

Organisation, Listening and the Aesthetics of Disposal

Rolland Munro CSTT

ABSTRACT

Tristram Shandy deconstructs the conventions of the emerging modern novel almost as fast as its conventions were minted on the page by other 18th century writers. In consequence, readers of this early novel could not just consume the words on the page as they might do with a history but they required instead an aesthetics of disposal to help them to manage the endless digressions, the blanks in text, and the ambulation in chronology of this most disorganised of novels. In this paper listening to ruptures and fissures in the text is likened to the work of employees today, who similarly have to manage the inter-plays of convention and invention within the disorganisation of the contemporary corporation.

*Writing, when properly managed, is but
another excuse for conversation.*

Laurence Sterne

It is not the squeal of the newborn that announces Tristram Shandy's birth into the world. It is the squeak of a faulty door hinge that wakes the expectant father.

Every day, for at least ten years together, did my father resolve to have it mended; -'tis not mended yet. No family but ours would have borne with it an hour; - and, what is most astonishing, there was not a subject in the world upon which my father was so eloquent as that upon door hinges; - and yet, at the same time, he was certainly one of the greatest bubbles to them, I think, that history can produce; his rhetoric and conduct were at perpetual handcuffs.-Never did the parlour door open, -but his philosophy or his principles fell a victim to it.- Three drops of oil with a feather, and a smart stroke of a hammer, had saved his honour for ever. (161)

It is not therefore that technology does not speak. To the contrary, the father of the newborn Tristram Shandy has been listening to this door hinge these past ten years.

As with much of the vast layers of technology that litter our lives, a door hinge might be presumed to hang silent for most of the time. Out of sight and out of mind, at least until the parlour door is brought into use. Yet this is far from being the truth:

. . . for the many years in which the hinge was suffered to be out of order, and amongst the hourly grievances my father submitted to upon its account - this was one -that he never folded his arms to take his nap after dinner, but the thought of being unavoidably awakened by the first person who should open the door was always uppermost in his imagination, and so incessantly stepp'd in betwixt him and the first balmy presage of his repose as to rob him, as he often declared, of the whole sweets of it. (162)

As it happens, it is this very listening out for its squeak that inevitably robs Father of his repose. The very anticipation of hearing it makes the hinge ever-present to his imagination.

What is striking is that this response to the noisy door hinge is not the expected one of simply eliminating its squeak. As Tristram says, no other family 'would have borne it for an hour'. But instead of availing himself of the requisite technology, by adding 'three drops of oil', Tristram's family incorporates the squeaking of the hinge into their daily life. Drawing on Bourdieu (1990), we might be

tempted to say that living with its disorder has becomes part of Father's *habitus*. But there is something sharper at work here. For the way Father has of disposing of the hinge's protestations is to accommodate these into his sleeping pattern, literally altering his bodily arrangements around the unwonted sounds; much as someone living over a railway line adapts to the rumblings of trains below.

Yet Father's 'tactics of consumption' (de Certeau, 1984) do not quite stretch to putting up quietly with an inconvenient and irritating noise. 'Inconsistent soul as man is – his whole life a contradiction to his knowledge' – Father uses his powers of reasoning to set forth his *principles*, seizing on any event as a springboard for philosophy. In this way Tristram's father illustrates an 'aesthetics' of disposal. Instead of feathering in a little oil, and so quelling its sound, Father *attaches* himself to the squeak. In ways that let him wax eloquently, and immediately, he folds his reason around the existence of the aberrant hinge and so uses the occasion of its squeak to give vent to his great discursive powers. Rather than organise and put things into order, he applies reason to such issues to 'sharpen his sensibilities, to multiply his pains, and render him melancholy and more uneasy under them' (161).

The disposal of the text

Tristram's discourse on the door hinge, quoted above, are the first words after the Preface to *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, to give this famous early novel its full title. By rights then, they should appear in the opening pages and certainly Tristram, Laurence Sterne's hero, has long promised to begin with the event of his birth. But as narrator of his own story, things have not quite fallen out that way. Indeed, Tristram does not get around to his birth until the third of the original nine volumes. So a curiosity of the book, published between 1759 and 1767, is that the Preface appears between Chapters XX and XXI of the third volume.

Why this delay? Well, as Tristram, explains, 'tis the first time he has had a moment to spare! Ostensibly, at the time of his writing the Preface, nothing is happening. Dr Slop is engaged with the midwife and his mother upstairs; Uncle Toby's man, Corporal Trim is busy turning an old pair of jackboots (worn by Sir Roger Shandy at the battle of Marston-Moor) into a couple of mortars to help re-enact the siege of Messina; and the two brothers, Father and Uncle Toby, replete in their wigs, are asleep in the room below, exhausted from two hours and ten minutes of hard riding with Dr Slop on their respective 'hobbyhorses', argument and armament.

For it is not just the Preface that has been delayed. The birth has also been forestalled: 'the child is where it was'. The child is stuck. The arrival of Tristram into the world has to wait on the family servant Obadiah returning with Dr Slop's bag of instruments. And so Tristram, in the unlikely role of narrating his own birth, has been busy in the meantime with the telling of the intervening succession of events.

The train of events occurring during the delay (between Obidiah being sent off to fetch the man-midwife's bag and Tristram's actual delivery) begin with a long detailed discourse by Uncle Toby (also known as Captain Shandy) to the newly-arrived Dr Slop on the manner of fortifications, which culminates in an outburst by Father that 'the whole science of fortifications' would be the death of him, as 'it has been the death of thousands':

I would not, I would not, brother Toby, have my brains so full of saps, mines, blinds, gabions, palisadoes, ravelins, half-moons, and such trumpery, to be the proprietor of Namur [the site of a famous siege], and of all the towns in Flanders, with it. (92)

Any of us, as Father is expostulating, can reach a limit to what can listen to; at least without getting our turn to expound our own predilections and prejudices. But as Tristram notes, 'a man's Hobby-Horse is as tender a

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part as he has about him' and Father is thus in danger of insulting his brother irreparably over a topic he likely to be most sensitive over. Fortunately, however, this assault on Uncle Toby's attachment to the science of fortification meets with such a fraternal good countenance that Father is immediately smitten to apologise for his unkindness.

Apologies accepted, Corporal Trim is then sent by Uncle Toby to fetch a book by the great Stevinus, his house being just the 'opposite side of the way'. But before he can illustrate to the Dr Slop and Father the key point he wants to make about sieges, a handwritten sermon falls out. All three, Father, Uncle Toby and Dr Slop, thus sit down to 'listen' to Corporal Trim reading this sermon aloud, but the latter is hard pressed to get through its full length. In terms of the actual text of *Tristram Shandy*, about a third of the sixteen or so pages of the sermon are composed of interjections, comments and discussion as each of his audience pounces in turn on every chance and occasion to interrupt.

Much as happens in meetings today, each in the room seems concerned only to ride his respective hobbyhorse, the angle onto the world that interests him most. So it is fair to add that there is indeed little display of any listening here. There is certainly no evidence of anyone 'listening' in the sense of following the thought of anyone else, or even attending to what the sermon might be really about. Each appears merely to have an ear out for a word or phrase to whose meaning he can attach himself. So the metaphysically-inclined Father finds occasions to wax eloquently with his propositions and contentions, the military-minded Uncle Toby concerns himself with projectiles and fortifications, and the Jacobite Dr Slop hears mainly Anti-papist plots. Even when the man-midwife Dr Slop falls asleep, he still wakes at the phrase 'the physician I usually call in' and immediately declares that there is 'no need . . . to call in any physician in this case', 110).

This interchange is followed up by

Obadiah returning with Dr Slop's bag, the servant having just been thrown at the gallop from Hymen, the horse belonging to the family. Just ahead of unpicking the consequences of this, Tristram intrudes into the narrative matters, he claims, that 'should have been told eighty pages ago'. These he has delayed since he 'foresaw they 'twould come in pat hereafter' (118). Father's proclivity, Tristram explains, is for using ratiocination and syllogisms for avoiding what he called 'error', in civil matters as well as speculative truths. Father, it must be said, might be deaf to the squeal of a newborn child, but as already indicated he is not indifferent to the import of a birth.

Like the managers we work under, Father has long planned all the eventualities he could foresee. He has, for example, included detailed arrangements for the lying-in in a series of clauses in the marriage settlement. That these have already fallen by the wayside has already been explained and Tristram, in the context of his present chapter, concerns himself with Father's attempts to convince his wife, by force of argument, on the importance of having Tristram by way of 'Caesarian section':

Cursed luck! said he [Father] to himself one afternoon, as he walked out of the room, after he had been stating it for an hour and a half to her, to no manner of purpose; -cursed luck! said he, biting his lip, as he shut the door, -for a man to be master of one of the finest chains of reasoning in nature, and have a wife, at the same time, with such a head-piece that he cannot hang up a single inference within-side of it, to save his soul from destruction. (120)

As Tristram takes it on himself to explain, Father's justification for a Caesarean is to protect 'the pineal gland of the brain', as noted by Descartes. Indeed, in Father's view, the advantage was that the 'whole organisation of the *cerebellum* was preserved' (124) and not damaged by the physical pressure exerted on it by the *pubis* as in a normal birth.

Consequent to this failure of Father to convince his wife, Dr Slop is only in attendance as a support to Mrs Shandy's own choice of midwife. But even as it now appears that the man-midwife's presence is necessary, Dr Slop has difficulty in extricating the newly invented forceps from his green baize bag. As a result of Obadiah's fall and the extreme care with which he had twitched the strings together to avoid the jangling of its contents from interfering with his whistling, the knots have become inextricably entangled. Indeed, had Mrs Shandy not been having such a bad time of it, she could have given birth 'seven times told, before one-half of these knots could have been got untied' (135). This thought, we are told, 'floated only in Dr Slop's mind, without sail or ballast to it, as a simple proposition – millions of which . . . are everyday swimming quietly in the middle of the thin juice of a man's understanding' (135).

Within the serendipity of how things are taking place, a 'sudden trampling' in the room above is sufficient to surface this proposition in the form of a curse by Dr Slop. As Tristram's mother gives a groan, and Dr Slop curses further at Obadiah as a 'blockhead', he then cuts his thumb with a knife as he strives to give 'birth' to the forceps from the knotted bag. But Father cannot bear to listen to his servant, for whom he has great respect, being 'disposed of in such a manner' and seeks revenge. Indeed, neither of the two brothers are prepared to let this new opportunity to exercise their opinions go to waste. So, much as bosses like to chastise the culprits ahead of putting out the fire, these 'small curses' are turned by the moralising Father into a waste of 'the soul's health' and by Captain Shandy into the uselessness of 'sparrow-shot . . . fired against a bastion' (136). The result is yet further delay until Dr Slop, under pressure from both Father and Uncle Toby, purges himself by delivering a four page long extended form of the 'curse of excommunication'.

When Dr Slop finally 'delivers' the

latest gynaecological technology from its green baize bag, he fumbles so vilely that the 'squirt' is attached to them. This presages (as Father is about to learn) the dangers that a boy child faces in a forceps delivery. The problem, Dr Slop tells Father, is that the technology of the forceps cannot tell the hip from the head. To which Father (to whom a good nose is the major article of extension in his phrenology of the species) responds by suggesting that 'when your possibility has taken place at the hip, you might as well as take off the head too' (148). As things come to pass, it is Tristram's head that is in place, not the hip. So, the result of the application of the forceps is to take off the attachment of the baby's nose, not his squirt.

This calumny for the baby is worsened by being mistakenly christened Tristram. Up till this point, Father had planned for his son to be named in honour of *Tristmegistus*: 'the greatest king –the greatest law-giver –the greatest philosopher –and the greatest priest' (224). Other than the shape of the nose, a good name for his son was Father's other major 'extension' in his philosophy of destiny, matters that have also required prolonged intrusions by Tristram into the text. As it happens, however, in the rush to have the weakly child christened, the maid, Susannah, mishears the name, and so misinforms the curate standing in for Mr Yorick the Parson, who cannot be found.

Introduction

Technology is always directional; it illuminates a path, a way of going on in the world. In highlighting the technologies at the disposal of the Shandy household - hinges, forceps, jackboots and disputation - I have in mind therefore more than a *prosthetics* of 'extension' (Strathern, 1991), the various artefacts to which we attach ourselves and by which we may be making ourselves 'visible' and 'available' (Munro, 1996) as characters in a novel, or even players on a world stage.

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What concerns me is the *disposal* of our bits and pieces: the distribution and circulation of organisational artefacts. It is their very ordering and arrangement - within the technologies with which we become familiar - that help magnify or diminish our capacity for acting in the world. As Heidegger (1993[1971]) reminds us, technology is a way of 'revealing'. The hammering of silver ore, per his example, brings a goblet into 'unconcealment'. This is certainly one very basic way of understanding what is at stake with the term organisation; when we use it in the sense of method - that is to say when we are organising *for* production.

What puzzles though is when a path 'revealed' by production is not taken. When the *consumption* of an 'unconcealment' of substance, so to speak, follows a different turn. So that jackboots turn into mortars, the squeak of a door hinge spurts forth philosophy and the application of forceps detaches the nose from the infant's body. Such 'irrationalities', as they might appear to managers of large institutions, are more usually laid at the door of people. It is as if managers assume that it is easy enough to design a good enterprise, but that there is something intrinsically difficult about people that threatens to make the whole organisation unmanageable.

Yet it is possible to seek other explanations. Especially over technology, which when introduced for one reason, or even retained for another reason, opens itself up to be used for yet further reasons. Thus Covaleski and Dirsmith (1986) noted how nurses used budgets in quite different ways to those intended by their designers. Similarly, the faulty hinge is more than an ever-imminent artefact for Father to fold his reasoning powers around. As Tristram explains, the servants of the house also use the squeak of the hinge as the excuse for leaving the door ajar, all the better to listen to the tenor of the house and judge the occasion and the mood appropriately.

This is the argument I have made over

the importance of paying attention to the archaeology of control technologies purchased by the managers of modern organisation (Munro, 1995). Technologies, particularly the so-called human technologies, are often not replaced, but are more usually simply added to. And, in turn, such layers of technology create not only 'noise' within the systems of communication; this 'litter' to the world of organisation also creates a *bricolage* that makes a re-disposal of resources evermore available to organisational participants in ways that have never been intended.

Aesthetics and organisation

In addressing in *Tristram Shandy* as a moment in the long-forested birth of the modern novel, the key point I want to emphasise is how the process of 'unconcealment' in writing is constantly harassed and harnessed by the material forms of earlier technologies, be they in the form of 'arts' or 'sciences'. Issues of aesthetics, with their predilection to focus on the production and consumption of signs have tended to overlook here, I am arguing, the priority of *disposal*.

The fact that technology speaks for itself rather than 'listens' to its designers, raises issues not only about the aesthetics of substance but over its disposal. There is a multivocality to technology, a veritable polyphony in its use little heeded by those charged with the running of major institutions. Yes, much of the litter of technologies that surround us, and beset us, may on occasion come in useful. Particularly jackboots come in handy when one is engaged in a re-enactment of a siege. And logic is surely essential when one is in the habit of disputation. But this said, the proliferation of technology also, and increasingly, fills up the world in ways that menace the very notion of things being 'organised'.

Technology does not only have its production and its consumption. It also calls

for a disposal, a rearrangement of the world that is also, and always, a re-ordering of things. At stake here are not only theories of organisation, or understandings about the sedimentation of routines and habits. There has also been much written recently on the culture of organisation and the way in which the kinds of artefacts that pepper our organisational spaces cultivate an aesthetics of organisation (see, for example, Gagliardi, 1996; Strati, 1999).

The subject of aesthetics is thus increasingly leaving the abstractions of Kant and others to tie, instead, the conventions by which an 'audience' is produced and reproduced to the material forms by which ideas are being 'bodied forth' (Merleau Ponty, 1962). Thus were this paper to proceed to a disquisition on the organisation of listening some attention would be given to a *materiality* in the reception of signs. Against those who stress the merely symbolic, the point would be to say first what others have already said in respect of there always having to be a 'materiality' to signs. And secondly to draw attention, as I have before, to one of the insights of information theory, namely that a 'message' can never be carried within the sign itself (Munro (2001a).

Taken together, these two matters suggest there are material conditions of possibility from which even language, and hence reason, cannot escape. What we call 'messages', even in the case of music, can never themselves be 'sent'; what is elicited cannot be carried within the body of the message. Rather interpretation always has to be drawn from the very body to which messages are directed. Thus poetry works not through the ink, or even its inscriptions as Latour (1987) would have us think. Listening occurs by an embodiment of affect, by *difference* being 'digested'.

Invention and convention

As indicated by Tristram's difficulties in the re-telling of his own birth, the problem of

'organising' into a narrative all the calumnies befalling him are central for the novelist. In thus attempting to 'body forth' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) his 'stream of consciousness' to his imagined readers, Sterne in the form of his narrator, Tristram, fully draws on the conventions of story-telling available in his day, including Fielding's reversal of time.

In the conventions of the period, as with Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Richardson's *Pamela*, or Henry Fielding's *History of Amelia*, the narrator is expected to present his or her tale as a 'chronicle' or 'history': as a strict sequence in which one event tumbles out of another. This allows the narrator to proceed step by step, as if everything, including the birth, the death and the marriage, has all already happened in the great train of events. But in creating *Tristram Shandy*, Sterne wants to do more than simply fold his narrative into the institutional apparatus of what is shaping up to be the 'modern' novel.

Invention, as Wagner (1976) suggests, does not exist in opposition to convention, so much as the one is ever in the *inter-play* of the other. Understanding this intricate interdependence of invention and convention helps assess the different directions being taken by the modern novel. And particularly so as the forms of the novel begin to shake up its antecedents of 'histories', 'epic poems' and various forms of 'romance', including the 'picaresque'.

As noted earlier Sterne's 'inventions', his reordering of the organisation of the novel, play on conventions that are barely dry on the page of the century in which he is writing. But this interplay of invention and convention is already far from being unique to Sterne. For example, *Shamela* - the most successful of all parodies of *Pamela* - is used by its creator Fielding to cruelly mock what he saw as Richardson's shameless appropriation of 'virtue'. Technologies of writing always threaten to outwit the novelist who fails to master the full range of conventions.

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Yet for all his acclaimed originality Sterne does not entirely abandon the reporting of events in their sequence: 'this happened, then that . . .'. This becomes just one more device for holding onto his Reader's attention. As he likewise records conversations, particularly those taking place between Father and Uncle Toby, using direct speech, creating different 'voices' by the use of idiosyncratic expressions and accents much as forerunners like Richardson and Fielding have already accomplished. In the hands of Sterne, however, none of these inventions or conventions is ever quite the same.

The convention of the time was for the narrator in earlier novels to stay outside the story, her or his ruminations being confined mainly to the Preface, or intruded into the text by way of an apology or an aside. Thus the conventions of writing a 'history' had typically banished the author's perspective to a point 'outside' the story. In terms of an aesthetics of disposal, the text was already 'organised' around expectations of a chronology; a 'history' that has already been recorded. So Robinson Crusoe's chronicle is claimed by its author Defoe to have been discovered; and Richardson stumbles across a pile of letters, which are said to be written by Pamela and her correspondents.

But far from 'vanishing' the Author's view, Sterne composes his material in ways that bend the perspective of the novel back inside the story. Much of the 'disorganisation' of the novel results just from such intrusions of the author. What has become known today as the author's 'standpoint' (eg Smith, 1990) - the viewing point that avails the perspective - becomes incorporated into the text as if life and opinions were homogenous.

Critically, Sterne's invention is to describe the unfolding of events as if the 'progression' imputed by the convention of chronology includes not only events, but also the development of ideas. The irony of this 'mad' novel being precisely the truth of this very point!

Giving 'body' to opinions

It is this 'fusion' of events and ideas that is the 'invention' that radically affects the shaping of Sterne's novel; and of course of so many writers in the twentieth century who have followed him. So that, even if the form has to skip a century or so to catch up, it is not just 'events' which are to be recorded. It is the very opinions and sentiments that go to forming this 'seeing' - the perspective - that adventures onto the page. Now, suddenly, the novelist is inventing an infinite horizon in which almost anything, and everything, can be included. So rather than having simply to follow a more or less pre-determined 'train of events', the Reader is faced with a free-flowing stream of consciousness, a 'chain of reasoning' within which there is no longer any 'necessary connection' (see Munro 2005).

The shift in form here is truly enormous. Previously, what could be included in the convention of chronology was limited. Apart from the author's preface, and the intrusion of an occasional excuse or apology, the communal experience of the event had to be sewn into the dictates of simply describing 'what happened next'. The aesthetics here was therefore merely one of colour; some gave events a flourish, others played them down. And if events, more or less, had to be recounted within their proper sequence, there was little for the author to do other than to present these, hoping the Reader could bring these 'back to life'.

It is this infinite scope of inclusion that Sterne may justly claim to be the first to fully realise.

Henceforth, as every ethnographer of organisation today now knows, the path between narrative and description is no longer straightforward:

Could a historiographer drive his history, as a muleteer drives on his mule -straight forward -for instance, from

Rome all the way to Loretto, without ever once turning his head aside, either to the right hand or to the left, -he might venture to foretell you to the hour when he should get to his journey's end: but the thing is, morally speaking impossible; for, if he is a man of the least spirit he will have fifty deviations from a straight line to make with this or that party as he goes along, which he can nowise avoid: he will have views and prospects to himself perpetually soliciting his eye, which he can no more help standing still to look at than he can fly . . (28)

And here, as the writer of this particular paper, I cannot resist intruding on this stream of consciousness, to underline the inventory of the 'technologies of writing' which follows. This list of Tristram's surely should be on the contemporary ethnographer's agenda:

. . . he will moreover, have various
Accounts to reconcile:
Inscriptions to make out:
Traditions to shift:
Anecdotes to pick up:
Stories to weave in:
Personages to call upon:
Panegyrics to paste up at his door . .
(28)

Tristram concludes this particular meditation on the technologies that litter the recording of our lives, by pointing out that the list is endless:

. . To sum up all; there are archives at every stage to be looked into, and rolls, records, documents, and endless genealogies, which justice ever and anon calls him back to stay the reading of: - in short, there is no end of it. -For my own part, I declare I have been at it these six weeks, making all speed I possibly could, -and am not yet born . .
(28)

Tristram's plight, as narrator, is that all this machinery of writing keeps threatening to take on a life of its own. One idea spins off

another and, soon, the whole apparatus of affect appears to be 'roiling' (Thrift, 2004) out of control. As Tristram himself notes:

I was just going, for example, to have given you the great outlines of my uncle Toby's most whimsical character; - when my aunt Dinah and the coachman came across us, and led us a vagary some millions of miles into the very heart of the planetary system (56).

As the Reader keeps having his nose rubbed in it, the 'fusion' of events and ideas can never be held apart. And so, even with the help of reason, the 'train and succession of ideas' is never so well behaved as one might imagine from the doctrine of the philosophers.

One has only to stop for a moment to think of the way senior managers today seem constantly diverted in similar ways. In their efforts to keep their grand narratives of mission and vision afloat, they seem to be in the business of making strategy and policy as much as they ever concentrate on the manufacture of services or goods. It would thus seem fair to add that it is as much Reason itself that is adding to the 'confusion' of *Tristram Shandy*. Insofar as 'chains of reasoning' are always being applied to events by its narrator, in the vain attempt to make what 'has happened' more clear and distinct, we can begin to perceive that there can be no such thing as 'pure' events.

Organising a 'life'

Sterne's novel is in every sense a 'life', as well as a vehicle for 'opinions'. As others have remarked, his sharp wit, often sly and salacious, is balanced by the affection and tolerance he displays towards the delights and absurdities of life. In this way, Sterne achieves much more than making his respective champions of the pen and the sword, Father and Uncle Toby, personifications of the two competing and contrasting worlds of argument and armament.

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His great success is to go beyond the sketch and create timelessly lovable characters, the great majority of whom we instantly recognise as figures from life. As already noted, it is particularly Father, for all his great learning, who seems ever-ready to make a booby of himself. Thus we find him spending more than three years after the birth, writing up a *Tristra-paedia* in order to educate his son and finishing only one half of it - but of course much too late in consequence for this 'bible' to be any use in bringing up the 'totally neglected' child (II, 30).

Nor is this example just a case of Sterne exposing the follies of erudition and even anticipating the fallacy of attempting to govern through the writing of policy, as per the control freakery of the Blair government and many leading institutions in the UK. Sterne is just as sly in pointing out the pitfalls that arise from a wont of proper learning. These of course are made ever-present by virtue of Uncle Toby, a man incapable of understanding anything, even a sermon, in any other terms than the stratagem of fortifications: 'A tower has no strength, quoth my Uncle Toby, unless it is flanked' (107).

Memorable though his characters are, I want to go on to suggest that this is not his great achievement. In understanding the infinite horizon that Sterne has created for the reader as well as the novelist, it is rather to the issue of time to which we should turn. Under the excuse that his Reader might more fully appreciate all the uproar and nonsense unfolding before their eyes, Tristram is always setting himself the additional task of preparing the reader meticulously for what is *yet to come*. As Sterne's hero, Tristram, makes clear, he does not want to have to 'account' for matters afterwards, in the manner of someone who belatedly tries to explain a joke that has fallen flat.

The motility of holding out a world that is 'history', one moment, and creating a world that is 'yet to come', the next, does more than occupy and flesh out the plot, such as it is. It also pre-occupies many of Tristram's more

direct addresses to the Reader. For example, having diverted from a description of Uncle Toby, in order to complete the circuitous route and so explain about aunt Dinah and the coachman mentioned earlier, Tristram makes the following pertinent observation:

Notwithstanding all this, you perceive that the drawing of my uncle Toby's character went on gently all the time; - not the great contours of it - that was impossible - but some familiar strokes and faint designations of it were here and there touched on, as we went along, so that you are much better acquainted with my uncle Toby now than you were before (56).

And so just when the narrator looked to be out of control, the whole narrative of his birth can get going again. This fact alone might be surprising enough. But this Author will not quite leave the matter here.

As a learned man, Tristram knows it is an 'abominable thing for a man to commend himself' (55). But, equally, he notes it would be 'full as abominable' to leave the 'conceit of it rotting in his head' when the merit of the invention has likely been overlooked by the Reader:

By this contrivance, the machinery of my work is of a species by itself; two contrary motions are introduced into it, and reconciled, which were thought to be at variance with each other. In a word, my work is digressive, and it is progressive, too, -and at the same time.

As the narrator suitably adds: 'Digressions, incontestibly, are the sunshine, - they are the life, the soul of reading: - take them out of this book, for instance, you might as well take the book along with them . . .' (56). And never in the history of writing, at least until the digressions eventually get the upper hand and the later volumes degenerate into a pastiche of Yorick's final summative words (celebrated in the name of the recent film of the book) was perhaps a truer word spoke!

The organisation of the novel

A constant, exacting, and ingenious pursuit of originality, such is the effort which sums up the intention of Sterne. This is the judgement of the great French scholars, Legouis and Cazamian in their monumental *History of English Literature*. And, to be sure, there is great invention. In reading Tristram Shandy, the reader finds Sterne ready to leave no trope unturned, matters I have explored elsewhere (Munro 2005). But while acknowledging the wit and genius of the writing, it is possible to be measured about the actual form of invention.

It is a commonplace to suggest *Tristram Shandy* 'deconstructs' the novel, even if might surprise to find forms of the modern novel being deconstructed as early as 1759. Yet in re-telling its events, particularly the events surrounding the narrator's birth which occupy almost half of the original nine volumes, I have sought to suggest that there is much more to Sterne's masterpiece than this. Indeed, it would be as fair to say Sterne's target is the very notion of reason and its complicity with key notions of organisation, including history, hierarchy and homogeneity.

Indeed, much apparent delay in reporting events is accounted for by Sterne in just this way. Ever alert to the 'Tragedy of Culture', as Weber is eventually to call it, Tristram knows the danger of the reader literally 'following' events as they happen on the page, without full appreciation of their nuance or literary import. So it is through his careful 'plotting' of digressions, more than any real attention to events, that we come to appreciate, for instance, how much of Father's immense learning and scholarship has been bent to the task of understanding the meaning and significance of the nose – to the extent that we find him in possession of every text on which disquisitions over the length, shape or nature of the nose have ever appeared.

In this way, Sterne sets about

inventing a new kind of 'Reader'. One whose willingness to *manage* the 'disorganised' text also allows her or him to be led by the nose, so to speak. It is the reader consequent involvement that of course lets him or her appreciate much more of the tragedy of Tristram Shandy's birth, as it unfolds, than could otherwise be achieved. For example, if one had not already guessed by Tristram's own virtual absence from four or the five volumes of the text, for example, one recognises that the narrator has been born a nonentity from having listened instead to Father holding forth on his 'doctrine of noses'. In this way the feelings for the father of a son born without a nose are also much affected by the Reader becoming intimate with Father's long disquisitions with Uncle Toby about the 'principles' that govern the nature of a child.

And if it is thus 'irrational' to rely on a nonentity to 'organise' the text, then of course the reader must 'manage' as best she or he can! It would be wrong of course to suggest here that Sterne is being entirely 'novel', even in proposing his new technology of 'progression by digression'. Rabelais has been here before. The basic convention is already familiar in the form of an author's preface and in *Tom Jones*, Fielding has already deployed this convention in an inventive way, distributing his authorial interruptions throughout in a series of perpetual prefaces to each new Book of his novel. Even to the extent of Fielding claiming that these intrusions on the story are what actually keeps the reader awake!

In making his debut as an 'innovator', the earliest meaning of the term novelist (ODEE, 1966: 616), Sterne also profits from the 'haphazardness' of the *Essays* of Montaigne, which O'Neil (1982: 87) describes as a 'happy combination of seriousness and free play'. But, despite these acknowledgements, there is still more to say here. As with the many other conventions he deploys, Sterne's originality lies in his willingness to both adapt this convention of the essay to the purposes of the novel AND to stretch it to excess. What is new with

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Sterne is that instead of the narrator *organising* the text, it is the reader who has to *manage*.

Managing and disposal

The history of institutions, as I have argued elsewhere, might be seen as a shift in trope from one of 'organisation' to that of 'management'. Where the former trope invites reason to be applied within a world of objectivity and fact, the latter engages managers in a process of 'endless deferral' (Munro, 2004) in which the power of absence appears to triumph over the logic of presence.

In their attempt to control thought as well as action, managers have increasingly homogenised their thoughts and 'opinions' in the form of policy, principles and strategy, treating these as on a par with events. The resulting 'disorganisation' (Munro, 2001b; Cooper, 1992) is plain for everyone to see. The surprising lesson from *Tristram Shandy*, however, is that disorganisation may not be the disaster it appears.

Just as the reader learns to 'manage' the text, so organisational participants today are learning to 'manage' the organisation. And in ways that intensify the demand upon us not simply to 'reason', but more to *manage* our lives. The convention of 'management by nobody' as Lloyd Gray (2006) succinctly captures the change, has been transformed into the contemporary responsibility of 'management by everybody'.

Unless we are merely to be enraptured within the succession of one event after the other - becoming the product, so to speak, as much of the great circular theories of time as of the linear - it follows from the dissolution of modernity that our lives have to become 'projects'. And, further, that these projects, in turn, 'pre-dispose' us into taking one path rather than another; making us, for most intents and purposes, organisationally deaf to other people's arrangements and rearrangements. So the

'good life' turns away its thought from the closure of 'making money', and the auto-eroticsim of 'grazing' eschews the 'communal grace' of eating.

Seen in this light, the value of what are conveniently called *conventions* is that they illuminate the order that has 'gone before'. Being taken for granted, well-accepted forms do much of the work of organising for us. And insofar as these time-honoured arrangements make some matters present and others absent, more or less predictably, they also allow us to pursue paths without too much disruption or inconvenience to others. So, too, conventions in writing also affect the 'disposal' of the text and help develop habits of reading. These in turn speed up the *consumption* of text, if for the sake of not always attending closely to its actual production.

And so too, we may say, with the study of organisation. This has also been prey to an unwitting aesthetics of disposal, in which most frequently it is time itself, whatever that is, that has been driven out. If we continue to think of time simply as linear, we attribute too much to chronology and elide all that is real and interesting about the 'ordering' of our worlds. So that, like the infant Tristram, the understanding of organisation keeps being 'forestalled'. Its learned study either remains deferred, arriving always too late like Father's *Tristra-pedia*. Or, conversely, time as the essential 'extension' of organisation is amputated from birth by the Dr Slop of the day, wielding the latest management technology.

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