

## The Body Dances: Carnival Dance and Organization

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**Abstract.** Building on the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Maurice Merleau-Ponty we seek to open up traditional categories of thought surrounding the relation 'body-organization' and elicit a thought experiment: What happens if we move the body from the periphery to the centre? We pass the interlocking theoretical concepts of object-body/subject-body and habitus through the theoretically constructed empirical case of 'carnival dance' in order to re-evaluate such key organizational concepts as knowledge and learning. In doing so, we connect with an emerging body of literature on 'sensible knowledge'; knowledge that is produced and preserved within bodily practices. The investigation of habitual appropriation in carnival dance also allows us to make links between repetition and experimentation, and reflect on the mechanism through which the principles of social organization, whilst internalized and experienced as natural, are embodied so that humans are capable of spontaneously generating an infinite array of appropriate actions. This perspective on social and organizational life, where change and permanence are intricately interwoven, contrasts sharply with the dominant view in organization studies which juxtaposes change/creativity and stability. Key words. body; Bourdieu; carnival; creativity; knowledge; learning; Merleau-Ponty

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Must the life of the body be given up on, as the sheer unthinkable other of thought, or are its mysterious ways somehow mappable by intellection in what would then prove a wholly novel science, the science of sensibility itself? ... Nothing could be more disabled than a ruling rationality which can know nothing beyond its own concepts, forbidden from enquiring into the very stuff of passion and perception. How can the absolute monarch of Reason retain its legitimacy if what Kant called the 'rabble' of the senses remains forever beyond its ken? (Eagleton, 1990:14)

The Body as 'Absent Present' in Organization Studies?

Nietzsche famously suggested in the *The Gay Science* (1887) that all philosophy is, without knowing it, based on an understanding of the body, or

rather on a misunderstanding of the body. He warned against the mistaken tendency to take grammar too seriously, allowing linguistic structure to shape or determine our understanding of the world and believing that the structure of language reflects a prior ontological reality (Barad, 2003). It is

this what Eagleton is getting at in the epigraph to this paper. Yet, in studies

of the social world and organization the existence of human bodies tends to be taken for granted and knowledge of the body mediated through abstract representations. Shilling (1993) thus describes attention to the body as an 'absent present' and emphasizes the particular difficulty of grasping the material body because its existence is permanently deferred behind the grids of meaning imposed by discourse. Gabriel (2003: 520) echoes this sentiment in a recent review of a book aimed at exploring the relationship between body and organization (Hassard et al., 2000), 'Many contributions ... while extolling the body, come close to losing it in a discursive din'. Shilling (1993: 81) criticizes this 'discursive essentialism' and claims that

'the body may be surrounded by and perceived through discourses, but it is irreducible to discourse'. Whilst it can be beneficial to break down the limits between textual and contextual domains, there remains the need to be constantly suspicious about the extent to which broad domains of social being can be incorporated within the single conceptual domain of 'discourse' (Boje et al., 2004).

The emphasis on discursive analysis has a number of important implications. It suggests that materiality can be seen as a product of language or some other form of cultural representation (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002), thus reducing the experiences within organizations to linguistic-semiotic ones and neglecting the multi-dimensional ways in which we experience reality. It also sustains a Cartesian ontology where the relation between subject and object is conceived of as holding between a disembodied and timeless subject and an external objective reality (Burkitt, 1998a). This leads to an 'objectivist' conception of nature as an 'in-itself' to which we, as subjects, have access only from the outside. This objective reality, which includes our own bodies and living matter in general, is seen as existing in an absolute space and time and as operating in accordance with

causal laws (Matthews, 2005). Yet, social scientists have now begun to tap into evidence from the life sciences which suggests that human beings record experiences and knowledge in ways that include much of the body besides the brain with skin, posture and gesture all implicated in the processing

of information (Clark, 2003). In this context MacIntyre (1999: 8) observed that 'Human identity is primarily, even if not only, bodily and therefore animal identity'.

In this paper we aim to develop an embodied view of organization that acknowledges the human body as a key entity. In doing so we build on the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Pierre Bourdieu who tried to construct

in their own particular but interrelated ways a general theory of practice by exploring how perceptual habits are formed by the embodied person. We thus depart from the intellectualist, discursive view of organizations

and bodies and discuss the human body's potential for generating creative and innovative practices. This means that embodied persons are not simply constructs, but they are 'productive bodies' (Burkitt, 1999: 2) capable of activities that change the nature of their lives. Following

Bourdieu and Merleau-Ponty, the body is to be understood as neither a biological nor a sociological category, but rather as point of overlapping between the physical, the symbolic and the sociological. Though it is widely acknowledged that the inscription of bodies is one of the primary functions of society, there still exists an urgent need to examine the use of the body in its immediate materiality and not simply as representation (Barad, 2003). As Merleau-Ponty (1964: 52) suggests, 'We must rediscover a commerce with the world and a presence to the world which is older than intelligence'.

Two decades ago Cooper and Burrell (1988) already suggested that a lot of active and reactive organizational forces are focused on the body; be they biological, social or political. Indeed, it is the materiality of the body, the lived social organism in its physical expression that provides the perpetuum mobile for social life (Höpfl, 2003). What if we were thus to explore the silenced areas of the body as a spontaneous, experimental and creative force that challenges organized ways of life (Sørensen, 2006; Styhre, 2004) and the embodied desires that can disrupt, undermine and upset the homogeneity of organizational life (Linstead, 2000; Thanem, 2006)? Much is to be gained by seeking to theorize what Grosz (1994) calls the 'lived body' rather than simply looking into the techno-administrative use of bodies in organizations, and this is precisely what we aim to achieve by working through our 'theoretically constructed empirical case' of carnival dance.

## Carnival Dance

The origins and development of carnival present some of the most complex and interesting problems in the history of culture and scholarly attention to the subject has continued to grow. With carnival forms now

being discussed across a range of disciplines, from criminology to cultural studies, carnival has become the touchstone for a variety of hotly debated topics like subversion, transgression and popular resistance to authority (Bernard-Donalds, 1998; Ivanov, 1984; Stallybrass and White, 1986).

From an organizational perspective, 'carnival', has been developing steadily as an emerging conceptual model and analytical category, yielding three main carnivalesque themes in organization studies (Boje, 2001; Rhodes, 2002, 2003): resistance (the tumultuous crowd), hierarchy (the world turned upside-down) and popular culture (the comic mask). In short, the carnival metaphor allows researchers to look into issues of power, hierarchy and order. In this sense carnival is not seen as an embodied event

but as a mode of understanding. It provides scholars with the necessary conceptual toolkit to explore the tension between the apparent unmediated events of 'real' carnival and its dependence on established codes, rules and conventions. We do not deny the efficacy of such textual representations

of carnival and fully acknowledge the substantial contribution of this approach to the understanding and development of the concept, but we suggest that much can be gained by pursuing an alternative course.

In what follows we will commit to a performative model of carnival in which basic terms and objects are forged in a manifold of actions and interactions. As Barad (2003: 802) puts it,

A performative understanding of discursive practices challenges the representationalist

belief in the power of words to represent pre-existing things ... The move toward performative alternatives to representationalism shifts the focus from questions of correspondence between descriptions and reality (e.g. do they mirror nature or culture?) to matters of practices/ doings/actions.

A performative perspective suggests that there are important aspects of our research which cannot be put into words and escape the possibilities of language, without considering this necessarily a problem. Thus, as Law (2004: 88) suggests, 'It might be perfectly appropriate to imagine representation in ways that wholly or partially resist explicit symbolisation'.

What we find particularly striking and compelling about the carnivalesque event is its treatment of the human body. At any time in history carnival consistently has taken its energy from the human bodily capacity to overflow its own limits and to refuse confinement (Bakhtin, 1984). Carnival bodies are open to the world, and the emphasis is placed on the body parts that stretch out into it (Gardiner, 1998). Carnival rejects the tradition where the body is seen as a property of a subject, who is thereby dissociated from carnality and makes decisions and choices about how to dispose of the body and its powers. The carnival body is a communal body contained in the collective mass of the people, not the biological individual (Burkitt, 1998b). In carnival the body is valuable precisely because it is not a closed unity. It violates the boundaries between self and other, self and the world. Furthermore, the carnival body represents hybridisation, a co-mingling

of incompatible elements, and questions the formation of social groups through inclusion and exclusion (Stallybrass and White, 1986).

In the organizational world those parts and aspects of the body which are publicly celebrated in carnival culture have become privatized and experienced as sources of embarrassment. Sexual life, giving birth, death, eating and drinking have turned into private acts and lost their public, symbolic content. That is, they have become what we refer to today as 'body functions', the by-products of the bodily machine, and as such they have lost their meaningful place in the cycles and rituals of public life. Bodies here have acquired an individual nature, one that is closed off to the world and complete within itself. Thus, rather than on the open and unfinished body, accent is placed on its sealed and finished nature. The emphasis is put on the body parts that create the boundaries—its skin, smooth surfaces, musculature and, in particular, the face and eyes (Schroeder, 2004). Bodily surfaces demarcate social and personal limits and identities are formulated through the experience of a self that is closed and literally self-possessed (Michelson, 1999). In other words, the body has become what Merleau-Ponty (1962) designated as an 'object-body'.

#### Subject-Body and Object-Body

Merleau-Ponty explored in the *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962) how human beings as subjects are essentially embodied, so that their being is 'in-the-world'. Influenced by Freud and psychoanalysis, Merleau-

Ponty argued for the body as the agent of experience and the basis for all knowledge. He was concerned primarily with mapping the various manifestations of embodiment in terms of relation between perceiving subject and perceived world (Gardiner, 1998) and prioritized practical over reflective forms of being, seeing intentionality manifested in our immediate perceptions, feelings and actions, rather than our reflective thoughts. For Merleau-Ponty the human body is a part of nature, but a very special part because of the human possession of speech (logos). Our own bodies are thus no longer seen as objects but as relations to the surrounding world, which in turn is defined by its relation to us as embodied and active beings (Eagleton, 2004). An embodied being is thus necessarily actively involved with, and inseparable from, its surrounding world (Matthews, 2005). This is expressed in Merleau-Ponty's doctrine that it is our bodies themselves which are the subjects of experience.

Merleau-Ponty (1962) used the conceptual categories of 'subject-body' and 'object-body' to develop his position. The subject-body is the body we live from within, understanding it immediately. This body is a basis for our action; it is always present. In spite of this, or because of this, we stay unaware of its presence. In the object-body, 'we have the body'. That is, as long as we remain the subject-body, there is only a potential separation between the body and ourselves, because our bodies are not objectified. The object-body, however, divides the body and us by giving the body

a sense of exteriority. We become observers who have bodies, bodies to which we stand in a relation of possession. Our body is therefore both the subject that is doing the touching as well as the object that is being touched.

For Merleau-Ponty the body is neither an internal nor an external projection.

Things are the extension of our bodies and our bodies are the extension of the world; through our bodies the world surrounds us. In other words, Merleau-Ponty transforms the concepts of interiority and exteriority into the indeterminate surfaces of a Möbius strip. It is particularly difficult to grasp what the body actually is, not only because our body is so close to us but also because of the complex relation of dependence between

the subject-body and the object-body:

Neither subject nor object can be conceived as cores, atoms, little nuggets of being, pure presence: not bounded unified entities, they interpenetrate, they have a fundamental openness to each other ... They are interlaced one with the other not externally but through their reversibility and exchangeability, their similarity-in-difference and their difference-insimilarity.

(Grosz, 1994: 43)

### The Body Dances

To give some texture to our theoretical exposition we will look at a particular version of Afro-Brazilian carnival dance: the samba. We intend to show how samba can provide us with an understanding of the possibility of a corporeal intelligence: thinking with/through the entire body. As we are not dance scholars, we have chosen Rector (1984) and Browning (1995) as our guides into the world of samba, both because of their impressive

knowledge of it and because of their personal experience dancing and teaching Brazilian dance.

The word samba comes from Angola and the Congo, meaning a navel-tonavel bump into another person. Samba was also originally synonymous to the word 'batuque' (beat). It designated neither the type of music nor a particular rhythm, but the act of dancing. Among the six to eight million black people who came to Brazil, corporeal expression manifested itself through the tribal dance without any established rules. At the onset samba was a dance, liberating one from fear, bringing one person maximally close to another (everything was drawn into the zone of free familiar contact), with its play and its joyful relativity. There was no onlooker, no dominant idea, and no judgment. The dancers were completely embedded in the wonder of movement. Samba was movement performed by the body as an end in itself. The artistic logic of the dance ignored the closed, smooth and impenetrable surface of the body, and retained only its sensuous and instinctual characteristics. Understanding the world through carnival dance did not imply choice, as a fundamental feature, but rather habitual action.

The rhythm of samba was so catchy that it was gradually absorbed by all black people and later by white people. Samba became a mix of Angolan

samba, European polka, African batuques, with touches of Cuban habanera and other styles. Over time a number of organizational principles got introduced in the dance (Rector, 1984):

1. The law of repetition: in the dance, movements are basically the variation of the same samba step;
  2. The law of contrast: in spite of repetition, the monotony is broken by a greater emphasis being placed upon some of these movements;
  3. The law of chain reaction: like a ball of yarn, dancers unroll the thread linearly in a progressive series of movements.
- At a later stage of the dance development external actions and interactions became the focus. The samba parade evolved into a real spectacle. The introduced element of judgment and competition enhanced the object characteristics of the body (the object-body is itself an instrument and the end of our actions). At this stage the dance represented two different forms of movement: 'concrete' movement and 'abstract' movement. In concrete movement the dancer is conscious of her bodily space as the matrix of her habitual action, but not as an objective setting; her body is at her disposal as a means to create a movement, but not yet as the means of expression of symbolic meanings. In this movement the dancer is the body, and her body is the potentiality of a certain world. In the abstract movement there is an awareness of an objective, this movement is very much borne on by that awareness. It is triggered off by this objective, but it is clearly centrifugal, shaping a clear 'intention which has reference to one's own body, making an object of it' (Merleau-Ponty, 2004: 113). This new body gains a power of projection and representation. Once again the body becomes an object, an instrument but in a rather different sense, as an immense and intricate

living system of meanings. The originally formed concrete movement is supplemented by abstract movement, which, from its side, goes inward, discovering outward-bound patterns of meaning. Together, these two types of movement 'wrap up' the process of subject/object-body relationship, 'granting to the human being the feeling of being able to fully inhabit the world, understand it, and constantly orientate itself within it' (Kujundzic and Buschert, 1994: 212).

What is striking and original about samba carnival dance is that it is not simply an example of a subject-object relation of dependence, nor simply a metaphor of inversion setting the object-body in the place of the subject-body while preserving the binary structure of the division between them. In carnival dance it is precisely the purity of this distinction which is transgressed. The object-body invades the field of the subject-body, blurring the hierarchical imposition of order; creating the triumph of one aesthetic over another, making the subject open up to be completed by the world-things, others, and interrelations. It reveals the dependency of the object-body on the subject-body and vice versa, showing the inextricably mixed and unarticulated (but not unintelligible) nature of the background which is made up of 'practices', 'capacities' or 'stances'. In carnival dance,

no body enjoys an absolute privilege inasmuch as each must be and is continually tested and retested with respect to another. Carnival dance stages the dialogue between bodies.

Since there are no rigid boundaries between subject-body and object-body, the body constantly establishes the range of that boundary within its own 'economy'. In ordinary life this establishment normally leads to habitual appropriation. In other words, human action uses paths that naturally follow the physiognomy of things and situations that decipher the shapes and messages of the world and past human experience. Habitual appropriation involves a modification and enlargement of the corporeal schema, an incorporation of new principles of action and know-how that permit new ways of acting and understanding: 'It is a sediment of past activity that remains alive in the present in the form of the structures of the corporeal schema; shaping perception, conception, deliberation, emotion, and action' (Crossley, 2001: 104). Habitual appropriation consists of broad forms of competence and a practical, pre-discursive grasp or understanding of the world. Merleau-Ponty (1962) argues that habit is not a mechanical response and is not acquired in a mechanical fashion, but neither is it a reflective or intellectual phenomenon. It is a phenomenon that forces us to abandon each of these false alternatives in favour of a more existential focus upon our simultaneously meaningful and embodied manner of being-in-the-world, a phenomenon on which thought depends. As Burkitt (1998a: 68) puts it: 'Thought is not structured by anything that could be considered as a 'mind' which is somehow distinct from the body, whether this is a set of cognitive structures or categories, or innate ideas. Instead, it is learned bodily actions or habits which make thought possible'.

#### Body-Habitus-Field

This brings us to Bourdieu's notion of 'habitus'. Habitus is a Latin word,

which refers to a habitual or typical condition, state or appearance, particularly of the body (Jenkins, 1992). Bourdieu retains some of the concept's original meanings in his definition:

Habitus is the durable and transposable systems of schemata of perception, appreciation, and action that result from the institution of the social in the body. It contributes to constituting the field as a meaningful world, a world endowed with sense and value, in which it is worth investing one's energy. (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 99)

Bourdieu sees habitus as an integrated whole of dispositions which constitutes

a living presence, a cohesive living actuality and potential (1990: 102-104). The dispositions and generative classificatory schemes which are the essence of the habitus are thus embodied in real human beings. It is because the body has become a repository of ingrained dispositions that certain actions, certain ways of behaving and responding, seem altogether natural. Habitus can thus be considered as a certain durable organization

of one's body and of its deployment in the world. It exists as behavioural manners, and is manifested through its effects. The practical schemes through which the body is organised are the product of history and, at the same time, the source of practices and perceptions, which reproduce that history. Experiences will tend to confirm habitus, because most people are bound to encounter circumstances that tend to agree with those that originally fashioned their habitus. Habitus is also described by Bourdieu as 'the generative principle of regulated improvisations' (1990: 57), which points us more directly towards the potential of a socialized body to respond to, to be a part of, a surrounding world. Habitus changes with each sequence or iteration, in a direction which attempts a compromise with material conditions. However, the compromise is inevitably biased, as the perception of objective conditions is itself engendered and filtered through

the habitus. Particular practices or perceptions should thus be seen, not as the product of habitus as such, but as the product of the relation between

habitus and the specific social contexts or fields within which individuals act. A field is a social arena within which struggles or manoeuvres take place over specific resources or stakes and access to them. Dispositions are

acquired in social positions within a field and imply a subjective adjustment

to that position. The relation which obtains between habitus and the field to which it is objectively adjusted is a sort of ontological complicity,

a subconscious and pre-reflexive fit. This complicity manifests itself in what Bourdieu calls the *sens pratique* (or 'feel for the game'), an intentionality

without intention which functions as the principle of strategies devoid of strategic design, without the conscious positing of ends. This *sens pratique* is what allows habitus to generate an infinity of strategies which are adapted to an endless number of possible situations (Mahar, 1990). Habitus becomes active only in relation to a field and depending upon the stimuli and structure of the field, can generate different, even opposite, outcomes (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

Carnival Dance and 'Le Sens Pratique'



The sens pratique precognizes: it reads in the present state the possible future states with which the field is pregnant. The logic of practice is logical

to the point where to be logical would cease being practical. (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 23)

Samba can be seen as a combination of routine, habitual movement, play and improvisation, without explicit reference to any codified knowledge, and without every dancer necessarily 'knowing what they are doing' (in the sense of being able to adequately explain what they are doing). In samba one has no choice but to think with the body. This reveals itself in samba music which is a polymeter. The interest of polymetric music is in the simultaneous patterns which are established in a single measure. So each player has to concentrate on her part though the dancer can make reference to all of them with different parts of her body. Browning (1995)

has noted that the only way to understand a polymeter is by knowing how to dance it. The strong beat in samba is suspended, the weak accentuated. This suspension leaves the body with a need that can only be satisfied by filling the silence with different motion. Samba, the dance, cannot exist without the suppression of a strong beat. The dancer is able to accommodate more simultaneous rhythms than the individual musician by using different parts of her body, creating totality through fragmentation. This 'thinking with the body' manifests itself in what we call 'feel for the dance'.

It lacks the intentional action shaping the resulting totality; the total outcome is anything but the sum of total intentions at the level of dancers.

The dancers situate themselves within 'real activity as such', that is, in the practical relation to the world, which directly governs their movements (Morris, 2001). Dancers possess a practical mastery of the implicit principles of the dance, not just the knowledge of explicit, consciously recognized rules.

According to Bourdieu, developing this sens pratique does not entail learning an arbitrary set of rules, but rather listening to one's body. Carnival

dance is strongly informed by historical learning and treats the body as a 'living memory pad, an automation that leads the mind subconsciously along with it' (Bourdieu, 1990: 68). Unlike the logic of discourse, which functions by making the work of thought explicit in a linear series of signs,

the sens pratique is pre-reflexive. This logic of practice ensures the order

and continuity of any form of organization (Gherardi, 2000). The active presence of the past tends to guarantee the structure of dance practices and

their constancy over time more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms could do. The body enacts both tradition and ritual in the dance form. It does not represent what it performs; it does not simply memorize the past but enacts it, bringing the past back to life and thus offering a prospect

for sensuous or 'sensible' knowledge.

#### Stability and Change in Carnival Dance

There are a number of organizational principles that ensure the internal

logic and the integrity of the dance from both the external point of view (among different dancers) and internally (within a certain individual dancer). Samba movements are not choreographed, their nature is habitual: simple forward and backward steps and tilting, rocking body movements. Dancers unroll the thread linearly in a progressive series of steps

(Rector,

1984) but samba is not just comprised of the steps. The wholeness and expressiveness

of the dance come from postures, gestures and facial expressions.

Samba contains numerous elements that are derived from everyday life and are thus shared by a society as a whole. Postures and gestures, Bourdieu argues, are highly charged with social meaning and values, and although they are learned they seem so fundamental they are most often perceived as natural. Gestures in dance can be understood as a mode of homologization by means of which practices are ordered across time and

space. The dance structures are inverted as they are interiorized, and where

dancing flips over again in exteriorizing itself in the form of dance practices

that have the deceptive appearance of being free improvisation. It is indeed the tradition, as a silent and determining memory of samba, which situates dancers' bodies in space and time, thus defining the lines and figures of the dance. Samba is known for its incorporation of figures that

flash across time. Dance ethnography has often referred to such figures as African or indigenous 'survivals'—gestures that can be traced or inferred to pre-slavery and pre-colonial sources (Browning, 1995).

Carnival dance is not just a 'concentrated' example of the expressive nature of embodiment. In carnival, the term 'dance' refers to a larger sense

of a social field where collective body, power and history are celebrated by

members of a community. 'Body in carnival' is also the body informed by a set of social beliefs; it is the body of a social ideogeme that has been

fused with its own discourse. Within a field of carnival there is more than a single modality of existence. It is a realm of unspoken and unarticulated embodied practices conceived under the impact of habitus. They provide the basic grid or meta-dispositions towards ways of perceiving, knowing and appreciating the world. The power of the unspoken in carnival dance derives from the thoughtlessness of habit and habituation, rather than consciously learned rules and principles. Though the meaning of the carnival for each dancer is constructed from the vantage of their uniquely embodied viewpoint and hence is irreducibly pluralistic, the dancers continue to inhabit the same social field. The meaning and social efficacy of carnival dance is determined both within that given field and in a network

of hierarchical relations with other fields. With an understanding of the entire structure of relationships that define positions in the field

of carnival, and with the knowledge of its interactions with other social fields, it becomes possible to answer the question of whether carnival, and carnival dance in particular, is capable of acting as a force in re-evaluating

the role of the body in social processes, in re-assessing how people's experiences

of, and responses to, social structures are shaped by their sensory

and sensual selves (Schilling, 1993). The whole development of the dance—disintegration/unification among dancers and differentiation as the result of their competitive impulses—can have direct significance for the change in their habitus, the provisional result of which is new improvised choreography/steps/ figures. Consideration of these mechanisms of integration and differentiation is also relevant to an understanding of how habitus works. Corporeal expression is generally unconscious, fashioned by habitus and may often contradict voluntary expression. At this point the corporeal becomes open to contestation and active reinterpretation, generating the possibility of drawing it into social discourse. Carnival dance is a particular form of social interweaving which possesses the compelling force that pushes through its tension to a specific change and so to other forms of intertwining and interacting. Carnival dance shows that the change in habitus characteristic of the dance is subject

to a quite specific order and direction, although it was not planned by individual dancers or produced by purposeful effort. The choreography of the carnival dance is not intentional/imposed; any more that it is unintentional/irrational. It is developed through the autonomous dynamics of a web of dancers' relationships. Though habitus has an 'infinite capacity for generating practices' (Bourdieu, 1990: 55), the limits to these practices are still set by the socially situated conditions of its production. The conditioned and conditional freedom habitus provides, removes any possibility of totally chaotic creation. On the one hand habitus provides carnival dance with numerous possibilities, freedoms and opportunities. On the other hand, it is the habitus that so clearly defines impossibilities, necessities, and prohibitions inscribed in the objective conditions.

### Concluding Connections and Reflections

Experience stands in ineluctable opposition to knowledge and to the kind of instruction that follows from general theoretical or technical knowledge.  
(Gadamer, 1960/1982: 355)

We suggested at the start of this paper we intended to move the body centre-stage through the theoretically constructed empirical case of carnival dance. We borrow the notion of 'theoretically constructed empirical case' from Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 160) and prefer this to that of metaphor. We see it as a way of bringing to the fore theoretical connections, of thinking differently about organization, rather than exploring the various ways in which what goes on in carnival dance is analogous to what goes on in (work) organizations (without necessarily having to change the way we actually think about organizations). Whilst we hope to have developed in the reader a general awareness that 'the sens pratique of organizing is inscribed in the bodies and in the habitus of practices' (Gherardi, 2000: 216), it still behoves us to elucidate the implications of our analysis for

organizational life and theory.

As indicated in our abstract, in this paper we put to work key analytical concepts from Pierre Bourdieu and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. It would be an understatement to suggest that attention to their body of work in mainstream

organization and management studies has been limited. Merleau-Ponty especially has been largely ignored [Küpers (2005) and Strati (2007) being two notable exceptions] and when mentioned his work often merits little more than a passing reference to 'the body' or 'perception'.

Although

the work of Bourdieu is getting increased recognition in mainstream debates in recent years—for example, Battilana's (2006) use of his conceptualization

of fields; Mutch's (2003) application of his concept of habitus; and Özbilgin and Tatli's (2005) extensive review essay—this often happens in a way that picks up concepts such as field and habitus divorced from their relational context (Mutch et al., 2006) and that ignores Bourdieu's commitment to the empirical domain as the source of his theoretical and

philosophical project (Özbilgin and Tatli, 2005). As these approaches, almost without exception, pay little attention to the issue of embodiment, it should come as little surprise they find the concept of habitus 'vague',

leaving little room for learning and social change (Battilana, 2006), and tending 'towards a sense fatalism and an inevitable reproduction of existing patterns of thought and action' (Mutch, 2003: 397). However, once we start filling out the concept of habitus empirically and relationally it proves to be anything but 'fatalistic'. As Gherardi and Nicolini (2000: 332) pointed out, for Bourdieu the knowledge contained in habitus is primarily a 'competence-to-act' and is deeply rooted in individual and collective identity and practices. The knowledge captured in the habitus is not simply something people have, rather it is better regarded as something that they do (Blackler, 1995).

Our work, then, aims to provide a counterbalance to the dominant disciplinary

discourse on knowledge and learning which was so succinctly captured by Blackler (1995: 1022): 'in place of a strong reliance on knowledge

located in bodies and routines ... emphasis is increasingly falling on the knowledge that is located in brains, dialogue and symbols'. Yet this dominant view has been attacked in phenomenological philosophy as 'unrealistic', since the kind of transcending of experience required for such 'knowledge' is in principle impossible in human affairs (Gadamer, 1982). Carnival dance precisely offers a form of organization (admittedly well beyond the traditional boundaries of the work place) and knowing which is dynamic, concrete and relational. Participants in carnival dance learn by engaging with others in an ongoing practice whilst modifying their relations to all the others and contributing to the overall dance, thus

demonstrating that knowledge is a socio-cultural phenomenon which is not acquired piecemeal by individuals but involves 'the development of a new identity based on participation in the system of situated practices' (Gherardi and Nicolini, 2002: 194). This helps us move beyond what Cook and Brown (1999: 381) call the 'epistemology of possession', which treats knowledge as something people possess (in their heads), thus privileging the individual and the explicit, and facilitating its commodification.

Guided by Bourdieu and Merleau-Ponty, our reading of the organization of carnival dance gives us some insights into what concrete forms an 'epistemology of practice', to use Cook and Brown's terminology, might take. The knowledge expressed in carnival dance does not strive for intellectual control over objects (or subjects) such that they can no longer 'talk back' and surprise us. It offers what Strati (1999, 2007) called 'sensible knowledge'; a knowledge which generates dialectical relations with action and which opposes descriptions that neglect the corporeality of human experience in organizations:

Sensible knowledge is directed towards 'sensible' worlds. That is, it is a form of knowing-and acting-profoundly diverse from the knowledge gathered and produced through the logical and ratiocinative cognitive faculty directed towards 'intelligible' worlds ... it does not restrict such knowledge

to the mere direct, physical and objectively observable relation; instead, it accounts for the subject's intimate, personal and corporeal relation with the experience of the world. (Strati, 2007: 62)

Strati went on to explore three concrete examples (labelled 'with the hands', 'with the feet' and 'with the ear') of such 'sensible knowledge', demonstrating how people adopt bodily movements and postures appropriate to working within a particular organizational space and make these habitual by work practice.

Our own exploration of habitual appropriation in carnival dance allowed us to make links between repetition and experimentation, thus showing how routine and improvisation, tradition and creativity, are utterly intertwined. Those who possess a superior knowledge of dance forms were seen as repositories of tradition. Dance technique is understood by the dancers as an integral part of the lives of bodies in the communities that have produced dance tradition, yet the choreography of the samba is characterized by individual creativity and by no other fixed rule than that the sambista feel must be expressed with the body. Though the dance is in many ways predetermined by dancers' habitus, it does not mean that through the practice of dancing something new cannot be created. For it is in conjunction with habitus that the dynamics of dancers' interaction leads towards new developments in existing group and individual structures. We can trace parallels here with Cook and Brown's (1999: 397-398) study of a group of design teams at Xerox for whom interacting with old artifacts is a source of insights in designing new technologies. The design teams explored how the mechanisms 'sound, feel, and work together', thus regenerating those particular bits of knowledge associated with a particular competency. These cases are ways of responding to what Bilton (2007: xv) calls 'the challenge of creativity in management ... to overcome these stereotypes of novelty and continuity'. As such it adds a timely (or perhaps 'untimely'?) alternative perspective to the discourse surrounding creativity and change management, a discourse which offers 'little evidence of critique or genuinely alternative voices' (Sturdy and Grey, 2003: 652). Precisely because of their unchallenged uniformity, discourses of change and creativity are in danger of being emptied out of all meaning (Rehn and De Cock, in press). If we pay attention to 'sensible knowledge', how people 'create, invent and enact organization, doing so not as individual

yet interrelated 'minds' but through their corporeality' (Strati, 2007: 66), the taken-for-granted grounding of such concepts as creativity, innovation and change starts to look like just so many assumptions, created to fit nicely in with other assumptions. Perhaps we may even come to realize that our familiar theories of organization and the world fit together so snugly, less because we have found out how the world is than because we have tailored each to the other?

In developing our perspective in opposition to dominant perspectives on knowledge and learning, we have remained true to the wider projects of

both Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu of creating an epistemological break—a break with familiar conceptions of the world (Matthews, 2005; Özbilgin and Tatli, 2005). Our final aim is precisely to create new openings, new ways of thinking about the body and organizing—other recent examples are offered by Sørensen (2006) and Thanem (2006)—and we hope that our work, constrained as it is by its particular subject matter, may provide the stimulus/platform for researchers to apply some of our interpretations in other, perhaps less explicitly body-centred, social and organizational settings.

#### Notes

1 For example, Bourdieu said in an interview that he borrowed a way to analyse the relation between individual practice and the world that was neither intellectualistic nor mechanistic from Merleau-Ponty (Mahar, 1990: 34).

2 As Bourdieu put it emphatically: 'I think that one cannot think well except in and through theoretically constructed empirical cases' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 160).

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