One consociate mechanism for the distribution of knowledge: A contribution to the *Festschrift* for Wes Sharrock[1]

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Abstract

Following Wes Sharrock's lead in his classic paper *On Owning Knowledge* (1974), this paper explores the nature of collective representations as recipient designed consociate social objects. The example it examines is a Corporate risk register as the collaborative production of a *Lebenswelt* pairing, namely the written/read format constructed documentary analysis. The paper brings out how the document's structure is used to shape the meanings the risk analysis carries, as well as how that structure is tuned in terms of an indealisation, namely the 'proper reader'. The paper concludes with some remarks on the possible use of sociological theory as a resource for Ethnomethodology.

HALF A LIFETIME OF FRIENDSHIP

Quite rightly, many contributions to this volume will begin by drawing attention to Wes Sharrock's deep scholarship, his extraordinary breadth of reading, his uncanny recall of the minutiae of arguments and evidence as well as his astonishing speed of thought and acuity of judgement.

I want to start with something else though: Wes' generosity. All the time I have known him, Wes has been generous almost to a fault; generous with his time, generous with his ideas and generous with his support for the interests and work of others. Now, anticipating his rebuke, I will accept that he likes his colleagues and students and he likes talking with them about their work and interests. Nonetheless, impressive though the body of his own work is, were we to look for the refraction of his influence in the work of others, I am convinced our estimation of

[1] I would like to thank Mike Lynch and Paul Smith for helpful comments on an earlier draft.

the value of his contribution to the discipline would be increased by orders of magnitude (and I speak as one who has benefited endlessly and immensely from this generosity).

To the above, I want to add something else: Wes as a friend. During the nearly fifty years we have been working together, Wes' friendship is the aspect of our relationship I have valued most. I don't mean just those moments when things don't go well in some other part of your life and his empathy and wisdom help assuage passing frustration and distemper, but also those moments of triumph and success when alongside the congratulations come a few words of caution and *memento mori*. It is the sobering jolt of pragmatic real worldliness as much (or even more than) the balm of personal solace I value. In thick and thin, good time and bad, Wes is there for you but not as a false friend content to echo your rage against the slings, arrows and vicissitudes of the world. He is there to lend you help and support but also to encourage you to understand and be yourself. And, for being that kind of friend to me all these years, I would like to thank him.

INTRODUCTION

One class of Durkheimian facts—the analytic objects claimed these days as Ethnomethodology's (EM) quarry (Garfinkel's oft-cited animals in the foliage)—are collective representations.[2] The standard exemplars are such things as Moses' Decalogue, Newton's Laws of Motion, Churchill's 'blood, sweat and tears' speech and our own 'fake news'; those myths, legends, theories, verities and widely endorsed but not necessarily verifiable views shared within a society. In what is a classic paper (Sharrock 1974), Wes Sharrock pointed out while Sociology has been very concerned to identify the forms which collective representations such as bodies of defined knowledge might take together with their configurations, functional significances and exactly who 'owns' them, by and large it has been less interested in what people actually do with such corpora. Neither has Sociology spent much, if any, time detailing the mechanisms through which knowledge and other collective representations come to be distributed.[3] In the present discussion I want to pick up both insights in the hope of making a small contribution to re-balancing the

[2] Indeed, you could argue that since, by all reports, Durkheim regarded *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1976) to be the culmination of his life's work, they are the most Durkheimian of Durkeimian facts.

[3] The second insight was one of those throw-away *aperçus* anyone who has known Wes for any time will have come to recognise. This one was offered during the discussion of a paper by Graham Button and himself at the Mind and Society meeting in 2018. The clumsy phrasing, though, is mine. With it, I am trying to mark a distinction between the work of those who take an interest in popular culture and its systems of representation and an EM interest in how this representational work is brought off. The social distribution of knowledge is, as we all know, one of the core idealisations of our common sense understanding of the social world identified by Schutz.

state of affairs Wes remarked on. My example is far more prosaic than the Ten Commandments or contested allegations of interference in Presidential elections. It is a risk register, a management object widely found in Corporate strategic plans, reviews, initiatives and the like. My interest is in the risk register as an intersubjectively accomplished written/read Corporate document, a text which constitutes and enables the sharing of a collective representation about the future which an organisation faces.

The mode of analysis I adopt is 'third person phenomenology', an analytic stance Wes and I have identified within Ethnomethodology when viewed as a First Sociology. The notions of a First Sociology and 'third person phenomenology' are quintessential Wes: translucent crystallisations of welters of amorphous ideas. With First Sociology what is central is Ethnomethodology's ontic relationship to more conventional Sociology. It concerns itself with the primordial social facts on which Sociology's own research endeavours rest. Third person phenomenology seeks to provide an analytic or observational account of first person experience, what, in one example we have described, we called its 'interior configuration' (Sharrock and Anderson 2011).

My point of departure will be something of a knight's move on a very familiar theme summarised in a couple of quotations from Garfinkel. The first reveals a procedure, a tactic, for giving momentum to analysis.

> My purpose by deliberately misreading Gurwitsch and Merleau-Ponty, is to appropriate to the interests of EM investigations and its policies and methods, the topics and themes of gestalt phenomena that Gurwitsch and Merleau-Ponty describe as the achievements of their investigations. I give them the EM name: 'a figuration of details'. (Garfinkel 2002: 177)

The second is couched as advice to neophytes trying to apply the procedure for themselves.

> Misreading texts as instructions is the key to exhibiting the 'achieved' phenomenal field details of practical action. If you try that kind of alternate reading simply by confining your attention to the particular direction, alternately read instructionally as a text, you can find yourself up a tree, you can find yourself in something of a cul-de-sac. Meaning you must not only read the text. You must do what the text can be read instructionally as the instructed course of doing. (Garfinkel 2002: 178, emphasis in original)

My move is to use the idea of treating texts as instructions, or better treating the reading of texts as instructed action. Under this rubric, reading involves the laic adoption of an analytic stance towards the detailed features of management objects such as a risk register in order to bring off the social distribution of collective representations and thereby ensure their status as Durkheimian social facts. Accomplishing the written/read text is to achieve a *Lebenswelt* pairing; that is, the following of the text and in so doing the accomplishing of the action the text is a set of instructions for.

The example I will use is taken from materials Wes and I gathered as part of our recent study of executive management, though it was not included in the final published volume.[4] As is the way of these things, in the end deadlines, word length restrictions and our struggle with the unruliness of the example led us to leave it out. So here is a piece of jetsam, something rescued from a project which managed to achieve lift off in part because we had to let it go.

The full document is set out in the Appendix. It is one of the devices managers call 'RAG rating' mechanisms. It forms a component of the organisation's operational plan and, employing a traffic light metaphor, its purpose is to categorise sets of possible outcomes into 'Red', 'Amber' or 'Green' clusters according to the severity of the risk they pose for achievement of the organisation's planned objectives. Similar 'RAG rating' is used with project deadlines and deliverables, sales targets and customer groups, financial performance statements, budget allocations and in myriad other contexts. Indeed, any operational process with defined, time-linked objectives can be RAG rated. There is a further important feature to risk registers and other similar assessment tools. They set out consequential actions to address the profile of assessment outcomes they identify. This combination makes the risk register and its kin composite decision making and accounting devices. The analyses offered in the register provide the accountability of the actions to be taken. This composite character is going to be important for us.

The accountability of the register is tied to another of its features. It is what organisations term a 'live' document. It is updated on a continuing basis, usually quarterly (and with start-up organisations, sometimes monthly). In reviewing the register, the senior management team focus on risk 'variance' and hence on whether the stated management strategies are 'working'. What has changed? Are the severe risks being reduced? Have any risks been 'managed out' (i.e. turned Green, stayed stable and so are no longer attended to)? Have new risks emerged? Because progress on the operational plan is always an item at any Board of Directors meeting, the risk register is considered at that forum as well. Directors have the same order of interest in the register managers do. In addition, though, they attend to what we might call the credibility question. Have *all* the most significant risks been identified? Or are the risks listed only those significant ones which the management team feels it can manage? Because the credibility of the register is of concern to Board members, an orientation to plausibility and conviction (that is, the demonstration of credibility) is one of the register's design features. The

[4] To save space I am going to presume some familiarity with *Action at a Distance* (Anderson & Sharrock 2018), the published study.

register is built to make its reasoning visible with the aim of convincing its readers that the risks the organisation faces are under management control.[5]

A final general point: it is important not to view the risk register as proposing sets of ancillary actions to be placed alongside the delivery of operational targets. Attending to major risks and managing them is just how operational targets are delivered. It is why the register has the managerial importance it does. The register summarises how well the senior management team thinks it is doing with regard to its own priorities.

THE CHIASM OF LOGIC AND MEANING

The risk register is an exercise in organisational hermeneutics. Certain implicatures are to be drawn from what is laid out in the document. Of course, as I have already hinted, these may not be the only inferences drawn. Where there appear to be errors, omissions or 'woolly thinking', readers can come to very different conclusions from those hoped for by the management team. Since registers are rarely accompanied by extended explanatory commentary,[6] to prevent this outcome their internal structure is used to carry the logic of their interpretation. The structure of the logic is entwined in the structure of the meaning. This internal logic is displayed in the document's physical lay-out. The risk register is a 'written/read format-constructed document'. The tabular left/right and top/down format organises the propositions contained in the cells. This kind of format is highly recognisable and widely used.[7] However, even though the managers who construct the register might be highly experienced, on each and every occasion they have to find a way to use that structure to ensure the reading they seek is achieved. This is the work of completing the register; the discovery and exhibiting of the meaning of the 'risks' (that is, resolving the problematic possibilities of set by the conditions, factors, forces and constraints at work in the internal and external environments) which the organisation confronts by making a preferred interpretative path visible and followable through the register's structure. The work of reading the register and hence understanding the analysis, is the work of finding and following the risk management pathway. Both depend on shared apodictic managerial presuppositions, some of which I will describe. For those who construct and those who read the register, the intended outcome is the demonstration of the completeness of the analysis and the appropriateness of the actions to be taken. In very large measure, this achievement rests on providing a lock-stepped path for traversing the structure. The discovery, rendering visible and following of that path, are the *Lebenswelt* pairing of the written/read risk register.

[5] I am going to omit the obvious riff comparing management's practical interests and Sociology's professional interests in plausibility structures.

[6] Indeed, in one sense, an extended commentary immediately makes a register 'fishy'!

[7] See Anderson & Sharrock (2018: Part II).

THE PRAXEOLOGY OF RISK

Each time a risk register is constructed and used, two very practical tasks have to be accomplished. The standard format has to be fettled to yield the required analytic interpretation of the organisation's risk environment. This work is the construction of the 'risk account'. In determining the robustness and credibility of the account, the pathway through the structure has to be followed. Both sets of work constitute the praxis of risk analysis. In both aspects of this praxis, praxeological gaps have to be closed. For the managers building the analysis, these gaps are constituted on the one hand by the format and on the other the available constellation of 'meanings', 'interpretations' and 'data' to hand which has be fitted into that structure. Closing that gap is brought about by socially organised methods for laying out and finding the path. For the 'proper reader',[8] the gap is constituted by the structured analysis and the inferences to be drawn from it. The proper reader is presumed to orient to the self-same methods and to draw on the self-same resources to find the inferential path in the structure as those who construct and mark it. The work, then, relies on an assumption of complementary and reciprocal intersubjectivity. Both writers and readers presume their counterparts possess an array of symmetric competences and capacities, an array which doesn't need to be spelled out (and moreover could not be spelled out even if demanded). This array is shared knowledge, methods and capacities which 'go without saying' among senior managers. As a management object, the register displays all that has been used in its construction and all that will be necessary in its interpretation. Accomplishing the *Lebenswelt* pairing is closing both gaps.[9]

THE CONFIGURATION OF RISK

For the risk register, the organisation lives in an environment of risks.[10] The ones picked out are the bundles felt most likely to influence the successful achievement of the objectives laid out in the organisation's Strategic Plan. Unlike other similar 'bundling exercises', these are not arranged in a causal flow or some other

[8] This is a term of art. A proper reader is a course of action type oriented to by the managers who construct the document. For risk registers, the membership of this type is often highly constrained.

[9] Here we see something at the core of First Sociology: indexicality and reflexivity. Not everything can be spelled out. Specifying the meanings of terms is an open loop exercise. *What* is being indexed by *what* is determined in the context of the occasion and its setting.

[10] A little background may be needed for this and subsequent sections. The organisation is County University (CU), a Higher Education (HE) institution which, at the time the risk analysis was completed, had only recently been created. It was formed from existing provision in the local area but its survival crucially depended on achieving growth through the acquisition of additional student numbers (ASNs) from the Government funding agency. By any estimation, the growth strategy to attract the students and so justify the additional ASNs was highly ambitious. See Anderson and Sharrock (2018) for further detail.

hierarchy (of importance). From the register's point of view, CU's 'gestalt contexture' is a compendium of activities involving an addressed market, an operational delivery process, a set of deployable financial resources, a capital development programme and the management of information about all these things. Each is constituted as an 'alternative CU reality' in the Schutzian sense of distinct finite provinces of meaning: CU as market player; CU as delivery engine; CU as political actor and so on. In producing these realities, 'the same' activities are re-arranged and re-profiled within the bundles according to the structures of the relevant reality.

As a scan of the register shows, each bundle is decomposed into specific 'dimensions' of risk (tier 2) and indications of the ways those dimensions will be realised (tier 3). Tier 2 is not a further set of risks but a formulation of the logic of the risks in tier 1. The cell marked 'implication' is an inference over the relevant key targets. While the decompositional logic works through the tiers, the logic of risk selection works upwards or backwards from target to risk bundle. This is the key to the designed credibility of the exercise. In building the register, managers start with those things ('the killers') which if they are not managed will lead to major disruption or even, *in extremis,* dissolution of the organisation. They then work back through the specific risk bundle to which those risks have been attached. While the 'production' logic of risks works left to right, the 'selection logic' works right to left since if the 'killer' implications are not identified, then the key risks they represent won't be either. When reviewing the structure of risks, any competent reader will look first to the implications in order to identify where the omissions might be.[11] The future perfect historiography (the 'how it will have been brought about' story) is of much less interest or importance (but not unimportant). The summarised historiography plays a role in presenting the preferred decompositonal ordering but not in selecting or specifying the risks.

THE APPREHENSION OF RISK

The risk register is produced as, and seen as, an account of senior management priorities. What things are the top executives trying to ensure or avoid? It is, therefore, a window on their own budgeting of their time and attention. Two variables are used to configure these preferences; impact and likelihood. Some organisations like to use ordinal (often 3 or 5 point) scaling with the product of impact and probability defining the 'riskiness' of the risk. CU uses nominal categories. Whichever method is adopted, the critical consideration is in securing a credible assessment for a 'real' or 'realistic' risk. The inclusion of low impact/low probability risks is a sign of poorly thought through, rushed or otherwise shifty analysis which will lack credibility. Two sets of things are being assumed here. First that there is

[11] That is after they have scanned the risk column to see which are red and how many there are.

knowledge of the agreed key targets of the organisation. Naturally, some of these are generic. Every organisation will worry about shortfalls on revenue targets or threats to its business model. Other targets, though, are peculiar to CU, for example the criticality of ASNs. Second, it is assumed that there is knowledge of the causal texture through which the implication generates the impact. This causal texture is, of course, contextual. Halting of the availability of ASNs threatens CU's existence because of its business model. It would not do so for a more mature university. In other words, seeing the meaning of 'impact' requires an understanding of CU's strategic plan and its core business structure. Once again, some of the interrelationships within these two are standard and others very much more idiosyncratic. Appreciating the shape of the risk profile entails determining which is which.

The interpretation of likelihood turns on a third set of taken for granted understandings; those which senior managers have of the character of CU and of organisations like CU. What senior managers are drawing on here is their accumulated experience of how things in universities and similar organisations usually turn out. As can be seen from the detail offered in footnote 8 above, one of CU's problems is that at this point in its existence, it has no accumulated history and so managers are forced to project prior experience in other settings onto CU's short and medium term future. The resources for this projection are, first, the typicality of the decompositional logics of the risk bundles and second the mapping of CU onto those typical structures. For example, terminating the flow of ASNs would choke off most of CU's opportunities to enlarge its market share and so, as with any start up, result in an eroding (or erasing) its capacity to grow. It does not have a mature market which it can try to re-configure. However, this is HE and, unlike the business world, in HE 'big' decisions are rarely subject to short term revocation. The impact of terminating ASNs is high but the likelihood it will happen much lower. Given an understanding of CU and HE, the 'story' regarding ASNs tells itself. The same holds for all the other pairings of impact and likelihood. Even conditions which if they were to eventuate, would be 'disastrous', are framed as of little concern as long as they are unlikely.[12]

THE SYMMETRY RISK AND RESPONSE

While impact and likelihood are important, they do not entirely determine RAG rating. Equally important are temporality and the fit of risk and response. Obviously clear and present dangers are going to matter more than future uncertain ones. But it is more subtle than that. Temporality refers to the timeline over which

[12] This is the reason why some organisations do not favour scaling. The resulting 'scaled' risk loses the qualitative assessment. Or, rather, it encourages focus on the 'high' numbers without necessarily allowing either a clear view of the components of the assessment or the 'play' in the assessment criteria.

the mitigation will be put in place. This is most readily seen in the case of the risk of a major incident. Such an incident will have high impact but the likelihood is set at rare. At the point the register was constructed, CU had not yet begun to develop and test a Major Incident Plan. This is a significant exposure for an organisation of its size. If one compares this situation to the risk of failure in Quality Standards, again there is a combination of high impact and low likelihood, but this risk is identified as 'green' because the required support processes for Quality and Assurance of Standards are being put in place with the date of completion being the announced date of an upcoming audit. In terms of impact and likelihood, these two risks are equivalent. But only when you know what CU's senior team is focussed on does the differential weighting become reasonable.

The relative fit of risk to response is defined by the scope of the mitigation strategy. Whatever is not 'managed out' by that strategy remains a residual risk. Demonstrating the scale of this residual risk is important. Managing risks is not necessarily (or even usually) about eradicating them but rather trying to reduce them to a level 'we can live with'. Some 'riskiness' always remains. What is visible here is the budget line or trade-off between effort (i.e. scaling up the mitigation) and the materiality of the residual risk posed. Scoping the strategy (that is, deciding what and how much of it will be done) is critical. It fixes choices in operational planning and implementation.

For senior managers, picking the 'right things to do' is not about starting up new activities but the shaping and targeting of those things that are already planned and being (or about to be) implemented so in delivering what they are tasked to deliver, they manage risk as well. Choosing activities whose re-shaping will maximise organisational effectiveness and minimise organisational torque (in other words, achieve the effect with the minimum of disruption) is a management art. Once again, the cessation of ASNs offers an interesting example. Mitigation consists in re-shaping two lines of action already in place. Growth plans are constantly under review as part of the annual planning and budget setting process. These plans would be re-shaped by shifting growth away from ASNs to other areas together and by tuning back levels of growth expected. Ongoing cost management processes would be racked up to address the subsequent revenue shortfall. However, in the short to medium term not all costs are under (internal) control. Increases in utility costs, for example, or national salary agreements, are not within CU's immediate control. As a consequence, costs associated with these and similar aspects of CU's operation constitute a residual risk which cannot be managed out. It is the combination of the risk impact and likelihood pairing counterbalanced by the potential residual risk which provides the final rating of 'Amber'.

CONSTITUTING THE MARKET AS THEMATISED RISK

Thus far, I have been attending to the two dimensional logic of the register: the tiered structure and the shaping of assessment and response. In this section, I will work through the logic of the one risk which any manager taking up the register would undoubtedly focus on first; the market engagement line assessed as 'Red'. The pivot on which this risk turns is the centrality of revenue targets. Continuing failure to attain revenue targets is life threatening for any organisation. But so are many other things. Why is it deemed to be so dangerous for CU? The answer is the scale of the risk at this point in CU's strategic development. First, there are the scale of the impact and the level of likelihood. A revenue shortfall would be critical if it were to happen and, in the current circumstances, it might. The second set of considerations reflects back on what kind of failure this would be. It would be a market engagement failure and market engagement is the central plank in CU's strategic plan. Failure to *maintain and build on* contract levels by calling down ASNs would be a complete failure of strategic intent. It would not just be an operational failure; it would also be the failure to expedite the organisation's mission. If it were to occur, the rationale for CU would have to be questioned. To repeat the phrase we used in the discussion of the sensitivity analysis in *Action at a Distance*, these circumstances would not lead to organisational re-direction but to exit. This is what anyone with a knowledge of CU, its strategic mandate, the background to the initiative and its organisational structure knows. As a risk, it is not just predominant, it is massive and potentially overwhelming.

Then there is the timeline. The immediate organisational context for the assessment is CU's recent recruitment history which, as we detailed in *Action at a Distance*, is following a trajectory considerably below the original strategic plans (and, indeed, somewhat below the revised plans). This is not a future danger but one which is being realised, at least in part, and with which the organisation is struggling. The risk is ongoing and has not been reduced. The mitigation has all the elements you might expect. Churn the courses in the hope of hitting on something which will ignite market attractiveness. Undertake intense but short term pulses of marketing. Tighten belts even more than before and revise the target numbers downwards. This is really all the management team can do and what they are doing (whilst stopping short of initiating an exit strategy such as a 'takeover' by one of the major universities in the region).

What makes this risk different is the looseness of fit between the mitigation and the scale of the problem. The size of the disparity marks recognition by the senior management team that the drivers for the original risk specification are outside CU's control. Low growth in aspiration is both a long term characteristic of the local educational culture and affected by organisations other than CU. (For an extended account of all the factors involved see *Action at a Distance Part II*). Full funding for the refurbishment of facilities which had been transferred from a local

College was not secured at this point. Should the full funding package not be acquired, it would be impossible to lift the facilities to the level required. The actions set out in the mitigation do not and could not address this challenge. The management team has no way to ameliorate the risk. Any success in managing the risk and attaining the targets would be in spite of these barriers. Any shortfall on the targets will exacerbate the drag being imposed by them and, in addition, any reduction in strategic momentum can only serve to increase the impact of the friction they generate. If you don't know all this background, while it is possible to understand why the risk associated with the CU 'offer' might be 'Red', it is almost impossible to see why it must be so.

SUMMARY

The analysis I have given draws out the pair of complementary interpretive strategies visible in the CU Major Risk Register. These strategies enable the co-production of the risk analysis as a written/read *Lebenswelt* pair. Both rely on the contextual use of the standardised formatted structure of the register to order the risks identified, thereby constituting their meaning or significance. This is matched by a use of the structure to discover the path through the categories which, in turn, constitutes the credibility of the analysis. Both strategies critically depend on the use of common yet unarticulated understandings to render the structure 'docile-enough' for the pairing to be successfully achieved. In the absence of these resources, without extensive interrogation of the categories the symmetry of the reasoning would remain intersubjectively intractable. To work as the kind of meeting document it is, that is as a device for focusing and constraining discussion, such intractability has to be overcome. My analysis shows the skill in carrying out this organisational work as part and parcel of defining and sharing the analysis, managing risk and calling up taken for granted assumptions that work rests on. Management objects like the risk register are to be found everywhere in organisations, a fact that is further testimony to how essential they are to accomplishing those social institutions as forms of consociation and hence as endogenously organised systematically reproducible structures of sustainable action at a distance.

SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY AS A RESOURCE FOR ETHNOMETHODOLOGY

I want now to thread this analysis back into the considerations with which I started, corpora of knowledge, the misreading of texts, Sociology's concern for Durkheimian facts, and EM's relationship to those concerns and to the accounts which are given of them. The latter, in particular, have been a constant pre-occupation of Wes' for most of his career.

For me, one of the most important points made in *Action at a Distance* is the claim that, as a First Sociology, EM does not need to have the fraught relationship which many would say it currently has with Sociology. It does not need to be seen as a problem child, nor does it have to be permanently rebellious towards its disciplinary parent. The reasons are simple enough. Because EM does not share Sociology's field assumptions (to borrow a term of Alec McHoul's (2009)), it does not have the same analytic objectives. And because it does not have the same analytic objectives, its methods can't be expected to be the same. Of course, I accept EM was born out of a critique of the central tenets of 'constructive analysis' (among other things) in Sociology, a critique which enabled it to develop its own grounding. But once that work had been completed, the purpose of the critique was satisfied and the point at which EM needed the argument was past. The two could, and did, simply part ways, although 'professional' as well as 'laic' sociological analysis continued to offer resources and opportunities for EM's own work. Sociology carried on with its revelatory concerns for the hidden order underpinning the structures of daily social life whilst EM pursued its program of excavating the order visible in the phenomena which constitute the apodicticies of those very structures.

While this parting ought to lead to a policy of analytic indifference on both sides and hence disciplinary tolerance, it does not mean the two endeavours have to be completely sundered. Neither does looking from within the point of view of EM towards the point of view of Sociology mean one is seeking either to prop up constructive analysis or engage in it. Sociology has some interesting problems (it must have or we would not have been drawn to it in the first place) which EM has always used as stimuli for its own modes of working. Misreading philosophers may well have been among Garfinkel's 'aids to a sluggish imagination' but he could just as easily have proposed misreading sociologists. Indeed, as Mike Lynch has pointed out (personal communication), one could say that is what he does with Durkheim.[13] In this final section, I want to offer an illustration of how the analysis of the risk register could be treated as just such a misreading and what it might imply.

'The Great Transition' is Sociology's founding idealisation, so it is hardly surprising the frame of reference of sociological luminaries like Giddens, Beck, Luhmann and their critics use to position their discussion of the significance of risk in contemporary society is cast in terms of the consequences of modernisation, that historical process by which contemporary forms of society were developed during the 16th to 19th centuries. At the core of the idealisation is a comparison of two types of society—pre-modern and modern—which are contrasted on every

[13] There is an important point to be made here. Just as Garfinkel's misreading of Schutz, Gurwitsch, or Merleau-Ponty did not turn EM into a form of philosophical phenomenology, so misreading of sociological authors need not imply a reneging on foundational EM principles let alone a reconciliation of them with the principles of contemporary Sociology.

descriptive axis Sociology can invent. As with its partner, industrialisation, modernisation is not viewed as a single phase change. Rather it is an evolving reconfiguration driven by the increasing social (and hence cultural) importance of science and technology. These twin revolutionary forces created the structures of High and Late Capitalism and the social formations associated with them. Now they are creating the social formation of our current modality, one which the mandarin theorists of Sociology call 'reflexive modernisation' (Beck, Giddens and Lash 1994).

For Giddens (whose account seems to act as the foil for others in this debate), there are two dominant characteristics of contemporary society: the loss of nature and the loss of tradition. The former is not the disappearance of the natural but its socialisation. Today, no part of the natural world escapes society's imprint. As for the loss of tradition, this is marked by erosion first of old certainties (the 'death of God') and their substitution by the determinist miracle of Newtonian Physics followed, in turn, by its displacement by a *Weltanschaung* of philosophical and scientific uncertainty. Since the character of our knowledge is constantly being radically transformed, *per impossibile,* we cannot say we know *for certain*. In Giddens' view, the net effect of these processes has been a disembedding of social relationships from the context of local concrete relationships and structures and a re-embedding of them in generalised, abstract institutional systems and relationships. The Protestantism of Martin Luther has morphed into that of Martin Buber; the Physics of Laplace has been surpassed by that of Niels Bohr. One of the consequences of this turbulence of disembedding and re-embedding has been the disappearance of a reliance on 'fate' and its explanatory assurance. In its stead, we have the angst associated with the ubiquity and pervasiveness of 'manufactured risk'.

> Manufactured risk refers to new risk environments for which history provides us with very little previous experience. We often don't really know what the risks are, let alone how to calculate them accurately. (Giddens 1998, p 28)

In Giddens' view, this has led to a shift in value orientations and 'new moral climate of politics', a 'push-pull' of scaremongering and cover-ups locked in a double-bind of uncertainty. Since we don't know (for certain) whether any claimed deleterious action (smoking, climate warming, fracking) 'really' does pose a risk (all we have are relatively plausible scientific and other 'beliefs') what is and what is not a risk has become politicised as clashes of values. It is this politicisation which makes the contemporary form of modernisation 'reflexive'. The debates force society to reflect upon the decisions it makes. But of course, even then those decisions are cast by some as the imposition of dominant interests and their ideologies.[14]

There is a paradox here, though. The very forces generating this tidal flow of pervasive uncertainty have created a countervailing undertow, namely the gradual extension of the certainties of applied mathematics into almost every corner of our civic, social and economic lives. This began in science with what Heidegger (1977: 26) calls '... the unconcealment in accordance with which nature presents itself as a calculable complex of the effects of forces' and has extended to the 'Enframing' of instrumental rationality which underpins what he holds to be the disciplinary degeneration exhibited in the professionalisation of instrumental rationality, a trend which reaches its apogee in regulatory decision making systems used to confront our uncertainty and the risks entailed thereby. Because we are now 'Enframed' by instrumental reason, audits, financial accounts, regulatory procedures, cost-benefit analysis and similar processes function as coping mechanisms, lifebuoys which, in the face of uncertainty, we use to avoid drowning in the icy waters of existential angst.

EM can have no truck with the speculative theorising of a Giddens or a Heidegger. They offer no way of getting the kind of investigative purchase it needs. However, what it can do is misread or misconstrue those texts in service of its own central questions, thereby treating them as if they spoke to EM's problems. If we were to do so, questions like the following might spring to mind: If 'Enframing' is the ubiquitous deployment of instrumental reason in all parts of the social world, where might we find perspicuous settings in which that reasoning might be exhibited? How could we observe the Durkheimian facticity of its function as an existential coping mechanism? In other words, what might the socially structured permeation of 'Enframing' look like as the routine shop floor work of managing uncertainty in daily life and where might it be found? My claim in the analysis I presented above is that the artefactual rendering of the intersubjective details of instrumental reasoning is analytically available in management objects like risk registers. In producing them as the properly constituted, recognisably competent management objects they clearly are, the teams constructing them create one of the apodictic phenomena which Heidegger's critique of modernity takes for granted. Moreover, these teams do so as part and parcel of their daily immersion in the routine course of their managerial lives. To phrase it in more characteristically Garfinkellian tones, a demonstration of strategies for the co-production of a Corporate risk register as a *Lebenswelt* pair is one answer to a question which, in

[14] There is an irony here. In Tony Blair's New Labour, Giddens saw a possible resolution to all this: a new way of reconciling the old polarities which structured debate. The revelation that New Labour was just power hungry, manipulative, autocratic, ideological, elitist and self-serving as well as beholden to the City and vested interests, just as its political opponents were, could stand, if one were needed, as an existence proof of the danger of too facile a translation from sociological analysis to political action.

its misreading, asks 'What on earth could Heidegger be talking about when he speaks of modernity's unconcealment through the presencing of Dasein as Enframing?'

In ending, let me be clear though. The analysis prompted by this misreading is nothing like the full throated Heideggerianism of many post-modernist theorists nor even the *sotto voce* version that Alec McHoul (1998) teased us with!

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APPENDIX: CU MAJOR RISK REGISTER

Reviewed & updated 26-06-09
Updated by

RED	Risk being realised and impact critical. Major countervailing actions being developed.
AMBER	Risk being realised but impact not critical or being reduced
GREEN	Risk managed

RISK TIER 1	RISK TIER 2	RISK TIER 3	IMPLICAT'N	IMPACT	PROB'TY	MITIGATION	OWNER	TIMELINE	RESIDUAL RISK	RISK
Market Engagement	CU "offer" is not sufficiently attractive to prospective students	Failure to maintain contract levels Failure to take up ASNs	Shortfall in revenue against business plan targets	Critical	Possible	Frequent & continual review of offer Short term marketing Financial contingency planning Revision to UCS forward business plan	CD CD EF EF & AB	Ongoing	Growth in aspiration in core market slower than envisaged Refurbished facilities remain below acceptable standard	RED
	HEFCE issues no further ASNs beyond 2011-12	CU growth strategy is halted	Revised business and viability model threatened	Major	Possible	Revise growth plans Stringent cost management introduced	AB	March 2009	Uncontrollable cost escalation	AMBER
	Failure to Engage Employers in CPD development	CPD offer not attractive to employers or potential students	Shortfall in revenue against business plan targets	Moderate	Probable	Targeted engagement with identified corporate clients Establish links with Business support agencies etc Year on year planning and review	HoS/SS	Ongoing Ongoing	Slower take up because difficulty in establishing position in local market Impact of recession	AMBER
Business Delivery	CU re-structure	Difficult of recruiting to posts in timely manner	Potential loss of momentum and leadership of some Schools	Moderate	Possible	Review Executive Portfolios to allow Interim CEO to focus on corporate role Develop contingency plans for HoS	Exec	Jan 2010	Extended notice period for recruited candidates Interim post holders leave UCS	GREEN

RISK TIER 1	RISK TIER 2	RISK TIER 3	IMPLICAT'N	IMPACT	PROB'TY	MITIGATION	OWNER	TIMELINE	RESIDUAL RISK	RISK
	CU Staff "offer" not attractive	Unable to recruit appropriate staff to deliver growth	Curriculum developm't is not as ambitious or aggressive as required	Critical/ disastrous	Possible	Gather market intelligence Develop package Develop recruitment information Develop induction arrangements Train existing staff	GH	Ongoing	Moderate risk of focused funding causing staff resentment.	GREEN
	Failure with Corporate System Development	Critical extensions to implemented systems and new systems delayed or significantly re-designed	Significant reduction in functionality & effectiveness Reduction in quality of user experience Weak MIS Lack of systems integrity	Major	Possible	Focus on delivery of 'critical few' projects Core systems architecture maintained Detailed projected planning and management	IJ	September 2010	Risk because of resource constraints	GREEN
	Failure to engage sponsoring universities in business planning	Inadvertent competition and loss of co-ordination	Loss of collaborative & supportive relationship	Critical	Possible	Define & share Academic Strategy Build on academic review & development collaborative task team Build strong relationships with University Senior Teams	AB	Ongoing Ongoing	Moderate risk of continual lack of knowledge senior academic and support staff	GREEN

RISK TIER 1	RISK TIER 2	RISK TIER 3	IMPLICAT'N	IMPACT	PROB'TY	MITIGATION	OWNER	TIMELINE	RESIDUAL RISK	RISK
	Major ncident puts business deliviery at risk	Loss of facilities and resources for delivery Health impact for staff and students (e.g. Meningitis or SARS)	Reputation loss & revenue loss Major impact on experience of those affected	Critical/ disastrous	Rare	Robust critical incident management plan in place	CU Exec	Jan 2010	Interim risk of sub-optimal response to incident	AMBER
	Failure of Quality & Standards assurance processes	CU degree validation questioned or suspended by Universities/QAA	Reputational loss and consequential market share loss	Critical/disastrous	Rare	Careful & detailed preparation for Collaborative Audit	KL	June 2010	UCS model is complex and some minor local difference of approach are likely. This may not be understood by Audit Panel	GREEN
Financial	Failure to manage within approved financial plan	Deficit increases beyond agreed tolerance band. Cash manag'nt becomes difficult	Increase in drawdown of overdraft facility	High	Possible	Strong financial planning	EF	Ongoing	Impact of "shocks" such as greater than planned inflation, unforeseen costs, interest rate increases, shortfall in recruitment etc	AMBER
	Failure to control key financial processes	Uncontrolled cost escalation	Increased in deficit or reduction in surplus	Medium	Possible	Defined, documented and implemented Financial Process & Regulations	EF	July 2010	Transition to compliance culture will take time	AMBER

RISK TIER 1	RISK TIER 2	RISK TIER 3	IMPLICAT'N	IMPACT	PROB'TY	MITIGATION	OWNER	TIMELINE	RESIDUAL RISK	RISK
	Cost of funding growth ramps faster than incremental revenues	Shortfall on planned cash flow	Impact on universities' balance sheet	Low	Possible	Strong monitoring of budget spending and cash flow	EF	Ongoing	Impact of "shocks" such as greater than planned inflation, unforeseen costs, interest rate increases, shortfall in recruitment etc	GREEN
		Cost of borrowing increases faster than plan.	Unplanned & uncontrollable increase in project cost s or funding costs	Medium	Possible	Revise CU business model Negotiate borrowing with long term deals	EF	Ongoing	Slight risk of revision of fixed rate.	GREEN
		Staff development and related staffing costs greater than plan	Unplanned increase in cost base	Moderate	Possible	Initiate staff development planning and budget deployment	GH	Ongoing	Moderate risk of overspend	GREEN
	Inability to raise sufficient funds to finance Phase II	CU growth capped at Phase I levels	Long term sustainability of CU threatened	Critical	Possible	Continue to develop partnership approach to funding. Develop funding contingency plans	CU Board	March 2010	Moderate to critical risk of insufficient funding for whole of Phases II	RED
	Inability to raise sufficient funds to support LN developments	Less than optimal facilities provided for HE in the LN	Student recruitment and quality of provision threatened	Moderate (high impact locally)	Likely	Continue to develop partnership approach to funding. Develop funding contingency plans utilizing HEFCE T&L Funds	AB & Exec	Ongoing	Insufficient funding available for current plans	RED

RISK TIER 1	RISK TIER 2	RISK TIER 3	IMPLICAT'N	IMPACT	PROB'TY	MITIGATION	OWNER	TIMELINE	RESIDUAL RISK	RISK
Capital Programme	Weak project management	Cost escalation in for re-furbishment & UQ1	CU borrowing requirement increases	Moderate	Slight	Cost led approach not design led with strict sign off	IJ	On going	Slight risk of inflationary costs, high running costs & less space	GREEN
		Project overrun in Refurbishment & UQ1	CU borrowing requirement increases	Moderate	Possible	Develop contingency plan	IJ	September 2009	Slight risk in the short term of less space & lower quality provision	GREEN
	Insufficient student accommodation available at central campus	Negative impact on student recruitment	Slower than planned growth in FTEs	Critical	Medium	Contract negotiation with WJ for alternative accommodation	IJ	Spring 2010	Over reliance on private sector for student accommodation	GREEN
	Insufficient student accommodation available within Learning Network	Negative impact on student recruitment	Slower than planned growth in LN Centres	Low (in short term)	High	Development of CU Accommodation Framework	IJ/Colleges	Ongoing	Demand may be insufficient to be attractive to local landlords	AMBER
Reputational	Major shortfall against CU public objectives	Loss of Partner & Stakeholder confidence Loss of media and public support	Resistance to further rounds of funding and/or expansion of CU	Moderate	Possible	More sophisticated & targeted PR campaign National PR campaign	AB	Ongoing	High risk of underachieving Phase II & III funding.	GREEN
Political Context	National policy changes for HE	CU base model of growth under threat	CU unable to maintain growth through recruitment to ASNs	Critical	Possible	HEFCE re-assurance re ASNs for SDF Projects Scale back UCS growth profile	AB	Ongoing	Uncertainty regarding ASNs & future HEFCE priorities.	AMBER

RISK TIER 1	RISK TIER 2	RISK TIER 3	IMPLICAT'N	IMPACT	PROB'TY	MITIGATION	OWNER	TIMELINE	RESIDUAL RISK	RISK
	Transition to Unitary Authorities	Unitary Authority delay causes uncertainty and delay in support and funding	Capital contribution to LN plans difficult to fund	Critical -> moderate	Possible	Work with Local Authorities to understand minimal possible commitments	AB	Immediate	UC contribution to HE development in LN reduced	AMBER
	Public Sector Funding Retrenchment	Reduction in levels of funding available to HEFCE, SHA and stakeholders	Pressure on revenue budgets Lack of funding for further capital development	Moderate	Likely	Maintain strong financial control and improve planning processes UQ1 development and Campus North refurb provides growth headroom	AB IJ	Immediate	Freeze in ASNs Reduction in contract numbers Unfunded ASNs	AMBER