Exploring the (Expanded) Realm of Organization: Celebrations of a Cooperian Revolution

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review of:
Robert Chia (ed.) (1998) *In the Realm of Organization: Essays for Robert Cooper*. London: Routledge. (HB: pp.257, £65.00, IBSN:0-415-12699-1).

Robert Chia (ed.) (1998) *Organized Worlds: Explorations in Technology and Organization with Robert Cooper*. London: Routledge. (HB: pp.195, £55.00, IBSN:0-415-12756-4).

In 1998 Robert Chia edited a two volume Festschrift to his mentor Robert Cooper. Acknowledging the importance of Cooper's thinking to a whole generation of organizational scholars, the papers in these collections are both a timely recognition and celebration of Cooper's thinking. Spanning a range of themes and interests, the papers collected together in these two books simultaneously enhance our understanding of Cooper's writings and are themselves valuable contributions to an agenda for organizational research that he has helped to set. If this was not enough, the second volume also includes an important new piece of work by Cooper, 'Assemblage Notes', as well as an interview in which Cooper discusses his formative influences and the directions in which his ideas have developed over the years. In short these books should be essential reading for anyone with an interest in theoretical developments in…

I was going to write "organization studies" but that wouldn't be quite right. In the editorial for the first of the two books *In the Realm of Organization: Essays for Robert Cooper*, Chia notes that one of the central problematics in Cooper's work has been his location as a thinker within a conceptual field overly stratified or striated by the academic disciplines. His basic point is that by organizing our knowledge into a discipline 'organization theory' whose boundaries need to be carefully policed (Pfeffer, 1993), we unnecessarily restrict the scope of our enquiries. To put it another way, focusing on organizations as distinct social entities blinds us to the more general processes of organization that touch upon every aspect of our lives. As Chia puts it: "Knowledge of organizing and the organizing of knowledge" are mutually implicated within one another (1998a: 2). Of course, to organize knowledge is one of the primary tasks of an editor, and Chia opts to replicate, at least nominally, this separation of

knowledge and organization by dividing the first book into two parts: one dealing with 'Postmodern Knowing' and the other 'Logics of Organizing'. These two sections fit into the more general thematisation of the two collections, which Chia suggests broadly follow "four enduring themes" in Cooper's work: *an epistemology of process*; a *logic of otherness*; an interest in *technologies of representation*; and *immanence*. The two parts of *In the Realm of Organization*, address the first two of Cooper's themes respectively. The thematic concern with technologies of representation is dealt with in some respect by all of the papers in the second volume, *Organized Worlds: Explorations in technology and organization with Robert Cooper*, where the question of immanence is also most effectively fore-grounded, though as Chia notes, this last theme is implicit in all of the papers and provides a note of continuity across the collections (1998a: 6).

A Question of Postmodern Knowledge

Turning to the first of these themes/sections, it might seem that the choice of 'postmodern' as an epithet for Cooper's epistemology is a little strange, not least because on page three of his introduction, Chia protests that "Cooper has been too often misconstrued as a 'postmodern' organization theorist", an error that has "only served to distract attention from the more general significance of his analyses of the fundamental nature of human organizing." Perhaps Chia's objection is more to Cooper being labelled as an 'organization theorist' than a 'postmodernist', or perhaps it is the unhappy conjunction of the two terms that causes offence? As Chia does not raise specific objections against postmodernism, we can only speculate. The only clue we might find to this problem is in Chia and Kallinikos' interview with Cooper (1998b: 136) where Cooper points to Lyotard's notion that the postmodern is implicated in the modern's promise to overcome itself. In light of this 'general agonism', Cooper suggests that "it becomes difficult to call oneself a postmodernist".

Nevertheless, this designation has stuck to Cooper's work, due in large part to the continued importance of the series of papers on which he collaborated with Gibson Burrell in the late 1980s (Cooper and Burrell, 1988; Burrell, 1988; Cooper, 1989). This series in turn inspired a whole series of engagements with 'the postmodern' in organization studies, ranging from the positively gung-ho to the determinedly antagonistic. If recent work on critical realism provides the perfect example of the latter (e.g. Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2000) Gergen and Thatchenkery's 'Organizational science in a postmodern context' epitomises the worst excesses of the former. The first of the papers in the 'Postmodern Knowing' section of *In the Realm of Organization*, Gergen and Thatchenkery's essay presents a critique of what they call modernist organizational science and, finding this model wanting on a number of grounds, suggests its replacement with a social constructivist or postmodern organizational science. I will not dwell too much on the details of this paper as, despite its premier position as the first paper in this first collection, it has very little to say about Robert Cooper's work and adds nothing to our understanding of either organization, postmodernism or knowing. After dismissing a caricature of modernism, with all 'its' conflicts and variety ironed out with a rather heavy hand, Gergen and Thatchenkery go on to assert that a new, 'critical' sensibility has now emerged within the humanities and

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social sciences that seeks to 'dismantle' these modernist assumptions. Indeed "such critiques not only obliterate the modernist logic, but throw into question the moral and political outcomes of modernist commitments" (p.21). Unfortunately this 'obliteration' appears to have been so complete that hardly a trace is left of it. Without so much as a reference we are simply informed that now modernism has been devastated, the only task left for the 'critical' scholar is to construct a postmodern alternative. To be perfectly honest however, not only do Gergen and Thatchenkery fail to offer up an interesting critique of what they call modernism, their alternative is anything but. Their greatest insight seems to be that things might be socially constructed. Wow. Having obviously never bothered to read any of the 'modernists', say Karl Marx for example, they seem to think the realisation that facts and figures are partial (in both senses of the word) is the exclusive preserve of late twentieth century scholarship. Both Marx's extensive critique of the complicity of bourgeois political-economy in the maintenance of mid nineteenth-century social order, and his analysis of the commodity fetish as an apparently neutral objectification of social relations, are entirely ignored (Marx, 1976).

What is perhaps most grating about Gergen and Thatchenkery's paper, appearing as it does in a collection of works dedicated to Robert Cooper, is that it entirely ignores any post-structural or even postmodern work of substance in favour of a watered down version of social constructivism. Where is the decentring of the subject so actively pursued by Cooper, following Derrida and Foucault?[1] Not only do Gergen and Thatchenkery entirely fail to engage meaningfully with any of the modernist writers they so readily dismiss, they also neglect the most important aspects of postmodernism so that their critique of modernism's individual rational agent is nothing more than a recognition of intersubjectivity. The subjects between which conversation might take place are left entirely unexamined so that the most radical suggestion for practicing organizational analysis they can offer is to sit down and talk to people: It's good to talk. What has happened to Foucault's critique of the repressive hypothesis and its incitement to discourse (Foucault, 1978; Munro, 2001)?[2] Despite having 6½ pages of references, one is left with the nagging suspicion that Gergen and Thatchenkery would have been better served by sitting down to read a couple of these than by writing this paper, a suggestion that receives support from their incessant use of unsupported assertions like "As most scholars agree…" (p.16), or "as many would say" (p.25). It is impossible for the reader not to ask: *who* would say? *which* scholars?

Worst of all, after their 'theoretical' discussion, they spout a river of happy-clappy, participatory liberal nonsense that sounds suspiciously like the new best practice. Indeed, their pluralist, inclusive net stretches wide enough to include Tom Peters as a useful resource for postmodern organizational scientists! In the end, their modern/postmodern distinction seems to hinge upon an entirely partial account of what is modern (descriptive, positivist science) and what it means to be postmodern

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1   For a discussion of this move, see question 6 of Cooper's interview in the present volume.

2   See also Burrell's discussion of dialogue as a "weapon of the powerful", a point that further highlights Gergen and Thatchenkery's neglect of power (2001: 19).

(prescriptive, pluralist dialogue). With such advocates it is little wonder that many critical writers, rather than sniffing around the 'post' to see if anyone interesting has been working there, simply piss all over it and pass on (for example Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2000). Instead of constructing a positive version of postmodern organizational science, Gergen and Thatchenkery have vomited up a three-course meal of indigestible platitudes and served it up as the academic equivalent of nouvelle cuisine. Low in fat, low in substance and with a completely decaffeinated version of critique. At base their account of postmodernism, despite mobilising the likes of Foucault, somehow manages to entirely ignore power! Promising us a positive version of postmodernism, which they claim is usually dismissed as being too nihilistic, they proffer instead – nothing. At least nihilism would be a productive negativity, a necessary destructive move or refusal (cf. Carter and Jackson's paper discussed below). This revisionism is just too much to swallow, and to suggest that it is inspired by Cooper and Derrida is to add insult to injury. As a final example I want to cite the Gergens' ideas on deconstructive practice as a consulting skill. In their conclusion, the authors cite a consultancy project carried out by Kenneth and Mary Gergen for a multi-national pharmaceutical company. As part of this postmodern consultancy, they conducted unstructured discussions with many of the organization's managers:

> Although these discussions ranged broadly, two forms of questioning were common across all of them: first, we asked the participants to describe instances in which communication and coordination were highly effective… our hope was, first to *deconstruct* the common sense of failure ('we have a problem'), and, second, to secure a set of positive instances that might serve as model practices (sources of reconstruction). (p.34 – emphasis added)

Deconstruction become Neuro Linguistic Programming… Need I say more?

Fortunately the tone of the collection soon picks up. In his paper on 'Forms of knowledge and forms of life in organized contexts', Haridimos Tsoukas considers the limitations of propositional knowledge as the dominant mode of knowing in modern organizations. Linking this propositional knowledge to the institutionalised dimensions of organization, Tsoukas also draws our attention to the less formalizable dimensions of organization which, following MacIntyre, he calls the *practice* dimensions. These practice dimensions, he argues, are characterised by a narrative knowledge that is produced and passed on informally through the communal traditions existing in organizations. By thus developing paired dualisms of propositional vs. narrative knowledge, and institutional vs. practice dimensions of organization, Tsoukas goes on to show how these apparent oppositions are always implicated in one another. For practices to subsist they need to be supported and kept alive within institutions. But the institutional pressures toward formalization erode these traditions by bureaucratising and disembedding them. On the other hand the propositional knowledge contained in rules cannot exist without the informal practices and local, narrative knowledges that enable rules to be applied. In a move echoing Gödel's theorem of incompleteness, Tsoukas notes that the generation of further rules to ensure that a rule is applied correctly results in an infinite regress where conformity can never be guaranteed. Because of this, the formal rules of propositional knowledge are always dependent upon their Other, the informal, narrative knowledge realised in practice which enable the rules to be applied with a degree of regularity. Although Tsoukas' exposition of this mutual interdependence is a little dry at times, this paper is nevertheless a useful and

informative intervention into debates in knowledge management over the relations between tacit and explicit knowledge.

Jeffcutt and Thomas' 'Order, disorder and the unmanageability of boundaries in organized life', the third of the 'Postmodern Knowing' papers, develops an interdisciplinary critique of safety critical software in information systems that spans organizational theory and software engineering. In this intriguing paper Jeffcutt and Thomas argue that the reception of information technology within organization studies, whether pessimistic (increased surveillance and control) or optimistic (increased empowerment and communication), has traditionally been premised upon the assumption that such technologies are predictable and stable. Turning their attention to the actual form and (organizational) behaviour of software in complex information systems, Jeffcutt and Thomas develop a post-structuralist conception of software as *text* in order to better appreciate the undecidability of such technologies. Drawing examples from safety-critical software failures, they use the case of the Therac-25 system to demonstrate the uncertainty inherent in complex, heterogeneous systems of control and coordination.

Therac-25 was a software controlled radio-therapy system which under certain conditions developed a system error and delivered a fatal dose of radiation to cancer sufferers undergoing treatment. By considering software engineering responses to such system failures, Jeffcutt and Thomas point to the essential uncertainty of software 'texts', noting that "codification must be associated with unpredictability" (p.77) so that the dream of error-free software is necessarily unrealisable. Whilst they do not therefore call for a complete rejection of safety critical software, or of software engineering per se, they do point to the need for a greater appreciation of the essential uncertainty and unpredictability of the increasingly complex systems that software applications are a part of. Pointing also to the parallels between organization studies and software engineering – disciplines with a common heritage and similar developmental trajectories - they conclude by suggesting the need for a more modest and situated approach to the study of organization and information that would build on Cooper and Law's (1995) idea of *cyborganization* to realise an unmodern version of organization studies, more accepting of heterogeneity and uncertainty as essential features of complex systems and working with rather than against this uncertainty. From such a viewpoint, giving up the modernist dream/nightmare of total control need not be an admission of failure, but rather presents us with an even greater challenge, one which some of Robert Cooper's ideas might help us rise to.

In the final contribution to 'Postmodern Knowing' John Law more than makes up for the section's bad start by presenting a thoughtful, erudite and politically engaged consideration of the implications of a postmodern turn for academic practice. If we accept the decentring of the subject, the death of the author, the end of meta-narratives and the mutual co-implication of power and knowledge, then as academics we are placed in the rather peculiar position of grandly narrating the end of meta-narrative from a position of authority that we acknowledge to be an effect produced by the heterogeneous networks we find our-selves wrapped up in, or even constituted by. In considering these issues, Law recounts the tale of a graduate student summer school that he ran on the modernism/postmodernism debate. By examining his position as an

authority on this subject, from which he makes the paradoxical proclamation of the end of meta-narrative, Law goes on to consider the ways in which speaking and writing perform a kind of closure that reduces the tension of uncertainty and not knowing. Giving the example of a mime performed by the students, he recalls their tension and dissatisfaction at this silent performance which aped the form of a lecture that Law had presented earlier. As long as this silent performance remains unexplained, the students remain in-tension. This tension is only reduced when Law finally tells them what it all means. The voice of expertise and knowledge produces the very modern sense of security that these students crave. In Bruno Latour's terms, it 'draws things together' (Latour, 1990).

In the subsequent parts of this essay, Law turns to consider the possibility of refusing this almost cybernetic or homeostatic drive to reduce tension. To provide an example of this kind of unspeakable, postmodern "knowing in tension" he considers Frederick Jameson's discussion of Frank Gehry's house, a perfect example of postmodern architecture (Jameson, 1991). Although Law's dependence upon the authoritative testimony of Jameson on this subject is not unproblematic, he nevertheless uses this as a starting point from which to consider what might be a postmodern alternative materiality of knowing that doesn't try to draw everything together and present it on a two dimensional screen or piece of paper. For Jameson, and for Law, Gehry's house is a three-dimensional *technology for thinking* (p. 98) that leaves knowledge in-tension precisely because it never draws it all together to present it unproblematically before the I/eye of a centred knowing subject. The whole of the body has to move through the house's architectural spaces in order to know it in any sense, but unlike the modernist movement of teleological progress, this movement is not a means subordinate to the end *product of knowledge*. It is itself the *process of knowing*.

Although there are obvious tensions within Law's paper, most notably his attempt to draw together various debates about the epochal change from modernity to postmodernity and their associated ways of knowing, he is at least aware of these tensions, and prepared to recognise them as such. Indeed, perhaps the greatest strength of this paper is its refusal to ultimately reduce this tension. Rather than offering closure, the text opens up to a whole set of material practices and points toward alternative knowledges that by definition cannot be drawn into the scope of its re-presentation.

Law's paper is also the most directly political of the papers in this section. One obvious reason for this is Law's foregrounding of power and questioning of authority within the processes of writing and speaking. Another however sneaks in toward the end of the paper. Following a list of alternative, potentially subversive materialities of knowing, Law adds the final suggestion: "Or the political as such: rainbow alliances; partial connections" (p. 101-102). In the light of recent political rallies and demonstrations by precisely such alliances, partially connected only by their common opposition to the various effects of an increasingly global capitalist order that Hardt and Negri have dubbed 'empire' (2000) this is an important point. Many critics of 'the movement' as it has been called (Klein, 2001), have attacked it for its inability to present a unified front and fight for a single issue. Parties on both sides of the modernist battle-lines have attacked and dismissed 'anti-capitalist' protests like Genoa, Seattle and Prague for their inability to present a unified front: to draw their diversity together and offer up clear

alternatives and manifestos. And yet, if we take on board John Law's points, what else could a postmodern political movement do? 'The movement' in this light is not so much about a teleological trajectory towards the emancipation of X, but rather is a movement in and of itself. It is directly political, but in a way that refuses to be territorialized by single interest, single party issues. In this it is not unlike the various spin-off groups from the Situationist International whose sometimes quite ludicrous anti-establishment activities were often criticised for not making serious political points (Plant, 1992). In its refusal to be simply located in a two-dimensional space, the postmodern politics of subversion keeps moving and connecting: what we might call communism, with a *différance* (e.g. Guattari and Negri, 1990).

An-Other Logic of Organization

The second part of *In the Realm of Organization*, entitled 'Logics of Organizing', comprises five papers from José Malavé, Rolland Munro, Jannis Kallinikos, Pippa Carter and Norman Jackson, and Hugh Willmott, each of which addresses in some way the question of duality and the essential dynamism and undecidability of organization. Opening up this section, Malavé reviews the system approach to the problem of social organization, a tradition stretching back to Hobbes' *Leviathan*. Having considered some of the limitations of this approach he then looks toward the metaphor of the network as an alternative approach. Dissatisfied with a version of network analysis that emphasises the 'net' at the expense of the 'work', Malavé turns his attention to what he rather confusingly calls the 'sociotechnical networks approach' of Law and Callon, and uses this to develop his own Transformation-Displacement Networks (TDN) perspective. Unfortunately, drawing as it does on the work of Bruno Latour, Michel Callon and John Law, this approach is hard to distinguish from the better known, and certainly more established, actor-network theory (ANT) (cf. Hassard, Law and Lee, 1999). Nevertheless, Malavé's paper does provide an interesting review of systems approaches to organization that takes in some of the classics (Parsons, Emery and Trist etc.) and suggests their limits: essentially that a systems approach cannot account for the constitution of the system's boundaries. Also, despite his bizarre terminological twist, Malavé's introduction of the basic ideas of ANT is quite clear and concise.

Where Malavé appears to break with Latour et al is his suggestion that by emphasising fluidity, their approach risks being left unable to explain the enduring elements of social organization that seem such an integral part of everyday life. Whilst it is hard to accept this criticism with regard to those writings on ANT that explicitly attempt to explain such durability (for example Latour, 1991; Callon and Latour, 1981), we can presumably accept its validity with respect to TDN, as the complaint is made by the originator of this approach. To resolve his contradiction Malavé treats us to a rather lengthy digression on Floyd Allport's theory of event structuring. Simultaneously rejecting quantitative approaches to network analysis, and qualitative approaches that depend upon a fixed, locatable conception of agency, Malavé introduces a barrage of new terminology such as 'ongoings', 'event-regions' and 'sub wholes', the upshot of which seems to amount to the assertion that order can only emerge from already established order, and not from chaos. The result is to push back the question of the

origin of order onto ever smaller and temporally distant orders. Unfortunately this approach seems susceptible to an infinite regress where the origins of order are always necessarily deferred, but in a way that effectively excludes any consideration of the un-ordered or truly chaotic[3]. Ultimately this leads Malavé to similar conclusions to those reached by Gergen and Thatchenkery, albeit with a little more sophistication:

> The meaning of organization as a bounded entity is to be sought less in a certain state of nature, or in a conceptual property of systems, than in such practices as teaching, research and publishing. (p.138)

Although the emphasis on practices avoids Malavé slipping back into a social constructivism grounded in the activities of a bounded human agent, the early sections of the paper had seemed to hold the promise of something rather more substantial. Indeed, with the initial focus of systems theory it would seem natural that Malavé should at least extend this analysis of observer systems through the work of second order cyberneticians and the idea of autopoiesis. This would have allowed him to offer up an explanation of *why* such practices might emphasise boundaries, the central problematic of his paper. In her wide-ranging study of cybernetics and science-fiction, Katy Hayles has dealt with precisely this question, connecting it to boundary anxieties surrounding the liberal, humanist subject (Hayles, 1999). Such an approach would have offered the more political engagement with, and explanation of, the problematic of boundaries missing from Malavé's otherwise quite informative paper.

The second of the 'Logics of Organizing' papers swiftly makes good any residual dissatisfaction with Malavé's conclusion. In this essay, 'On the rim of reason', Rolland Munro explores the treatment of dualism within organization studies, and the tendency toward what he calls a 'segmentation thesis' whereby the world is carved up into a series of either/or dichotomies. These theoretical concerns are developed through a consideration of the rather unfashionable organization chart. As an almost esoteric throwback to an age that still believed in the power of formal hierarchy and functional division, these days the organization chart is usually dismissed in favour of the informal dimensions of organization. Although it has thus become a commonplace that the formal elements of organization are dependent upon the informal, a point raised in both Tsoukas and Malavé's papers, Munro makes it his task to demonstrate the ways in which the informal is similarly dependent upon the formal, giving the organization chart a kind of significance such that the more it is denied, the greater its efficacy. Inverting the usual order of critique, Munro uses case study material to demonstrate how even in the absence of any explicit, top-down managerial directives, the formal authority of management provides the ground upon which the figure of informal, bottom-up initiative is articulated. In this way the authority of managers is preserved, and even amplified, by their reluctance to resort to the formal basis of their power.

As well as pointing to the limits of the informal, and the power relations obtaining in apparently de-hierarchized, flattened organizations, this thesis also provides Munro with

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3   Again, Burrell (2001) provides an alternative consideration of this same question, with somewhat different conclusions.

the opportunity to offer a constructively critical engagement with Cooper's own work on dualism. Addressing Cooper's treatment of Derrida's di-vision between hierarchy and interaction (Cooper, 1989), Munro draws attention to the significance of deferral in Derrida's idea of *différance,* a term that brings together both 'differ' and 'defer'. In short the argument is that because the idea of hierarchy is itself always dualistic (master/slave, superior/subordinate, good/bad), there is already an idea of interaction within hierarchy. For this reason hierarchy cannot simply be opposed to interaction as it always already implies it. This emphasis on the undecidability of division in turn points to the limits of a strategy of inversion that would leave the basic dualism intact, only overturning its supposedly dominant side. In its place Munro suggests an improved appreciation of the processes of division whereby oppositions are constructed and maintained. Such a view would not take dualism to be representative *of* organization (as with the formal/informal dichotomy) but as a means whereby organization itself is produced as "an interplay of endless dualisms" (p.157), a process that is heavily dependent upon the processes of representation discussed in several of the papers in the second volume (as discussed below).

In his chapter 'Utilities, Toys and Make-believe: Remarks on the instrumental experience', Jannis Kallinikos works through some of the contradictions and implications of a conception of instrumentality that assumes a clear separation of object and subject, leaving the latter entirely unexamined. He rejects several critiques of instrumental rationality, namely those based on ideas of the unconscious, cognition and antagonistic power relations, on the grounds that they seek only to delimit the bounds of rationality by pointing to limiting factors which leave the basic problematic of instrumentality unquestioned. Instead Kallinikos develops a quite complicated conception of instrumentality through a reconsideration of play as the basis for subjectivization. Thereby recentring the question of the (decentred) subject, Kallinikos points to the essential problem with instrumentality. Rather than offering a truth claim about the reality of decision-making and choice within organization, a discourse of instrumentality serves to produce the specific kind of subjectivity that it presupposes for its internal consistency. The reason that critiques have failed to fundamentally unsettle instrumentality's means-end rationality within organization is because it has tried to do so on the basis of competing truth claims when in fact the whole point of a discourse of instrumentality is to normalize and produce a particular kind of organizational subject.

In 'Negation and Impotence', Carter and Jackson develop a conception of negation that draws upon the work of the Frankfurt School, Foucault, Derrida and (implicitly) Cooper to insist that critique remain outside the dominant discourse in order to escape the power/knowledge effects constituted by its regime of truth. In the process, they attack both pluralism and dialectics for being essentially reactive and incapable of presenting genuine alternatives. Pluralism's ideal of antagonistic debate and formal opposition ignores power and so fails to recognise that the ultimate ground for participation in pluralist debate is power rather than any inherent legitimacy of position. As power is tied to knowledge, any party wanting to engage in pluralist debate necessarily has to respond to the way that the debate has been set up and circumscribed already. Pluralism is inherently conservative in this estimation. Similarly a Hegelian antithesis necessarily responds to, and is thereby dependent upon, the thesis which it opposes. As regards knowledge of organization, Carter and Jackson suggest that organization theory's

potential for critique is severely limited by a capitalist regime that is only interested in posing problems and solutions within a framework of efficiency linked to profitability. Giving the example of motivation, they note that the real problem is not 'motivation' per se, but 'motivation to work', or even just 'productivity'. Any solution to this problem has to be framed within a logic of increased profitability for it to be acceptable. Hence a solution to the problem of motivation that involved less routinized jobs, shorter working weeks and genuinely increased worker autonomy would be ruled out as too costly and unrealistic. It would not solve the underlying problem of productivity in the name of profitability. This raises a fundamental difficulty for organization studies as it means there are problems raised by the dominant discourse of organization that cannot be solved within that discourse, or by a purely reactive critique.

In a move that parallels John Law's idea of knowing in-tension, Carter and Jackson develop an idea of negativity that contains all the possibilities and alternatives denied by the positive: an active negation that accepts ambiguity and anxiety.

> To negate an affirmation is to recognize indeterminacy. In its denial, negation does not necessarily propose a different affirmative, but opens up the realm of all possibilities which the affirmation has denied. (p.206)

By thus opposing a negative capability to positive impotence, Carter and Jackson politicise the problem of opposing capitalism without providing a pre-formed, fixed alternative. Opposition in this sense, like 'the movement' discussed earlier, is entirely negative, but creatively so. After developing these ideas through discussions of poetry and cybernetics, Carter and Jackson end their paper by pushing forward a revolutionary political agenda that recognises the inability of organization studies, labouring under the capitalist regime of truth, to solve the problems that it perpetually encounters. Suggesting an alternative approach to organization that starts with the question of organization in the singular, rather than organizations in the plural, Carter and Jackson remain ultimately optimistic about the possibility of critique, but only so long as the critical tradition refuses to have anything to do with the mainstream of organization theory: critique must be resolutely negative.

In putting forward this argument Carter and Jackson develop and strengthen their earlier defence of paradigm incommensurability as the only way to avoid critique becoming reactively dependent upon the functionalist mainstream (Jackson and Carter, 1991). Given that their antagonist in the debate sparked by this paper was Hugh Willmott (Willmott, 1993; Jackson and Carter, 1993; Willmott, 1993) it is amusing that in this collection he again follows hot on their heels. Bringing *In the Realm of Organization* to a close, Willmott's 'Re-Cognizing the Other' provides a useful overview of what, following Bernstein (1976), he calls a 'new sensibility' within the study of organization. In doing so he situates Cooper's work within a wider context of changing ideas that generally cohere around an increasing reflexivisation of knowledge. In outlining these changes, Willmott addresses a number of issues from the role of the observer in quantum theory to the relationship between Tony Giddens 'double hermeneutic' and Cooper's conception of distal and proximal thinking. Throughout the first parts of this essay, the essential question is the relationship between the method through which knowledge is organized and the knowledge of organization that is thereby produced. For Willmott, the great advantage of Cooper's work over Giddens' and ethnomethodology

is that it challenges the ways in which the empirical is separated out as object and thereby subjected to scrutiny. In this sense ethnomethodology is insufficiently reflexive about the empirical objects it studies, and Giddens is insufficiently reflexive about the subject (human agent) at the heart of his understanding of structuration. Cooper's emphasis on the linguistic and epistemological labours of division that separate subject and object serve as a basis for rectifying the inevitable conservatism that results in these other cases.

By providing this overview and contextualization of Cooper's thinking, Willmott's paper makes good on the failings of Gergen and Thatchenkery's paper. Indeed, when reading the paper I was initially puzzled as to why it had not been used as the opening paper. As we reach the final sections however the reasons become clear. Willmott ends his paper by considering the moral and political implications of Cooper's work. Finding ethnomethodology and Giddens essentially conservative, Willmott sees a necessarily subversive side to Cooper's conception of, and privileging of the proximal over the distal. By disrupting taken for granted, commonsense definitions of reality, an attention to the proximal opens analysis up to a consideration of how things could be different. By denaturalizing the status quo, the possibility of change is introduced.

Nevertheless, Willmott has some reservations. By focusing only upon proximal *thinking*, rather than *action*, Cooper's engagement with the everyday practices of organizing is limited. There is little scope in his work for changing this practice, just the ways in which we think about it. Whilst I have my reservations about Willmott's separation of theory and practice here, he does have a point. As I have tried to indicate above however in the hands of John Law, and even more so Carter and Jackson, Cooper's ideas take on a directly political importance that precisely does point to a new direction for political action. In this sense Willmott's concept of 'the political' is perhaps a little restricted. In seeking to find the structuring of organizing in, for example, patriarchal relations (p.232) or capitalism (p.234) the danger is that Willmott's solution to Cooper's apparent lack of directly political engagement, is to push difference back into more traditional categories of resistance. With such a move, the old fault lines would be reopened as to which structure dominates: capital or patriarchy? The difference of a pure negation would be brought back under the yoke of identity: the identity of an oppositional critique.

Re-presenting the Technologies of Representation

In the introduction to the second collection, Robert Chia positions Cooper's work within the context of a social theory of organization: a tradition in which Max Weber stands as a figure of some significance. Performing a double function, Weber points us towards both the rationalization and routinization of the everyday and mundane, and the magical elements of the world that are repressed by this progressive disenchantment. In doing so, Chia picks up some of Willmott's political points mentioned above. Most significantly, Chia's introduction points up the ways in which an overly rational and divided modernity is dependent upon the continued exclusion of its Other. In the examples that Chia gives us the repressed ranges from the corporeal fluidity of shit and

piss, to the brush-strokes of the artist at work, a labour that is disguised by the western tendency to privilege final product over process. By thus highlighting the dependence of the self on a repressed other, Chia sets up a collection of papers that consider technology as the other to the human subject and, by foregrounding their co-constitution suggests an almost apocalyptic dissolution of the self in the cybernetic circuits of information and organization. Although this insight is not entirely new (see Nick Land, 1995) it is an important, and often overlooked point that seemingly clean, bounded and rational technologies of representation produce a problematisation of boundaries that threatens the very existence of a human subject. In this respect, the second collection develops the two remaining themes that Chia draws out of Cooper's work in the first introduction: his interest in technologies of representation and immanence.

Following Chia's introduction, the first paper in the second volume is John Law and Annemarie Mol's 'On Metrics and Fluids' in which, like Rolland Munro in the first book, they question the exclusive duality between the unmeasurable fluidity of human experience and the measurable, rational, technologically ordered world of static organization. Also like Munro, they note the actual interdependence of these two apparently opposed conceptions and explore this relationship through an empirical analysis and comparison of a Quaker prayer meeting and the manpower accounting system at Daresbury Laboratories, a scientific research institute. Whilst the meeting of the society of friends is an apparently fluid and unstructured gathering, where silence is disturbed only by spontaneous speech, resulting from deep contemplation and divine inspiration, the space in which this fluidity is enabled is a measurable room, with a specific architecture that can only be maintained by a rather mundane organization of room bookings, rents, timetables and carefully minuted committee meetings. Conversely the apparently ordered representation of the manpower booking system at Daresbury Labs is ultimately shown to be dependent upon the entirely fluid activities of the human scientists going about their daily business of doing science. Whereas the forms that generate the information on which this system is dependent demand that scientists account for their activities in half-day chunks, the reality of a scientist's work is much more complex and difficult to divide up. Often spending 5 minutes here and 30 minutes there, the scientists find themselves having to make up the figures so that they fit the form, rather than the form accurately reflecting the reality of their work. This limit upon representation is not one that can be accommodated by more accurate accounting processes, Law and Mol argue, but rather reflects the essential dependence of the measurable upon the fluid.

Law and Mol compare this situation of mutual definition and interdependence to the artwork of Maurits Escher in which the figure and the ground are completely interdependent. One cannot be seen without the other and yet, like many optical illusions, it is impossible to see both at the same time: the measurable and the fluid, sameness and difference, cannot be simultaneously apprehended by a centred, knowing subject. As well as indicating a fundamental limit of representation this also raises serious questions for epistemology and points to a recurrent tension within this collection of papers. As Robert Chia suggests in his introduction to *Organized Worlds* he, and presumably Robert Cooper, are more interested in pursuing a fluid ontology that can only be fleetingly captured by the glance. Any attempt to fix it with a gaze will destroy its basic principle of movement and change. As far as it goes, this inversion of

the traditional western privileging of the gaze is fine, but if we are to accept this ontology of movement as a more fundamental ground for basing our understanding of organization, then we run into potential difficulties. Whilst some of the contributors to this collection, notably Law and Mol, point to the interdependence of sameness and otherness, fixity and movement, others, like Chia, seem to be calling for a rejection of fixity, sameness and even organization itself. And yet if Law and Mol are correct, we cannot be so hasty. By doing away with fixity, we also lose sight of the ground upon which movement is dependent. On the other hand we accept the inevitability of this interdependence, then what are the implications for practice? We might write a nice collection of papers pointing to the irreducibility of difference and the indeterminacy of sameness; we might even consider the fluidity upon which our technologized representations are dependent, but without imposing a hierarchy, even an inverted hierarchy, upon this dualism then what difference does it make? The Quakers continue to pursue the silence of fluid becoming whilst the managers at Daresbury labs, and the designers of information systems, continue trying to fix fluidity as being and represent it in an (ac)countable format: there is nothing to choose between the two, and we cannot hold both visions simultaneously, a move which would involve a kind of gazing out of the corner of your eye, so we are just left with a slightly improved awareness of the inevitable partiality of knowledge then just get on with it as we always have done – praying or coding.

It seems that this tension is irreducible. If we denigrate the modern, profane world of organization as counterfeit and self-defeating, then the tendency is to replace this with an almost pre-modern metaphysics of movement and spirituality. This latter then gains ontological priority. It is the reality of fluid movement that becomes stratified and fixed by the forces of modernist organization and that we need to recover a sense of if we are to have a real, fundamental knowledge of the world. But why should we so privilege this Other ontological ground, especially if it is itself dependent upon a figure of fixed, solid objects? Even if we do privilege movement and fluidity as the ontological ground against which the figure of organization is articulated, should this mean that we consider it to be a good thing? Such would be to fall foul of the naturalist fallacy that confuses an 'is' with an 'ought'.

This is something that the process philosophers have long been well aware of. In *Time and Freewill* (1921) Henri Bergson makes a similar point concerning the necessary dependence of fluidity and freedom upon a hard ground of formalized habit. After having discussed the ways in which the scientific world-view tends to spatialize time by breaking it up into discrete points and distributing these points along a time-line, Bergson criticises this spatialization of time for losing sight of the underlying dynamicity of duration, which is anything but spatial. For Bergson, we need a non-spatial conception of duration in order to defend an effective version of freewill. For the most part however modern man is anything but free. For the most part he simply follows the paths laid down by habit and training.

> In this instance I am a conscious automaton, and I am so because I have everything to gain by being so. It will be found that the majority of our daily actions are performed in this way and that, owing to the solidification in memory of such and such sensations, feelings, or ideas, impressions from the outside call forth movements on our part which, though conscious and even intelligent, have many points of resemblance with reflex acts. It is to these acts, which are very numerous but

> for the most part insignificant, that the associationist theory is applicable. *Taken together they are the substratum of our free activity.* (Bergson, 1921: 168, emphasis added)

In this sense, although free action is necessarily, and ontologically, dependent upon a conception of duration that will always elude spatialized representation, it is also dependent upon quite definite habits and organizations that are entirely formed in a spatialized framework of time-tables and discipline: habit. As Law and Mol suggest, the one is impossible without the other.

A related theme is taken up in the second paper in *Organized Worlds*, Nick Lee's excellent 'Two Speeds: How are real stabilities possible?' in which he considers the complex processes of differentiation whereby regimes of signs, subjects and objects, and legitimate (state sanctioned) and illegitimate violence are distinguished and kept apart. Arguing against a logic of acceleration that pits the forces of order and organization against an unruly materiality that constantly threatens disorganization and chaos, Lee draws upon a combination of complexity theory and post-structuralism to suggest that order is stabilised by creating localised slowings, rather than global accelerations. Instead of order racing against disorder in an attempt to get one step ahead, a race that Lee argues would be self-defeating anyway, local stabilities are generated by effecting a slowing down of the seemingly infinite speed of disorder. It is this slowing down of de-differentiation that enables entropy to be held at bay, albeit provisionally and temporarily, and for order to prevail in a specific locale. Lee explores this argument further by considering Girard's arguments concerning the establishment of the legitimacy of the state's monopoly on violence in a move that is particularly relevant given the US/UK's current 'war against terrorism', or the conflict in the Middle East. For Girard, violence begets violence in an exchange of bloodshed and vengeance in which the origins of a conflict are always already lost. In an escalation where neither side can claim a moral high ground that is recognised by both, only further violence and retaliation can follow. For Girard, the establishment of order in such an exchange is only possible by the creation of a scapegoat who is killed by both sides, thereby ensuring a common guilt that binds a society together and slows the de-differentiation of guilty and innocent. By creating a collective, communal guilt from the slaughter of this scapegoat, there is no one left in a position to demand vengeance. The cycle of violence is thereby slowed and order can be established, at least for a time. As well as some striking parallels with J.G. Ballard's *Cocaine Nights* (1997), this argument should hold some warning for those currently seeking to ensure a global and permanent order by eradicating violence through the use of greater violence: a race that can never be won.

Richard Sotto's 'The virtualization of the organizational subject' takes up the question of the relationship between virtual, information technologies and human subjectivities. In the paper that perhaps most explicitly foregrounds Cooper's theme of immanence, Sotto develops a conception of organizational subjectivity using post-structural theory to point to the necessary interdependence of human subjects and technological objects. Showing how the traditional organizational subject is dependent upon a Cartesian mind/body dualism, Sotto points to the danger that just as post-structuralism decentres the subject to reconceptualise it as a distributed, cyborganic network, the increasing predominance of virtual technologies in organization studies threatens to take over this decentring by re-visioning it as an increasing separation of mind and body. As the latter

appears to disappear from increasingly disembodied, virtual engagements on-line, the decentred subject increasingly runs the risk of becoming technologically driven. Seeking a ground to distinguish the human from the technological automaton or expert system, Sotto considers Lyotard's idea of the suffering caused by the unthought. As a distinctively human phenomenon, this suffering provides a self-motivation for the human subject that is open to an outside. The human is driven as it were by the external force of an unthought that is always beyond it. If we ignore this essential incompleteness then the danger of virtualization is an increasing closure of the subject within complete and bounded systems of that which has already been thought. The implications for the stifling of life and creativity are clear.

Similarly considering the mutual immanence of the human and technology, this time with a particular emphasis on the body, Ron Day's 'Diagrammatic Bodies' rehearses a critique of the liberal-humanist subject defined in opposition to the technological object. Accepting the critique of self as disembodied mind, Day is keen that we should not fall back upon the body as a post-Cartesian foundation for the subject. Criticising Cooper for not sufficiently escaping the idea of technology as a supplement for a pre-existent bodily lack, he suggests that technologies actually refigure human bodies, so we cannot take an *a priori* human body as the driving force behind the production of technological machines – what McLuhan would call the extensions of man. Questioning this prosthetic logic, Day takes a leaf from Deleuze and Guattari's book and rethinks this relationship in terms of the production machines that produce, separate and distribute bodies and machines, subjects and objects. Complicating this relationship with reference to the idea of the fold, Day shows that even the body results from a multi-*plied* heterogeneity where self and other, subject and object are always mutually im-*plied* in one another. Even the body then cannot provide a foundation for organization studies, perhaps especially those bodies we call 'organizations'.

Although all of the papers in these collections deal with the profound influence that Robert Cooper has exerted on the way that we conceptualize organization, the last two contributions are from Robert Cooper himself. The final piece in *Organized Worlds* is an interview with Robert Chia and Jannis Kallinikos in which Cooper answers a set of questions ranging from his intellectual inspirations and early interest in Freud, to his relationship with French post-structuralism. Like the interview in this issue of *ephemera* this chapter takes the form of short questions from Cooper's interlocutors, followed by quite long and thoughtful responses, composed after the initial engagement of the interview was over. For this reason the responses do not read so much like a traditional interview, but provide an additional contribution and exploration of Cooper's work from a number of unusual angles that should prove interesting and informative both to those familiar with Cooper's thinking, and those new to his ideas.

The penultimate piece, 'Assemblage Notes' is an entirely new paper in which Cooper considers the general organizational process of assemblage through which objects and subjects are produced in-between their interrelations. Starting with a critique of simple-location in which clear-cut objects are presumed to occupy a fixed place in time and space, Cooper takes the reader on a break-neck tour of conceptual inversions where Durkheim's division of labour is transformed into the labour of division and the modernist logic of Mass production gives way to a study of the production of mass.

Developing this idea of assemblage as a simultaneous joining and separation of duality, Cooper considers the etymology of assemblage through semblance and semi to arrive at the idea of *the seam* – that which both separates and joins in a double movement that produces outside and inside all at once. Although Cooper's paper goes to cover much more ground, ever complicating and connecting the concept of assemblage, I want to stick with this idea of the seam for a moment.

Throughout the papers in these collections there is a tension between recognising the intractability of duality and seeking to overcome it. One response seeks to almost dialectically resolving dualism into a hierarchy that privileges one side or the other – for example by privileging the proximal as the ground of all distal thinking. This is perhaps best exemplified by Hugh Willmott. The other seeks to leave duality in-tension, recognising that both sides are irreducibly dependent upon the other and that any attempt to clean this situation up, or to speak the unspeakable is destined to flounder on contradiction and inconsistency. Perhaps this is itself a false dualism however. The proximal is not really opposed to the distal, but recognises the act of division that separates figure and ground and which precedes the delineation of subjects and objects. This is where Cooper's idea of the seam comes into its own. Paralleling some of Ron Day's ideas about 'production machines', the seam leaves the irresoluble difference of dualism intact, but draw our attention away this dichotomy toward that which lies "between the between" as Deleuze and Parnet put it (1987: xii). The seam not only separates and joins self and other, but makes the conception of these very ideas possible. Although such a move will not reduce uncertainty and tension, it does provide a line that thought can trace, a line that might offer some possibility of escape from the binary bind of the re-presented whilst simultaneously recognising its necessity.

Conclusion

Borrowing from John Law's discussion of tension we might conclude by pointing to a tension at the heart of these two collections. By setting up a dichotomy between the modern and the postmodern, Chia has enabled some strong claims to be made about the downside of the modern drive to purify and simplify, to organize complexity. In doing so, and particularly in the introduction to *Organized Worlds* he points towards a critique of the Enlightenment that has sufficiently gained in popularity over recent years to have already been subjected to a backlash (Porter, 2000). By indicating the darkness at the heart of the Enlightenment and modernist rationality, Chia follows a tradition of thought that is post-modern in the sense of seeking to replace modernism with a more inclusive and open version of social science and politics, an account that accepts and actively receives the Other upon whose rejection self-identity is premised. The tension comes from two connected points. One, as I have suggested above, is the tendency, having rejected the modernist project of purification, to reject this logic wholesale and valorize the disorganized and fluid over and above the profane realm of organization. Such a move leaves the structuring dualisms of modernism intact but inverts them, so that the fluid and disordered is privileged. Unfortunately such a move is also subject to the same criticisms as modernism. It neglects the fact that disorder is also dependent upon *its* other. The other problem with this move is that it tends to move from an ontological

claim about the fluidity of reality as becoming, to an evaluative claim about the goodness of this fluidity – what G.E. Moore called a naturalist fallacy. Just because something *is* doesn't mean that it *ought* to be. The ethical can never be reduced to a question of epistemology or ontology, but it can be opened up by them.

The second tension revolves around the use of nouns such as modernity and the Enlightenment, a move that seemingly goes against the whole idea of process and emergence by simply locating an empirical object against which an other is arrayed as in a dualism. This has little to recommend it as an anti-dualistic strategy and invariably limits the possibility for thinking otherwise. For example, although the Enlightenment is rejected as a strategy, the concept of enlightenment remains as the goal of any intellectual strategy so that on page 17 of his introduction to *Organized Worlds*, Chia suggests Cooper's 'Assemblage Notes' produces "an illuminating synthesis" – fine, but why should we need illumination? In order to see better: to gaze at an object in the full light of day. Unfortunately, Chia has already rejected this logic of the gaze in favour of a glance, something seen fleetingly as if out of the corner of your eye. Shouldn't we rather then, be paying attention to the glance, as he puts it, and practicing the art of seeing in the dark? This difficulty is recognised by Richard Sotto when he suggests that:

> To a large extent, the shift of attention from formal organization to organizing does not cease to condone the unfolding of the project of modernity. Like the will to formalize our knowledge about organization, the will to understand the processes of organizing, because it also focuses on finalized action, equally belongs to the symbolic architecture of the modern project… (p. 68)

At times, this seems to be exactly what these collections are suggesting, for example when they talk of illuminating the processes of organization.

By starting our critique with the dawn of modernity and the Enlightenment, perhaps we are not looking far enough back?

> It is as if we were still ancient Hellenes, interpreting vision as an outward movement of perception, rather than as a subtilized retinal wounding, inflicted by exogenous energies. (Nick Land, 1992: 29)

Although the majority of the writers in these collections are well aware that the human subject is produced by external forces, in a process of folding as it were, there are times when the search for illumination and enlightenment still assumes the gaze of a knowing subject. Like Plato's philosopher kings, these 'Young Cooperians' are ready to guide us out of modernity's dark cave with its seemingly stable shadow-play, to show us the movement that produces these illusions. But once out of the cave, what then? Perhaps we are witnessing a second Copernican revolution – a Cooperian revolution – but instead of decentring the Earth, it is the human subject who has been decentred. Just as Copernicus recentred 'vision' on the sun, perhaps we too shall stare directly into its glare and realise an incandescence surpassing the false shadow-play of enlightenment. As Nick Land has suggested however, this would mean a changing conception of vision away from a perceptive subject, striving to see better, more clearly. Instead, turning towards undifferentiated, solar brilliance our eyes would be opened to a searing of retinal tissue, however subtilized, that would burn out forever the self-centred eye/I.

In a similar vein I have to concur with Jannis Kallinikos in his essay in *In the Realm of Organization*. The risks associated with exploring the dark side of enlightenment remain risks undertaken by a subject:

> The relationship always runs in one direction, i.e. from the subject to the world. Although framed in terms of risk and uncertainty, the problem is basically one of extension. The metaphor is one of exploration. Accumulated knowledge is supposed to improve the possibilities for the effective conquest of the extension of the world. Knowledge constantly enlarges the subject's conquering eye and expands its vision. (p. 166)

In this sense our 'explorations' of the 'expanded realm of organization' (Chia, 1998a: 6), or 'technology and organization' (1998b) remain locked into an imperialist, or even Hellenic, logic of oculocentric self-extension. That this imperialist conception of the self is so resilient should not be taken as a criticism of these collections, however, but rather as a sign of their importance. With luck the decentring will be carried forward by these Young Cooperians. The future looks bright and I for one am taking off my shades.

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