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Paper: 129: *The Ordering of Relations: Jaynesian Psycho-History, Bicameralism and Post-Individual Digital Subjectivity*

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Abstract

During the course of this paper I explore the Jaynesian notion of bicameral consciousness (1976, 1990) in relation to notions of relational ordering and the re-constitution of persons within post-individual technological practices of self. The paper considers notions of bi-cameralism as expressed through the interpretation of ancient artefacts and texts and their connection to ancient forms of mutually constitutive social and psychological organisation that were expressed through the co-ordinating mechanism of visual and auditory hallucinations commonly referred to as the ‘gods’. The paper mobilises this explanatory trope in the exploration of contemporary technological artefacts and associated reconfigurations of self, consciousness and social organisation. These developments can be understood to create space where mobile digital technology and applications represent a re-emergence of visual and auditory externalisations that represent a similar directional and narrated form of moral guidance. As a consequence notions of self, social relations and social organization are critically reconsidered.

Key Words: Self, Subjectivity, Bicameralism, Technology, Social Relations
Psycho-history is a field of enquiry that is seldom referred to in relation to some of sociology’s pressing concerns, and yet it resonates with some of the most well established concepts in the social sciences. In this paper I seek to examine Julian Jaynes’ thesis outlined in The Origins of Consciousness in the Break-Down of the Bicameral Mind (1976, 1991) and relate it to social scientific understanding of social organisation, the ordering of relations and contemporary social practices. The question of social order and social organisation remains one of the classic questions for sociological enquiry. Issues concerning the re-ordering of relations necessarily focus on individuals, persons, selves and bodies. This is due to the implicit model of social organisation within relational sociology that takes the principle of emergence and the accomplishment of order as a property produced through the sum of agentic parts seriously. This is not to deny the import of material conditions or the enabling and constraining character of institutions but merely to accept that people and practices matter.

**Sociology, Anthropology and the Ordering of Relations**

Matters relating to the ordering of social relations proliferate within social anthropological accounts of social organisation. For example, much has been made of the relationship between practices of consumption, the constitution of identity and the accomplishment of relations within both tribal and late modern forms of sociality (Strathern, 1991). Latimer (2009) builds on this approach through a synthesis of contemporary social anthropology with sociology and notes that much of the recent discussion regarding the ordering of relations has focussed on the relational aspects of the body and embodiment. Latimer argues that this framing of the body in social relations can be understood to be constituted through four forms of social analysis that I will briefly outline below.

According to Latimer (2009:4) the first way in which a reconsideration of the ordering of relations has been realised in the social sciences has been through a reconsideration of the body and embodiment in ways that draw from Foucault’s notions of corporeal docility and utility, Mauss’s concern with techniques of the body and the consideration of physical display as expressed through studies of body-art and body-building (Lloyd, 2004, Monaghan, 2001). Secondly, through a reconsideration of the body in terms of group interaction, membership and categorization practices in relation to the accomplishment of social relations and order and thence ‘world-making’ (Goffman 1963, Garfinkel, 1967). Thirdly, by viewing the body as an assemblage that is

Within the ideas of relational extension, bodies can be re-theorized in terms of relations as these are elicited from moment to moment... here in a process of ‘world-shifting’, affiliations and attachments are secured and resecured through an exchange of prosthetic materials. Such ‘switches’ in the world thus require a constant ‘re-attachment’ in terms of affiliations and belongings. In this double movement, bodies can be understood to be always shifting first from one form of extension, and therefore relationality, to another, and second, with this, from one set of ‘belongings’ to another. Yet these bodies are knowing only in a strictly limited sense; what counts as ‘knowledge’ changes with each switch of the world and is as much the result of arrival, rather than something that can be known beforehand. As much as materials are in play within these processes of attachment and detachment, it is the ‘worlds’ of participants that are most liable to alter and shift in line with relations...

The new sociology and anthropology of bodies represents a fluid perspective of the way in which embodied persons are enrolled and situated within a matrix of discursive and socio-material practices. However, the notions of relationality contained within this approach can also be developed through the consideration of interiority as a relational matter. Contemporary psycho-social studies remain committed to exploring the mutually constitutive character of relationality and interiority often through psycho-dynamic approaches and critical psychology (Hollway et al, 1984). As I have stated elsewhere:

Interiority involves a reconnection with Lacanian psychoanalysis and other psychodynamic approaches that opens up the subject as a vast network of signifiers and signifying practices that represent a complex site open to interpretation and scrutiny through the relation of the world of discourse, power and politics to the interior expanse of the unconscious and desire... In terms of ‘relationality’, subjects are seen not to stand in isolation but rather to be in a network of relatedness in and between subjects and, as importantly, subject positions (Housley, 2009:70).

In this paper, I mobilise Jaynesian psycho-history as a means of exploring the ordering of relations in a way that takes the mutually constitutive character of interiority and relationality as a given. Whilst the Jaynesian conceptualisation of brain organisation and it’s reflexive relationship with social organisation may be viewed as problematic within social explanation (mainly due to the fact that the Brain remains overlooked by social theory) this paper takes the plasticity of the brain as a serious point of consideration in terms of the affects and effects of society and culture. One that emerging debates and dialogue between neuro-psychology and sociology will no doubt develop and enhance in the coming decades. Within the confines of this paper it is
conceptual application, revalorization and synthesis that are attended to as part and parcel of a process of assembling a language that can begin to explore the increasing social transformation, colonization, externalisation and extension of ‘interior’ processes within contemporary society.

**Psycho-history and the ordering of relations?**

Jaynes argument is assembled through psycho-history and the study of the archaeological record and neuro-scientific understanding of the structure of the human brain. He suggests that the emergence of consciousness over the last six thousand years has to be understood in terms of brain plasticity, materiality and socio-cultural organisation. For Jaynes, human beings have not physiologically or neurologically changed that much for tens of thousands of years. However, the plasticity of the brain means that consciousness and social organisation are mutually implicative; where culture acts as a form of ‘software’ that is run on the ‘wetware’ of the brain. Furthermore, for Jaynes the emergence of moral consciousness is the key to understanding social organisation; in this he is consistent with the traditional schools of social anthropology and their descendents although his departure point, focussing as he does initially on interiority and socio-cultural materials, is somewhat different.

According to Jaynes, in ancient societies hierarchical social formations from god-king – priesthood – worker – slave were subject to similar requirements of social ordering and the management of relations in the pursuit of certain societal and material conditions through the fulfilment of basic pre-requisites. Jaynes argues that early civilization was characterised by a form of ordering based on a particular form of consciousness which he describes as ‘bi-cameralism’. He suggests that this form of consciousness involved the co-ordination of left and right hemisphere activity through admonishing auditory hallucinations that guided person’s actions at points of social interactional stress i.e. where actions needed to be co-ordinated, sanctioned, regulated and *decided* upon. In reference to tribal formations Jaynes (1990:140) states:

> I have suggested that auditory hallucinations may have evolved as a side effect of language and operated to keep individuals persisting at the longer tasks of tribal life. Such hallucinations began in the individual’s hearing a command from himself or from his chief. There is thus a very simple continuity between such a condition and the more complex auditory hallucinations which I suggest were the cues of social control in *Eynan*’ and which originated in the commands and speech of the King.
Within later stages of near eastern civilization the auditory hallucination was also sometimes accompanied by a visual component particularly within ritualised symbolic spaces of worship or meditation that were characterised by the use and incorporation of statues, idols and symbolic architecture (Jaynes,1990:150). Furthermore, an important aspect of early town planning were the central location of temples or ‘god houses’ that often included aesthetically complex reliefs of gods, ancestral skulls and idols that Jaynes (1990: 151-160) understands as having specific hallucinatory affordances and thence capacity for the ordering of social relations.

For Jaynes the power of the auditory command (often accompanied with a visual manifestation or provoked through visual aesthetic means) is fundamental to understanding the ordering capacities of bicameral consciousness, technology and artefacts. These voices were representative of the ‘gods’ who provided instruction and regulation of different activities and practices. Furthermore, the ‘gods’ included a personal god that, in many ancient cultures, mediated with other gods within a complex cosmological hierarchy.

In terms of neuro-psychology this can be understood in terms of right and left hemisphere organisation of the brain and the need to link these two quasi-autonomous spheres at certain points of action. Jaynes notes that the wiring between the two hemispheres is functionally minimal and that auditory hallucinations from the right sphere helped to co-ordinate action with processing emanating from the left. Jaynes (1990:101) argues that the commands of the gods as evidenced in archaeological artefacts were generated in the right hemisphere (Wernicke’s area) as admonitory hallucinations. The auditory hallucination is not to be confused with an inner narrative but understood as a clear and hearable event akin to contemporary schizophrenic accounts of auditory hallucination and various voices. Indeed, Jaynes makes the case that schizophrenia is an artefact of bicameral consciousness in late modernity and notes the ways in which schizophrenic voices not only mock, cajole or comment but also command. For this form of ancient consciousness, reinforced through pyramidal social organisation and religious custom, any notion of subjective interiority is occluded. This has consequences for notions of social action, in a state of bicameralism different practices apply. Jaynes (1990:134) offers the following reflection on the origins of auditory hallucinations prior to his hypothesised state of fully social organised bicameralism:
Let us consider a man commanded by himself or his chief to set up a fish wier far upstream from a campsite. If he is not conscious, and cannot therefore narrate the situation and so hold his analog 'I' in a spatialized time with its consequences fully imagined how does he do it? It is only language, I think, that can keep him at this time consuming work. A Middle Pleistocene man would forget what he was doing. But lingual man would have language to remind him, either repeated by himself, which would require a type of volition which I do not think he was then capable of, or, as seems more likely, by a repeated ‘internal’ verbal hallucination telling him what to do.

For Jaynes, this early bicameralism developed into forms of social organization that he describes as literate bicameral theocracies that included the Egyptians, Assyrians and later on in the ‘new world’, the Mayans and Aztecs. Jaynes examines the artefacts of these societies in the form of steles, architectural arrangements, sacred objects and texts. He notes how certain steles or stone columns were not only inscribed with ancient text but also served to provoke admonitory hallucinations as a co-present manifestation of the symbolic effect/affect of the stele and the gods. Through careful engagement with archaeological evidence and ancient stone mediated texts Jaynes (1990:182) suggests that...

Reading in the third millennium B.C. may therefore have been a matter of hearing the cuneiform, that is, hallucinating the speech from looking at its picture-symbols, rather than visual reading of syllables in our sense.

For Jaynes the various social, cultural and ritualistic means for eliciting these voices served as a means of reproducing ancient social orders and regulating the patterns of interaction and social relations certainly until the codification and scribing of law. The gods commanded human beings in relation to approved courses of action during moments of decision making e.g. not x but y. In this sense bi-cameral consciousness is not commensurate with reflexive subjectivity but represents an externalization of guidance and behavioural monitoring through the auditory manifestation of the gods voices. This, argues Jaynes, was one of the main ways in which ancient societies were ordered and the integration/control of the individual in terms of collective life was achieved. An ancient crisis/catastrophe and mass movement of peoples brought bodies utilising different auditory technologies into contact with one another and, according to Jaynes, this Babel effect and the requirement to communicate across boundaries through war, peace and survival in response to a catastrophic event scenario resulted in a form of anomie dislocation within which subjective consciousness and writing emerged as a response to the social fact that auditory technologies were no longer routinely and stably shared. This represents the moment that human beings literally stopped ‘hearing the gods’; a fall and
separation that is reflected in most great early religious and civilization origin narratives. As an early Assyrian text records speaking from the last three centuries of the second millennium B.C. (Jaynes, 1990:225)

My god has forsaken me and disappeared,  
My goddess has failed me and keeps at a distance  
The good angel who walked beside me has departed

For Jaynes, one social-cultural response to this was the development of divination, initiation, use of certain mind altering substances and other ritualistic practice as a means of generating psychological states where the gods voices could once again be heard (although not systematically shared) the second, was the emergence of monotheism and the written Law, rather than hallucinated, commandments. The written law provided a means of re-establishing social organisation and the ubiquitous ordering of social relations and everyday conduct.

The Jaynesian hypothesis suggest that schizophrenia is part of the full range of consciousness types which, in the past, approximates to a form of consciousness that was affirmed and ‘built into’ ancient human societies. The actual hearing of voices and visualization of members of a pantheon, elicited through architecture, symbolism, word images and sculpture formed part of the bi-cameral built environment and contours of experience through which human being’s social action was regulated and directed within ancient social forms. However, Jaynes (1990:319) also notes the potential for his hypothesis to inform contemporary analyses of social order and organisation. He states:

Also beyond the purview of the present book is a full exploration of the way that more secular developments of the last three millennia are related to their emergence from a different mentality. I am thinking here of the history of logic and conscious reasoning from the Greek development of Logos to modern computers, and of the spectacular historical pageant of philosophy, with its efforts to find a metaphor of all existence in which we may find some conscious familiarity and so feel at home in the universe. I am thinking too of our struggles towards systems of ethics, of attempting with rational consciousness to find substitutes for our previous divine volition which could carry with them that obligation which at least could stimulate our earlier obedience to hallucinated voices. And too the cyclical history of politics, the gyres of our wavering attempts to make governments out of men instead of gods, secular systems of laws to perform that formerly divine function of binding us together into an order, a stability, and a commonweal.

**Contemporary social organisation and relational ordering mechanisms**
Jaynesian ideas may not be to everyone’s taste but they provide a fruitful reservoir for social theoretical critique, analysis, interpretation and investigation. Contemporary attempts to deepen the subject (Blackman et al, 2008) and move beyond the de-centering thesis could benefit from a critical engagement with Jaynesian psycho-history as would the contemporary theoretical reconsideration of the ordering of relations. Jaynes provides us with a psycho-historical theory of the subject that is related to the classic sociological question of organisation and the ordering of relations as opposed to the well worn conceptual comfort provided by appeals to the literary notions of discourse or episteme. Whilst one could make links between post-structuralism and Jaynes the latter presents a history of consciousness within which the materiality of the brain and interiority of consciousness are not made problematic through appeals to a reductionist conceptualization of the discursive. Rather the plasticity of the brain, the variation of conscious interiority and its reflexive relationship to forms of social organisation is attended to and, as a consequence, notions of ‘interiority’ and ‘exteriority’ are not regarded as mutually exclusive but form a psycho-social continuum.\[9]

Now, within contemporary society there is much commentary and anxiety about the fragmentation of social organisation in the face of massive global transformation and social change. Traditional means of ‘ordering the social’ have been subject to extreme pressures in the face of globalised market capitalism. At the same time emergent forms for ordering relations can be located in design led (i.e. intended) and serendipitous (i.e. unintended) effects of new information and communication technologies and their integration with ‘traditional’ 20th century media platforms and other formats. The key development here was the integrated circuit and the arrival of the silicon micro-chip which opened up the space for the development of personal computers and new forms of communication technology. These represent techno-social materials that can be understood to ‘drive the social’ (Latimer and Munro, 2006) in and through situated action and the pursuit of augmented reality through the embedding of networks within objects and persons. Thus, we see increasing integration between the internet and mobile telephony with radio and television. Sociological studies of such technology have established the transformative and sociological consequences of new communicative technology. In more specific terms they have identified the dual integrative and surveillance functions that such technology affords. They are integrative in the sense that mobile communication, social network sites and self-broadcast vehicles provide a means of consuming and communicating that facilitates integration with the collective and provides a normative basis for the regulation of behaviour within virtual communities and
networks. They are surveying in the sense that they afford new technologies with information recording and retrieval capacities that logs location, internet use, e-mail, phone-calls and electronic consumption patterns. This also provides for a form of subjectivity that gives rise to self-regulation in response to a reflexive awareness of storage, retrieval and accountability that is a ubiquitous feature of the new contours of digital culture. Furthermore, such a matrix of communication technology also affords access to data search engines that can provide information (from celebrity news website to definitions provided by Wikipedia) but also represent a source for moral scripts and reasoning: i.e. what should I do in this situation. Indeed, with the advent of grid technology and second generation ‘blue-tooth’ interactivity the potential for exchanging information between networked individuals whilst ‘on the move’ is on the cusp of becoming mainstream. Thus, in the near future individuals will be able to share information electronically about various ‘statuses’ (e.g. being single or looking for a job) whilst going about their daily business. This information can be communicated via new generation mobile telephony along with contact information and web-links, this can then be manually followed up at a later date if the individual wishes to do so or even there and then if it is tied to some form of subtle visual or audible alert. Indeed, one can imagine how such alerts could be transposed from noteable breaches of interaction order (think of the incoming message alert associated with text messages at present) to increasingly differentiated and specialised ‘signals’ that are incorporated into mobile and increasingly ubiquitous human interaction mediated by ICT advances of the sort alluded to above. In order to try and flesh out this theoretical exploration further I shall focus on one case of contemporary mobile computer/telephony; namely the Apple I Phone and it’s software ‘applications’ popularly branded as ‘apps’.

**Case Example: Mobile Phone Applications**

Apple I Phone invites the user to use his or her handset to not only talk but also access information, play games, connect with other users through mobile social networks, exchange information, locate services and navigate roads and cities to name but a few of the available ‘applications’. Within this plenum of directional possibilities the moral guidance of bodies as persons is salient. The advertising includes depictions of computerised menus being scrolled by thumb (choice) that when ‘clicked’ open up applications that include a situated GPS positioning of the handset (and thence body) in relation to the tourist geography of a world city and key sites of consumption (e.g. the nearest Starbucks coffee house) to directions being narrated by road
navigational software. The representational material associated with the advertising of the handset invites a relation between the individual and choice as a precursor to technologically enhanced freedom. However, in contrast to this market oriented stimulation of desire the mundane phenomenology of handset technology also suggests a directional hand held digital guide that alleviates or at least ameliorates decision making through a hand held container of globally networked informational enhancement made possible through physics and the positioning of artificial satellites in orbit around the planet. Furthermore, these applications represent moral resources for co-ordinating social action and are therefore implicated in the accomplishment of social organisation within different sites, settings and frames of activity. In this sense, users become ‘morally networked’ and interpolated into hierarchies of information selection and control.

However, in this paper our main focus remains a consideration of the potential consequences of this amelioration of decision making by the self. Thus, we might argue that if this form of mobile technology and array of applications extends itself then it may represent a breaking down of modern forms of subjectivity and self where the reflective practice of finding oneself somewhere or being on the way to somewhere is relationally transformed. The space of the individual is technologically colonised through the enhancement of the geo-positioning of bodies within a network of spatial and temporal points which can be mobilised and read in relation to finding and consuming information and services.

As Ferguson (1996) has noted the hollowed out rational individual can be conceptualised in terms of the psychodynamic transformation of the prime driver of social identity within different social forms: in the case of late modernity a transformation from ‘needs’, ‘desires’ to the ‘wish’ (Ferguson, 1996, Bauman, 2002). As Ferguson (1996:205) has argued the notion of desire:

... links consumption to self-expression, and to notions of taste and discrimination. The individual expresses himself or herself through their possessions. But for advanced capitalist society, committed to the continuing expansion of production, this is a very limiting psycho-logical framework which ultimately gives way to a quite different psychic ‘economy’. The wish replaces desire as the motivating force of consumption.

However, if it is the case that the ‘wish’ becomes a dominant psycho-social frame for understanding contemporary developments in consumption it may also be enhanced in terms of an understanding of the
various digital *genies* that provide a space for directional, suggestive and narrated resources for realising instantaneous wish based consumption. Furthermore, I am arguing that it appears (as if by magic) that the contemporary technological artefacts are a development over and beyond mere consumption practices; the guiding lights of various mobile applications are tailored to different wants, requirements and functionalities. If this trend is indeed discernible then perhaps the use of Jaynesian metaphors may help us unpack these developments as a form of bicameralism that reproduces the trailer-truck division between the gods and man within human consciousness and projects this materially into a new form of consciousness and social action. This new form of projected consciousness remains rooted in human capacities but resurrects the voices of the gods, if you like, in relation to human decision making through the assembling and real time flow of mobile computer mediated information from an increasingly networked social sphere. Thus, it is worth considering how the routinization of such practices, as suggested earlier, also represents an ordering of relations and thence social organisation. The technologies associated with the *breakdown* of bicameral consciousness (i.e. when the gods did not speak as they once had and therefore new religious practices emerged which aimed to recreate the hypothesised earlier conditions where the gods spoke directly) such as visual and auditory hallucinations and engagement with the statues of the gods and steles, the use of ritual and chemical enhancement and initiatic practices are, in this new digital bicameralism, found through various communicative events e.g. individually tailored adverts directed to your own mobile phone as you move through different spaces and places of consumption, status information on people in your immediate vicinity that relate to setting, strip of activity and individuated desires and other applications that are as yet to arrive. The admonishing, commanding, inspiring, co-ordinating, narrational gods are re-materialized through a handset and a wide range of networked applications that provide a platform for visual and audio events in a way that intimately integrates with the human sense apparatus and head.

The advent of a new pantheon of digital ‘gods’ can be thus understood to provide direction for the definition and thence co-ordination of social relations and action: these digital reifications will have origins in search engines but assume a more advanced presentation of information to human agents through mobile hand held telephony that draws from both large global data bases and information communicated between networked individuals within a situated setting. In a limited but rapidly evolving sense artefacts such as the ‘apps’ of the increasingly popular I Phone represent a contemporary artefactual signature of such an operationalization and
co-evolutionary point of sociological, technological and human convergence. Thus digital mobile telephony is not merely an amulet but a portal that can generate visual and auditory externalisations that inform and guide action-in-the-world. In this sense the digital gods on the one hand and bodies on the other in contemporary space represent a realization and ordering of social relations and practices that is reminiscent of the Jaynesian metaphor of the human ‘trailer’ and the ‘truck’ driven by the auditory cues of the gods. Indeed, as mobile, personalised, hand held, body-proximate technology evolves the question of where the human lies in a contemporary reading of this metaphorical division between human subjects and mobile networked computer telephony may become increasingly unclear. This is particularly salient in relation to changing cultural gradients of interactional stress and the substitution of stand alone human decision making with increasingly networked, mobile and application dependent navigation(s) of the world.

Post-individual Subjects?

In conclusion, the advent of directional and relational software reconfigures not only the relational aspects of social organisation it can also be understood to represent a reconfiguration of subjectivity. Whilst the advent of hand held mobile digital audio technology represented a cultural-technological signature of increased individuation within late capitalism the advent of a diverse set of mobile, directional, relational and increasingly narrational mobile applications that are tailored to specific users represents a transformation of ‘self’. The interactional maintenance of self and other becomes transformed as technology colonises the means of normative socio-cultural direction and engagement. If not X then Y becomes a moral categorization process mediated by a range of software applications; a pantheon of digital gods that fill the hollowed out space of the modern subject giving way to an enhanced but transformed fragmented self that is increasingly hooked into a range of applications that represent the first stages of a reassembled but technologically driven directional, relational and narrational verbal and visual hallucinatory experiences that in turn reconfigures but also constitutes a new form of social organisation and order. In this sense the re-ordering of relations involves a re-ordering of the individual and society through the immanent colonisation of being with normatively driven and culturally co-ordinating technoscience. In short, want to re-order the social? There’s an ‘App’ for that!
References:


Notes

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1 An early Natufian settlement near the sea of Galilee famously excavated in 1959.
Indeed, in one sense the separation between ‘psychological interiority’ and ‘social exteriority’ could be understood as an artefact of the breakdown of bi-cameral consciousness and the emergence of lingual subjectivity.