



# Organizational Space/Time: From Imperfect Panoptical to Heterotopian Understanding<sup>\*</sup>

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## abstract

Within the managerial arena the last century can be characterised, or perhaps caricatured, as being concerned with the pursuit of control and efficiency. In this pursuit space and time were treated as *a priori* categories that have been commodified, rationalised and considered deterministically. The last two decades have, however, seen an increasing emphasis on the role of the intangible intellectual, emotional and attitudinal properties of organizations. While organization studies, and theory building, shifted in favour of these intangible factors, mainstream authors, together with many in the managerial community, continue to ignore these studies except where they contribute to establishing further control. Consequently many have critiqued contemporary management practice as exercising total, panoptic, control over the time/space of employees. While accepting the rhetorical strength of these studies, we argue that control is necessarily imperfect, as disorder remains immanent in the construction of order and is subject to its own process of becoming. However, the suggested 'imperfect panopticon' itself falsely dichotomizes important aspects of spatial/temporal experience in placing control against freedom, good against bad. In contrast the conceptualisation of space and time developed in this paper suggests these categories should be understood theoretically as complex and post-rational. We seek to inform an emergent heterotopian theory/practice that embraces complexity and ambiguity, proposing a new perspective that we believe is significant for innovation, knowledge and power.

## Introduction

The emergence of the rhetoric of the 'post-bureaucratic' organization has led to an increasing emphasis on the role of the intangible intellectual, emotional and attitudinal properties of organizations. As postmodern organization theory has engaged with the complexities and ambiguities of the relationships of people, organization and these intangibles, the theoretical debate on them has largely excluded consideration of the contribution of the physical context of organization (Baldry *et al.*, 1998; Hatch, 1987, 1997), and issues of spatial and temporal resources of the organization have largely been taken for granted (Styhre, 2001). Some from academe consider that, within the

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practice arena, time remains largely commodified (Hassard, 2002) according to chronological measures, and space remains subject to measurement and allocation as a setting (Goodsell, 1993) and structure (Baldry *et al.*, 1998) for governance and control. Others, however (e.g. Becker and Steele, 1995; Duffy *et al.*, 1993; Duffy, 1997), consider that new forms of physical design enable freedom from Taylorist (Taylor, 1911) physical and chronological constraints within new forms of post-Fordist (Duffy *et al.*, 1993) workplace.

In seeking to develop a complex understanding of how resources of time and space can both enable and constrain organizational action, we critique the simplistic view of space and time as simple *a priori* categories available for manipulation and control. We examine the way that both space and time can be understood as an arrangement of symbolic and expressive markers, evoking sensations, thoughts and memories amongst the actors that experience them (Butler, 1995, Gagliardi, 1992). Such markers provide a rich typology, ranging from the overtly physical to the transient and ephemeral.

Adopting process metaphysics, we build upon Lee's (1998) conceptualisation of organization as a representational activity designed to slow the infinite speed of the world creating areas of relative stability. We consider how organizations develop processes running at multiple speeds, and how the numerous timings created through these varying speeds lead to an ever-lengthening 'smear' of organizational practices consisting of multiple speeds, times and places. We observe that the contemporary organization can be viewed as endlessly trying to control its context through the creation, reconfiguration and destruction of these spatial and temporal resources. Disorder is argued to be intrinsic to the technologies characterised as exercising total control of the subject, hence the organizational context is better described as an 'imperfect panopticon' (Hannah, 1997). This conception can, however, be critiqued as maintaining the dichotomous setting of 'good' against 'bad', and 'control' against 'freedom'. Instead, we maintain that whilst the organization seeks to control actors within its context, so these actors also control the organization. Here, organization and organizational actors must be conceived postdichotomously, in that the organization is both comprised, and independent of, its actors at one and the same time. Within this conceptualisation, organization, actors, and spatial and temporal contexts of action are, simultaneously, both enabling and controlling of each other.

Developing this discussion, we seek to establish the grounds for consideration of the contemporary workplace within a postdichotomous reality framework (Beech and Cairns, 2001), as a heterotopia (Foucault, 1994); both tangible and intangible, fixed and floating in time and space, good and bad, and enabling and controlling. This we see as being possible – probable – by application of the principles of Janusian thinking (Rothenberg, 1979), in which human beings are capable of holding, and commonly do hold, two contradictory and seemingly irreconcilable propositions as being true at the same time, without conflict, resolution or synthesis. Finally, we posit that these complexities of organizational space/time can only be understood by processes of immersion within them, engagement with them, and through development of pragmatic epistemologies (Calori, 2002), in which researchers and researched share *real-time/real-space* (2002), but with recognition that this occurs within multiple postdichotomous realities (Beech and Cairns, 2001) of contextual thinking/acting.

## Conceptions of Space and Time

Modernist theories base themselves on assumptions that spatial and temporal resources are pre-existing 'natural' resources that provide the setting for human action. This position is evident in much of mainstream organizational literature (e.g. Joroff *et al.*, 1993; Johnson and Scholes, 1999). The praxis of this approach is grounded in a rational space/time relationship, seeing these as the contexts of human thinking/acting. Where space and time are discussed, it is almost exclusively in terms of manipulating the former in order to get more output in terms of the latter. Both are understood as simple, singular and unidirectional.

The epistemological assumptions of 'natural' space are rooted in the scientific method – the explicit idea that rational thought can create a 'mirror' of the world through a unitary authoritative knowledge of the world. The instrumental use of time and space that this perspective adopts can be seen most clearly in the early literature on organizations. Taylor (1911) provides perhaps the paradigm example, however, studies on the relationship between workplace environment and productivity extended to both workplace and office (Roethlisberger and Dickson, 1939). For example, in 1919, Vernon (Sundstrom and Sundstrom, 1986) produced studies of the monthly output of five English tinplate factories, as well as the corresponding outdoor temperature, over a six-year period. He concluded that output fell as temperature rose and as a result improvements were made to working conditions. This marrying of economic imperative with (apparently) utilitarian ideals continues to be reflected in contemporary workplace literature where a stream of research (e.g. Bitner, 1992; Aronoff and Kaplan, 1995; Leaman and Bordass, 1997) has sought to explore the relationship between the physical environment and the evaluation of occupancy satisfaction, health and productivity in workplace, concluding that the one had some kind of empirically identifiable influence on the other.

The conception of time employed within the preceding studies is of a linear-quantitative time (Hassard, 1996) an "absolute, true, and mathematical time" (Chia, 2002: 863) available as a commodified resource for planning and control, given value only through the rubric 'time is money' (Lackoff and Johnston, 1980). Hassard (1991) argues that social time is inextricably linked with the normative environment of social life. From the earliest years our actions have been shaped to coincide with the normative timings associated with eating, drinking and sleeping. This socialisation extends into the school, where attendance is regulated into hourly, daily and weekly periods during which activities such as eating and playing are regulated by institutional rules. This school training conditions the individual for the workplace, the individual having learned to accept 'chrono-logical', coordinated clock time as a necessary part of social life and a major element of organization.

As previously argued, 'natural' conceptions of time and space provide the backdrop for much of contemporary organization theory. Both 'resources' have been, and continue to be, the site of ongoing attempts to simultaneously control both the context, and the actors within it. Yet the treatment of these as 'natural' resources, in which scientific rationalism establishes control, is not the sole paradigm for either resource. For space in particular, the ideal of defined behavioural outcomes – particularly employee

productivity – through management of organizational space has become the ambition of management, in support of wider business objectives such as improved efficiency, effectiveness, output, etc over time. Our discussion now examines evidence that time and space are equally organised and controlled by those who occupy the workplace.

In contrast to earlier perspectives, contemporary researchers in space and time have examined the socially constructed nature of both categories. Addressing space first, researchers have investigated the ways in which the diverse physical artefacts of, and social interactions within, the workplace are used by people (Turner, 1971). Unlike the assumptions of ‘natural’ space, no assumptions are necessarily made about the deterministic impact of physical or other aspects of the working environment. Rather, the space of artefacts emerges from the interplay of artefacts and the emotional responses of the individuals within it. For example, based on observation of social behaviour in a study of library reading rooms, Sommer (1969) found that occupants established personal space through sitting in such a way as to discourage others from approaching them, by creating boundaries through the arrangement of their personal effects, or by establishing rights to particular seats by regularly occupying them for significant periods of time. According to Sommer (1969), these ‘occupation rights’ are likely to be enforced through social support from other regular users. In organizational settings these rights manifest themselves in the personalisation of the working area as a visible expression of an individual’s identity, interests and ownership (Aronoff and Kaplan, 1995; Elsbach 2001). These territorial rights are jealously guarded often in spite of formal management policies.

The subtle differences in physical artefacts are often imbued with personal or social meanings. These meanings are not limited solely to the personal technology of the office, but extended to the physical and architectural setting. Thus organizational artefacts, their physical setting and social interaction help shape the cultural values, beliefs and norms of the organization and create the landscape of organizational identity – its ‘organizational space’ (Strati, 2000a: 118). In these terms, organizational space and its artefacts are akin to a literary text reflecting the authors intentions and personality (Ward *et al.*, 1989). Indeed Hillier (1996: 129) uses the term ‘intelligibility’ to differentiate between different spatial configurations. These ideas have been influential in the design and management of the workplace, bringing a new emphasis on patterns of movement and interaction in the developing context of the rhetoric of the knowledge economy (e.g. Grajewski, 1993; Duffy, 1997; Arge, 2000).

Although the artefacts of the workplace – walls, cups, machines – are generally recognised for their utility, often they both invoke a response – ‘that ugly photocopier’ – and are invested with emotional qualities – ‘my miserable computer’, or ‘that cosy room’ (Fineman, 2000: 2). Strati (2000b) is careful to distinguish between sensory responses – which he attaches to the aesthetic experience – and emotional responses, which he sees arising from psychic rather than sensual origins.

Equally, Lefebvre (1991) distinguishes between objectively defined space – ‘spatial practices’ – and more subjectively defined mental, cognitive or ideational spaces – ‘representations of space’. He posits that the interaction of these two creates lived space – what he describes as ‘space of representations’. He concludes that space is never

empty and always embodies diverse meanings for the actors who share in it. Space may be physical and geographical, but 'space' is also a metaphor for people's range of intention and understanding – things seen, but also things thought. Thus organizational actors may find both freedom and control within the spatial constraints within which they operate. Indeed, as Surman's (2002) study reveals, the transition to homeworking leads many bank teleworkers to recreate the symbolic markers regulating space and time to delineate between home and work, control and freedom.

Research on time has increasingly recognised that 'natural' mono-temporal interpretations of time fail to capture the complexity of organizational practice. The 'periodisation' of sectors of time is most famously identified by Roy (1960) in the example of 'banana-time', the daily ritual of a group of workers in one organization. Gherardi and Strati (1988) go beyond a straight periodisation of time, arguing that their study of organizational times in three companies revealed that, far from being singular and consistent, numerous times existed within the organizational context. These times are distinct from, but in dialectic relation to, external clock time. Gherardi and Strati (1988) argue that the unfolding of time has numerous dimensions of duration. As such, the same event can be interpreted in many ways within and across multiple times. Here, rather than an homogenous clock time imposed on individuals, coordination of activity must be achieved through negotiation of perspectives using temporal boundary objects (representations of linear time) such as timelines in project planning (Yakura, 2002). The organizational context is rich in processes and documents that require temporal coordination (e.g. production plans, financial reporting, performance measurement). Predominantly these are regular and repetitive generating what Moore (1963) describes as the 'rhythms of production'. Moore's analysis reveals the challenges of social action as maintaining a balance between the synchronising of events, such that they occur at the same time in an appropriate place, and the sequencing of action such that events occur in the correct order. For Moore, the coupling of synchronisation, with the required frequency of an action, results in what he terms the *rate*, the structuring of time coupled with the allusion to speed.

Invoking the term speed returns our discussion to 'spatialised' practice (i.e. the rate over which territory is covered) and should alert us to the underlying nature of temporal experience. Time, as it is experienced, is argued by Butler (1995) to rely on the codification of events in memory that bring to present, and projected future, impressions of the importance, duration, frequency and interdependencies that combine to produce the experience of time. It is experienced, not as a regular succession of equal moments as in clock time, but as irregular periods of duration. This parallels Bergson's (1913) phenomenological analysis of 'real' time. For Bergson the constraints of 'natural' clock time generate a response of "the smuggling of spatial metaphors onto the plane of consciousness" (Chia, 1998: 351) leading us to conceive of time as passing from past to present whilst always facing the future to which we advance. 'Real time' is time as it is experienced; as the continuous stream of emotions that arise and subside over a period, the duration of internal sensation. Thus time might 'fly' when you are having fun, but 'drag' when engage in a tedious task. Bergson links this inner duration to memory that accumulates with a growing picture of the individual's past, that constitutes "the heavier and still heavier load we drag behind us as we grow older" (Bergson 1913: 38). Note

that while Bergson gives precedence to the time of experience, this itself relies on a directional and spatialised notion of social time in order to give it meaning.

This discussion of time and space in which both are seen as multiple and subject to negotiation, and/or manipulation, by both self and other would appear to problematise, but not preclude, the notion of space and time employed by those seeking to control the organizational context. This next section seeks to question the very basis upon which the practices of organization are founded, by examining the role of representation, and technology in particular, within an ontology of becoming.

## **Organizational Stability**

To Nietzsche (1968), we mistake as solid and essential that which is in flux, substituting an 'unreal' fixity on what is, for our inability to cope with what has been, and what is to be. If managerial control is to be a reality, it implies the appearance of some kind of stability. Yet in responding by promoting the metaphysics of change that this suggests, Chia (1999) observes that 'all things flow' is one of the most common and vague generalisations that has been produced. Our discussion, whilst accepting that all things are in a process of change – becoming and perishing – seeks to examine this 'flow' by considering the notion of speed. Firstly, we consider the possibility of achieving a general stability by escaping the process of perishing altogether, and hence uncover the infinite speed of disorder. Secondly, we debate the possibility of the slowing of reality to achieve relative stabilities. Lastly, through a discussion of the way in which rhythms and artefacts contribute to the maintenance of these stabilities, we describe the impact of our conceptualisation of fragmented time on control within the 'single' enterprise and on the organizational actor.

Conventionally, organization seeks to eliminate the disorder of the world by the endless pursuit of a 'solution'. Lee's (1998) essay on the nature of stabilities in social theory seeks to problematise this notion. Lee follows Cooper's (1993) examination of whether the 'temporal reversal' resulting from the modelling, rehearsal and testing of events can be extended, such that a general 'techno-fix' is developed that would allow humanity to outpace the disruptive influence of undesigned change. Adopting Cooper's argument, Lee (1998) maintains that in constructing representations, we are building extensions of bodily parts and functions that blur the distinction between human and non-human, by folding interior and exterior into one another. Lee demonstrates that although the 'convenience' of technology allows the subject to withdraw from the world (and the disorder this brings), the subject cannot stand apart from the world and is at once constructor of, and constructed by, the technology by which he hopes to withdraw from the world. Thus, far from being able to achieve an 'escape velocity' that would allow us to outpace disorder, we reflect our representational understanding of the world which brings with it disorder's trace (Cooper, 1990). Our pursuit of the techno-fix is therefore fruitless as the world proceeds before us, like a horizon, travelling at infinite speed.

The foregoing might seem to preclude any durable form of stable large-scale organization. What is conceded by Lee, drawing this time on Serres (1982), are

localised 'bundles of times' – pockets of stability in which meanings and categorisations remain stable over extended periods of time. Chia (1999) argues that an expanded view of organization as an activity rather than a given might reveal the “interlocking acts of ‘arresting’, ‘locating’, ‘regularising’ and ‘stabilising’ arbitrary portions of an intrinsically fluxing and transforming ‘real’” (Chia, 1999: 210). In the process of naming and differentiating an entity, we capture an area that has its own process of becoming and perishing. Thus, rather than being a dualistic choice between infinite speed or stability, multiple speeds can be said to exist, at the same ‘time’, without conflict or contradiction until the ‘will to power’ (Nietzsche, 1968) requires the alignment and synchronisation of them.

It is worth considering at this point the implications of this conceptualisation for the model of a ‘single’ organization. Such an organization is differentiated from its competitive environment and would seek to move at a slower speed than its context. However, rather than presenting a consistent and coherent body, there are a variety of speeds at work in the firm, as well as multiple pockets of stability overlapping, and partly synchronised with, other areas inside and outside the formal organization. We might, in two dimensions, visualise the organization as an ever-lengthening ‘smear’ where practices in those functions most concerned with control, for example accounting, chase the horizon most vociferously but, paradoxically, by being the most highly organised, have the slowest speed. In order to ensure the continuity and cohesion, organizations attempt to secure the elements in place by installing practices designed to arrest and locate the company in space and time. For Cooper and Fox these practices constitute *glossing*, “a socially instituted, socially controlled way of fixing the mobile” (1990: 578); a fixity that can never fully capture the world, and that will inevitably succumb to the mobile. Cooper and Fox argue that the processes of forecasting, planning and decision making are not simply the ‘temporal reversals’ of our previous discussion, but are abstractions, isolated from their ‘real life’ contexts, that are glossed and presented as objective.

## Discussion

Control remains the *sine qua non* of modernist perspectives on management action (Czarniawska-Joerges 1988), and as organizational time and space expand to become ubiquitous – ‘24/7’ working in the ‘virtual office’ – arrangements and techniques that enable continual control over workers activities have been sought in management. Foucault’s (1977) analysis of the panopticon, Jeremy Bentham’s vision of a perfect disciplinary prison, has become the central metaphor for a string of writers wishing to critique contemporary control techniques (see McKinley and Starkey, 1998 for review). In the panopticon the prisoner is located such that she is exposed to observation, either from her fellow prisoners or from an anonymous and invisible authority, located, but unobservable, within a central watchtower. The perfection of the ‘disciplinary gaze’ reputed to be achieved by the panopticon ensures the prisoner endlessly fears retribution and, consequently, exercises a self-discipline that ensures conformity to institutional norms. The space and time that the prisoner inhabits is constantly regulated.

Contemporary organizational practice is argued to provide such a 'disciplinary grid' (Townley, 1994) that exercises totalising control over the subject. However, as Ball and Wilson (2000) note, Foucault offered the panopticon as an example of disciplinary power, and was reluctant to extend the ideas to other institutional settings, seeing the factory as the site of relative, rather than total, normalisation (Gordon, 1986). Thus, critics of writers who have mourned the death of worker recalcitrance as a result of panoptic control, have argued both that the model of subjectivity adopted is limited (Ball and Wilson, 2000) and that, whilst the methods of resistance may have changed in response to new technology, the central problem of control-resistance-identity remains (Gabriel, 1999). Indeed, Hannah (1997) argues that the idea of the panopticon itself operates to maintain 'normality' amongst the already 'normal'. In an analysis that critiques the application of the panopticon in an organizational setting, Hannah concludes that panopticonism exists in many different forms in social life, but argues that the diversity of spatial and temporal locations inhabited by each individual ensures that the 'prisoner' of society is only an inmate in an 'imperfect panopticon'.

Resistance lies both between areas of practice and in the 'imperfection' of the practice itself. The dynamics of this are evident in Ezzamel, Willmott and Worthington's (2001) study of Northern Plant. In 'the factory that time forgot' management could never present the fully worked out account of the operation of the new work practices demanded by workers. This imperfection served successfully as an instrument of resistance for this group. Following our analysis, the partial stabilities proposed by management were ridiculed as contradictory and hypocritical. The fissures in the workers' own stabilities both between themselves and the shop stewards, and between the various skills levels in the factory, were concealed in the act of resistance allowing an apparently complete, and coherent, sense of identity to be maintained (Knights and Willmott, 1985) in the face of contradictory positions.

The reading of space and time presented in this paper is one in which both categories, and the experience of them, are revealed to be constructed within a context that is forever in the process of becoming and change. Indeed, we might observe that the logical extension of our reframing of organization, would be that the actor is driven to pay more attention to an increasingly localised set of activities – result, the compression of individual workspace and the experience of time famines (Perlow, 1999). This would indeed be true apart from the requirements of other sets of actors (the department, the function, the organization) who also demand detailed coordinated action over an ever-widening field – result, the expansion of organizational workspace. Thus, the individual's presence is required in a number of localities and, even when *glossing* techniques are employed, the threat of disorder ensures that, as organization attempts to create stable practices over distance, the requirement for co-presence in a growing number of arenas increases.

The individual as organizational actor is implicated as the force that, individually and collectively, attempts to tame disorder by establishing relationships between concepts, activities, people, ideas and objects. In addition, the actor seeks to maintain these relationships through re-enactment or substitution of a technology in place of the self. These moments are not, however, the result of a centred agency, but rather the result of the writing of the interwoven texture of organization (Cooper, 1989; Cooper and Fox,

1990); texts that are implicitly part of the drive towards stability and yet carry the trace of disorder with them. This interplay of organizational space and time with overlapping forces of localised practices, and wider issues of synchronisation and explanation, creates a *sheath of influence*. Within this, actors are at once constrained, the mechanism of the panopticon, and yet they are implicated in the (re)creation and extension of these practices upon which, to a greater or lesser extent, the stability of their subjectivities rely. Given the incomplete nature of this control, we follow and extend Hannah (1997) by arguing that the ‘imperfect panopticon’ occurs not simply because of the variety of spatial and temporal locations we inhabit, but because we construct those times and spaces from the multiplicity of possible spaces available from the range of temporal and spatial markers available.

According to Gagliardi (1992), organizational space provides benchmarks for organizational knowledge, evoking images, sensations, memories and thoughts in the people who work and live in it. In these terms, it is far from obvious that space is even an objective property of buildings or physical artefacts. As Hetherington (1997) points out, even the most intimate of places are not solely produced by acts of human volition and intentionality, but emerge from arrangements of space, time, artefacts and events. So, they must be considered both controlled by, and controlling of human thinking/acting. Space is shown to be simultaneously real-and-imagined, a concept explored by Soja (1997) in the context of planning theory. Soja argues that a postmodern planning theory must recognise the ambiguity and multiplicity of the postmodern period, moving beyond the search for order and stability of modernist planning theory towards “*the disordering of difference*” (1997: 246, italics in original), resituating planning as an ontological activity which recognises the “existential spatiality of human life” (1997: 246). The complexities of this ‘psycho-physiology’ (Cairns, 2002) of workplace are illustrated in the example of office redesign in which ‘the same assemblage of physical artefacts’ is first imposed upon, then deconstructed by a group, then reconstructed by them at a later date, such that “it is both the problem and the solution.... It is seen both as setting for governance and as enabler of freedom, within a single manifestation” (2002: 816).

## **Towards a Complex, But Pragmatic, Understanding of Organizational Space/Time**

In this paper, we have briefly outlined a range of conceptions of space and time, finding a tradition within both managerial practice and in mainstream organization studies of treating these as *a priori* categories to be understood in singular and linear terms and subject to manipulation and control. We have called attention to the diversity of the spatial and temporal mechanisms available to organizational actors. We have argued that these markers, and the meanings attached to them, form overlapping areas of relative stability, defining, and being defined by, those who participate in their (re)creation. While control mechanisms serve to *gloss* the mobile, we have argued that control is necessarily incomplete and that the organizational context must be understood as containing a multiplicity of possible times and spaces. In the following section we seek to move beyond the debate on organizational control by challenging the basis upon

which the notions of both perfect and imperfect panopticon rest, in that they dichotomise and exclude aspects of freedom/control, privacy/accessibility. We argue that challenging the 'author-ity' of these categories allows us to grasp the complexity of organizational activity revealing counter-sites, or 'heterotopias' (Foucault, 1986, 1994), constructed from the jumble of practices, behaviours and artefacts, whether they are fixed, transient or ephemeral.

In one of his last essays, Foucault (1986) sought to develop a typology of heterotopias. Heterotopias are places that are at once connected to other places and yet outside them – places that are situated in and across time, places that hold multiple, seemingly contradictory and exclusive, meanings to individuals at one and the same time. In his account 'Of Other Spaces', Foucault (1986) identifies a number of characteristics of heterotopias, whilst emphasising that there is no universal model. He suggests that they always presuppose a system of opening and closing that makes them both separate and joined to the spaces around them. In some way, they intensify the meanings of the spaces that enfold them. They are interlinked to the passage of time, whether of long duration – the museum or archive – or, of short duration as in the space of celebration. In some way they are capable of juxtaposing, in one real place, several different spaces – as with the cinema screen within the body of the cinema. Most importantly, they are rich in cultural allusion and meaning.

Foucault's particular insight was to contrast space, as the institutionalisation of history, with space as the relationship between sites:

We are in the epoch of simultaneity, we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment I believe when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skin. (1986: 22)

Little work has been done in developing a typology of heterotopian spaces within organizations, and in the light of our arguments, it may be ironic that Foucault identified the prison as an example of the heterotopia of crisis and deviation. Nevertheless, we argue that adopting this new perspective is significant, because such spaces, and the experience of them, are filled with power/knowledge (Soja, 1997), both through the physical artefacts and through the attribution of meaning to these artefacts. We argue that heterotopias are an unrecognised feature of organizational space, and are a response to the imperfect nature of organizational control, but that heterotopian workplaces themselves create new sources of knowledge and power in relation to organization and actors. These heterotopias will not be found, or at least recognised, in the 'natural' or the 'formal' world of organizational space and time. They emerge from the jumble of practices behaviours and artefacts of the organization, the transient and ephemeral – the autonomous workgroup, the transient project team, the myths of power and status. Heterotopian workplaces are both enabling and controlling, open yet closed off, fixed and transient, and contracting yet expanding to become all-encompassing.

Organizational space can be read as heterotopia at a number of different levels. The characteristics of the heterotopia can be found, for example, in the simultaneous and non-exclusive freedom/control, welcome/wariness in rituals of entrance and exit through reception space. Many contemporary workplaces – including offices, hospitals

and schools – are both open and welcoming, yet are closed off and subject to controlled entry due to organizational security needs, and in response to real and perceived threats of violence. In offices, heterotopian characteristics can be seen in the totem-like symbols of the executive suite, in the blurring of personal and organizational artefacts within the private office and, as we have already argued, in the real/constrained autonomy of the workgroup that seeks control of its work setting. The use of new information and communication technologies and the implementation of forms of flexible working enable the organization to create new folds and boundaries in space and time, allowing the worker to break free of spatio-temporal fixity, whilst enabling the organization to ‘fix’ her in space and time. At another level, multinational organizations place buildings in space, such that they are both part of the local community, yet are detached, and detachable from it. The workplace of the new organizations moves across the world in response to changing market conditions, today plugged in to the network in Glasgow, tomorrow unplugged and moved to Mumbai.

In concluding this paper, we have sought to develop a postdichotomous (Beech and Cairns, 2002) conceptualisation of contemporary workplace through reference to Foucault’s concept of heterotopia. We consider that the contemporary workplace is an example of a heterotopia *par excellence*, but that in the search for control, conventional management of space and time within organizations often fails to recognise that workspace is such a transient and ephemeral space. We propose a new perspective on issues of space and time in organizations, a perspective that we believe is significant for innovation, knowledge and power. This requires a recognition that what is fixed is mobile, what is valued is simultaneously without value, and that what is essential is disposable. In this perspective, time expands as it is compressed and space is bounded but without physical boundary. We consider that, only through a complex, contextual investigation of such heterotopias from within their multiple space/time realities, an investigation that values the researched as researchers – and in which the ‘official’ researchers are themselves researched, for their value-laden preconceptions that must be consciously surfaced and acknowledged – can pragmatic epistemologies (Calori, 2002) of the workplace be conceptualised, that will inform critical thinking/acting within the management of organizational space.

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