Reading *Star Tre*k: Imagining, Theorising, and Reflecting on Organisational Discourse and Practice.

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Abstract

This paper considers the parallels and intersections between *Star Trek* and contemporary management discourse. We show that the central issues of complex organisations and management are represented in fictional scenarios in *Star Trek* and that these find their 'real world' correspondences in the management literature. Tracing this theme over the thirty-year lifespan of the product, we outline both the central axial problems of organisations as well as contextual transformations, and, by focusing on particular episodes, we identify and analyse germane micro-sociological and micro-organisational processes. Thus, we consider *Star Trek* an 'expressive good' - that is, a material product of the culture industry that gives expression to the prevailing cultural processes through which its production and circulation takes place. Moreover, *Star Trek*, as an exemplary science fiction utopia/dystopia, facilitates a critical imaginary enabling us to envision a variety of organisational alternatives through which we can assess and reflect on our own management practices and organisational contexts.

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Introduction

The argument we will develop here is that the popular culture phenomenon *Star Trek*, (including the original television series, *The Next Generation*, *Deep Space Nine*, and *Voyager*, and associated merchandise and paraphernalia) can be treated as a research resource; data, if you like, that if read and interpreted, can provide organisational scientists with important insights into contemporary problems and phenomena. We approach '*Star Trek*' (the inclusive term for the television series and its many spin-offs) as an 'expressive good,' the product of a corporation in the entertainment industry, with a mass-market global consumer base. Conceived of in this way, it is as legitimate to take the scrutiny of *Star Trek* as seriously as any other management or marketing phenomenon. *Star Trek* is a particularly rich expressive good having held a central position in the popular culture market - a market notoriously prone to fads, fashions and short-term crazes - for the last three decades (a recent Harris Poll indicated that 53% of the US public define themselves as *Star Trek* 'fans,' while over 2 billion dollars has been spent on merchandise from the series).

When we say that products are 'expressive goods' we mean that in their production, in their circulation in the marketplace, and in the cycle of their consumption, they give expression to the prevailing social forces of the wider society of which that cycle is a part. That is, products are expressive of what consumers deem to be needful and desirable at that particular historical conjuncture, and of what governments and regulatory bodies establish as collective norms and principles. In sum, products, commodities, 'expressive goods' are *fetishes*. They are material objects that are much

greater than their simple materiality. They are, in a sense, invested with, possessed of, and animated by the spirits that move society as a whole. They are expressive of the *Zeitgeist,* the spirit of the times. As points of condensation for wider historical and social forces, they are things into which and onto which we project our highest values, our deepest needs, our most passionate desires, our darkest fears, and our most urgent anxieties. Indeed, the secret of the marketplace is that the product must be pitched, that the right spin must be put on the thing so that it catches the eye and stirs our desire to have it, to consume it, to be part of the world that it stands for. A BMW is more than a car. It is 'the ultimate driving machine,' and it expresses prestige, power, and a reality in which the owner of this product has already 'arrived' without ever driving at all.

In this paper, we focus especially on the management and organisational issues of *Star Trek* in terms of how each of the four series represents an 'ideal type' of the dominant organisational ethos of its time.[1] For us, *Star Trek* provides a potent set of visual images, narratives, and metaphors through which we can make sense of both theory and practice, and it also provides an ideal opportunity to work and play with the practices of theorising and the fluid boundaries between organisation theory, management studies and culture studies.   As much as anything else, *Star Trek* is a story about a changing organisation *at work*, dealing, albeit in caricature, with the types of issues that engage 'ordinary' people in their everyday lives. And like other popular cartoons – for example, *Dilbert* – its great attraction is its ability to represent, make visible, and make available to a mass audience, for common conversation, organisational issues that are a prevalent, if not universal, part of viewers' experiences. Indeed, if we accept Hirschman and Sander's (1997) assertion that 'one

potent approach for comprehending a society's values and beliefs is to examine the stories it tells' then it is surprising that *Star Trek* and similar stories haven't been studied to exhaustion by management and marketing scholars.[2]

A singular and valuable feature of *Star Trek* is that it has changed deliberately and radically over the last thirty years, reflecting broader changes in American (and wider) society over that time. As such, it provides a unique and rich longitudinal database of representations of (and inspirations for) management and organisational practices over an extended period. Thus, the paper is structured chronologically, as we examine the evolution of Star Trek and its various incarnations over time, from *The Original Series*, produced in the 1960s, to *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, to *Deep Space 9*, to the latest series, *Voyager* (hereinafter we will refer to these as *TOS, TNG, DS9 and Voyager*, respectively). We will discuss not only the changes between the series but also how these changes reflect and constitute changes in organisational theory and practice.

Our reading of *Star Trek* is obviously only one of many possible interpretations and we make no claim that it is the definitive or correct one. What is interesting for us, and hopefully for you, is that imaginative fictions like *Star Trek* can become resources that allow us to think ourselves away from the contexts of action and the mundane realities in which we are constrained to think and practice 'real' management. And this deliberate self-estrangement from the world (which, it must be stressed and made explicit to critics who, adopting the mantle of 'Science,' would charge that science fiction is 'bad data' and 'soft-science') is nothing but the original source of scientific objectivity specified by Bacon, and, as such, may provide us with the opportunity to creatively explore imaginative ways to deal with 'real' problems. In this way, science

fictional utopias are a 'species of political epistemology' and a 'metaphor for potential histories' (Pfaelzer 1988: 289). In other words, such utopias can facilitate a critical imaginary and enable us to envision a variety of organisational alternatives with which we can assess our own management practices.

Star Trek – 1960s style.

> A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not even worth glancing at,
> for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And
> when humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail.
> Oscar Wilde *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* (1895).

The original series (*TOS*), produced in the 1960s corresponds historically with the ideological climate surrounding the Cold War and the space race. At the time we were excited by space. We were on the threshold of what we thought was a new frontier – 'the final frontier' as Kirk narrates it, '..to boldly go where no man had gone before'. America would put a man on the Moon, and after that, the sky's the limit, literally. The onward march of human progress under American world leadership was assured, an assurance mirrored in Kirk's space-cowboy cockiness. In the Kennedy era American enterprise was at its zenith; this was the affluent society, and science, and specifically medicine, promised solutions to all problems. Mirroring this the authority of the Captain of the USS Enterprise was assured and underwritten by the clear, relentless logic of science officer Spock, the dedication of Dr 'Bones' McCoy, and the ingenuity of Scotty, chief engineer, who could always get more power from the thrusters. The command structure of the USS Enterprise was an idealised representation of American business in the post-war boom, from which the conflicts internal to American society had been eliminated.

In this Utopian vision of an already present / future American society: there is no class, or class ideological conflict, as in the affluent society which American post-war prosperity was delivering; everyone would, (soon, any day now!) have more than plenty. Checkov, a Russian, sat at the helm with Sulu, an Oriental, and Uhuru, a Black woman, was communications officer. There is no racial, or gender conflict. In harmony with the Enlightenment, modern tradition in which *TOS* is rooted, rational thought and a progressive and developmental model of science and society are privileged. In Trek-Utopia, poverty, injustice, crime and alienation are eliminated through technology, progress and a secular, liberal, humanist mythology, while social harmony is achieved through celebrating and protecting individual identity and freedom. Thus, Trek-Utopia is comparable to earlier utopian visions like Fourier's writings from the 1820s and H.G. Wells' ([1905] 1967) *A Modern Utopia*, which were both antithetic to the more communistic utopias of the nineteenth century where collective solidarity was given precedence over individual freedom. Hence, Kirk is positively hostile to societies that efface human individuality and freethinking, and he is keen to restore individual freedom to any stellar 'utopian' societies that he considers 'dystopian'.

At the same time, there are strong similarities between *TOS's* utopian vision and many of the communistic utopias in the literature, from Thomas More's original *Utopia* (1516), to Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1622), to Cabet's *Voyage to Icaria* (1839). Most obviously, the whole sphere of the economic is absent in *TOS*, there being no money, property, production, or commercial exchange, since replicator technology allows the instant 'production' of whatever you desire. Consequently, the Marxist critique of capitalism, and the ills of alienation, confrontation, and class

conflict, are waved away by technological progress, and, in the absence of money and property there's apparently neither crime nor greed.

Despite *TOS's* emphasis on progress and change, there is no explanation of how the present reality was arrived at, besides some vague references to cataclysmic events in the past (reminiscent of the Hebrew prophets' utopian narratives which predicted that a small remnant of society would survive a catastrophic event and that these would live the perfect life). And for all its talk about progress, *TOS* is a strangely static place with each episode returning to a symbolic beginning where everything is much as it was before: a *perpetuum immobile*. A more fundamental anomaly is the contradiction between *TOS's* belief in progress and change and its essentialist definitions of self and of human nature, which creates the continual tension between social order and individual freedom that runs through the series. It also means that *TOS* had a never-ending difficulty in dealing with issues of radical difference. Its message was always simple: women and ethnics have their places in society; as long as they are space secretaries, and say 'aye aye' to the captains of industry.

This brings us to the (ideal-typical) organisation that is represented in *TOS*. In the Captain's chair sits the charismatic hero, a man who made his own way in the world, who took risks and interpreted the rules in his own way. An entrepreneur with flair and verve, for whom things always worked out right in the end, Kirk was the ideal type subject, the young white man, the cornerstone of the American ideology. This charismatic individual who headed up the organisation relied on an hierarchical collective command structure, structured according to the principles of an ideal typical modern bureaucracy - highly qualified professional specialists, vocationally committed to their roles in the organisation, engineering, medicine, navigation,

science, communications, fields with clear and unambiguous jurisdictions, procedures, and protocols. Loyalty and solidarity were due not only to the Captain, (the individual entrepreneur) but were now also, and more so, built into the structure of the firm, into the abstract rules of the organisation, and into wider collective authorities: to one's office and rank, to one's duty to specific roles (i.e. to management); to the Enterprise, to Starfleet, to the Federation (i.e. to one's profession); and finally to the abstract and hypothetical values that the professional roles in the particular organisation were institutional instances of: Spock's science committed to 'Reason,' Bones' medicine to 'Life,' Kirk's Captain to the abstraction of 'Progress' itself as an absolute value — '...to boldly go...,' the principle and the motive of Modernity.

In many ways, *TOS* reflects, describes, prescribes and inspires the 'classical' understanding of organisational life, which was articulated and invented between 1880 and 1960. The *Enterprise* – the name itself is significant – conforms to Fayol's ([1916] 1949) fourteen General Principles of Management more than any organisation in the 'real' world: there is clearly a division of work; a belief in authority (including both the right to issue commands and responsibility for their execution); discipline (and, conversely, good leadership); unity of command (i.e. one boss); unity of direction (i.e. a single goal); the subordination of individual interest to general interest; a scalar chain (i.e. a hierarchical structure of authority); order (both material and social); equity; stability of tenure; a belief in initiative; an appropriate balance between centralisation and decentralisation; and *esprit de corps*. The one absent principle is 'remuneration'. Furthermore, by centring most episodes on a particular problem facing the triumvirate of Kirk, Spock and McCoy, *TOS* presents us with the

classical understanding of organisations as being fundamentally about decision-making, in terms of the optimal reconciliation of the political, rational and emotional issues involved in strategic action (as depicted, for example, in Herbert Simon's ([1945] 1997) classic text, *Administrative Behaviour*). The *Enterprise* also reflected the classical and dominant view of organisations as essentially co-operative, task-focused, open systems that would only survive by staying in equilibrium with their environment, which, in turn, required strong management. For example, in his appropriately titled book of the period - *The Enterprise and its Environment* - Rice (1963) defines the primary task of the organisation as 'the task that it must perform to survive' (p. 13) and the primary task of leadership as 'to manage the relations between an enterprise and its environment so as to permit optimal performance of the primary task of the enterprise' (p. 15).

The Next Generation (1987-1994)

By the late 1980's space had become boring, and limited. Travel further than the Moon to planets in our solar system was prohibitive, not only for technological reasons, but because we knew enough about the barren emptiness of space to make such effort pointless. While millions world-wide watched Armstrong make 'a giant leap for mankind' nobody wanted to watch any longer when the giant leap turned out to be no more than the routine space trucking of the space shuttle, plonking satellites around the globe was no more exciting than a milkround, and along with the monotonous novelty of 57 channels of SKY TV came the sinister threat of global surveillance and orbiting weapons systems targeting planet Earth.

The Next Generation (*TNG*) expressed this new historical context. The remake expresses a nostalgia for an era when the future was larger and brighter. At a time when the American economy was in the throes of a transformation, when corporations were down-sizing, rationalising, retooling, from the level of the firm right up to NAFTA and the IMF, *TNG* reinscribed the modernist ideal of a complex organisation integrated by a perfectly functioning division of labour in a hierarchical collective command structure, wherein competent professionals filled the duties of their vocations. The self-assured manifest destiny of America leading a global programme of development, prosperity, and democracy, appeared irredeemably compromised by defeat in Vietnam, the failure of American led modernisation to bring prosperity to the Third World, and the tarnishing of democracy in American sponsorship of cruel and barbaric dictatorships in Latin America. America had to appear to disentangle itself from active interference in other cultures, thus the 'Prime Directive' of the new Starfleet, and the ideological pangloss, that God is in his Heaven and the Universe is unfolding as it should. In contrast to the original series, *TNG* settled into a period of consolidating explored space, where the Enterprise usually dealt with known enemies/allies and rarely left Federation territory. In this new setting, focus on the outer frontier shifted to inner frontiers, and *TNG* showed not battle with the Klingons or Romulans (who probably stood for the Russians in the original series) for control of the Quadrant, but negotiating treaties and respecting neutral zones, and more significantly, of negotiating social relations between different races (species) Klingons, Vulcans, Ferengi, Romulans, the Borg, and so on who were characterised no longer by their absolute Otherness, their irreducible particularity as 'aliens,' but as aspects of ourselves, members of a wider collective with whom we must negotiate and

find common cause, rather than outsmart, defeat, and demonstrate our superiority over, the characteristic stamp on the encounter with difference in the original series.

A good illustration of this new paradigm occurs in the fourth season of *TNG*, when a new species, the Cardassians, are introduced into the series. In the episode, 'The Wounded,' a renegade Federation ship commanded by Captain Maxwell, a former war-hero, has gone into Cardassian space and is destroying Cardassian ships and stations, and the subsequent story revolves around Picard's ultimately successful attempt to talk him out of his violent actions. At the end of the episode a dejected Maxwell sings the Irish ballad *The Minstrel Boy,* the theme of which is the demise and usurpation of an old heroic code in a political world dominated by larger forces engaged in powerplays (Richards 1997: 26-27). The message is clear: in the world of the 1990s there is no place for the gung-ho approach of yesterday epitomised by the likes of Maxwell, Kirk and the Klingons, and, by extension, the US of the 1950s and 1960s which was all too ready to rush in with guns blazing after applying simplistic analyses to complex disputes in remote places like Vietnam and Korea. In this new era, American self-identity in international policy is refashioned from the cowboy to the policeman/diplomat whose primary responsibility is to ensure that the balance of power remains intact in the new global order.

From an organisational perspective, we may interpret the different species in the series as instances of Weber's three types of authority systems – the rational, traditional, and charismatic – while recognising that the empirical world never maps neatly onto any taxonomy of ideal types. For us, the Federation represents *rational-legal bureaucracy*, which 'is capable of attaining the highest degree of efficiency, and is in this sense formally the most rational known means of exercising authority over

human beings' (Weber [1921] 1968: 223). In contrast, the Klingon Empire, with its emphasis on custom and honour, typifies Weber's *traditional* authority structure, wherein age-old rules and powers are primary. And we interpret the Ferengi, who always threaten to de-stabilise the status quo, as representative of Weber's *charismatic* authority structure - remembering that, for Weber, a charismatic leader may not necessarily have outstanding traits. In particular, the Ferengi exemplify how difficult it is to perpetuate charismatic authority without transforming it into either traditional or rational-legal authority. Another recurring theme in *Star Trek*, following Weber, is that both charismatic and traditional authority are much inferior to rational authority – the future, according to Weber, 'belongs to bureaucratization' ([1921] 1968: 1401). At the same time, Picard, as charismatic leader, also serves to counterbalance the dehumanising and petrifying tendencies of legal-rational authority that Weber saw as the fatal flaw in modern civilisation; that through rationalisation we might become 'specialists without spirit, hedonists without heart' trapped in an iron cage of rationalised acquisitiveness of our own devising. In the ideology of *TNG*, modernity is saved from this fate by the agency of the charismatic hero (Picard) who, when the circumstances demand, is prepared to defy Starfleet Command, and reassert the principles of liberal humanism against the overbearing forces of rationalisation. This recurring theme of *TNG* is best exemplified by the episode in which Starfleet want to disassemble Data, to study him, and Picard refuses to allow the procedure, defying the prevailing technocratic rationality in the name of the individual's right to integrity and self-determination.

It is also important to note that the Ferengi, Klingons and Federation co-exist and define one other through their mutual relationships. Thus, since *TNG* - more so that

TOS - is about the totality of relations between different species, it also reflects a more sophisticated understanding of social and national (US) identity in the 1990s: society is now characterised by complex antagonisms; other cultures are no longer represented simply as less developed, or as more technologically advanced than our own, but rather as being 'different,' requiring a hermeneutic and reflexive orientation rather than competitive confrontation: we can learn more about ourselves and one another from our encounters with one another. This 'reflexivity' is the self-correcting principle at the heart of modern society, and 'reflexive modernization' lauded by Beck, Giddens and Lash (1994) will allow us to continually improve, and to keep on boldly going where no one has gone before, ultimately to a new point of harmonic convergence, where all difference disappears in a unified and unifying cosmic consciousness, a globalist sensibility in a globalised New World Order.

The nostalgic redemptive fantasy represented in *TNG* was that the postmodern American social organisation was self-correcting, and a society that had momentarily lost its bearings and directions could re-collect for itself its first principles, and get back on an even keel. This was the gauntlet thrown down by Q, the post-modern Man become God, omnipotent, omniscient, but not all good, to whom Picard replied that with resolve, determination, and self-confidence in the principles of Enlightenment reason that had brought us this far, we would weather the storm and go on striving to become the best that we can be. The world had changed, but perhaps not fundamentally.

This robust and reassuring assertion of '*plus ca change, plus c'est le meme chose'* was expressed in *TNG* in the portrayal of women. The prominence of women in *TNG* reflected on the one hand their new position in public life in American society, and on

the other, *TNG* reinscribed the persistence of gender hierarchy and confinement to traditional roles in the sexual division of labour in modern society in general, and in the modern complex organisations in particular. Women (and other minorities) were in the workplace, but the old order was intact. Dr Beverley Crusher, the professional working mother in the caring profession; Guinan, the archetype of the Black Earth momma, ageless and wise; Geordi, the young Black man, seeing the world through the colour-blind visor, the 'neutral' discourse of engineering. Deanna Troy represented emotion, communicativeness, sympathy, empathy, appetite, luxurious eroticism, sexuality, and allure. These qualities had their place in the contemporary organisation, but confined to the expanded professional role of personnel and human resource management. This paralleled the Bush rhetoric of a kinder gentler America, and the institutionalisation in the American workplace of not just employee welfare, but of counselling, addiction treatment, and so on, in a curious amalgam of reform and elaboration of power and subjectifying self-regulation. *TNG* flirted briefly with a female mould breaker, Tasha Yar, survivor of sexual abuse, security officer, and de-flowerer of Data, but she became a lesbian pop icon before lesbian chic came in, and had to be iced, underlining the conservative moment in post-modernism in the wider culture.

Organisation and management studies exhibited similar shifts in the form and content of their discourses between the 1960s and the 1990s. With hindsight, we can identify the late 1970s, when Burrell and Morgan (1979) published Sociological *Paradigms and Organisational Analysis,* as the point in time when organisation studies discovered warp drive, as it were, powering the discipline into strange new worlds. From then on there was less certainty about the discipline, as the flaws in the macho-

mechanical, functionalist paradigm became more obvious, and as the complexity of organisational life demanded a more sophisticated, more subtle form of theorising through which different stories could be told and different perspectives acknowledged (Morgan 1986). Increasingly, organisational theorists began to focus on the cultural and symbolic sides of organising (Pettigrew 1979, Smircich 1983, Hofstede 1980, Pondy 1983), and even in the discipline's intellectual core - in sub-fields like decision-theory and strategic management – instrumentalism and teleological thinking were coming under attack by writers such as March ([1976] 1979), who drew attention to the irrationality and ambiguity that is intrinsic to decision-making, and Quinn (1980) and Mintzberg (1985) who saw decision-making as a process of 'logical incrementalism' where strategic actions 'emerge' without deliberate design. For Quinn, Mintzberg and others, goals, plans and missions were instances of a teleological understanding of decision-making, which was inherently inadequate in a reality where ends were either adjusted to suit means or emerged through opportunistic or non-rational processes. Allied to this critique, was a deeper, critical reflection about the discipline itself, its relationship to management practices, and the deleterious effects of the management paradigm on minorities, women, the environment, the family, and foreign communities (Alvesson and Willmott 1992). And once organisation studies joined the postmodern carnival (Cooper and Burrell 1988), the centripetal forces of the pomo-Ferris wheel threatened to tear the discipline asunder (Cannella and Paetzold 1994, Pfeffer 1993). This is not to say that the classical, rational-instrumental understanding of management was ditched. Far from it. There was, and still is, a focus on the organisation in its environment and - *vide* the 1980s interest in Quality - an enthusiastic repackaging and updating of old ideas from classical management thought. Yet, in much the same way that the Ferengi and

Klingons joined the *Enterprise* in *TNG*, ideas that were previously alien to management studies came to be an accepted part of its now-fragmented identity (Whitley 1984). Not surprisingly, the pressing need to think in relational terms meant that the *network* came to be the dominant metaphor and motif in not only organisational theory and practice (Powell 1990, Nohria and Eccles 1993), but also across the social sciences in the 1990s (Araujo and Easton 1996). This interest in networks was reflected in *TNG*, where a new species, the Borg, took the relational and network ideas, currently in vogue in the literature, to their diabolical and fantastic conclusions. Since the Borg represent one of the most enduring and critical mirrors that *TNG* held up to contemporary society and organisation studies, we will now discuss their significance in more depth.

The Borg were introduced in a 1989 episode in which Q - an omnipotent deity/trickster who continually chides Picard about humanity's arrogance - sends the *Enterprise* seven-thousand light years away, 'to give you a taste of your future,' after Picard refuses to allow him to join the crew. They immediately encounter a cube-shaped ship, from which two Borgs – hybrid organic and artificial life forms - appear on the *Enterprise* and begin draining information from the ship's computers. Once their data survey is complete, the Borg vessel demands the surrender of the *Enterprise*. The Borg state that they are intent on perfecting the standard of life of every species they encounter through assimilating each one into the 'Borg Collective,' a giant, hive-like, cybernetic network of technologically-linked cyborgs in which each being shares the thoughts and feelings of each and every other member. The Borg is so integrated and collective that individual cyborg/humanoids do not register as individuals: through assimilation, individuality, the Self, is necessarily sacrificed.

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The Borg Collective may be variously interpreted, but, as organic/mechanical hybrids - they are 'cyborgs' (or cy/borg) – they certainly reflect Haraway's (1985) questioning of the essentialist boundaries of the modern project. For example, when an Away Team from the Enterprise beams aboard the Borg ship, they find that infants are cybernetically fused with machines soon after birth, and, tellingingly, there are no females. Thus, the potency of the Borg threat to the Enterprise is a metaphor for the cyborg's threat to the modern, humanist paradigm where essentialist models of the self, and apparently inviolable boundaries – such as between the human and the nonhuman, leader and follower, individual and society, whole and part, mind and body, culture and nature, male and female – are subverted. In Haraway's (1985: 178) words, cyborgs 'make very problematic the statuses of man or woman, human, artefact, member of a race, individual entity, or body,' and, while this may contain a radical promise of emancipation, this development is profoundly ambiguous, as, like the Borg, cyborgs represent the 'final imposition of a grid of control on the planet' (1985: 154).[3]

Another interpretation is to see the Borg as the Federation, or, more precisely, to see it as what the Federation will become in the future if it continues along its present path of development. The Borg's motivation is identical to the Federation's – 'we mean you no harm,' 'we only wish to improve quality of life' - and the *Enterprise*, like the Borg ship, is an organic-mechanical-cybernetic entity, as indeed are some of the crew (Geordi La Forge has a prosthetic visor, Picard has an artificial heart). The clear message is that the Borg ship *is* the *Enterprise*, and they only meet because Q sends the ship forward in *time* as well as in space. Thus, understood as an ideal type of the worst elements of science, the Borg represent the ascendance of one side of the

Dialectic of the Enlightenment (Horkheimer and Adorno 1973): the victory of

Instrumental Rationality and the concomitant oppression of the the political and

ethical dimensions of the Enlightenment project. In other words, the *Enterprise's*

encounter with the Borg can be interpreted as a vivid illustration of the twentieth-

century critique of Enlightenment thought. If the Federation portrays a Utopian,

modern future, then the Borg depicts a dystopian world that has lost its humanity to

technological consciousness, driven only by the imperative of rationalised acquisition;

we could become, as Goethe and Weber predicted, 'specialists without spirit,

hedonists without heart, a nullity that imagines it has attained a level of civilisation

never before achieved'. Thus, the Borg are an almost perfect pop culture

representation of Weber's central critical image of modern existence, the infamous

'iron cage,' wherein all natural and social relations are dominated by the principle of

rational instrumentalism. Developing Weber's stark prognosis of the fate of

modernity, the Borg are the *différance,* the unsaid but ever-present dystopia, that

inheres within all Utopian visions. George Kateb (1963: 231), in his critique of

utopian texts, might well have been speaking about the Borg when he observed that

> [t]here is one text or another on hand to demonstrate the logical conclusion of
> each part of the utopian program. Virtue can become automatism, painlessness
> can become animality, equality can become uniformity or truncation, stability
> can become stagnation, efficiency can become compulsive routine, social
> rationality can become social textureless, harmony can become lifelessness.

Similarly, the Away Team's discovery of the Borg nursery is a reference to

Habermas's critique of the colonization of the primary, language-based institutions of

the life-world, such as family and community (Deetz 1992). Habermas's argument is

that the corporation's narrow set of human needs – money and power – is normally

counterbalanced by the more meaningful life-world, but that as bureaucratic

institutions grow, the life world becomes 'overloaded' – so, for example, we go to professional counsellors rather than family or friends for help during trying times. At the extreme we end up destroying the natural environment and narrowing the human character, creating a dismal 'carceral' society (Foucault 1977). We become Borg. Interestingly, Habermas's solution to this problem – communicative action – is played out in *TNG* when Picard goes to Guinan, whose race was previously attacked by the Borg, for help. Picard, the latter-day Renaissance Man, asks, 'how can we reason with the Borg?' to which Guinan answers simply: 'you can't'. The clear message is that in the extreme, the product of reason – the Borg – becomes unreasonable, or alternatively that Enlightenment reason itself contains the possibilities for multiple – utopian or dystopian – rationalities.

Deep Space Nine (1993-1999)

When the third *Star Trek* series, *Deep Space Nine* (*DS9*) began broadcasting in 1993, the world had changed, fundamentally, and nostalgic reverie for a golden age of *Star Trek* cannot mask that. *Deep Space Nine* stands as a 'reality check' against the dream of a harmonious New World order brought about by reflexive modernization. Deep Space Nine is an immobile space station in deep space, signifying that *DS9* is about stasis: instead of boldly going forward, *DS9* is bogged down, stuck at the cross-roads of time and space. As such, it represents the aspects of contemporary history that are locked in antagonisms for which there is no resolution - former colonial overlords Cardassians, are held in hostile contempt by their former subjects, the Bajorans; opposites that stand variously, depending on the contextualization, for Blacks and Whites, West Bank Arabs and Israeli Zionists, Jews and anti-Semites, the New Independent States and Russians. And *DS9* is Beirut, Sarajevo, an NYPD precinct

station, or a shopping mall in the bad-lands of LA, or any of the infinite number of theatres of conflict in contemporary society, where the ideal of a future society is lost to the day-to-day practicality of muddling through. *DS9* is a postcolonial wasteland, akin to multi-ethnic postcolonial London where the 'frontier' talks back and the 'native' is ready to resist anything resembling a colonial presence. The hapless, motley assortment of races and species that comprise contemporary cities are preyed upon by unscrupulous wheelers and dealers, and wandering warmongers of varying hues of barbarity. The frame that holds both the show and these theatres of conflict together is security and crisis management by a team restructured by affirmative action and political correctness: the stoic Black chief, the angry young woman, the donkey-working Irish engineer, the naive, trimmed-down-to-size British doctor, and the stern, unwavering hand of the Constable, as impotent and directionless in determining the shape of a grander scheme of things as the UN Security Council in the Balkans. The central feature is no longer the bridge – symbolising command and control – but a 'promenade' and bar where different races mingle. Unlike Kirk and Picard, Commander Sisko is only nominally in control, and relies on a large network of informers. The station, originally built by the Cardassians, has an alien quality to it: and is always on the brink of war and conflict as revivals of religious nationalisms sweep the Klingon and Bajoran home worlds. In this context, the Prime Directive is rarely mentioned.

An interesting aspect of *DS9* is that while there was no commerce in *TOS* or in the earlier series of *TNG* – the 'replicator' having made production and exchange redundant - the old logic of commerce reappears with a vengeance in *DS9*. Life in the station is centred on the 'promenade,' full of shops, gambling houses, and business

establishments, while, early on, Jean-Luc Picard predicted that Deep Space 9 would become a 'a centre for commerce'. Money, issues of 'free trade,' and the exchange of commodities, often weapons, and especially the precious metal 'latinum,' play a central role in the relations between the Ferengi, the Federation, the Cardassians, and other trading species. (The availability of replicator technology exemplifies the type of amnesia and paralogy that is tolerated within the world of *Star Trek*).

Within organisation studies, we can understand *DS9* as representing the small but growing number of post-colonial texts that first began to appear in the late 1980s (Anzaldúa 1987, Said 1989, Spivak 1988, García-Canclini 1995) and which now constitutes a definite stream in contemporary discourse as evidenced by some recent publications (Calás and Smircich 1999, Calás 1994, Reed 1996). It also reflects the long-standing critique that anthropology - and *Star Trek* is founded on the concept of anthropological exploration – has a colonising and domineering dimension leading it to inexorably consume alien cultures. Moreover, the anthropologist – like the Federation/Borg - is no benign culture-junkie; rather s/he is voyeuristic, selfish, arrogant and an insidious instrument through which one group or society dominates another, and, in particular, is one element underpinning the ascendancy of the Occident (Clifford and Marcus 1986, Fox 1991, Grimshaw and Hart 1994, Tyler 1987: 92).

An important aspect of the post-colonial literature is that it allows, demands even, that the native speaks back, a theme that also runs through *DS9*. For example, the pilot episode includes a scene where Major Kira, a female Bajoran officer on the space station meets Dr. Bashir, a young English doctor from the Federation. Kira is a

veteran of the Bajoran war against the Cardassians, and she also distrusts the Federation, believing that they too may be colonisers. Their exchange goes as follows:

Doctor Bashir: I didn't want some cushy job or research grant. I wanted *this*: the farthest reaches of the galaxy; one of the remotest outposts available. This is where the adventure is; this is where the heroes are made. Right here. In the wilderness.

Major Kira: *This wilderness is my home*!

Doctor Bashir: (stutters)

Major Kira: The Cardassians left behind a lot of injured people. *You* can make yourself useful by bringing your Federation medicine to the natives. You'll find them a friendly, simple folk.

This exchange is reworked in a manner of sorts by writers like Anzaldúa (1987), who produced a multi-lingual, hybrid text that seeks to not only give the native a voice but also provides a different story about the genealogy and rationale behind the existence of a particular setting. Thus, the space station in *DS9* might very well still be the *Enterprise*, except this time interpreted by a (post-colonial) Other.

The implications of post-colonial theory for organisation studies are only beginning to be worked through, but it seems clear that since hybridity is a root metaphor of the literature – the post-colonial is a hybrid place – then hybrid notions and hybrid forms of theorising will be required. Thus, we can anticipate that new contact zones between disciplines will be explored, that new modes of re-presentation will be utilised (Krug 1998), and that previously opposing categories will be commingled as theorists rake through the ashes of those 'bonfires of the certainties' that have engulfed the social sciences (Law 1994: 248).

Voyager (1995 – Present)

Voyager, the fourth incarnation of *Star Trek*, is the present phase of the product. The product has been significantly reworked, and now expresses the new shape of American society generally speaking, and the problems and dilemmas of contemporary organisations more particularly. *Voyager* is trying to return home, no longer boldly going.., we are now trying to find our way back, to reunite, to reconcile, to settle down, and to live happily ever after. The command structure of *Voyager* is in place, but like the contemporary organisation and the wider society, it is a house divided. It is a Starfleet ship, but half the crew are Maquis, a renegade outlaw band who will not do things 'by the book,' but have their own rules and codes of practice. On *Voyager*, the Federation's bureaucracy, alliances, treaties, diplomacy, family ties, and the other institutional configurations of a complex interplanetary society are gone. Similarly, contemporary organisations are far from smoothly functioning bureaucracies, but are marked by competing internal narratives; and the rules of the organisation are contested on the basis of solidarities - such as gender, race and ethnicity - that fall outside of the formal parameters of the organisation. In the classical model, represented by *TOS* and nostalgically reinscribed by *TNG,* such alternate bases from which power could be based and exercised were irrelevant, but the contemporary organisation that doesn't reckon with the new culture wars, and actively take them into account and negotiate them, will find itself in motivational crisis, and indeed in serious legal trouble faster than you can say 'glass ceiling'. Similarly, what characterises life on *Voyager*, as it does in the contemporary workplace from the sweatshop to the Oval Office, is the fluidity of barriers between public and private roles, and the way in which, contrary to the classic modern model, issues that may have been previously held to be matters of private life, intrude into the workplace. Thus it is not only a question of women being on the bridge in command

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positions - so long as they acted like men! – but rather, sexuality in its widest senses must be accommodated in the new organisation. Maternity leave, child care provision, protocol for relations amongst staff members, these are the issues at the heart of the internal politics of the world's banks and businesses, and governing the transgressions of roles is what is really at stake in the Clinton / Lewinskey affair. Moreover, in a postmodern world, appeals to an Archimedian point are meaningless, just as for those on the *Voyager,* appeals to the Federation's ideas of right and wrong are redundant: the only fixed point in this decentred universe - for those in the *Voyager* - is the *Voyager*. Hence, the moral of this story is that we must muddle through, creating a local program of action that, while we know it can always be deconstructed, still provides meaning and sustenance amidst the mundane chaos of existence.

Captain Catherine Janeaway, committed to running a Starfleet ship, no longer only consults and then makes executive decisions (the classic modern model of managerial power, and the model represented by Kirk and Picard) she must also foster collective agreement with her crew. Thus, power is a matter of persuasion, agreement, and hegemony, rather than executive decision, calculated judgement based on the best available information. On Janeaway's *Enterprise,* the internal problems of the organisation are just as formidable as the external ones. Families are divided, with little hope of reconciliation, where previously family life was irrelevant to the concern of the organisation. In *TOS* and *TNG* the crew were single, or as professionals their vocation to their work took priority over all else. On *Voyager*, heroic Medicine is a chimera. The 'human(e)' doctor is dead, and the Emergency Medical Hologram, working in narrower confines must work up from being a holo sham to more humane standards, as technical competence is not enough to meet the health needs of

contemporary American society. In both these respects the problems of *Voyager* express the concerns of social welfare and public health care provision that are at the heart of the Clinton presidency.

Voyager also represents the most explicit attempt to confront the intrusion of sexuality and gender issues into the workplace. As such, it continues and develops the theme that emerged in *TOS* of women/ the sexual/ the unconscious as both an ominous *and* delightful Other: a primal and chaotic force liable to disrupt the social order and undermine the judgement of captain and crew, *and* a necessary element making adventures in space and organisational life much more fun. Although forward-thinking for its time, *TOS* reflected conventional gender ideology wherein the crew was predominantly male, and where fears/desires for the alien/Other frequently posed as female reflected the segregated spheres of masculine and feminine lifeworld apparent at that time. Although Roddenberry himself initially cast the First Officer as female, he ultimately capitulated to the predominant gender thinking of the time wherein women exhibited power only through their sexuality. Leaders and decision-makers were predominantly men, and women in the workplace were but an extension of the care-giving role in the home.

In contrast to this association between masculinity and power, *Voyager* experiments with various ways of conceiving of powerful women. Whereas Kirk's authority was based predominantly on individual loyalty to a flawed but archetypal masculine leader, and Picard's authority rested upon a masculinity based predominantly on faith in his measured reason and reflection, Captain Janeaway is a complex yet convincing women in authority and represents a new departure where the radical distinction between personal and professional life has become more fluid and malleable. As well,

Voyager presents versions of female leadership that are more convincing: unlike in previous series wherein characters such as Troi (*TNG*) and Uhuru (*TOS*) dress in revealing clothes and frequently defer to male authority, the female characters Janeaway, Torres, Kess - and Seven - are both more central to the storylines, and more complex and compelling, enabling us to imagine a contemporary version of powerful femininity that neither emulates male authority nor reverts to archaic feminine stereotypes. Rather, traits culturally perceived as feminine are portrayed as strengths: Janeaway's sensitivity to the personal dilemmas of her crew heightens her effectiveness as Captain; Torres' vulnerability does not interfere with her performance as a good chief engineer; and Kess' intuitive and empathic abilities enable her to outwit powerful enemies. Perhaps the most recent and most interesting character, Seven of Nine, has the most ambiguous status as simultaneously Borg/ human/ female, and is perhaps a clear example of the variety of sometimes clashing identities and ethnicities represented by the new-found hybrid identities discussed earlier, as well as a recognition of the various contradictory and complex positions women occupy with regards to their relationship to core/periphery: Seven is both colonised and coloniser, abused and abuser, human and Borg. As a female archetype, she is both masculine and feminine: physically strong yet lonely and isolated because of psychological abuse suffered during her time as Borg.

The centrality of sexual issues in this series - such as Kess' pregnancy, Torres' negotiation of advances from her Vulcan co-worker, Janeaway's treatment of Chakotay's affection for her when they are stranded alone, and Kim's attraction to Seven - all illustrate the 'return of the repressed,' the personal, sexual, and emotional life of the crew. This emphasis mirrors the emerging understanding in organisational

life of the significance of these issues within presumably rational structures. And rather than portraying these issues as problematic, as something peripheral to work life, or simplistically as harassment, *Voyager* illustrates how the personal constantly intrudes in and redefines the professional, and cannot be compartmentalised away or legally prohibited, again reflecting current themes in the organisational literature on sexuality (Hearn et al. 1989, Witz and Savage 1992).

Reflections

The fact that the four shows (*Star Trek - The Original Series*, *The Next Generation*, *Deep Space Nine*, and *Voyager*) co-exist in the same time/space continuum (re-runs of *TOS* and *TNG*, and back to back scheduling of *DS9* and *Voyager*, on Sky, and the national and global networks) is also interesting. It expresses the extent to which the past protrudes into the present, and illustrates an aspect of the post-modern condition, which is that (at least) four distinctive, divergent ideological moods can be operative at the same time. Nevertheless, this diversity does not mask the common themes that run through *Star Trek*'s various incarnations, and, as we have attempted to demonstrate, which also run through the evolution of management and organisation discourse.

Of course, Star *Trek* is a fantasy rather than a manifesto for social change, and one must not forget that. But the gap between science fiction and science fact should not be overstated either. Fiction (from 'ficto') means 'to make,' 'to create,' and the same impulse to creatively and imaginatively reinvent our environment(s) and ourselves underpins both professional 'real-world' management practice, and imaginary, fantasy-world management scenarios. Rather than thinking of a hard distinction

between management science in practice and management science fiction, we suggest that these realities from 'other dimensions' are not entirely alien to one another. Rather, we suggest that these are not alternate but *intersecting* universes, realms of fact and fiction that interpenetrate one another: our 'fictional' management scenarios mirror 'real' management problems, and vice versa.

Again, we find cognate themes in the parallel universe that is organisation and management studies. Like *Star Trek,* organisation and management studies is now a menagerie of different, but vaguely similar, research paradigms, illustrated by the co-existence of 'management' texts that interpret the significance of ANOVAs and Cronbach-alpha coefficients, and others that interpret the significance of Supernovas and Klingons in the Alpha Quadrant. This is to be welcomed and indeed the increasing complexity, uncertainty and diversity of Star Trek over the last thirty years is a good metaphor for the evolution of organisation theory over the same period. Finally, it is our hope that *Star Trek* and other 'expressive goods' will continue to be used as a rich resource for knowing about management and for exploring contact zones between different disciplines and communities of practice.

Notes

[1]For a selected bibliography of sociological interpretations of *Star Trek*, see Harrision (1996, Appendix B).

[2]See Hassard and Holliday (1998) for a recent and rare study of representations of work and organisations in popular culture. The special issue of ORGANIZATION (1999, Vol. 6, No. 4) on Science Fiction and Organisations also marks an interesting new trend in theorising about organisations.

[3]For further discussion on cyborgs, science fiction and organisation, see Parker (1999).

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