

ORGANIZATION'S ENGAGEMENTS WITH ANCIENT EGYPT: FRAMING AND CLAIMING THE SUBLIME?

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I write to examine the turn to ancient Egypt and the production of the geography of interest that surrounds it; specifically, I consider relationships between artifacts and arguments of relevance to organization by offering three spaces of aporetic negotiability that explore engagements with ancient Egypt. These examine attempts at a variety of claims in both senses of the word: forms of ancient Egypt are claimed for organization even as forms of organization are claimed and located in ancient Egypt. The argument is that while such appropriations can be constraining, they are simultaneously inscribed in the conditions for alterity and difference. Hence, the resultant piece inscribes a series of overlapping and, at times, contradictory relationships between ancient Egypt, organization and Egypt. In the first space I consider the writing of ancient Egypt into contemporary accounts on organization by discussing its incorporation into ancient Greek writing; in the second space I pose readings of international engagements with ancient Egypt as the other, while simultaneously claiming it in a metonymy of identity, of the self; in the third space I supplement this with a variety in readings of Egyptians' engagement with ancient Egypt. The afterword stops short of a final word; rather, it offers some reflections on ancient Egypt's appeal to various organizational collectives.

Key words. administration; ancient Egypt; aporia; origins; subjectivity; writing

But concerning Egypt I will now speak at length, because nowhere are there so many marvellous things, nor in the whole world beside are there to be seen so many works of unspeakable greatness. (Herodotus, II, 35)

No considerable power was ever amassed by any nation ... that did not also turn that nation toward Egypt, which was regarded in some measure as its natural lot. (Fourier in the introduction to the *Description de l'Égypte*, 1809–1828)

... [ancient] Egypt, as an allegory for a kind of thought supposedly surpassed and superseded but simultaneously impressive and insightful, registers a complex, and still poorly understood, set of ideas about modernity itself. (Davis, 1996: 810)

Despite the 'unspeakable greatness' of Egypt's works, somehow Herodotus manages to 'speak at length'. And yet when Herodotus proclaims to 'speak', he writes (Hartog, 1988). In a similar vein, I find myself 'speaking out' on ancient Egypt by writing into the organizational literature. Yet, I do not write about the 'many marvellous things'—or 'wonderful things' as Howard Carter cried out millennia later—I write to examine the turn to ancient Egypt and the production of the geography of interest that surrounds it. Such interest is, on the one hand, a pre-mapped terrain, and on the other hand, a fluid seascape that eludes the control of cartographers. Specifically, I examine relationships between artifacts and arguments of relevance to organization; my intention is to illustrate how such engagements enable elements of ancient Egypt to be adopted towards a metonymy of identity. While such appropriation can be constraining, limited by the 'aura of naturalness that comes from deep historicity' (Smith, 2004: 3), it is simultaneously productive, opening up spaces for alterity.

Often, the subject in accounts of organization and ancient Egypt is the scribe (Ezzamel, 1994; Lamond, 2006), while ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic writing is usually utilized as the object for locating evidence associating ancient Egypt with notions such as 'administration' and 'accounting' (Ezzamel, 2004; Ezzamel and Hoskin, 2002). Indeed, over the last centuries, the scribe and hieroglyphs have also become typical symbols of Egypt alongside the pyramids and the sphinx. Egypt symbolized by a squatting scribe can be noted as far back as 1715 on the frontispiece for the Leiden edition of Herodotus' accounts by Gronovius (Plate 1 in Hartog, 1988: xxiii). Writing has also positioned ancient Egypt within international interest as relevant to the recorded history of all knowledge. For example, the image of an ancient Egyptian symbolizing 'Written Records' appears on the painted dome of the reading room in the Thomas Jefferson Building of the US Library of Congress, home to ISBN cataloguing. The mural depicts 12 countries, or epochs, that contributed to the 'Evolution of Civilization,' from Egypt to America (Trafton, 2004). The representation of this 'natural' progression should not be surprising, since, as Jeffrey (2003: 12) notes: Egypt was, after all, the oldest pristine territorial state ... it seemed to provide not only a template for other existing or incipient empires and political collectives to follow, but also an example of how it might be achieved.

'The oldest empire in history' was the caption recently used by The History Channel to promote 'Egypt', the first in its Engineering an Empire series, an episode in which 'administration' became a recurrent theme. Such inter-textuality is relevant to the paper at hand. For example, the 'natural' turn to Egypt was presented by Fourier (1809–1829) in the introduction to *The Description de l'Égypte*—a 24-volume French account of Napoleon's expedition to Egypt (top quote). Featuring at the end of a resonating progression of great names

(e.g. Plato, Homer, Pythagoras, Alexander, Pompey, Caesar, Anthony and Augustus), the statement rationalizes Napoleon's invasion of Egypt through naturalizing the conquest and grounding it within a form of normalized European existence (Said, 1993). A century later, Napoleon's statement that 'Egypt is the most important country in the world' is cited on the title page of *Modern Egypt* (1908) by the British Earl of Cromer, a book which, in part, sets out principles of bureaucratic apparatuses for 'governing the subject races' and 'civilizing the natives' (Frenkel and Shenhav, 2006). On another facet, the Description, had accorded only a handful of the 24-volume survey of Egypt to life there in the 18th century—the foremost inclusion centering on ancient Egypt (Reid, 2002; Vercoutter, 1992). With no sign of Egypt's contemporary inhabitants, the frontispiece featured ancient monuments from Alexandria in the north to the Cataract in the south (Figure 2), both 'framing and claiming' ancient Egypt (Reid, 2002: 3)—a notion to which I return shortly.

Napoleon's invasion is often credited with an explosion of fascination with ancient Egypt (e.g. Jeffreys, 2003; Reid, 2002). The consequent rise in the study of ancient Egypt foregrounded its inclusion in a variety of disciplines—including extensive discussion of its forms of 'bureaucratic administration' in sociology by Weber (1978), who had also used the analogy of 'Egyptianization' to articulate fears of impending universal bureaucratization (Roth and Schluchter, 1979). Since then, engagements with ancient Egypt in a variety of organizational texts have involved both cursory reference, and, more recently, rigorous research (e.g. Ezzamel, 2004).

A change in wind, turning the interest to ancient Egypt, can be refreshing, especially when considering Czarniawska's (2003: 431) satirical comment: 'The origins [of administration] go back to the ancient Greeks (where else!) ...'. Well, maybe to the ancient Egyptians, is one reply. While broadening the perspective, however, such response could potentially inspire revisionist approaches to 'organization studies'—which is not the aim of this paper; rather, my intention is to question the possibilities of framing and claiming the sublime in ancient Egypt.

So I return to the title, 'framing and claiming', a variation on the more common expression: 'naming and claiming'. 'Framing' here stands for ongoing practices that attempt to shape and direct interest, and that, through demarcating spaces for engagement, attempt closure. This involves making decisions to see and to frame—as well as to make arguments that shape significance. 'Naming' becomes the absent present: it defines the pun, the difference, and even while in the background it is still relevant to producing a claim. I simultaneously draw on two meanings for 'claiming': to seek ownership on ground of right, and to present an allegation, argument or statement. The position I adopt is that producing a claim involves both producing an argument as well as staking out space to create presence (Derrida, 2005; Derrida and Stiegler, 2002).

While inquiring into the possibilities of framing and claiming, I also draw on Davis' (1996) statement that the adoption of ancient Egypt in contemporary work incorporates both social and philosophical ambitions. Such adoption, however, is ridden with contradictions and tensions in a combination of revelation and practical consideration. Ancient Egypt, on the one hand, can constitute the 'marvelous' or 'wonderful', the sublime and inspirational; while on the other it can generate the security that current knowledge has somehow superseded that which we admire (Davis, 1996; Derrida, 1995b; Kuberski, 1989). The production of such framing processes also holds contradictory effects. Claims on the past can serve to naturalize forms of normalized existence, in this case: organization. But simultaneously, such claims are also inscribed in the conditions for alterity and difference (Derrida, 2005; Derrida and Stiegler, 2002). In three sections to this paper, I offer spaces from which to consider ancient Egypt and organization. In the first space I consider the writing of ancient Egypt into contemporary accounts on organization by discussing its incorporation into ancient Greek writing; in the second space I pose readings of international engagements with ancient Egypt as the other, while simultaneously claiming it in a metonymy of identity, of the self; in the third space I supplement this with a variety in readings of Egyptians' engagement with ancient Egypt. In the first instance, however, I foreground the illustrative spaces with the assumptions that foreground this paper.

On the One Hand ... On the Other Hand ...

I have deployed the expression in this heading throughout the previous passages; it is one that Derrida has often used in his writing. I have found it a convenient way of describing some of the aporias that I have experienced in writing this account. Aporia is the Greek term denoting logical contradiction; to Derrida the experience of an aporia is an experience of the contradictory tensions at stake: 'the not knowing where to go', the experience of being pulled in different directions (Derrida, 1993: 12). The aporia—or aporetic moment—takes the form of something that cannot be explained within standard rules of logic and which cannot be avoided (Lucy, 2004); it can also be irresolvable involving an oscillation between contradictory possibilities, going from one to the other and back again (Derrida, 1993). Yet, aporia does not mean paralysis; rather, it can be the condition of making a decision and proceeding, of making action possible (Derrida, 1992, 1993). The non-passive endurance of the aporia can be productive, 'Such an experience must remain such if one wants to think, to make come or to let come any event of decision or of responsibility' (Derrida, 1993: 16).

Experiences of aporia have been central to my writing on organization and ancient Egypt. For example, I find myself at once drawing on Derrida's discussions on the text (1976, 1978, 1981a, 1981b) and on Foucault's notions on subjectivity (1980, 1983)—even as I am aware of the contradictions in some of their respective arguments (e.g. such as on the constitution of conditions of possibility to a text). In a similar vein, I find myself at once resisting the 'postcolonial' signifier, while simultaneously drawing on the works of authors regarded among its key proponents (e.g. Mitchell, 1991, 2002; Said, 1978, 1994). Even to move forward, to actually write down an analysis, an argument, I am confronted with an aporia; writing often depends on the very practices it condemns (Rorty, 1995). So my account stands representative of some of the engagements I problematize. Various conditions of historicity provide both the spaces of possibility for the text at hand, and the aporias to be negotiated (Derrida, 1992). Textual analysis here becomes a way of taking a position on institutional

and political structures that make possible and govern one's practices and performances. While my entrée to critical literature was initially through organization studies, not so my entrée into discourses on ancient Egypt—these I grew up with, infused with their contradictory effects. So the process of writing this account has been tortuous because, ultimately, it also represents my struggle against specific forms of subjectivity, in Foucault's (1983) terms.

'The Aporial Absent Presence'

In this paper, 'organization studies' is not a circumscribed, delimited field with a fixed object of analysis (Czarniawska, 2003; Jones et al., 2004; Parker, 2000). I use the term to refer to a loosely defined activity of inquiry, situated within an intersection of disciplines (Czarniawska, 2003), involving the production and consumption of texts circulating in a variety of expert and academic institutionalized spaces that are constantly redefined through specific notions of identity and division (Parker, 2000). Yet, two issues would need to be established to enable a study on organization in ancient Egypt: a clearly defined 'object' of analysis (one that becomes fixed as a point for contrast), and a specific 'subject' that mediates between past and present. In other words, evidence of some 'thing' would need to be identified, and, archaeologically, some 'one' would need to be identified doing it. Both are problematized in this paper.

First, whereas one would need to circumscribe specific knowledge on organization so as to find its evidence, this paper rests on the notion that there is no essential, fixed, object to 'organization'. Knowing has space and time dimensions that are not necessarily created in the same way (Derrida, 1995b; Derrida and Stiegler, 2002; Jones et al., 2004); the domain of organization is formed by a delineation of what counts as such, attaching a self-evidence to its particular modes, e.g. 'accounting', 'administration', etc. (Miller and Napier, 1993). This involves ensembles of practices and rationales as well as various professional and expert bodies through which relations are then formed. In other words, there is no a priori 'organization' for which to search—no 'transcendental signified' in Derrida's terms. The notion depends on various acts of engagement to which active processes of classifying and archiving are integral (e.g. Bowker and Star, 1999; Jones et al., 2004).

Second, while one would need to analyze how forms of knowledge are embodied, this paper is premised on the notion that there is no essential subject in archeological inquiry. Following Smith (2004), histories manufacture essential subjectivities, presenting an essential subject as if 'sociologically consistent and historically stable' (p. 2). This, in part, is underpinned by a form of archaeological cosmopolitanism that advocates for a global human heritage, and whose politics is predicated upon universal subjects that mediate between past and present. In relation to organization and ancient Egypt, this could enable one to point to the dawn of the 'administrator' or the 'accountant' (e.g. Chandler, 1984; Ezzamel, 1994) embodied by the scribe. However, the production of essential subjects is not limited to globalizing knowledge, but can also serve projects aimed at localizing privileged access to a sectional past (Smith, 2004)—a notion to which I return later in this text.

Altogether, this paper argues that the practice of organization analysis should not lead to reifying and canonizing the existing tradition (Czarniawska, 2003); rather, it should enable an examination of the politics that objectify organizing (Jones et al., 2004) and that generate essential subjectivity (Smith, 2004)—as well as our implication as academics in such politics.

Why? I address this in relation to the topic at hand. On the one hand, 'ancient Egypt is now fully present' (Haikal, 2003: 138); the effects of the interest that produces and consumes it surround us, from documentaries on new discoveries, to accounts in academic journals, to yet another Wilbur Smith novel or Mummy sequel. Its 'presence' is made, produced, by ongoing attempts at closure of specific meanings enabled by relations of power (Derrida, 1981b; Derrida and Stiegler, 2002). On the other hand, production and consumption involve the negotiated settlement of social relations through which some elements are promoted while others are rendered absent; the latter involves a process of 'disposal', in Hetherington's terms (2004: 163), the accounting processes by which we deal with gaps, 'the aporial absent presence', within our otherwise seamless representations'. It is this 'absent presence' that, despite ongoing deferrals, ensures the impossibility of completely closing, sealing, political identities and structures. Indeed, the attempt to undertake the latter can generate unnecessary violence, in Derrida's terms (2005). Yet, while closure is often incomplete and even productive of resistance, its potentially constraining dynamics generate the responsibility to examine the ways in which actuality is made, the responsibility to analyze various normalizing procedures—of language, politics, media, etc.—that produce significance, that assign certain events presence, and overlook others (Derrida, 2005; Derrida and Stiegler, 2002). On the one hand, this involves the analysis of structures that enable and constrain ('make possible and govern') processes of textualization (Lucy, 2004; Rorty, 1995). On the other hand, the possibility of reference to the other, and thus of radical alterity, of difference, is always inscribed in the presence of the present (Derrida, 2005). Such analysis, therefore, begins from an encounter with the aporias that must be overlooked in order to make presence (Derrida, 1993). One such aporia is central to inscribing the text at hand: this account is a product of the very forms of closure that it resists; its seeds were sown in those texts' attempts at framing; every attempt at rendering this text their 'other' at once renders it their supplement, drawing on them to create presence while defined by its difference to them.

In what follows, I build a theoretical account constituted of narratives which articulate with one another, even as each offers a different facet; there is no single picture or story (Hetherington, 1998). While I initially focus on written records, I draw on texts in the wider sense (Farmer, 1997) including narratives in documents, architecture and various forms of art and media. In three sections I offer spaces of aporetic negotiability in which I found myself deliberating on the topic at hand. The resultant piece inscribes a series of overlapping and at times contradictory relationships between ancient Egypt, organization and Egypt.

Writing Ancient Egypt: A Critical Appreciative 'Account' of 'Work Organization in Ancient Egypt'

Set your heart on being a scribe that you may direct the whole earth. (Ancient Egyptian instruction text in Kaster, 1995: 17)

But the king said, 'Theuth [the ancient Egyptian god credited with the invention of writing] ... since you are father of written letters, your paternal goodwill has led you to pronounce the very opposite of what is their real power. The fact is that this invention will produce forgetfulness in the souls of those who have learnt it because they will not need to exercise their memories being able to rely on what is written ... So it's not a remedy [pharmakon] for memory, but for reminding, that you have discovered. And as for wisdom, you're equipping your students only with a semblance of it, not with truth. Thanks to you and your invention, our pupils will be widely read without benefit of a teacher's instruction; in consequence, they'll retain the delusion that they have wide knowledge, while they are, in fact, for the most part incapable of real judgment'. (from Plato's Phaedrus cited in Derrida 1981a: 102)

This paper started with a reflective process instigated by my reading of a specific text: Ezzamel (2004) in *Organization*, an 'account' of work organization in ancient Egypt. I use quote marks to denaturalize 'account' and to draw attention to the text's footnote (p. 534) that states that the practice of producing an account is always a form of valuing—a process that is historically contingent. The positioning here is both appreciative and critical, attempting to interpenetrate what are traditionally regarded as binary opposites by inscribing experiences of aporia. Such aporetic experiences are not simply related to the subject matter, but also to how I might address it: collegiality and politeness in response enjoin a double duty, including the avoidance of the language of ritual and of duty (Derrida, 1995a). Further, even though critique and appreciation are not identical, they often participate in the same (Derrida, 1995a). But I must start somewhere, so I address some of the foundations for my appreciation of that text.

To me, it was a delight to read an organizational take on ancient Egypt where the pyramids are not conjured up. Indeed, Ezzamel (2004) problematizes access to information on work organization in the Old Kingdom, that was, in effect, ancient to its ancients. The text is carefully positioned in terms of the specific period that is researched and in terms of its analysis. It elaborately achieves what it sets out to do: extending ancient Egypt into the literature on organization and producing an authoritative account of work organization that pushes back notions such as 'division' of labour, 'administration' and 'accounting' into ancient Egypt. Further, whereas focus here is on the account's omissions, on what is deferred, I am appreciative that such deferrals are acknowledged, thereby reflecting an awareness of spaces of aporetic negotiability—where the text could have gone in alternative directions—even as it pursues its intended project to locate specific conceptions in ancient Egypt. So in reaching closure and demarcating its space, it created 'doors'—to borrow Hetherington's (2004) metaphor—some of which I engage with as potential points for departure; this is relevant ground for appreciation since the paper at hand, a project of alterity, was thereby conceived. Specifically, I start with the argument for a 'visible hand of administration' in ancient Egypt (Ezzamel, 2004: 497, 502).

My position is that the 'hand of administration' had to be rendered 'visible'; its presence had to be produced through encounters with aporias that are resolved through intentional deferrals. However, even before it could be rendered 'visible', 'the hand of administration' had to write. This is where the examination of the relationship between artifact and argument begins to take shape: what follows is concerned with the tensions between writing in ancient Egypt and writing ancient Egypt into current accounts.

The project of writing ancient Egypt into contemporary accounts started with other ancients, notably the Greeks; the fascination with ancient Egypt is not simply a modernist enterprise. While the ancient Greeks valued oral knowledge, the Egyptians were renowned to them for their written records (Cartledge, 1997; Hartog, 1988). And so re-writing writing in ancient Egypt was well underway (Derrida, 1995b). Indeed, historical accounts of ancient Egypt often start with ancient Greek ethnology, a documented history of 'otherness' in Hartog's (1988) terms, most notably by Herodotus who arrived in Egypt in 450 BC. Writing in ancient Egypt was also written into Greek accounts by philosophers, such as Plato. Ironically—disciplined as I am by various forms of truth—the first passage that Ezzamel (2004) triggered in my mind was from Plato's Phaedrus (top quote). It took some active restraint on my side to appeal to my awareness of various translations of ancient Egyptian instruction texts aimed at scribes (e.g. in Kaster, 1995; Simpson, 1972) and to my awareness of Derrida's (1981a) deconstruction of Plato's text; in this section, I draw on both as an entrée to an examination of the contemporary appropriation of writing in ancient Egypt.

I start with brief reference to the ancient Egyptian accounts on the scribal role, some of which have also inspired previous work on the 'accountant' (e.g. Ezzamel 1994). In some translations of these texts, one could read power credited to inscription, at times brandished by the instructional text like a 'carrot' to save the person from the 'stick' of alternative 'careers' of sorts. Such 'careers' are often defined by contrast: the Other is at times a soldier, a fieldworker or a sailor. Indeed some of these translations could be read as 'recruitment' accounts; however, in others, one could also read the role of disciplinary techniques and the perseverance required until, like a horse, the scribe is broken into their productive and powerful role. However, my task is not to incorporate such instructional texts into my analysis; rather, I refer to them briefly for two reasons. I illustrate how familiar, and therefore seductive, these texts can be, and core to the task at hand, how these contemporary translations can afford a reading of the power accorded to inscription (and to the forms of life that inscription enables) that is different to ancient Greek accounts on writing in ancient Egypt—such as that commonly attributed to Plato's Phaedrus.

In the Phaedrus, Plato poses an 'ancient Egyptian' myth around the god Toth's introduction of hieroglyphs, the pharmakon of writing,

to the king. Translations suggest that the king, however, responds with wariness towards the hieroglyph's role in altering memory (top quote). Aside from the potentially self-defeating irony that the 'myth' utilized by Plato³ to argue for orality was made up (Nehamas and Woodruff, 1995), Plato's arguments could encourage one not to take written work at face value. Yet, this is not the project at hand; this would privilege speech over writing, the very task that Derrida (1981a) set out to deconstruct.

Derrida (1981a: 99–100) problematizes translations of Plato's account through an emphasis on the word *pharmakon*, which in Greek could mean both 'remedy' and 'poison'—an either/or that is simultaneously a neither/nor (Derrida, 1981b). In other words, the term is undecidable since it holds contradictory meanings. Derrida discusses how translators have resolved the 'impossibility' of the *pharmakon* by rendering the word into one meaning or the other, thereby deciding what Plato had left undecidable. Hence Plato's 'original' text is already a contested site in the process of translation. There are several implications. First, Derrida (1981a: 85) illustrates the determination of certain structures in Plato's 'original' myth of Toth. Second, he illustrates that attempts at opposing the two terms—in that case speech and writing—is illusionary; they inhabit each other (Johnson, 1981). And yet the two terms actively defer each other. Third, he illustrates that no mode of communication is free from misinterpretation, ambiguity and the author's intentions; however, rather than accept the common logic that intentionality and contextuality determine meaning, intentionality and contextuality can be products rather than sources of interpretation (Derrida, 1988). I pursue these points further in the following passages.

In reviewing Derrida's (1976) discussion of the historical emergence of formalized writing and its contribution to organizational analysis, Cooper (1989: 493) has made the statement that 'writing thus becomes inseparable from the division of labour in society ...' And so it could follow that this twinning could be traced into ancient histories such as Egypt's. Such assertions, however, would be too tidy, posing closure rather than undecidability. The problematization of ancient Greek accounts of ancient Egypt (Derrida, 1981a; Hartog, 1988) is representative of how one might begin to examine contemporary accounts on work organization in ancient Egypt and the processes by which they create spaces for the production of claims. I return to Ezzamel (2004).

The text acknowledges that 'historical evidence so far removed from the present is clearly open to a variety of readings' (p. 497); however, a specific reading is still privileged, the paper arguing for the role of both 'accounting' and 'administration'. In a similar vein, the text 'deliberately' avoids 'the temptation to engage with theoretically laden arguments'; a deferral in which 'heavy-laden theorizing' comes to constitute a 'risk' to the 'richness and uniqueness of the historical material'. Here, establishing the relationship between artifact ('material') and argument is achieved by an intentional deferral of any potentially disruptive theorization. Yet, the account's footnote reminds the reader that all accounting involves a form of valuing. So unless certain material is inherently sublime, if the reader is to value it as 'rich' and 'unique', it is only through a foreground of assumptions constituting ancient Egypt, organization and legitimated categories of thought.

The production of the text rests on the exploration of 'evidence' (again, artifact) of work organization; this presupposes structural substantiation for contemporary claims (arguments as well as spaces of presence). The search for self-present truth (Derrida, 1976) involves a realist process by which one identifies the current essential characteristics of a notion then finds evidence of such essential elements in the ancient past. This necessitates acts of deferral. The reader is offered the acknowledgement that readings of ancient Egypt could potentially privilege 'industrial and post-industrial Western' conceptions (p. 500); this instance of aporetic negotiability is then resolved through focus on 'elements considered by contemporary [also western] scholars to be key to work organization'. Shortly after, to enable the deferral of potentially centrifugal theorization, the argument is that the 'ancient Egyptian [non-western] context could be impaired if a heavy-laden theorizing is superimposed on the analysis' (my emphasis and insertions). The argument I am forwarding here, however, is that such 'context' does not pre-exist acts of translation and textualization; its chains of signification had to be produced; these, then, provide the ground for the insertion of those elements rendered relevant by contemporary scholars (Derrida, 1981a, 1988). Further, to assume current patterns of classifying in archaeological inquiry into the ancient past 'presumes a priori the stability of a certain apparatus of difference which segments social worlds along a stable set of social fault lines' (Smith, 2004: 3, my emphasis)—one such example could be a "'division" of labour'.

Why would any of this analysis matter? Here, I return to examine the effects of the 'aura of naturalness that comes from deep historicity' (Smith, 2004: 3). The stabilization of an essential core constituting elements of 'administration' and 'accounting' affirms current understandings of these terms—terms that, in turn, involve normalizing activities by setting standards and by providing ways of thinking and of acting (Cooper, 1989; Miller and Napier, 1993). In other words, 'although inscriptions have been seen as crucial in constructing centres of calculation, this constitutive ability tends to be explored in one direction (that of achieving normalities rather than creating difference)' (Jones et al., 2004: 730). I briefly discuss the implications of these logocentric effects for organization.

First, the assertion of current conceptions can reproduce existing power structures by subordinating ancient Egypt to contemporary projects. For example, locating 'accounting' and 'administration' in the ancient past reinforces the professions in the present. Here I appropriate Cooper's (1989: 500) statement that when attempts do not incorporate 'the deconstructive cast that Derrida brings to the analysis of writing ... they are liable to give the impression that the formalized writing of the professional is firmly founded and therefore largely unproblematic'. Hence, Miller and Napier's (1993: 632) statement that the 'rhetoric of accounting history has contributed to the self-image of the professionalized practice of accounting' can also serve the rhetoric of administration history. Second, writing certain ancient Egyptian processes as 'accounting' and 'administration' participates in classifying attempts at discursive closure—framing and

naming. The delimiting of ontology, in Derrida's terms (Farmer, 1997), defers and potentially marginalizes alternative readings into such activities, readings that could disturb realities on work organization, maybe even enabling 'antiadministration' (Farmer, 1997). In other words, depriving certain practices of self-evidence can extend the limits of what can be thought and lived (Miller and Napier, 1993). Third, there is the consideration of the alternatives that are deferred through a realist premise for the engagement with ancient Egypt; I proceed to elaborate.

Ezzamel's (2004) candid illustration of how categorizing continues to be problematic is a good reminder of how tenuous it is to attempt to splice ancient archives onto contemporary ones; what is archived in a different way, is lived in a different way (Derrida, 1976, 1995b). For example, while the account problematizes 'time', that could be furthered; Toth, the god credited with inventing writing (and of whom scribes were followers), was also the master of passing time (see Derrida's review of Toth's other roles, 1981a: 86–94). As an analogy, this relationship between inscription and time can open up interesting dimensions for organizational analysis that recognize the artifactuality of time (Derrida and Stieglar, 2002). In other words, what we currently mean by time cannot be [mis]taken for what it may have meant in other places, at other times. So despite the strikingly familiar ancient Egyptian calendar, one can only speculate on the understanding of temporality then, since practices were geared towards an embodied afterlife (hence mummies) that involved work (Milde, 1994). This presents two notions. First, on the note of the afterlife, one could have good reason to pursue 'nominalism' (a term that realism defers) in approaching written records; ancient Egyptians systematically defaced names of people (e.g. Pharaohs or queens) who had fallen out of favour to deny an afterlife. As Milde (1994: 15) puts it, to them 'You do not have a name, you are a name; just as you are a body'. Second, work as part of the afterlife is not necessarily implicated in the negative valuational patterns instigated by the implication of labour with punishment for the original sin as in biblical traditions; work as the result of the fall from grace, from which people could, and should, attempt to extricate themselves towards the afterlife, holds both empowering and constraining repercussions in this one. An alternative reading could encourage one to re-examine such teleological assumptions.

I now refocus the attention from the ancient archive to a more recent one. By way of illustration, I return to Ezzamel's (2004) opening statement that mentions the examination of 'original' documents (p. 497).⁴ The understanding of these documents is predominantly of more recent vintage. In other words, the account's irreducible metaphor, the 'hand of administration' (pp. 497, 502), owes its 'visibility' in large part to a 19th century project, the legacy of which scholars operate within: the decipherment of the Rosetta stone⁵ and consequent developments, including translations, within Egyptology. Here, Derrida's contribution is two-fold. First, it both challenges traditional notions of originality (Derrida, 1972) and cautions that no reading is ever genuine to the 'original'—hieroglyph or English (Derrida, 1981a, 1981b). Second, it alerts one to how the structures of science, here Egyptology (the '-logy' signifying science belonging to logo-centric discourse), can predetermine the text—as well as any coherent reference I make to ancient Egyptian practices in this account. Here, I borrow from Ezzamel (2004) a statement directed at the ancient past, and insert it into this different chain of significations (or 'context') to redirect its relevance to the work at hand:

The translation of various work activities undertaken by groups of individuals into accounting numbers susceptible to more detailed and thorough analysis occurred through the intervention of scribes applying their expert knowledge. (p. 530)

Here, my appropriation is one of scribes as analogy for what we, as academics and writers, are participating in: ongoing acts of translation enabled by interventions that involve the application of expert knowledge. The paper at hand and Ezzamel (2004) are not the same, but they participate in the same; while resisting patterns of ancient Egypt's interpretation and appropriation, I am engaging in its inscription and dissemination: in the nominalist spirit of 'ancient Egypt', simply by invoking those words, I would be participating in its perpetuity.

So why have I persisted with this aporetic experience? First, it is to enable a provisional passage: the argument that establishing a history of administration in ancient Egypt can downplay the historicity of the interest in both 'administration' and 'ancient Egypt'. While the former has been the subject of discussion in the organization literature, this paper attempts to address the latter. Because of the power in inscription, my argument is that inquiries need to analyze and demonstrate the apparatuses—including organizational research itself—that create and reproduce patterns of identity and difference within specific social configurations (Smith, 2004). Second, we are written as we write (Cooper, 1989); in the process of writing, I also confronted other drivers that sustained the impetus for this inscription; I address these drivers in the following two spaces of engagement.

Of Archaetexts, Archetexts and Architexts: Egyptology and Revival, Empire and Industry

Here in Egypt, everything is written (...) since the most ancient times (...), and so too is even your own history, the history of you Greeks ... As a myth of its origin, a memory of a city must be entrusted not only to a writing but to the writing of the other, to the secretariat of another city ... The living memory must be exiled to the graphic vestiges of another place, which is also another city and another political space. But the technographic superiority of the Egyptians is nonetheless subordinated to the service of the Greek logos ... The Egyptian is supposed to have appropriated the culture of the Greek masters, who now depend on the hypomnemes, on this secretariat's writing, on these monuments: Toth or Hermes, whichever you prefer. (Derrida, 1995b: 114; on Plato's Timaeus)

The name given to the study of Egypt (...) distinguishes it from that of Greco-Roman civilization (...) and incorporates it into a field of knowledge conceived as the scientific study of the 'other', but often practised as the humanistic search for 'self'. (Wengrow, 2003:

In this second space I present an analysis of contradictory engagements that involve framing ancient Egypt as the other, while simultaneously claiming it in a metonymy of identity, of the self. In doing so, I offer a reading of the processes in which ancient texts, what I call here ‘archaetexts’, can, on the one hand, be actively transformed into master narratives, ‘original’ patterns or logocentric blueprints, ‘archetexts’, while simultaneously, on the other hand, they can be deployed in constructing ‘architexts’, designs and buildings that cater to a politics of metonymy, to the idea of an other as a symbol of sublime identification around which identity can be expressed (Hetherington, 1998). To undertake this, I engage with what Derrida has described as apparently disparate instances that constitute a generalized writing, everything which ‘gives rise to an inscription in general, whether it is literal or not and even if what it distributes in space is alien to the order of voice’ (Derrida, 1976: 20). However, I will first foreground this discussion with a brief note on the aporetic negotiability at the heart of this space.

By assigning certain past events a time and a place, spatio-temporal specificity, they seem full of presence; yet, the significance of events is always made, produced; it is artifactual, in Derrida’s (2005) terms. In other words, ‘to claim what happened there and then as an event, let alone to claim that it is happening still, would be precisely to be seen as claiming something, to be making a case, to be producing what happened’ (Lucy, 2004: 33). Such production applies to claims on the ancient past—organization in ancient Egypt—which I have addressed in the previous space. But by the same measure, it also applies to claims on any past no matter how recent—including claims on the organization of knowledge on ancient Egypt, in which I partly engage in this space and the next. So, on the one hand, I participate in the production of series of events that could be taken to constitute a history of the present (Foucault, 1979). But on the other hand, I also analyze processes of textualization that contribute to the organization of engagements with ancient Egypt—as experiences produced within a textual apparatus (Derrida, 1981b, 1988). In what follows, I examine the productive explosion of interest in ancient Egypt over the last two centuries (Jeffreys, 2003; Vercoutter, 1992) through exploring alternative facets in the formulation of ‘events’: emphasis is on the articulation of texts, artifices, and how this can serve to reinforce specific interests. I offer a reading of two broad engagements with ancient Egypt: through Egyptology and through the Egyptian Revival (Carrott, 1978; Curl, 1982; Trafton, 2004)—attempts at producing archetexts and architexts—a somewhat unusual association since the former is often regarded scientific and the latter artistic. This is situated within readings of imperialism—accounts that are increasingly gaining presence—as well as readings of industrialism (Hobsbawm, 1999) and orientalism (Said, 1978), accounts not often included in the analysis of engagements with ancient Egypt.

The Napoleonic engagement with Egypt, introduced at the outset of this paper, is often cited as the ‘event’ par excellence which sparked centuries of interest in ancient Egypt (Jeffreys, 2003); this can be at the expense of the ‘eventness’ of other engagements, an exclusion with consequences. First, to automatically assume that this event marked the ‘inception’ of Egyptology in the early 19th century—to establish its presence—would be to overlook centuries of engagements, both European and Arab (e.g. El Daly, 2005). Second, the Napoleonic expedition left Egypt within a few years, relatively quickly—which could leave the impression that foreign interests in Egypt were fleeting, rather than an ongoing engagement inscribed in forms of imperial power, ‘a constellation of processes’ from myriad encounters (McClintock, 1995: 16). Yet, for example, in a somewhat unusual emphasis, Dixon (2003) utilizes the landmark date, 1882, associated with the start of decades of British occupation in Egypt, to describe how events around that time led to proliferation in Egyptology through the establishment of the Egypt Exploration Fund. Accounts suggest that British interests in Egypt involved attempts to introduce practices based on their administrative experiences elsewhere, especially India (e.g. Tignor, 1963, 1966).⁶ Yet, the extent to which British colonialism in Egypt actually reflected its practices in other countries is the subject of discussion (e.g. Mitchell, 1991, 2002; Reid, 2002; Said, 1978). The point here is that the Egypt context differed in part due to the increasingly popular accounts on ancient Egypt (Schwab, 1984). Dixon (2003: 88) describes an expedition:

One official was mightily impressed by the huge polished sarcophagi. ‘How,’ he wondered, ‘did these old people get all the seventy solid single-stoned tons of granite or porphyry into huge side-niches...?’ (...) But it was the technology that impressed him, not the motives behind it. ‘Greater even than the wonder was the prodigious foolishness of the whole thing. All for dead bulls!’ (...).

When Dixon here depicts the engagement with technology over motives in the imperial interest in ancient Egyptian, he also indirectly reminds the reader that the rise of Egyptology also paralleled industrialism. In a similar vein, Kuberski (1989: 75) presents patterns of engagement in which ancient Egypt’s revelations are ‘counterbalanced by more practical considerations’ in his reading of Egypt’s reappearance on the European horizon, one that underlines the simultaneous experiences of sublime insight and technological admiration within imperial encounters. It is this blend of scientific interest and metaphysical insight that I seek to further through a discussion of the active acts of translation of archaetexts into both archetexts and architexts, processes that involve a variety of conceptions of knowledge and power. To start with, I turn to Egyptology and the formulation of archetexts.

‘Egypt’, as the name of a country, is arguably unique in its attachment to the scientific suffix, ‘ology’;⁷ yet, the discipline focuses on the ancient history of that land (I address the effects of this in the following sections). Like other branches of archaeology, Egyptology had also proliferated during the 19th century as a powerful apparatus of representation providing histories that manufactured essential subjects (Smith, 2004). Spurred on by the enigma of undeciphered scripts, the study of ancient Egypt took off through the confluence of philology and archaeology (Kaster, 1995; Robinson, 2002) which generated intrigue, empowerment and novel insight; states Schwab (1984: xxiii): ‘The ability to decipher unknown alphabets ... had one incalculable effect: the discovery that there had been other Europes’.

Schwab, like Wengrow (2003, top quote), also focuses on the effects by which humanism had enabled the scientific study of the other to be practised as a search for the self. One can read relevance into this legacy. Egyptologists are often raised in the Classical-textual or Biblical-textual tradition (Jeffreys, 2003). Simultaneously, as Reid (2002:11) puts it, ‘Even after Michel Foucault, Edward Said, and the revival of Antonio Gramsci, positivist assumptions about progressive, objective, “scientific” knowledge still underlie much writing about Egyptian archaeology ...’. On the one hand, forms of this knowledge on ancient Egypt have been ‘criticised for often being insular’ with little inclusion of developments elsewhere in archaeology.⁸ A reading could ascribe to it characteristics of a “political” economy of truth’ (Foucault, 1980: 131): centred on scientific discourse and the institutions that produce it, subject to economic and political incitement, and the object of immense diffusion and consumption (circulating through apparatuses of education and information). Such scientific discourse has at times attempted to rule in and rule out specific forms of engagement, with a polarization between ‘orthodoxy and heresy’; an example of the latter can be found in ‘forbidden’ archaeologists who challenge ‘the accepted canons of the discipline’ (Rice and McDonald, 2003: 16). On the other hand, Egyptology has generally had profound productive and creative effects; and like other forms of science, it has, at times, facilitated international relations (Haikal, 2003). Further, any attempts at framing ancient Egypt, at reaching closure on its forms of engagement, can never be complete. Discourse is never fully closed; it articulates with other discourses. The dynamics of production, dissemination and consumption of knowledge on ancient Egypt do not sit in isolation; rather, in some ways, Egyptology was served by ‘Egyptomania’ (Haikal, 2003; Rice and McDonald, 2003), the ‘intoxication with things Egyptian’ over the last few centuries (Brier, 2004). To illustrate this, I turn to Egyptology’s articulation with the orientalist and industrial interests that served Egyptomania.

Developed at a time when the natural sciences were exploding, the prestige in Egyptology—Schwab (1984) argues—had fortified the oriental challenge and the desire to deal with it. Orientalism had served as the precursor to the discipline of Egyptology, and the two, while predominantly separated in the 20th century, still maintain that overlap in the names of some institutions (Reid, 2002). In the case of industrialism, one could point to the legacy of confluence between industry and empire (Hobsbawm, 1999; Said, 1994), but also to associations between industry and ancient Egypt. On one facet, it is argued that industrialism contributed directly to Egyptology through Egypt’s own industrial revolution. That period brought into Egypt foreign techno-experts who, to quote Jeffreys (2003: 4) ‘often became absorbed with the physical remains of Egypt’s past and applied their own area of expertise to its observation and explanation’. But on another facet, Egyptology articulated with the ‘revival’ of interest in ancient Egypt that was borne out in forms other than archaeological discourse, notably industrial discourses including the Egyptian Revival movement in architecture and design. While there is variety in these instances of engagement, they share a dissemination of specific knowledge conceptions of ancient Egypt that could enable ‘there and then’ to become ‘here and now’ (Schwab, 1984); I expand on this in the following passages.

Readings of the European and US industrial utility for ancient Egypt by the turn of the 20th century are enabled through the Egyptianizing elements adopted in architecture and design, or the transformation of archaetexts into architexts. In many ways, the Egyptian Revival was at once Egyptology’s other and its supplement, differing from it while simultaneously sustaining the production of interest in ancient Egypt—an interest in the ancient past that simultaneously involved an interest in appropriating its empowering effects. Here I draw on Burrell and Dale’s (2003) discussion of how architectural spaces of organization express power relations and interact with identity. In the case of the Egyptian Revival, authors point to at least two dynamics. First, ancient Egypt represented strength and immortality in the face of time, its structures built to last for eternity (Carrott, 1978). And second, the power effects of ancient Egypt were also grounded in the belief that the ancient Egyptians had profound knowledge (e.g. Brier, 2004; Carrott, 1978; Kuberski, 1989). Ancient Egypt was not only conducive to the scientific enterprise of ‘stability, durability and dependability’, it was also symbolic of wisdom through ‘ancient secrets’ (Carrott, 1978: 108). Hence, through acts of metonymy, invocations of ancient Egypt enabled the parties that engaged with it to appear both capable and knowledgeable. Egyptian Revival architecture provides salient examples for Burrell and Dale’s (2003) notions of ‘building power’ (constructing superiority through purposefully created spaces and connections), ‘building consumption’ (merchandizing luxury goods through commercial ‘pilgrimage’ sites) and ‘building production’ (factories) (pp. 182, 183, 185).

For industrial design, ancient Egypt had come to represent the ‘science and knowledge; sublimity and mysticism’ that enable ‘an illustration of what art and science can accomplish’ (Carrott, 1978: 102, 107). The sublime is a theme in the Revival’s engagement with ancient Egypt more broadly (Trafton, 2004), but more specific to building was an affirmation of the colossal stature of ‘man’. Champollion (Figure 3) had admirably remarked how no people had ever conceived of architecture ‘on so sublime and so grand a scale as the ancient Egyptians. Their conceptions were those of men a hundred feet high’ (cited in Honoré Greppo and Stuart, 1830: 267). This may have served the enlightenment project well, but it also affirmed the role of scale, grand scale, in projects. ‘Bigness’ was a factor both in ancient Egyptian architecture and in industrialization. The Egyptian Revival movement had paralleled industrialism in Europe and the United States (Carrott, 1978), and also in Egypt (Haikal, 2003). As Egyptian cotton was finding its way to Lancashire, the Egyptian cotton industry in Egypt embraced ‘bigness’ in factory organization, much to the delight of its British partners (Owen, 1999). Overseas, factories ‘acquired exotic plumage’ (Curl, 1982: 4) as well as a range of other Egyptianizing elements in their design (Elliot et al., 2003). In discussing 19th century urban forms, Kellely (1996: 256) notes: Critics admired the ‘obelisks and pyramids of the factory chimneys’ in England and prompted the vogue for vast, impressive architecture. The Victorian concept of the urban sublime grew in part out of a longing for Egyptian impressiveness and an attempt to define contemporary culture in similarly vast and dignified terms.

In other cases, it was the power effects of claims to knowledge that led the Egyptianizing style to be adopted for organizations associated with ‘wisdom’ such as libraries and colleges (Butler, 2003; Carrott, 1978; Curl, 1982). The wisdom theme also carried over to courthouses but there, along with prisons, the disciplinary theme was more paramount. Trafton (2004), for example, blends Foucault’s (1979) discussion of the Philadelphia system of disciplinary techniques with the use of Egyptian Revival in US penal architecture. However, at times it was simply that Egyptianizing was appropriable to structures of new technology; ancient Egypt suited the engineering demands of certain projects, enabling a move from Grecian or Roman prototypes to an alternative form, which while economically and functionally practical, could still appeal to aesthetics and taste (Carrott, 1978).

Finally, conceptions of ancient Egypt have also been utilized in technologies of commodification, promoting consumption in part through its dazzling image (McDonald and Rice, 2003). In architecture, Egyptian Revival ‘commercial picturesque’ buildings became en vogue (Carrott, 1978: 102). This style continues to be appropriated for casinos, cinemas (Bryan, 2003; Fazzini and McKercher, 2003; Kuberski, 1989) and department stores (Elliot et al., 2003). Yet, the Revival was only a part of ‘Egyptomania’ more broadly; Egyptianizing was implicated in promoting consumption through areas other than architecture, notably commercial marketing of products. So, for example, purveyors of iron, a new building material in 1847, associated it with ancient Egypt to call attention to its solidity and durability (Carrott, 1978). Furthermore, ancient Egypt’s association with knowledge made for successful marketing across a range of industries such as tobacco, film and beauty products (Brier, 2004; Rice and MacDonald, 2003). Indeed, claims to ancient Egyptian grandeur and wisdom had been the topic of colonial rivalry between Britain and France; this rivalry was enacted through acquisitions of genuine archaeological artifacts such as obelisks (Hassan, 2003a; Reid, 2002) and the handover of the Rosetta Stone—the ‘key’ to ancient Egyptian knowledge—from France to Britain in the imperial conquest (Jeffreys, 2003; Vercoutter, 1992), but was also borne out through competition in commercial marketing of Egyptianized products such as porcelain (Brier, 2004).

In leaving this space, I return to Derrida’s (1995b) reading of Plato’s *Timaeus* (top quote) in which the ‘superiority of the Egyptians is nonetheless subordinated to the service of the Greek logos’. Forms of accounting that engage with ancient Egypt enable ongoing metonymy of present and past organization. For example, it could be argued that the ancient Egyptian obelisks that became symbols of imperialism (Hassan, 2003a) had been produced (in ancient times) and transported overseas (in the last centuries) through large endeavours of organization. Indeed, excerpts of 19th century accounts in Vercoutter (1992) extensively depict the contemporary technologies and efforts involved in the transport and erection of obelisks. More recently, extensively documented in multiple media are the UNESCO’s organizational feats in transporting Ramses II’s Abou Simbel temples, double exposures in which the temples themselves stand acclaimed as marvels of organization. The motives between these projects are different: the former serving imperial identities, the latter serving the formulation of a shared world heritage. Yet both engagements inscribe the fascination with ancient Egyptian artifacts into accounts of a technologically superior, progressive identity. The merger of interests in the sublime and the practical can enable organizational forms of framing and claiming in which ancient Egypt is at once both insightful and superseded (Davis, 1996; Kuberski, 1989). However, such processes also involve inclusions and exclusions. Again, notions of alterity—of absence and presence—are relevant since synchronic views of organizing exclude the other (Jones et al., 2004). Ironically, it is often the case that Egypt’s people constitute the other that is written out of accounts that cater to the universal interest in ancient Egypt (Said, 2000a), a discussion to which I now turn.

‘Past Greatness’: Living with Ancient Egypt

Generally, it can be said that there are three types of struggles: either against forms of domination (ethnic, social, and religious); against forms of exploitation which separate individuals from what they produce; or against that which ties the individual to himself and submits him to others in this way (struggles against subjection, against forms of subjectivity and submission)... In the nineteenth century, the struggle against exploitation came into the foreground. And nowadays, the struggle against the forms of subjection—against the submission of subjectivity—is becoming more and more important, even though the struggles against forms of domination and exploitation have not disappeared. Quite the contrary. (Foucault 1983: 212–13)

In examining the production of essential archaeological subjects, Smith (2004: 1) contrasts two positions of engagement: archaeological cosmopolitanism advocating for a global human heritage, and local ‘advocative archaeology dedicated to providing subaltern groups with a privileged claim to a sectional past’. Both positions can be read into contemporary engagements with ancient Egypt: its international utility to the globalization of archaeology and a shared world heritage, and its local appropriation in ‘recuperative identity politics’ (Smith, 2004: 2). The cautionary note is that the latter position also rests on assumptions of an essential subject that carries a consistent set of elements across from the ‘ancient Egyptian’ to contemporary Egyptians. Yet, one of the empowering effects has been the engagement of some Egyptians as participants in the authoring of history, ensuring that it is ‘more than Western monologues into Egyptian silence’ (Reid, 2002: 11; also Haikal, 2003). So in this third space, I canvass diverse engagements in a reading of an ‘archaeology of the disenfranchised’ (Scham, 2003); I supplement the international interest in ancient Egypt with an interest in Egyptians’ engagement with it.

To start with, I want to put forward the argument that it is of no small significance that in ‘manufacturing essential subjects’ (Smith, 2004), the powerful apparatuses that generated the wonderful ‘ancient Egyptian’ during the 19th century had developed along with the apparatuses that generated the ‘uncivilized native’ of the ‘subject race’.⁹ While some foreign interests read elements of similarity into the former and aspired to identify with ancient Egypt, these interests also deployed distinct technologies that established their difference from the latter (Figure 4). Analyses of travellers’ accounts in Egypt during the 18th and 19th centuries, point to the contrast between

engagements with ancient Egypt and contemporary Egypt. On the one hand, ancient Egypt appeared to present familiar and desirable patterns of knowledge and organization, while on the other hand, the Egypt they encountered appeared disorganized, even chaotic (Fahim, 1998; Mitchell, 1991). The former appeared to defy time, some of its elements in pristine condition after thousands of years; the latter seemed to present decrepit elements. Fahim (1998: 10) remarks: ‘for the Europeans modern Egypt had two contrasting cultures that co-existed side by side: one was ancient and great while the modern way of life was still medieval and backward’.

In discussing how social groups attempt to get rid of what is unwanted, Hetherington (2004: 161) notes, ‘the anomalous and the incongruous ... continues to present itself unless it is represented out of existence’; the settlement of social relations is established through tacit acknowledgement of the ways by which some things are rendered absent. Ancient Egypt would be consumed with more enthusiasm (e.g. as in the Egyptian Revival or Egyptomania) if the contemporary inhabitants of the land were rendered invisible. Here I return to the salient Description, its frontispiece a prime example of such technologies of exclusion. Yet, of specific relevance to this section is the Description’s limited inclusion of Al-Azhar, the leading knowledge institution in Egypt at the time.¹⁰ Its discussion is short and mostly superficial despite awareness on the part of the French of the institution’s socio-political influence; this pattern also surfaces in subsequent accounts of Al-Azhar (Reimer, 1998) and has elicited two propositions.

First, travellers found elements of the Egypt encountered difficult to interpret and classify. In the case of Al-Azhar, readings predominantly framed its learning practices as symbolic of ‘chaos’ and the absence of ‘order’, altogether, readings which declare: ‘organization is absent, and anarchy hovers at the gate’ (Mitchell, 1991: 80–1). Al-Azhar also lacked the architectural or tourism ‘markers’ that denoted a site’s significance (Reimer, 1998), seen as lacking in height and space (Mitchell, 1991). Second, ancient Egypt occupied the larger interest of travellers, the features of Islamic Cairo, an ‘alien backdrop’ to the desired encounter with the civilization of ancient Egypt (Reimer, 1998: 269); altogether, it would seem that ancient Egypt afforded the more accessible and coveted forms of knowledge that such engagements sought.

Some appropriations of ancient Egypt in the analysis of the contemporary one involved the naturalization of negative elements from ancient Egypt, supported by ‘decline’ notions of civilizations. In certain cases, deep historicity is used to situate contemporary problems—as if Egypt’s ‘past greatness’ had only left its negative elements behind. For example, Lord Cromer, who had a passion for the classics (Reid, 2002), argued that to understand the ‘Egyptian Question’ one had to study some ancient history. In discussing the governance of ‘subject races’, he critically observes in *Modern Egypt* (Cromer, 1908: 22): The drastic nature of those methods, and more especially of the punishments which the rulers of Egypt were in the habit of awarding during the first half of the last century [19th], and even at a later period, did not, indeed, differ very materially from those of their Pharaonic predecessors.

Herodotus says ... However, attempts at closure in readings of the Egypt encountered—readings that would allow for imposing specific conceptions of order—simultaneously held the conditions for their alterity. Ancient Egypt could also be appropriated by various Egyptians; at times even enabling contemporary organizational notions (e.g. industry, bureaucracy) to be ‘indigenized’ rather than ‘introduced’—but in contradictory ways.

On the one hand, patterns of a negative appropriation can be read into the work of some key Egyptian intellectual leaders. For example, Rifaa al-Tahtawi, a 19th century Azhari Sheikh lauded as ‘the most famous Egyptian thinker of his generation’ (Reid, 2002) had extended his education in Paris, developing his interest in ancient Egypt while in France. Al-Tahtawi is credited with a prolific career across translation and education, but one in which he also served rulers in Egypt eager to borrow Western administrative techniques. His contributions included, among others, two seminal works relevant to this account: the first history of ancient Egypt in Arabic (Jeffreys, 2003; Reid, 2002) and one of the first major texts in modern Arab political writing which introduced the concept of production as an extended interpretation of ‘the general good’ (Mitchell, 1991).

Of the latter, Mitchell (1991: 107–8) notes: After elucidating the meaning of the phrase [‘the general good’], the work considers its three parts, agriculture, manufacture, and commerce, and then examines their development in Egypt from the earliest times to the present ... At one point in the work, Tahtawi states that the phrase ‘general good’ corresponds to the French term ‘industrie’. The cause of Egypt’s condition is diagnosed as the absence of this habit of industry, the characteristic of the productive individual and the civilised society. Its absence makes Egyptians indolent, and indolence is fundamental to their ‘character’. Using European sources, Tahtawi traces the trait of indolence all the way back to the ancient Egyptians.

On the other hand, ancient Egypt increasingly became core to the development of a ‘restorative archaeology’, in Smith’s (2004) terms, one in which its ‘past greatness’ is appropriated locally—such as in this quote made in 1893: ‘There is one thing that unites us all in the Orient: our past greatness and our present backwardness’ (cited in Mitchell, 1991: 169). While, the ‘past greatness’ is adopted through ‘our’, indicating an ownership of ancient Egypt, it is utilized as a point of contrast to a degraded present, reflecting assumptions of superiority of the ancient ‘East’ over the modern (Jeffreys, 2003). Again, on the one hand, this can be representative of the way in which conceptions of the ‘orient’ can be inserted into local identity (Said, 1978), or the ‘orient-as-self-image’ (Mitchell, 1991: 169): the ancient Egyptian’s ‘greatness’ is positioned in strong contrast to the contemporary Egyptian’s ‘backwardness’. But on the other hand, it opened spaces for deploying deep historicity in the struggle for empowerment. Here, I draw on Foucault’s three forms of struggle (1983, top quote)—against the subjugation of domination, against exploitation, and against the subjection of subjectivity.

In the first half of the 20th century, empowering appropriations of ancient Egypt have often been described as a ‘renaissance’ (e.g. Haikal, 2003) with wide variety in its production. For example, in resisting its colonial utility in forms of domination and exploitation, elements of ancient Egypt could be adopted towards nationalism (Fahmy, 2002; Kerisel, 2001; Mitchell, 2002; Reid, 1997, 2002). Egypt’s own ‘Egyptomania’ (Haikal, 2003) generated a ‘revival’ in art, literature and architecture (Elliot et al., 2003; Haikal, 2003; Hassan, 1998). Increasingly, appropriations of ancient Egypt also served a range of productive enterprises including commercial branding of commodities and tourism (Fahim, 1998; Hassan, 2003b; Rice and MacDonald, 2003). It also served the institutionalization of specific forms of knowledge; ancient Egypt was written into the core curricula of Egyptian schools—the one in which I was educated at primary and intermediate levels—based on a progressive model of history that starts with ancient Egypt and ends with modern Egypt (Reid, 1997; Hassan, 1998; Mitchell, 2002). Various resistances to forms of subjectivity enabled a reclamation within Egypt of its past, specifically its positive dynamics. In focusing on appropriations that cater to specific organizational notions, I draw on two examples from the works of Egyptian novelists Mahmud Taymur and Naguib Mahfouz.

Most accounts of Egypt’s ‘modernization’ and ‘industrialization’ generally start with Muhammad Ali, an Ottoman Pasha at the turn of the 19th century, whose efforts to change the structure and shape of Egypt rendered ‘administration’ and ‘bureaucracy’ core objectives for development—inspired by the European example (e.g. Fahmy, 2002; Marsot, 1994). A century after Muhammad Ali’s reign, Mahmud Taymur deployed ancient Egyptian elements in a passionate letter from the Sphinx written to commemorate the deceased ‘reformer’ (in Fahmy, 2002: 14–15). In that ‘letter’, the Sphinx, whose epiphanies had also legitimated ancient Egyptian pharaohs, talks of Muhammad Ali’s ‘deliverance’ of Egypt and his restoration of the nation to its former glory. The double exposure implicitly situates his introduction of European 19th century organizing efforts against interpretations of ancient Egyptian order.

Another example, one that is more individualizing, is the appropriation of ancient Egypt in *Respected Sir*, by Nobel laureate, Mahfouz (1987). The novel is about an Egyptian 20th century ‘organization man’ whose whole life becomes consumed by his burning desire to rise through the rungs of the bureaucratic ladder in the public sector. One element of the tensions utilized in justifying his sacrifices are played out in the following passage: He also told himself that ‘government official’ was still a vague concept inadequately understood. In the history of Egypt, an official occupation was a sacred occupation like religion, and the Egyptian official was the oldest in the history of civilization. The ideal citizen of other nations might be a warrior, a politician, a merchant, a craftsman or a sailor, but in Egypt it was a government official. And the earliest moral instructions recorded in history were the exhortations of a retiring official to his son, a rising one. Even the Pharaohs themselves, he thought, were but officials appointed by the gods of heaven to rule the Nile Valley by means of religious rituals and of administrative, economic and organizational regulations. Ours was a valley of good-natured peasants who bowed their heads in humility to the good earth but whose heads were raised with pride if they joined the government apparatus. Then would they look upwards to the ascending ladder of grades which reached right to the doorstep of the gods in heaven. (pp. 110–11)

Here, elements of ideal citizenship and the sanctity of an official occupation are justified through the deep history of the administrative apparatus and its organizational regulations. Notably, the complex relationship between Pharaoh and the people is sanitized in the form of an administrative transaction of Maat, an ambiguous notion usually associated with ‘justice’, ‘rightness’ or ‘truth’ (also a goddess). Significantly, however, with Pharaoh’s godlike status and its implication with Maat, one can only speculate on how workers were constituted as subjects then. Reference to Maat is also included in Ezzamel’s (2004: 505, 531) appropriations of that transaction. Despite the different utilities of the texts and despite the differing purposes of the broader social projects that shape them, both accounts reproduce specific conceptions of ‘administration’ thereby essentializing its legacy, to contemporary Egypt or to organization studies. So while archeological cosmopolitanism is often pitted against local appropriations (Smith, 2004), the two positions are not mutually exclusive; rather as supplements, they open up the spaces for, and reinforce, their respective alterities.

On the one hand, the struggle between both positions over the ownership of ancient Egypt can be observed in the debates over repatriation of ancient Egyptian artefacts from international museums (e.g. the Rosetta stone, Nefertiti’s bust, etc.). But on the other hand, localizing and globalizing efforts reinforce each other. To start with, global interest empowers local appropriation—but pragmatic considerations can also shape both positions: international researchers require physical access to the sites in Egypt, whereas local archaeological activity requires financial, technological and intellectual investment. Egypt continues to engage international participation in the ongoing ‘discovery’ and ‘preservation’ of ancient Egypt, the landmark event enacted half a century ago.

Even as he rode the crest of Arab nationalism, Nasser appealed to internationalism through the UNESCO-sponsored salvage campaign, declaring that the High Dam 11 would be for the benefit of Egypt but that the antiquities were the heritage of all humanity (Reid, 1997: 66).

In some ways, such projects have catered to the universalization of ancient Egypt as part of everyone’s past, rendering it strategically positioned within the ‘origins’ of civilization. Localizing appeal to international interest continues today with both constraining and productive effects. On the one hand, the development of Egyptology within Egypt—while very laudable and prolific (Haikal, 2003; Reid, 2002)—has differed little from the traditional approach (archetexts), and the terms of engagement with ancient Egypt continue to be defined by the intellectual and political elite (Colla, 2002; Jeffreys, 2003). The selling of ancient Egypt by a variety of productive sectors at times caters to imperialist nostalgia (Rosaldo, 1989); the dual representation of Egypt that dominated the writings of 19th century

travellers—featuring an orientalist inferior culture versus an ancient superior civilization—is still used by travel agencies to attract visitors (Fahim, 1998; Hassan, 2003b). Local attempts at closure also confront their alterity; contemporary aspects of Egypt continue to resurface the disorder disdained for centuries—‘the anomalous and the incongruous ... continues to present itself’ (Hetherington, 2004)—even as constant efforts are deployed to eliminate those elements that ruin the view and present an organized image structured around enclaves that promote the consumption of ancient Egypt (e.g. Mitchell, 2002). On the other hand, ancient Egypt is celebrated through contemporary Egyptian Revival projects (architexts). These include opulent hotels and shopping malls such as Cairo’s new InterContinental Citystars and adjacent Stars Centre, fitted with towering golden columns and obelisks. Other such structures draw on the wisdom of the past to celebrate and promote knowledge in the present; examples of such edifices include the re-established Bibliotheca Alexandrina, the new Library of Alexandria (Butler, 2003), and the Smart Village (Figure 5), a public-private partnership aimed at the development of the communications and information technology sector. More significant, however, to the paper at hand is the emergence of accounts that defy the dominant narrative of an imperialist project aimed ‘rescuing ancient Egypt from oblivion’ (Bryan, 2003); El Daly’s (2005) discussion of the ‘missing millennium’, the era between Classical writing and the European Renaissance, offers a seminal examination of ancient Egypt as it features in medieval Arabic writings, one which aims to encourage further study of the Arab engagements with ancient Egypt—including its state ‘administration’.

Afterword: ‘Startlingly Modern’ Work Organization?

Craftsmen, in dateless quarries dim,
Stones formless into form did trim,
Usurped on Nature’s self with Art,
And bade this dumb I AM to start,
Imposing him.

(Melville, *The Great Pyramid* in Kellely 1996)

In many respects, the ancient Egyptians will turn out to have been startlingly modern. (Kaster, 1995: x)

... archaeologists [organizational theorists] must become analysts of the naturalizers rather than analytical naturalizers. The political potency of the discipline would then rest not upon generating claims on the past but upon exposing the strategic practices at play in the assertion of all such claims, past and present. (Smith, 2004: 19)

I do not claim the last word, nor should the reader expect one (Derrida, 2005: 73). What I would address here—in what is traditionally the final space to a paper—is unfinalizable. This is especially the case since analyses of texts are open to textual analysis and do not aim to provide a revised canon; so, the text at hand, ‘my’ text, holds the elements that subordinate it and contradict it (Rorty, 1995). By way of example, I now refer to an aporetic experience that I have sustained throughout writing this paper: ‘aporia’ is a Greek term drawn upon here to critically examine engagements, including Greek, with Egyptian artifacts. What I attempt to inscribe here are a few limits, margins or horizons, sites of deferrals but also of difference (Derrida, 2005; Heatherington, 1998). Such non-passage is not necessarily negative; it can simply be the edge of the approach of the other (Derrida, 1993). The three spaces examined attempts at a variety of claims in both senses of the word; forms of ancient Egypt are claimed for organization even as forms of organization are claimed and located in ancient Egypt. In what follows, I offer some reflections on ancient Egypt’s sublime appeal to organizational collectives.

Kaster’s (1995) book on ancient Egyptian texts uses the term ‘startlingly modern’ in its introduction, but significantly, the term is repeated when focusing on instructional texts aimed at scribes: ‘Like many other aspects of ancient Egypt, all this is startlingly modern’ (190). Ancient Egypt easily, but precariously, both mirrors and inspires (Rice and MacDonald, 2003). In a similar vein, it poses the potential for organization theory to write it in a form of retrojection that promotes present conceptions. Simultaneously, however, organizational accounts can become implicated in a search for ‘origins’ at the expense of what such accounts do in the present: who and what they include and exclude. I elaborate on these issues in the following passages.

Part of constructing relevance involves framing processes of ‘elsewhere and formerly’ that can transform their relevance into ‘ours and presently’ (Schwab, 1984)—a claiming process for organization of ancient Egypt. This, however, affords the resources for justifying and normalizing specific forms of truth on organization. Ancient Egypt can be implicated in forms of self-reference that have more to do with the culture that produces them than their object of analysis. Discourse on work in ancient Egypt, for the largest part, privileges progressive knowledge that is difficult to resist (‘division’ of labour, ‘administration’ and ‘accounting’ can become milestones in such progress). This knowledge is validated by a wealth of scientific research and media dissemination, not least of which are the increasingly ubiquitous documentary channels for which ancient Egypt is a central and recurrent theme (Jeffreys, 2003; Roth, 1998). But if we were to approach theories as buildings (Farmer, 1997), the question is whether these would involve more than a process of ‘Egyptianizing’ current conceptions of work and organization in globalizing the consumption of academic texts. For example, some of Davis et al.’s (1997) notions of ‘stewardship’ could be mapped onto scribal roles—but then so could some of the notions that constitute a ‘knowledge worker’. Maybe even the ‘origins’ of ‘strategy’ could be pushed back from the Greeks to the Egyptians; etymology aside, surely the knowledge of that ‘Theban’ who mentored Philip, Alexander’s father (Cummings, 1993), would have been shaped by ancient Egyptian practices. With Bernal’s (1987) contribution, Black Athena, on board, a text that revisits the ‘origins’ of the Greco-Western tradition in part to ancient Egypt,

there is ground for similar analysis to be had in organization studies.

Yet, if there is something to be gleaned from the post-Black Athena debates (e.g. North, 2003), it is that such attempts simply centre on turning the tables on race without attempts at radically questioning or denaturalizing its relevance. So a project in which ancient Egypt becomes the next object for discourses on 'origins' of various notions defined in 'organization studies' could be precarious. This is where I revisit the wariness voiced in the introduction aimed at the revisionist possibility: like the search for the origins of the Nile, the potential quest for 'fetishized abstraction' (Kennedy, 2005: 94) can simply reproduce, even strengthen, those powerful naturalized differences that serve some political collectives and disenfranchise others. In a more extreme form, an emphasis on ancient Egypt as the 'origin' of recognizable practices may not be significantly different to the historical forms of determinism in which ancient Egypt has been implicated with the 'origin of civilization' (e.g. Smith, 1923). The sobering issue is the implication of 'origin' discourses in political ambitions (North, 2003; Said, 1993; Wengrow, 2003). So regardless of which way the factual evidence points on the extent of ancient Egypt's implication with varieties of coercive labour, perhaps that engagement could serve to bring the contemporary forms of that silenced topic into work organization in a discussion of how forms of otherness often legitimate domination and exploitation. What is more surprising than reading forms of administration in ancient Egypt is that organizational texts had largely reproduced its relevance to organization while ignoring the common accounts on ancient Egypt's—and ancient Greece's, for that matter—forms of coercive organization. This is not to affirm that the latter actually existed, but to argue that such acts of 'interpretive charity' applied to this and any other practices that could strike us as 'repellent' (Cartledge, 1997: 17) warrant closer scrutiny: an exploration of why and how contradictions are glided over and the strategic practices utilized in dealing with paradoxes (Smith, 2004) such as the 'coercive administrative' Egyptians or the 'slave-holding democratic' Greeks. This is not simply a concern with statements on an indeterminate past, but with their effects in the present.

The modern appropriation of ancient Egypt that I encountered regularly as I studied at Cairo University was the statue, *Awakening of Egypt*, by Mokhtar. Modern Egypt is a woman: tall and proud, looking forward with her hand resting on a majestic ancient Egyptian sphinx (Figure 6). I have fond memories of that statue. Yet, for the purpose of this paper, I return to the painted dome of the Thomas Jefferson building, introduced at the outset of paper as an example of international appropriation (Figure 1). Representative of a progressive model of history, it starts with ancient Egypt and ends with the US. In the case of Mokhtar and some subsequent representations, the starting point is similar, only the endpoint is modern Egypt. Both positions participate in framing and claiming ancient Egypt's legacy. However, these forms of symmetrical engagement do not necessarily destabilize foundational assumptions. What is also not readily apparent in processes of textualization and their attempts at closure is that engagements with the sublime in ancient Egypt have tended to ignore alterities and exclude discussions of constraining effects. For example, 'pharaonic' and 'pharaoh' continue to hold negative connotations in the common Egyptian Arabic vernacular, but especially among religious conservatives, invoking conceptions of subjugation and enslavement¹³ (Colla, 2002; Hassan, 1998; Kerisel, 2001; Reid, 1997; Said, 2000a). And whereas ancient Egyptian elements had been deployed within the USA since its inception (Roth, 1998), discourses on ancient Egypt had also been implicated in a silenced topic of work organization that paralleled industrialism for a while: slavery. In exploring the relationships between the fascination with ancient Egypt and anxieties over race-based slavery, Trafton (2004) depicts how during the 19th century US Egyptian Revival both sides to the slavery debate engaged with ancient Egypt; contradictory discourses served to liken the US to the ancient Egyptian empire thereby enabling and justifying slavery on the one hand, while on the other hand they also empowered African Americans through an assertion of the blackness of the ancient Egyptians.

I had indicated to the reader at the start of this paper that it ultimately represents my own resistance to forms of subjectivity. Earlier reference to Mahfouz is relevant here, his literary career in one way representative of confictions in identity that I seek to inscribe. A strong body of literature (Said, 2000b), in some ways, Mahfouz's work can illustrate the tensions faced at times by Egyptians between the 'contradictory pulls' of ancient Egypt and contemporary everyday Egyptian culture (Le Gassick, 1984: 5). His earlier body of work comprised novels depicting life in the time of the pharaohs (Haikal, 2003); however, it is a later body of his work focusing on Egyptian life around the middle of the 20th century that delivered his international accolades (Said, 2000a). To me, this tension is symbolic of situations in which some Egyptians can find themselves: at once having to reconcile the enthusiasm and awe that is accorded to ancient Egypt with disdain for Egypt's current cultural, linguistic and societal elements. People can find their land's ancient past the object of international fascination and desirable ownership, and yet live as subjects of international ongoing attempts at reform and development. If anything, it is the struggle against these contradictory dynamics that have sustained the impetus for this paper.

Part of me is always proud whenever ancient Egypt features constructively. Further, in pragmatic terms, the international interest in ancient Egypt has not only become central to the economic well being of Egypt, but is also inextricably enmeshed with social and political dynamics. It is from this situated position that I have approached the writing on the turn to Egypt and its readiness to claim ancient Egypt. Even while framing holds doors that can be opened into spaces for alterity, it is only if the latter can be claimed and occupied that alternative engagements are generated. Since the pre-occupation with ancient Egypt has tended to limit and marginalize the creative spaces available for engaging with contemporary Egypt, the challenge then is to explore the means by which to extricate organizational analysis from the grip of the 'ancient' in engagements with matters 'Egyptian'. For without this, the organizational literature could risk the intellectual reproduction of the frontispiece to the Description—all focused on claiming ancient Egypt, with ongoing difference from, and deferral of, constructive engagement with its current people.

Notes

This paper is dedicated to the memory of Mary, my mother-in-law, who died as I was writing it; she spent her working life as a tourist guide across Egypt, talking to French-speaking audiences about its textual legacies and its inhabitants, ancient and modern.

1) Ezzamel (2004) notes that evidence on ancient Egypt is lacking. Many archived historical texts of ancient Egypt burned with the Library at Alexandria in 47 BC and then with the closure of the temples in the fifth century, more archives were lost to fire (Vercoutter, 1992).

2) In what he terms the 'schoolboy' texts, Kaster (1995, original 1968) pulls together several instructional texts aimed at scribes, some of which they would have copied to develop writing skills. Other famous texts on 'careers' include the 'Satire on Trades'.

3) Although Greek in its origin, some accounts that can be gleaned through the world wide web have cited this as an ancient Egyptian myth—so in some ways, the place of inscription in ancient Egypt has been overwritten by the Greeks.

4) The reader is not advised in what ways these accounts are 'original'. In the first instance, I assumed they were in hieroglyphs, but then noted that they were contemporary translations.

5) Relevant to the discussion of speech/writing is the predominant proposition that with formal closure of the ancient Egyptian temples by around 450 AD hardly anyone could read ancient Egyptian texts—and the living and oral tradition of hieroglyphs was lost (Vercoutter, 1992). This is challenged by El Daly (2005).

6) The association of Egypt with India was also borne out in ancient Greek representations in the development of empire—note Hartog (1988: 357): 'India is to the Indus what Egypt is to the Nile ... If Egypt explains India, so equally must India explain Egypt ...'.

7) Note that in the case of 'Assyriology', the term differs somewhat from the contemporary names of the countries whose history was the object of study.

8) From the Series Editor's Foreword and back-cover to each of the eight books in the series *Encounters with Ancient Egypt* (2003).

9) The former was enabled by the confluence of archaeology and philology (Kaster, 1995; Robinson, 2002) and the latter by the development of philology alongside biology (Schwabb, 1984; Foucault, 1980).

10) Described by Timothy Mitchell (1991) as 'the oldest continuing centre of scholarship and law anywhere in the world'; described by Edward Lane as 'the principal university of the East'.

11) Debates proliferate on the actual merits of the High Dam (e.g. Kerisel, 2001); however, it is of symbolic significance that some of the same countries that funded the salvage of the ancient Egyptian temples had denied funding of that dam aimed at Egypt's economic development.

12) www.smart-villages.com/default.asp?action=article&ID=27

13) An event that is often used as an example here is from Sadat's assassination, one of his assassins claiming to 'have killed pharaoh' (Kerisel, 2001; Reid, 1997).

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