

Is there a Cannibal in Organization Studies? Notes on Anthropophagy and Organization (Recipe Included)

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This article draws out cannibals and cannibalism to elaborate issues of boundaries and consumption in theorizing organization. The logic(s) of cannibalism highlight some of organization's inherent tensions, stimulating our understanding via the manifold movements of the cannibal. In a moment of reflection—the negotiation of who should and who should not be consumed—the cannibal appears, a figure at the precise point of passage between the organized and primordial chaos, chronologically hybrid, an affecting shadow in a melancholy economy.

Key words: Cannibalism; Transgression; Organizational Borders; Consumption; Hybridity

INTRODUCTION

The [meeting] afforded us an opportunity of informing ourselves, whether they were cannibals; and we did not neglect it. We first tried, by many indirect questions, put to each of them apart, to learn in what manner the rest of the bodies had been disposed of; and finding them very constant in one story, that, after the flesh had been cut off, it was all burnt; we at last put the direct question, Whether they had not eaten some of it? They immediately showed as much horror at the idea, as any European would have done; and asked, very naturally, if that was the custom amongst us?

*Attributed to Lieutenant King,
member of James Cook's expedition*

Anthropophagy (better known as cannibalism), being one of the principal taboos of social existence, is not without organizational interest, and as a concept evokes excess, sacrifice and boundary transgression. This article will thus draw upon anthropophagy's logic to understand inherent tensions in organizing, and mobilize this 'primitive' notion to investigate organizing processes (cf. Cooper, 1990; Godfrey, Jack, and Jones, 2004). Cannibalism, visualized here as a chronologically hybrid form of consuming the social subject, signals an ambiguity that allows incursions into the splits of organizing, treading between melancholia and aggression, purity and defilement, civilized and primitive, Us and Them. To put it another way, subjectivities formed in social relation—and participating in processes of agitation, resolution, and continuous opening—arise in the context of multiple and overlapping times; and we argue such a rich conceptual body can nourish our understanding of organization. We therefore invoke the fundamentally disorganizing cannibal—simultaneously ritualistic and frenzied, archaic and contemporary, internalizing and externalizing—as an organizing notion to shed

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light on contemporary corporate cannibalizing practices, specifically examining Starbucks' market saturation strategies with an eye on material and consumptive organization.

The collective body consuming itself, an aspect of organizational wellness that is rarely addressed, can be read either as a form of cleansing or as the utmost pollution. Both the anthropological debate over the evidence for anthropophagic behaviour—that is, whether systematic cannibalism ever existed, or if designating 'the cannibal' is merely a way of signalling otherness—and strategic management themes of e-commerce 'cannibalizing' other sales channels fundamentally interrogate the boundaries between and within social organizing. The situation could be posed differently. Organizational wellness, even the very instance of an organization, can suggest stability and avoidance of uncertainty—the guarding of an organization's borders that J.D. Thompson's (1967) archetypal text *Organizations in Action* exemplifies. Although there are other ways of understanding what organizational wellness might be, the stability created by established and guarded borders has been seen as foundational for the emergence of an organization—a foundation called into question, we argue, by cannibalism. To some extent, notions of disorganization as essential for organization (e.g. Cooper, 1990) and the embodied and, thus, problematic nature of the organized individual (e.g. Dale, 2001) have been discussed. This text continues this distaff thread of argumentation, specifically by following the weaving path of the cannibal across various boundaries. Cannibalism, the Other's ultimate activity, both constitutes and threatens organization as a notion of sociality and, consequently, guards its wellness.

One could be excused for thinking this topic's choice is based more on possibilities for shock and titillation inherent in discussing cannibalism than in any real analytical interest (see Kidd, 1988; Anglo, 1979). Still, as the anthropological debate concerning the eating of human flesh has shown, cannibalism propels us to talk of other issues, specifically those that address civilization and the human condition (Arens, 1979; Goldman, 1999). Nor is our interest in the cannibal merely a poetic one: we contend that the very real acts that take place behind veiled references to cannibalism are analytically interesting. Cannibal logic can function as a tool for contesting the tidiness of naturalized dualistic categories and when analysing, for example, late capitalism. We are not speaking of anthropophagy merely as a metaphor. Even though cannibalism can be employed metaphorically, such as when Elkington (1998) refers to contemporary corporations as 'cannibals with forks', we contend that beyond this metaphor lurks a very real logic of transgression that could be used to make sense of contemporary organizing practices, such as, for example, takeovers, mergers and acquisitions. The cannibal and its accompanying conceptual constitution emerges not as a metaphor, but as chronologically hybrid movement and guide to organizational wellness even in the absence of a specific man-eater. There is an obvious risk of trivialization here, of the cannibal turning into mere metaphor and rhetorical finery that we hope to avoid.

The cannibal ingests the flesh of his fellows. Psychoanalytically related states of melancholia are said to stem from a sense of loss around an object of love with a concomitant desire to have through consuming, pulling toward one's mouth (cf. ten Bos, 2003). Eating human flesh, especially if you are, indeed, a human being yourself, is generally thought of as a bad thing. Interestingly, such behaviour can be used to define who counts as human and who is other, i.e. in an organizing manner. Similarly, the notion of cannibalism productively connects to that of economy, particularly as the latter has been portrayed as something of a cannibal itself: organized capitalism is accused of acting in an insatiable and gluttonous way, and in a very real sense consuming the world entire. In an age of borderless, restless, ceaseless capital, the very image of economy becomes that of an all-consuming presence, an omnipresent omnivore that would eat whatever is placed in its path (see Desai, 2002; cf. Lash and Urry, 1987). Economy, viewed thus, is never concerned with eating well, just with eating, devouring—something akin to a cannibalistic frenzy.

Discussions of anthropophagy within anthropology have often revolved around one specific issue, namely whether cannibalism, i.e. the ritual eating of human flesh, has ever existed (see Arens, 1979; Gardner, 1999). The case for cannibalism's existence seems to consist in a fair amount of collected ethnographic and/or anecdotal data, apparently presenting unequivocal proof that ritual cannibalism—anthropophagy—has at least existed. The counterclaim, as forcefully argued in Arens' (1979) much-debated *The Man-Eating Myth*, suggests that such data, in most cases, seems to be at least once removed from any actual practice, often anecdotal or part of an oral history, and that the validity of such claims may be tainted (see also Lestringant, 1997). Although Arens has been soundly criticized (see Gardner, 1999, for a balanced account), some of his arguments are interesting. He demonstrates that claims of cannibalism have often either been directed at other tribes—as a method of demonization—or take the form of 'way back when...' stories. If one wanted to make an enemy tribe something other than human, claiming that they ate humans was an efficient and economic way, and one often utilized. Montaigne's (1581/1965) essay *Of Cannibals* illustrates this by exposing the symbolic notion of barbarism at the heart of discussions of cannibalism and the way in which it predates discussions of cultural relativism (cf. Lindenbaum, 1983). In other words, designations of cannibalism symbolically create Otherness.

Moreover, if one wants to emphasize that the tribe one belongs to has gone forward from a more primitive past, saying that the tribe engaged in cannibalism, but in an earlier period, can be seen as a way to symbolically create a past that is historically other regarding one's own group. Rawson (1999) notes that it is widely reported that anthropophagi themselves routinely deny that they engage in human flesh-eating, and that it seems that real cannibalism cannot truly be contemplated among an 'us': instead the cannibal always emerges as either an 'other' or as a rhetorical device. Lestringant (1997) goes even further, arguing that a cannibal always belongs to a created category removed from the practice of anthropophagy. In his analysis, the cannibal is a figure that went from being a heterogeneous but natural presence praised by (for example) Voltaire to an abject horror, from other to Other.

RECIPE FOR AN ABOMINATION

The following recipe for the cooking and eating of children in a cannibalistic ritual was collected from the people of the Solomon Islands' Western District:¹

Necessary items: young child; pig of opposite sex; banana leaves; sharp knife; earth oven

1. Kidnap a baby during head-hunting expedition to an island less well equipped with muskets and other armaments than yourselves e.g. the island of Kolombangara.
2. Wait till the 'mana' (spiritual power invested in a human being or object) is required for a task such as building a new canoe house or launching a head-hunting expedition.
3. Form a circle and pass/throw the young child from person to person until it is disoriented and tired.
4. Slit throat of young child with bamboo knife.
5. Find a pig of the opposite sex and slit its throat.
6. Cut up child and pig into small chunks and fold into banana leaves.
7. Dig out earth oven, put in food and cover with hot stones from fire.
8. Leave over night, then dig up earth oven and consume as part of collective ritual feast.

¹Gained by J. Borgerson through personal communication with anthropologist Daniel Miller, who recorded the information in 1976 while working for the Solomon Islands National Museum.

This unusual recipe seems to encourage the reader, or cook, towards what we would generally consider an abomination, including unspeakable acts of murder and cannibalism. Cannibalism ‘of all savage practices, is without a doubt the one that inspires in us the greatest horror and disgust’ (Lévi-Strauss, 1976: 347–8). Yet for an abomination, the ritualistic culinary goal appears straightforward and elegantly organized. Lévi-Strauss (1976) argues, through a lens of cultural relativism, that such acts might appear no more barbaric than common practices in civilized cultures (cf. Sheller, 2003: 148–9).

Commonly understood, cannibals are those humans who eat human flesh. In order to be an inhuman cannibal, one must, in fact, be human; yet not surprisingly, our usual assumptions about who we are—what human beings ‘do’ in an ontological sense—fail to incorporate the cannibal, as well as other abject and taboo behaviours. In modern contexts, cannibals’ apparent brutality and willingness to undermine or break taboos shocks, perhaps causing a breakdown of social functioning. In the archaic ritualistic sense, however, cannibalism may function very differently—for example, bonding a group through the transfer of power immanent in human flesh in expectation of an upcoming challenge or dangerous task. Of course, if cannibals never existed, then the process of finding the cannibal is more about creating a vision of some ‘other’ from the point of view of one who has the power to designate existences or name, often evoking racist colonial intentions and interests. Yet, actual or illusory, the cannibal confronts us with a form of being that puzzles and disgusts, because of the engagements cannibalistic practices require—what participating in them means about what we must touch, see, and hear.

Disgust with the impure act of anthropophagy may have many roots. Prime among these is a kind of hypothetical reciprocity: if I eat you, your brother may well eat me. Revulsion toward being transformed into another human being’s faecal matter may be lodged deeply in our collective unconscious, recalling anxiety in relation to the abject, i.e. the phenomenon of horror and revulsion created by the collapse of the distinction between subject and object and the associated breakdown in meaning (Kristeva, 1982; Bataille, 1985). When you eat me, you have turned me, a human being, into an instrumental object, a source of nourishment, as when Dornstreich and Moffen (1974) analyse the viability of cannibalism by discussing nutritional values and protein sources.

The fear of mixtures discussed by Mary Douglas (1966/2001) in *Purity and Danger* engages with an imagined cosmic order: within such an order, cannibalism plays with fear of mistaken identity and a denial of one’s humanity. Put in the framework elaborated by Douglas, cannibalism is taboo on a deep level, suggesting negotiable status for human being: that is, we may be the soul-bearing top of the food-chain or a fair source of proteins. As suggested by Freud (1913), this tension points to something essential to the human condition, what might be considered its fundamental incompleteness. Paradoxically, we are both what we eat and what we do not.

CANNIBALISTIC CONTEMPORARY

Cannibalism is one of the primordial mores. It dates from the earliest existence of man on earth. It may reasonably be believed to be a custom which all people have practiced. (Sumner, 1906: 329)

Thus we may say that surplus-value rests on a natural basis; but this is permissible only in the very general sense, that there is no natural obstacle absolutely preventing one man from disburdening himself of the labour requisite for his own existence, and burdening another with it, any more, for instance, than unconquerable natural obstacles prevent one man from eating the flesh of another. (Marx, 1967: 511–12)

Regardless of whether we mobilize cannibalism as the practice of anthropophagy, the logics therein, or iconic, popularized cannibalism, we are always evoking the other, calling the

cannibal into a context that organization can grasp. Such an invocation presents dangers and challenges. For example, we recall that aspects of the very idea of modernity have in part been articulated through a vision of the primitive that serves modernity's narrative and also provides an appropriate version of otherness (see, for example, Gordon, 1995a, 1995b). This other may be rejected aspects of the self: cannibalism as an anxiety-inducing event can lead to denial and distancing (Rawson, 1999). Thus, as noted in readings of Hegelian self/other relations that attend to a self/same other's emergence (see, for example, Borgerson, 2001; Fuss, 1995), any notions of the cannibal will be infused with the narrator's intentions, traumas, and dysfunctions.

Iconic representations of pop-cannibalism consistently work by positioning that which we fear the most (the primitive, or the existence of the primitive among those who seem civilized). Perhaps the use of the term 'cannibalization' as a way to talk about corporate management in the quote below about Starbucks points to the conquering corporation's fear in failing to comprehend its own borders. That the apparatus of capitalism may, in the end, devour itself is both fear and hope, and resides, in some way, at the heart of Marx's theory (see Marx and Engels, 1998; cf. Hardt and Negri, 2000; Desai, 2002). That in the modern company for which one works lurks a cannibal logic—perhaps transferring power not from market to company, but in unexpected ways within the company itself—evokes a melancholy shadow that obscures the modern corporation (cf. Burrell, 1997).

Apparently, in the context of the modern market economy, the cannibal emerges as an atavistic idea, something belonging to another age. Yet we can find many relevant references to cannibalistic practices, as demonstrated in the following comments regarding Starbucks:

Conventional wisdom dictates that a retailer that crams stores close to one another cannibalizes its own sales. Yet Starbucks embraced self-cannibalization as the fastest way to expand its business. [...] A new Starbucks location typically eats away at the business of the older one nearby—at first. Within a year, though, sales at the original store recover. Even if they don't, the company would rather have one store lose those sales to another Starbucks than to a competitor. [...] We self-cannibalize at least a third of our stores every day.' [Starbucks chairman and chief global strategist] Schultz said. (El Boghdady, 2002: H01)

How should we understand this 'self-cannibalization'? Portraying self-consumption as business-as-usual, or even a brilliant strategic move, offers a vision of corporate physiology which positions the organization's 'mouth' hierarchically away from the lesser parts. What is the place of the mouth in organization theory? Some analyses of modern organizations have, of course, presented them as 'all mouth' (cf. Gibson-Graham, 1996; Gray, 2002), organizations at an oral stage, consuming everything in their path. Consuming, regardless of what one is consuming, becomes more important than upholding 'civilized' limits of the organization. Matter is out of joint, or using words ascribed to Georges Bataille: 'Human life is still bestially concentrated in the mouth'. But is a cannibal a cannibal only when s/he puts human flesh in her mouth? Clearly, to comprehend the cannibal and related practices, one must go beyond schemas that insist upon preordained categories of order, the pure and impure (cf. Bataille, 1985: 5–9).

Many investors soured on the stock when Starbucks opened more and more stores, taking away, or cannibalizing, business from its older stores.

Starbucks Japan says it has to grow to satisfy its customers. 'When we self-cannibalize, we keep the customer and keep the sale,' says Marc Stolzman, chief financial officer at Starbucks Japan. (Chan, 2002)

The term cannibalism can be used to refer simply to the 'eating up' of objects, not only human flesh but, theoretically, any transgressive consumption. From a Western perspective, this may imply consumption that eats away at foundations and stability. Cannibalizing may refer—and perhaps always has referred in the wake of debates over its very existence—to practices of using that involve the elimination of an object, sometimes to the detriment of one's own welfare, or an unreflective practice that leads to a demise, loss, or waste.

The cannibal, as we have argued already, navigates a number of borders, between home and hunting-grounds, Us and Them, now and then. The simple act of eating that which is not to be eaten temporally transforms, transmutes the cannibal from civilized modern to archaic monster. In this, the cannibal springs from the pages of Michel Serres (see, for example, Serres, 1982) and Georges Bataille (1985, 1987, 1989). As a beast that questions borders through action more than words and hunts without restraint, the cannibal manifests the body politic's paradox. The cannibal evokes contamination—a mixing or heterogeneity that defies precisely what we think is good for us and troubles taken-for-granted notions of wellness through protected purity at the heart of social organizing.

CHRONOLOGICAL HYBRIDITY

There are of course numerous kinds of cannibalism. In other words, there are different reasons to eat human flesh, and these differences are important when classifying behaviours. We will distinguish between at least three—the libidinous cannibal, the survivor, and ritualistic anthropophagi—and this also ignores the distinction between exo- and endocannibalism (succinctly put, whether one eats family and friends or strangers). The survivor, a person who has resorted to eating human flesh, typically lacks key definitive elements: to truly be a cannibal one has to choose to eat the forbidden food, not merely attempt survival at all costs (for an alternative position, see Petrinovich, 2000). Anthropophagy in such situations may be even admired somewhat, as a twisted triumph of the human spirit.

The contemporary cannibal is often portrayed as a libidinous one, a psychotic without a firm grasp on reality, somebody who takes 'sick pleasure' in eating another human being (cf. Brink, Gutheil, and Stekel, 1953). Movie icons such as Hannibal Lecter, literary figures such as Patrick Bateman from *American Psycho*, and sensationalist figures from the news such as Jeffrey Dahmer all exemplify human flesh eating as a psychotic excess, a perverse presence in the modern era. Hannibal Lecter's suave, well-read gentleman character evokes a decadent past. Patrick Bateman both is and is not perfectly attuned to the Greed generation, greed that here easily becomes premodern craving. Jeffrey Dahmer simply stands out as a perfect other in our midst, the soft-spoken guy right next door who engages in horrific rites within prefabricated suburban housing's sanctified privacy.

The existence of cannibalism in bygone days, before 'civilization' (cf. Barker, Hulme, and Iversen, 1998), might be comprehensible, but brought into modern times the atavistic becomes pollution. Exemplifying a moment of rupture, the Italian filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini has his unrepentant cannibal in *Porcile* cry out three times, 'I have tasted the flesh of my father; I tremble with joy!' Poised at the intersection of two eras in early human history—with a third 1960s' Italy storyline of an apathetic bourgeois boy with a fascist father and an affection for pigs—*Porcile* unapologetically portrays the continuities and discontinuities between these eras (see Borgerson, 2002). Pasolini's cannibals are captured, tried, and then crucified by early Christian officials who clearly and strategically manifest their role in the future's formation and find cannibalistic practices incongruous (communion aside, obviously).

The existence of cannibalism thus poses a double problem for the notion of social organizing. To begin with, it may erode the structure that would exist among humans, as it allows for the immediate reclassification of a human being from a member of a structure to a potential second course. Furthermore, cannibalism questions the civilizing process, insofar as it points to a set of behaviours that if introduced in a contemporary setting seems to have the potential to unveil a beast at the heart of humanity. Both of these may partly explain our morbid fascination for this alternative source of proteins. More appetizing in regard to

organization studies, however, are the ways in which the logic of cannibalism and related explorations highlight separations, transgressions and transitions.

In any discussion of cannibalism, highly organized rituals meet sheer disorganization and psychosis, and this challenges simplified organizing logics. The cannibal—subject, self and human, yet object, other and inhuman—has the power to convert subjects into objects. The cannibal can thus be traced, engaging the borderlands between us and them, now and then, civilization and the archaic state. Ambiguous, always on the move, never fixed, always questioned, the cannibal provides a counterpoint to the civilized organization. From the point of view of organization theory, the cannibal is a border-function, a jagged edge between the structured and the disorganized. Just as the cannibal transgresses borders between subject and object, invoking the abject, sometimes with his/her teeth, the notion of cannibalism transgresses delineations between civilized and ordered institutional action and more atavistic modes of ritual action. Much like a parasite (Serres, 1982) that lives in a strange, symbiotic relation to its host, or the saprophytic organism (which nourishes itself on dead or decaying organic matter—see Höpfl, 2000), the anthropophagi challenge simple notions of inclusion and exclusion, and thus speak to a more complex understanding of what organized behaviour is.

Cannibalism might also be linked to notions of change—understood as a dialectic process between dualistic poles, such as the Self and the Other—acting as a marker in this symbolic space (cf. Lindenbaum, 1983). Interestingly enough, anthropological literature suggests that cannibalism normally takes place in times of crisis, or other transitional periods (see Goldman, 1999). As Rawson (1999) points out, its existence in Western settings has usually been situated at times of upheaval, and Burrell (1997: 183) briefly discusses how cannibalism in New Guinea, far from being a chaotic and bestial activity, in fact is a highly organized ritual of transforming boys into men. Similarly, the discussions regarding how e-commerce would ‘cannibalize’ more traditional retailing focuses on a period of transformation set to usher in the age of a ‘new economy’.

But can we organize this cannibal logic? Can we use the disorganizing logic of cannibalism? Organization, in the sense often employed within the field of management and organization studies, refers to a set of mechanisms and behaviours that both materially and symbolically create a semi-permanent entity that can be referred to as existing beyond the individual agents/processes/materials of which it apparently consists. Regardless of whether we prefer talking about institutions that are afforded a structured and almost static epistemological certainty, or organizing processes that are more fluid and open-ended (see Borgerson and Rehn, 2004), we continue referring to entities that enable us to talk of a ‘We’. This We may be disjointed and/or internally conflicted, even terminally so, but it still maintains the possibility of designating a Not-We, an Other. Often when cannibalism is discussed, what one does is delineate differences, shifts, and change, so that even the proclamation that one’s tribe was once cannibalistic demonstrates the tribe’s ‘progress’. Cannibalism can in this way, by troubling signifiers of progress and modernity (cf. Godfrey *et al.*, 2004), be invoked as a primitive notion of meta-organizing, or an introduction of the archaic realm into modern organizing.

In retrospect, we propose recognizing cannibalism’s *chronologically hybrid* mode, multiplying exponentially the insights available from examining simple conceptual contamination, category confusion, and boundary transgression. The hovering premodern, even primitive, qualities of the contemporary, cultured cannibal highlight one avenue for understanding the taboo of cannibalism (cf. Godfrey *et al.*, 2004). All three contemporary cannibals mentioned above are distinctly modern, even the gentlemanly Doctor Lecter; yet they engage in one of the most infamous premodern activities we know—the rendering of flesh, the ingestion of the felled enemy, the gleeful howl with bloodstained lips. Thus, eating

human flesh is not an abomination in that humans are impure, or necessarily bad because it makes an object out of a human being, but evil because it opposes progress.

CANNIBALS IN THE BOARDROOM

So, with the exception of exploiting the entertainment value therein (an accusation that has been directed towards Anglo (1979)), cannibalism seems to have an uneasy place in that most progressive and modern of contexts, capitalism.

Today the company, which does not franchise, has over 6,000 stores in more than 30 countries, with three new stores opening every day. Critics on Wall Street give Starbucks two more years before the market here at home is saturated. Schultz, sitting impatiently in his office with its unscenic views of the Port of Seattle train tracks, scoffs at that interpretation. 'Those who talk about saturation obviously don't understand our business strategy,' he says.

The strategy is simple: Blanket an area completely, even if the stores cannibalize one another's business. A new store will often capture about 30% of the sales of a nearby Starbucks, but the company considers that a good thing: The Starbucks-everywhere approach cuts down on delivery and management costs, shortens customer lines at individual stores, and increases foot traffic for all the stores in an area. (Daniels, 2003: 76)

A simplistic view emphasizes the frenzy and indiscriminate deglutition² that seems to characterize both cannibalism and capitalism. Neither seems to pay enough heed to the rights of that which is consumed, and both seem to purely objectify the same. In fact, some refer to the modern system as 'cannibal capitalism':

When we look around ourselves we are often forced to acknowledge that the economy we live in is often *not* a positive economy of mutual trade for mutual benefit, but rather a dog-eat-dog economy, *a cannibal capitalism* which has a tendency to eat itself and all those caught in it. (McConnachie, 2002, emphasis in original)

Furthermore, discussions of economic or commercial benefits of cannibalism are not unknown, even though it might be more common to talk of consuming that which Marx (1975a: 127) called 'time's carcass'. The nutritional potential of human protein has been a recurring theme in anthropological discussions and, as we have noted, some writers straightforwardly discuss cannibalism in New Guinea as a nutritional issue (Dornstreich and Moffen, 1974). In popular culture, in movies such as *Alive!*, *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover*, and the arguably less popular *Cannibal Holocaust*, as well as a number of novels, cannibalism is used as a device to problematize the relation between man, economy and consumption—as well as being a dramatic device which seems to resonate with audiences, with obvious economic implications. Examples of commercial cannibalism, i.e. the economic utilization of human flesh, are also found now and again, particularly in relation to famines or other upheavals—if there is too little to eat, the inherent economic value of human flesh re-enters the market society. For instance Suzuki (1996: p 202) discusses such cases in assessing the historical basis for Thomas Deloney's fiction, and quotes him as follows:

he was rosted alieue...serued in to the ghests in stead of porke...the Inholder made pies of him, and penny pasties, yea, and made his owne seruaut eate a piece of him

Flesh of Christians, six deniers (later four deniers) the pound....

As Godfrey *et al.* (2004) have argued, the way in which wealth, capital, time and blood metaphorically intermingle in narratives of vampires shows us a way to conceptualize certain aspects of capitalism. This potentiality becomes even more pronounced here, where the market value of human flesh becomes not an empty metaphor but an entrepreneurial niche. Jonathan Swift's masterly *A Modest Proposal* (1729/1948) famously points to the potential to use human meat more efficiently, when he satirically points out that the children of the Irish

²Simply put, ingesting through swallowing.

might best be used as a cheap alternative to turkey. A similar, fictional example can be found in the much-admired musical *Sweeney Todd*, where ‘pies most delicious’ were made out of Mr. Todd’s customers. Further, every major war seems to create at least some stories about the bodies of the dead having been used as food for the living, and stories of the entrepreneurial butchering of humans have circulated in relation to severe recessions, such as in Germany during the hardships of the 1920s. The potential for consumption that resides beneath the skin of organized man is thus not a secret.

This is, of course, easily understandable in an economic context. Not to use the flesh of humans is actually a terrible waste, particularly in a world that still deals with hunger as a global issue. This, of course, was what Swift referred to in his satirical tract, even though his satire was directed mostly towards the Irish. The classic sci-fi movie *Soylent Green* (1973) makes all this the dramatic core of the story, so that the eponymous government’s solution to hunger drives us toward the film’s final lines: ‘Soon they’ll be breeding us like cattle! You’ve got to warn everyone and tell them! Soylent green is made of people! You’ve got to tell them! Soylent green is people!’ To be frank, the sanctity of the human body makes far more sense within the framework of Bataille’s (1989) general economy. This, a highly original economic framework that places waste and excess—rather than scarcity and prudence—at the centre of the economic, sees great productive potential in unnecessary expenditure; and the wasteful way in which we simply bury or burn excess protein is a great example. Still, this very economic principle is countered by the principle that we do not want to confuse the object/subject-divide, and while affording agency to objects may be all the rage (made evident by, for example, the interest in actor-network theory within organization studies; cf. Borgerson and Rehn, 2003), turning subjects into mere flesh is exactly the kind of reductive mistake management, including human resource management, has been accused of all along and that critical management studies has tried to battle.

On the other hand, what are the people from Starbucks talking about then? Cannibalism, as discussed earlier, references styles of strategic competition. When, for instance, two retail outlets are placed too close to each other, they are said to ‘cannibalize’ each other’s sales, as witnessed in the strategy employed by Starbucks and arguably a lot of aggressively franchising companies. Similarly, the introduction of e-commerce sales channels has been said to ‘cannibalize’ the brick-and-mortar outlets of companies using a mix of channels. The sanctity of the human border of skin obviously can be found even within the social body of contemporary organization. This notion of a social body which can be transgressed just like a physical body rarely emerges explicitly (see, though, Cummings and Thanem, 2002), but talk of self-cannibalization within corporations would seem to point to transgression of the corporate social body in which the confusion between Us and Them re-appears.

So what is it that takes place when one Starbucks sales-point cannibalizes the profits that ‘rightfully’ belong to another? In a sense, the (b)order distinguishing one part of the company from another collapses. The cannibal act resides in not preserving the kindred unit in recognition of its being one of one’s own—and having company goals that benefit from such unexpectedly transgressive activities. The barbarism of eating other humans lies profoundly in not fully acknowledging their humanity, and, instead, reducing them to a piece of nourishment, an object of power, or simple spoils of war. Similar degradation apparently emerges when strategic corporate cannibalism sacrifices the social body and the sanctity of the institutionalized entity. Does the self-cannibalization of Starbucks, though economically rational, challenge the possibility of intra-organizational loyalty? What is an organization if it can consume itself?

Cannibalism problematizes consumption, whether we are talking about the ingestion of human flesh or the utilization of efficient market mechanisms to expand successful (or weed out unsuccessful) parts of the organization. In an age where a globalizing, constantly spreading

and relentlessly penetrating capitalism is seen as consuming everything in its path, the turn to cannibals for organizational guidance seems almost logical. To what else should one liken the all-consuming juggernaut? Still, as Gibson-Graham (1996), for example, has pointed out, this view of capitalism as penetrating and all-consuming is highly binary, essentializes bourgeois capitalism and denies the possibility of resistance, hybridity and local adaptations. Such a view is also overly metaphorical. Instead, we must look to the ways in which one navigates the borderlines between the functional logic of global capitalism and the symbolic logic of lived economy—i.e. the ways in which *living* an economy can create hybrid forms of gift- and market-economies (see Yang, 2000; Rehn, 2001). In this space, this passage between, the cannibal becomes an invigorating, ambivalent figure. For, and this is important for the organizing of contemporary capitalism, cannibalism can never be total. Unrestrained anthropophagy has, according to at least some anthropological data (see Gardner, 1999), never existed in an ordered social setting, and its existence in even the most unordered is tenuous at best. Instead, the eating of one's own kind is always a negotiation, a melancholy dialogue—not necessarily an aberration, but always part of a wider cultural debate about the place of human being in the world. In this way, cannibalism perennially forms organization, and its spread into the language of management should perhaps be seen less as feeding a continuously starved capitalism, and more as existential themes encroaching upon the economic realm.

Fundamentally, and as also noted earlier, cannibal logic raises questions of power transference within a system. The original recipe, early on in this text, suggests tribe members may kidnap, kill, and cannibalize a young child in order to raise 'mana' for an important undertaking. Within Starbucks, retail outlets are forced to 'attack' each other in order to drive up the total takings of the corporation. Both these processes are forms of sacrifice, the intentional transgression of a specific boundary undertaken in order to gain power—or organize it. The health of the total social body—whether tribe or corporation—here depends on self-ingestion. Cannibal logic, thus, may show us the impossibility of total, static systems, and instead emphasize the continuous negotiation over waste, death (Bataille, 1989), and humanity's limits. A continuing investigation into the melancholy cannibal could, thus, focus on the specific ways in which those within this most modern of contexts conceptualize and practise sacrifice and magical transfers of power.

IS THERE A CANNIBAL IN ORGANIZATION STUDIES?

In a moment of reflection—the negotiation of who should and who should not be consumed—the cannibal appears, a figure at the precise point of passage between the organized and primordial chaos, chronologically hybrid, an affecting shadow in a melancholy economy. As pointed out earlier, both cannibalism and certain conceptualizations of capitalist logic (Gibson-Graham, 1996) question borders and actively work to transgress these (also see Marx (1967: 663) on 'nomads' or Marx (1975b: 450) on free trade). Cannibals as well as globalized capitalism are commonly presented as ignoring borders, and transgressing these at will (see Gray, 2002; Callinicos, 2003). For capitalism, this is so regarding both national boundaries, such as in discussions about the WTO, and institutional boundaries, such as when jobs are sent to low-wage countries—or parts of the same company are pitted against each other to 'increase competitiveness'. In such cases, the usual 'rules' regarding what will be viewed as an unassailable entity are thrown out of the window.

Such ambiguities should be well known to organization theorists, and organization studies is itself a strangely cannibalistic, parasitic, saprophytic engagement. Living on organizations, drawing life force out of what we create as living and portray as dead, the field exists in a strangely dual relation to its empirical basis (cf. Wray-Bliss, 2004). Organization studies

specifically inhabits a space with a cannibal logic, the borderlands between chaos and something else, and navigates this, creating passage-ways that hopefully can be comprehended. Whereas the cannibal's abomination and impurity reside in eating that which is not to be eaten, organization studies has found other ways to consume the Us. The negotiation and the reflection that remain a necessary constituting part of anthropophagy has here been turned into a methodology section. Nevertheless, cannibalistic ambiguity and hybridity do not only present organization studies with yet another metaphor. Rather, melancholy cannibal logic challenges us to justify our own existence. The eating of human flesh is a simple defilement, but the reduction of the social into easily handled and consumed nuggets in journal articles in *Organization*, *Organization Studies* or *Culture and Organization* presents another scenario altogether, and arguably an 'intellectual cannibalism much more revolting to the anthropologist than real cannibalism' (Lévi-Strauss, 1996: 258). If, in fact, organizing is always about creating Others, organization studies could easily succeed in not only creating them, but also making these presentable and digestible commodities, a concern already discussed in the field (e.g. Wray-Bliss, 2003; Parker, 2002).

Obviously, wellness (here understood as a mode of organizational stability) and defilement are not mutually exclusive, but exist in a dialectic. We have tried to disinter notions of material practices at organization's base, in the present context relating to eating or ingesting. Cannibalism takes place at the extremes of eating and, moreover, establishes itself as a chronologically hybrid act—transgressing the boundaries between the past's primitive and the contemporary. We have attempted to understand cannibalism as a boundary behaviour, as border transgression, as a practice of transition and, maybe, crisis in this negotiation of consumption that echoes spaces of passage (see, for example, Serres, 1982) and creates knowledge. What we have anticipated, then, are mixes, hybrids, and confusions. In typical paradoxical tradition, the conditions of being a cannibal are to be human while, at the same time, being defined as inhuman—a melancholy scenario, to be sure. As for the notion of wellness, cannibalism highlights that we always must remain reflexive towards our own consumptive practices—whether our comestibles of choice be organizations or small children.

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