

## **THE CURIOUS ORGANISATIONAL WORLD OF IMAGINATION, ART AND THE PRECARIAT: IMAGINING A FRIEND**

**J. Miguel Imas<sup>1</sup>**

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### **RESUMO**

Neste texto procuramos evidenciar as concepções de Marcelo Vieira sobre a relação entre a cultura, o mercado e o desenvolvimento. Baseamo-nos, sobretudo, nos trabalhos realizados no âmbito do projeto PROCAD, na parceria entre os programas de pós-graduação em Administração da Escola de Administração Pública e de Empresas e da Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina. Do conjunto dos trabalhos selecionamos três, nos quais Marcelo e seus orientandos discutem e aprofundam os principais conceitos do projeto. No primeiro artigo é abordada a evolução do contexto histórico do campo da cultura de 1920 a 2002. No segundo, a relação entre cultura e desenvolvimento é discutida e os dois conceitos são aprofundados. O terceiro artigo utiliza os conceitos e relações anteriores para a reflexão sobre um caso empírico do Programa Bairro-Escola de Nova Iguaçu-RJ. Entendemos que os três artigos, embora não representem a obra de Marcelo, evidenciam características importantes da contribuição que deu aos estudos organizacionais no campo da cultura no Brasil.

Palavras-chave: Cultura. Desenvolvimento. Mercado. Campo da Cultura.

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1 Visiting Professor of Getulio Vargas Foundation, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Director Creativity, Discourses, New Values & Practices in Latin American and African Organisations Dept. of Leadership, HRM & Organisation, Kingston University. J.Imas@kingston.ac.uk.

*“Tell her that you are coming to explore dreams.” “What do you mean?” I said. “Dreams... are dreams and you will discover many along these corridors.” He said, standing in one corner of the office and inadvertently gazing through the glass window. From the large glass room, strategically located at the centre of the floor, to provide a good view of the entire office floor, you could see people going about their daily dramas. I looked too and could see some stressing faces, some smiley ones and some heads fully in tune with their computers. But, I could also see our reflections in the glass too. I could see our faces and the contours of our human figures. For a sec, I could pretend I could catch our own drama, transparent and blissful in that room. This experience felt very strange. We were there to capture others’ reflections that could tell us something about the ingenuity, practices, narratives of the day to day activities people had in this building. Interrupting my own dream, he said, “Never mind, just go and collect as many as you can and don’t despair if you don’t understand them! For dreams are the provisions of our and their curiosity.” After that he began to turn his attention to other theoretical organisation matters that appear to dominate his mind. I couldn’t tell what his thoughts were about. That was his trade, his craft. I couldn’t decipher in that room what was he implying. I only had a gut feeling that we were there discussing more than just work, business or organisation, but something else... lives and even souls.... It was time to wonder outside and begin the process of collecting these dreams. I needed to learn; to force myself to understand, to appreciate why dreams and not simply the real world. Not an easy task, I thought, for the one who wonders and lives immersed in others’ dreams, may live suspended in these long labyrinthic corridors which are in most cases product of our joint imaginations.... That day I could not make sense, just let myself guided by his intuitions and experience gaze.”*

The passage above, the reader may wonder, illustrates a meeting between two scholars (a master and a pupil) discussing the imponderables of conducting social/organisational research in an office; in an organisation. The passage presents a mystifying and fictional story line drawn from Haruki Murakami’s novel *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* (Murakami, 2003). It is suspended in time and with no clear reference to any particular place (except an office building). Remarkably though, the passage describes this pursue of knowledge under the concept of ‘dreams’ rather than cognitive or behaviouristic as the rules and procedures of our subject (in most cases) impose us to do. It invites a *Borgesian*

conjecture of a blurred universe where ‘reality’ is blended with ‘imagination’; where it is difficult to separate the real from the imaginative, from the dream. ‘Dreams’ are at the centre of our creative and imaginative experience, unleashing a wave of narrative constructions, emotional communications, bodily reactions and spontaneous illuminations (Bogzaran, 2005). Dreams, like suggested in the passage above, appeal to an aesthetic form of theorising (Hansen et al., 2007) rather than our more archaic and mundane *scientific* one. In this aesthetic theorising, we open our senses to experience multiple opening and possibilities of how, e.g., to understand what we research, and to consider other meanings as valuable as the ones produce by our factual knowledge privileged practices. We posit ourselves under a different cloud that considers artistic, imaginative and creative forms at the centre of our theoretical, philosophical and rational experience.

Under this creative and artistic cloud I want to take license as a writer and researcher here, mixing the real, the poetic and imaginative, to reflect upon my collaborative work with my colleague and friend, Professor Marcelo Milano Vieira. Sadly, his joy, academic zeal and physical presence are not with us anymore. He left us untimely to wonder on questions that touch our human (organisational) sensibilities. Undoubtedly, his legacy to the study of organisation in Brazil is unquestionable. His legacy on the study of culture, power, his philosophical inclinations towards the work of Burdieu leave behind an open ended dialogue of ideas that Brazilians and other scholars will visit and revisit for many years to come. I do not want to go long here then, eulogising his work. It is for readers to explore (and discuss) such large bibliography he left behind. In this essay, I want to concentrate instead in our recent encounters and dialogues about the arts, precariousness and organisation studies in Brazil and Latin America. These discussions, together with Professor Katarzyna Kosmala, ended in a book project (under construction) that brought together different disciplinary strands from art to organisation studies. It brought us together to elaborate and construct theory of organisation from the periphery (precariousness) and the arts. Moreover, it brought together our sensibilities and passions as authors, artists and craftsmen of organisation.

My purpose here is very simple. First and foremost, I want to honour my friend and colleague untimely departure. I do this by employing a *Borgesian* mythical and allegorical narrative of a dialogical (Bakhtin) kind, blurring the real from the imagined, to celebrate his capacity to transcend beyond the confines of our realm of studies. In this created world that I present next, I set what others will have to end in his absence which is to explore (with artists) what for us reflect our trade as creative, imaginative, passionate and aesthetic act; an

extension of who we think do and are. He was there with us in this project, committed to this work of art that excited him and stimulated his mind. I close the paper with a poem, inspired by his work and years of camaraderie and respect of what he did in Brazil, Latin America and beyond.

## **PRECARIETY, ORGANISATION & ART**

*It's the possibility of having a dream come true that makes life interesting.”  
(Paulo Coelho, Alchemist)*

The idea that some *invisible* characters in organisation studies are product of a world conceived in the remote areas of the Amazon; or to be more precise outside the boundaries of civilization was exposed in the early days of the Brazilian colony. The periphery of civilization as contemplated and described by several European authors with only partial knowledge of traditions and customs of that periphery invited some to proclaim that the organisational world inhabited by those characters may be an obscure world that could never be found. No much research until the present day has come to enlighten further this thought. Since most of this world belongs to the so called *precariat*, difficult to see, experience and recount, scientists of the social type declared the remoteness and distance Amazonian world as a dark land, inaccessible by the scientific eye. Is it possible then that this peripheral world, where our theoretical canons do not exist or cannot be applied, could never materialise? Is it possible to sustain that characters who inhabit this world are condemned to remain in the obscurity of our and others imagination?

That question terrify scholars of organisation studies who could only restrict themselves to define that periphery as a ‘precarious’ world, that possesses cultural elements distinctively different from our capitalist contours. This pre-capitalist world, e.g., Christian Duparc (in Plante, 2010) describes as possessing values such as friendship, solidarity, affection and virility, alongside unknown and unaccountable working practices – a cultural island. Standing (2011) sustains that this world consist of insecure, migrant, frustrated (young) people, with no decipherable jobs, no much opportunities, exploited and criminalised by a system that marginalised their existence. This is a world at the periphery of material existence (Wacquant, 2008); a world without (access to) resources for the full development of life

(Precarias a la Deriva, 2006). A world invisible to detect and account therefore condemn to ignominious [non]existence.

This obscured world appears to be silenced and condemned by a European sign of, first the colonial type, and then the postcolonial one (ref). The [post]colonisers obsessed with lineal representations, economic progression, and social homogenisations could neither find nor describe that strange and obscure land. Even worst, they did not allow any notion of knowledge to emerge from outside what they regarded as the legitimate *colour palette* from which well researched theories and constructs emerge. The Amazonian realm then remained an uncivilized and obscured land that could not be touched, dreamed or discussed beyond the dogmas of the post-colonial (scientific and capitalist) eye.

The obscurity of this world condemned by this higher authority of knowledge and progression was something contemporary authors in the Brazilian latitude of organisation science were trying to paint using another brush. Their brushes distinctively different from the material and scientific colonised mind resonated more with the work of art. Art, the aesthetical and emotional inter-connection of ideas, creativity, thoughts, feelings and sensibilities, according to them, could (perhaps) finally unveil a version (or many versions as some sustain) of this obscured world of the *precariat*. An artistic practice, it was thought, could shake the preconceived and fixed knowledge and official versions of the colonised (organised) world, allowing a multitude of meaningful experiences to shake the fixed dogmas of our (colonised) past, present and future. The indiscernible *precariat* could then emerge as a multitude of people, whose voices may suggest an all together different way of engaging with ‘invisibility’ of the Amazonian land and the creation of meaning through a cacophony of narratives, pictures, music, painting of many different cultural and historical types.

A *renaissance* (organisation) scholar painted in the colours of an exiled Duchamp (Demos, 2007), moving in-between places, resisting to conform and aspiring to re-materialise the everyday existence of the obscured land was the project some Brazilian authors have. A scholar who is capable of intervening in marginal and unaccounted spaces, performing, co-creating with his/her host the politics of everyday life. A scholar, who performs an artistic intervention act, imagining (in the process) a new practice of organisation-intervention-art. A nomad in mind and spirit that subvert the dominant status quo, dislocating the well-known and established knowledge emanated from the north to the south. Breaking dualities and separations of privileged/disprivileged discourses (Deleuze and Guattari, 2008), this subversive scholar embraces a creativity of the *intermezzo*; a creativity that de-roots

everything we know and accept as the principles, narratives of our well conceived organisation world of economic control and managerial guise. This renaissance scholar was forging a new identity embedded in an imaginative space of no clear references; where creativity was conceived as a participatory act of interventions, dislocations and experimentations of an intuitive, improvised and emotional kind. This is what might after all, some regarded as the beginning of unobscuring the Amazonian land. Finally, many could express and celebrate the new wisdom of the multi-local invisible *precariats* of the mythical land that the hegemonic sign neglected and silenced for such a long time.

We may conclude that this possibility may only be a dream; a dream that will be hard to concretise. Notwithstanding, as the renaissance scholar may point out: *it is the possibility that one day may all have the same dream, what can turn an ominous existence into a radically fruitful tangible one*".

## **EPILOGUE**

*"If I am really a part of your dream, you'll come back one day."* (Paulo Coelho)

Stories always convey an end. Whether those stories are of the real type or the imaginative one (like the one here), we always feel the urge to end them somehow. Some end happily, some end tearfully, some end encapsulating a powerful thought; idea that can make us think differently about a theory, a concept, a group or simply about life. In our studies, we pursue this ending in our conclusions.

Conclusions are important in our papers, books, power-points, even in our argumentative dialogues. Conclusions provide the *grand finale* of an experiment, a study or a provocative theoretical thought. But equally and most significant, they provide a link to the next story. It is only a link in a long chain of stories that continue to evolve and to be written by other authors. It is as if our story, i.e., research, was continuously suspended; an open-ended overture of theoretical innuendos that never satiate the curiosity of an audience, demanding others to pick it up and write it further. Whether the opening is of a critical type or a sparkling imaginative one, we do know that there is always hope that our ideas will be preserved in this continuous dialogical chain. It is with this thought in mind that this mythical story presented here comes to an end. Blurring the world of imagination with the real, this tale questions our constructed and accepted reality. It appeals to the dislocated, and the

subversive, challenging through an imaginative account the nature of our craft. This provocative challenge of daring to look outside our realm of scholarship is what embraces the memory of my colleague and good friend Professor M. Vieira. His desire to embrace the culture of organisation studies from the art, from an aesthetic and poetic stance made for the work him and I with others embark on. He will not be with us to finish that work. Yet, his philosophical reflections, theoretical interpretations of an aesthetic kind, will see us all through to achieve what we began. The long corridors that we cover in our research work will be enlightened by the presence of his happy and tearful soul.

### ORGANISATIONAL CORRIDORS OF TEARFUL & HAPPY SOULS

*“It is in the darkness of the mind, when obscurity and absence dominate our thoughts what we relish and defy”*



*“Raise in hope, we believe we go  
when time comes to let us know  
that twist and despair  
is all what we got;  
no matter how much all we care and love,  
for the truthful soul,  
is the one who will remember,  
hope always convey the thought  
that when we fall  
tears will roll from our happy souls.*

*Standing tall, we imagine so,  
that when the call comes,  
our educated minds will explore,  
how and what I have done,*

*along these corridors of dreams, friendship and hope,  
where I did so much for those, who like me,  
where trying to create or forge,  
long chains of human love,  
peace and knowledge of course.*

*Finally, we are pushed to go,  
where no one, I know, have been before,  
'cause we now need to explore,  
other corridors of love,  
that will keep our souls happy and in joy,  
knowing that we leave behind,  
so much to think of those corridors,  
we so many times walk with friends,  
discussing what they mean for our souls.*

*Now, the voices of those who are gone,  
bring tears and joy,  
but also wisdom that dares to challenge and question those,  
who seem to know  
why we gather and work.  
whilst we still hear their voice,  
we may wonder why, why,  
they are gone,  
knowing that,  
we still need their wisdom  
to guide us through the corridors of blurred thoughts.”*

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