in the writings of Boje or perhaps Brewis and Linstead's (2000) depiction of sexual harassment in the workplace and the experiences of sex workers. These examples might sit well within a Gramscian understanding of the subaltern. Overall however, it proves quite difficult to establish who (if anyone) can be classified as subaltern in organisations today. For instance, one can question whether the workers in Case and Chassey's (2001) study of the violence of identity effacement in electronic workplaces can be subaltern, or the badly paid journalists and free-lancers in O'Leary's (forthcoming) study of the newspaper industry, who believe that the job of the journalist has been debased:

> Yeah. It's just - we are sent out to do extremely shitty jobs. Like - dress up as Oscar Wilde, get onto public transport, recite poetry . Don't laugh - I had to do that! Am, there is a guy in there who has to go around doing Sambo Boy - he has to dress up as James Bond and eat a sandwich. That's just for a picture - the idea is that the public don't know that it is someone from the Echo. There's a girl in the office, who a couple of weeks ago, had to dress up as a Frenchman - you know, tash, garlic the whole works. And it's just non-sensical really - we are news reporters, that is not news, that is features.

These stories, along with many of the papers in this seminar offer a challenge to Spivak's 'tight' definition of subaltern. In Czarniawska's paper, humiliation, an unavoidable if regrettable effect of power, includes the humiliation story of a woman top professional. In David Sims paper, the subaltern (middle manager) is frequently asked to make narrative sense of situations, with this sense being publicly rubbished by his/her seniors. Suffering therefore is a key theme in this seminar with storytelling sometimes offering a catharsis as in O'Crualaoich's paper and Green and Green's paper. Finally, even if we can establish who is the subaltern, there remains the question of how their stories are told (if they can be told), who is to tell the story and how truthful or accurate the story can be.

Prospecting Ends

Our discussion on subalternity and storytelling has, up to now, been largely informed by Gramsci and his interpreters and a rather traditional understanding of folklore. The question for us now is to what degree these ideas are relevant in the context of organisations and society in the early twenty-first century. We can certainly point to clear differences about contemporary life that problematise the concepts. Today, for instance, there really isn't a peasantry, at least in the West, akin to the peasantry of the eighteenth or even nineteenth century. The majority of people live in cities, and the largest employment sector is neither agriculture nor industry. Most important, perhaps, the distinctions that were maybe clear in Gramsci's time, such as between the hegemonic and the subaltern, or between high and low (popular) culture, are much more ambiguous today, and the cultural elements that go with the hegemonic class are consequently much harder to find. Today, the popular products of the culture industries – soap operas, football clubs, popular music, and so forth – are consumed by the majority of all social classes. And, in contrast to the nineteenth and much of the twentieth century, consumption provides a primary ontological base for human identity (in contrast to Marx's theory which privileged production). This 'hybridisation' – of classes, ethnic groups, nations, cultures, organisations and technologies – now requires quite different conceptual instruments. On the other hand, social and organisational theorists find it quite difficult to think outside of the canonical terms of 19th century social science. Or, as García-Canclini (1995: 178) put it, "It seems that we anthropologists have more difficulties in entering into modernity than do the social groups we study".

Our discussion on folklore and storytelling is also complicated by a number of issues. First, there is the argument that what may appear to be sites of opposition against authority and the oppressors are perhaps better understood as a *licensed* method for disciplining and controlling the oppressed groups' need to protest. As Balandier put it, the 'supreme ruse of power is to allow itself to be contested *ritually* in order to consolidate itself more effectively' (cited in Stallybrass and White 1986: 14). A second point is that folklore is maybe better understood as a form of *escape* rather than resistance. This would suggest that we should shift our perspective from one informed by Marx to one informed by Freud (for an example see Bettelheim 1975). Third, the attacks on storytelling should not be disregarded. On the one hand,

storytelling is assailed by positivists as an anachronistic form of non-science and at the same time is decried by post-structuralists for its predilection for closure. In turn, the postmodernists decry 'grand' narratives while others devalue the meaning of narrative by seeing narrative everywhere. Yet, Kearney (2002: 4) is compelling when he asserts that 'in our postmodern era of fragmentation and fracture.... narrative provides us with one of our most viable forms of *identity* – both individual and communal'.

These issues around subalternity and folklore studies act as a backdrop to some final thoughts on how the ongoing story that is organisation theory might unfold. In thinking prospectively, we can reflect on the various rationales that led us all to be here, and how the tales in, of and around the subaltern storytelling seminar might punctuate our own narratives and our collective disciplinary story. Briefly, we can identify some themes that run through the various papers presented at the seminar.

First, there is the issue of representation and, maybe more importantly, misrepresentation. Of course representation is a long-standing theme in organisational analysis (Jeffcutt 1993) and, more broadly, in the social sciences (Rabinow 1986) but what articulates a number of papers in this seminar – e.g. the papers by Sims, Gabriel, Nilsson – is their concern with misrepresentation, dissimulation, lying, omission, distortion, and editing especially in the context of storytelling. Without doubt, all stories involve some element of misrepresentation in their telling: as we say in Irish *Bíonn dhá insint ar gach scéal, agus dhá ghabháil déag ar amhrán* (there are two ways of telling every story, and twelve ways of singing a song). But this leaves us with a paradox. On the one hand, even if there are two or more ways of telling every story, this necessarily implies the inherent *sameness* of the story. Indeed, the power of the story is this ability to maintain its character; as Bourke has put in, 'narrative has the power to convey ideas, and to offer them in resilient, subtle forms that can resist the sometimes brutal logic of the loudest voice' (Bourke 1999: 208). On the other hand, one of the attractions of storytelling is that it enables and encourages all forms of (mis)representation. As various papers in this seminar demonstrate, a story may be radically recast and even 'turned on its' head by a skilful storyteller to suit her own ends. This, however, does not indicate that researchers must always be searching for and seeking to represent the 'real' version of the story, the 'truth' as it were. Because sometimes misrepresentation does not so much hide an old truth, but create a new

truth. Or, as Kearney recently put it 'poetic lies, which ostensibly distort truth, can contrive at times to tell another kind of truth, sometimes a truer truth' (Kearney 2002: 23).

A second theme relates to the tendency, within the story-telling perspective, to use the standards of nineteenth-century realism to determine what constitutes a (good) story – stories must have a beginning, middle, end, plot, characters, motives, coherence, etc. We have, in effect, a novel-centred view of storytelling and there seems little room for Flann O'Brien's view that 'One beginning and one ending for a book was a thing I did not agree with. A good book may have three openings entirely dissimilar and inter-related only in the prescience of the author, or for that matter one hundred times as many endings' (O'Brien [1939] 1967: 9). The storytelling turn in organizational analysis does not yet seem to have embraced the 'postmodern' critique of storytelling conventions – and maybe for good reason – with the possible exception of David Boje. Thus fragmented, unfinished and truncated stories are, within the storytelling conventions, considered unsatisfactory stories. Yet some feminist critics have argued that this demand to present a 'total account' – exemplified, for instance, in the 'talking cure' method in psychoanalysis – is symptomatic of a phallocentric demand to 'tell everything' (Bernheimer and Kahane 1985). 'According to this view, it is precisely the cryptic, elusive and obscure elements in [the psychoanalysand's] own version of events which constitute a necessary female refuge from the male imperative to know and appropriate everything alien to it' (Kearney 2002: 35-6).

A third theme running through a number of the papers was a willingness to adopt (or maybe admit to adopting) viewpoints that might best be described as fundamentalist[3], metaphysical or spiritual which have traditionally been excluded from social scientific discourse. Case, for example, introduces and advocates Buddhist thought and epistemology to 're-enchant the disenchanted texts of organizational science'. Green and Green draw on a vocabulary – e.g. the 'Orders of Love' – and dogma that is quite alien to organisation theory but yet one that many will empathise with. And Gabriel runs somewhat against the fashion for constructivism by accepting that some facts are just that – facts – and neither merit nor require an epistemological treatise about their constructed nature.

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[3] In the sense of accepting a literal adherence to basic principles.

Fourth, this seminar has been the product of an interesting engagement between two disciplines: organisation theory and folklore. As such, it is maybe an example of the type of *reconstruction* that almost inevitably follows the fragmentation and *deconstruction* of postmodernism. From the viewpoint of organisation theory at least, the discipline of folklore provides some interesting cues for future work. There is, for instance, the folklorists' ever-present interest in history (tradition) and geography (location), which organisation theories – probably burdened by their sociological heritage – have not embraced to the same extent. Contemporary folklorists have also demonstrated an enviable ability to transcend traditions and conventions, in terms of doing and presenting research. We will end by commending just one book, *The Burning of Bridget Cleary* by Angela Bourke (1999), as a good example of the type of research that is wholly engaging as a storytelling, forensic in its detail, impressive in its scholarship, imaginative in the connections it draws between oral traditions, reportage, popular culture and high literature, and insightful in the way it presents a story about the events that occurred in a small community in 1895 as a parable for the relationship between Ireland and Britain. The vitality in the writing is matched only by the historian's keen sense of being scrupulous about veracity. It tells a story and is about stories and storytelling, and much more besides. It is a story about the subaltern in the best tradition of *Subaltern Studies* historiography, told with sympathy, scholarship, style and substance. It is, perhaps, a hybrid text, and in the hybrid world we live in maybe this is what we should all aspire to produce and consume.

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