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The focus of this paper is on the emergent occupational group we have called the ‘Nouveau Craft workers’ (NCW). In particular we look at the now expanding heritage and conservation construction industry that requires craftwork practices not found in contemporary craft training programs, but practices which were once common in the pre-industrial past. These include craftwork such as: thatching, plumbing, carpentry, blacksmithing, lead working, the list goes on.

The objective of the paper is to explore and identify similarities and differences between traditional craft cultures, contemporary craft and the new, emerging craft groups in the construction industry. For example throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century traditional access to the area of craft work was through the apprenticeship scheme. Most apprentices were employed and indentured for a specified period of time. Also in the common trades like engineering, and construction, the vast majority of the workers were male. For many this ‘serving of time’ and gendered dominance was seen as a ‘right of passage’ for young males, who were initiated into the mysteries of the craft. It was also seen as an

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1 On average an apprentice would be required to serve time, tied to the master for a period of five to seven years, although some were longer. Towards the end of the twentieth century pressure was brought to bear to reduce the time required to be served to an average of three years.

2 In this paper we interchange between craft and trade as the boundary between the two occupational groups became blurred.

3 Again the number of female apprentices rose at the end of the twentieth century.
effective means of regulating the labour supply into the trades. With the NCW groups this seems to be changing for example, there is now emerging an increase in female plumbers who are in demand from single female property owners, a group whose numbers are also on the increase.

However, for the NCW groups there does not seem to be a requirement to serve time with a skilled craftsperson, but there is a requirement to study for and pass the technical examinations in order to gain the appropriate qualification to practice the craft. There is also some evidence to suggest that a number of professional middle class workers are turning to these occupations as a means of bringing about a ‘sea change’ in their life. The implication being that this craft sector is becoming middle class.

We could argue then that the NCW groups have bypassed the more traditional cultural features (social processes) and colonised the technical aspects of the crafts. This has led to a new socio-technical system replete with its own discourse and very much linked to enterprise and entrepreneurship.

We therefore propose to tentatively explore these changes in craftwork organisation within the construction industry and ask; in what ways could these changes impact on organisation theory, in particular critical theory, discourse and the labour process?

The significance of this study is that if a re-discoursing of craftwork has occurred, then it brings to the literature a new occupational development that contrasts with mainstream organisation theory on working and middle class occupational categories.


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The language of organisational development and planned change management programmes is often a macho, heroic one of transformation, revolution and radicalism (McNulty & Ferlie, 2004), but the reality of much organisational change is quieter and more domestic, that of organisational repair.

This paper will look at the gendered work of repair through a consideration of the invisible work of women in organisations (Fletcher, 2001). It will explore the metaphor of invisible mending or darning. This paper is based on an investigation of the fabric of organisation and looks at the four skills in which women were traditionally schooled and which might usefully be reinstated in failing organisations today. The skills are:

- Weaving
• Embroidery
• Patching
• Darning.

Weaving is a popular metaphor in organisational analysis. It speaks of integration and networking, the bringing together of disparate strands into a satisfying whole, the seamless meshing of many slender threads. But weaving is the creation of something brand new, and as such might have limited potential for reinvigorating and rejuvenating organisations.

Embroidery is about surface decoration and beautification. It is the glamour work of the needle. It is analogous to rebranding and reinventing corporate identities. But embroidery is all surface and very little depth, and does nothing to strengthen fabric, in fact, excessive embroidery can cause fabric to split and shred, for fibres to pull away and holes to appear. Far from adding value, the misuse of excessive embroidery can cause deep damage and destruction.

Patching is the opposite of embroidery in terms of glamour. To patch a damaged garment is to extend its life by sewing something additional on, to make a series of accretions, but again, the patch is alien to the receiving fabric. The results are often unlovely. The end results are associated with hardship and want.

Darning, however, is different to all of the above. It is, like patching, unglamorous work, but unlike embroidery, it is plain not fancy needlework. It is a chore. It is boring work, done in ugly, neutral colours. But in times of hardship and battles for scarce resources, it is an invaluable skill. Darning is about restoration and repair. It is about preserving the past and the well-loved. Modern embroiderers are also reclaiming darning and exploring the technique in new ways, and in this lies a possibility for the future. Darning can preserve and transform. It can beautify and make new whilst retaining the old. In this way, darning, rather than weaving should be the key metaphor of organisational development and change. The humble, portable darning mushroom rather than the costly and cumbersome loom might be restored to pride of place in the metaphorical OD toolkit.

The paper will explore these themes through a variety of literature, and practical examples. It will draw on the work of Gherardi (2006), De Certeau (1986) and Carter (2004). Participants will be encouraged to engage with the themes in a tactile, practical, hands-on way.

References


(Darning sample, Rippin, 2005)

Paper 3: Knitting Identity

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Drawing from a combination of published materials and interview data, we discuss the presentational strategies used by young women to construct identities both in relation to and separate from work, home and the Third Place. In particular, we concentrate on how female knitters present themselves as young women, as crafters and as members of organized knitting groups, both physical and virtual in web rings of blogs dedicated to knitting. We draw attention not only to verbal and physical strategies for presenting identity (including comparisons, differentiations and ideal specifications) but also to the nature and description of the knitters’ material productions, both for self and for others. We also examine the extent those productions are themselves compared with and differentiated from those from other crafts, other hobbies and from work. We draw on works of Luce Irigaray to interpret our findings, particularly her arguments for separation from male identity and for mother-
daughter connection The maternal image is revealed through supervisory roles such as the ‘List Mum’. Grandmothers are important for contemporary knitters and we suggest that nannas provide an important and varied point of reference: The nanna may be a source of learning, loving and nostalgic comfort but also a reference to the past that may be celebrated, tolerated with humour or discounted with distaste. In so doing, we draw particular attention to identity boundaries associated with age, gender and place and examine how they affect and are affected by the knitting of identity.