Thomas Pynchon and the Scrambling of Literary Codes: Implications for Organization Theory

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abstract

To write is to impose a favoured epistemological framework on the empirical material. This paper aims at discussing the literary work of the American novelist Thomas Pynchon and what implications his treatment of the line of demarcation between science and literature, derived from his idiosyncratic epistemological position defying any strict separation of genres and language games, has for the field of organization theory and management studies. The paper concludes that Pynchon's work is valuable within a broad ranging critique of the function and use of language and narrative forms of expression in management texts. Writers like Pynchon help unsettle the received epistemologies of the dominant scientist forms of writing in organization theory and function to de-familiarize the established forms of thinking.

Introduction

> I always speak the truth. Not the whole truth, because there's no way, to say it all. Saying it all is literally impossible: words fail. Yet it's through this very impossible that the truth holds onto the real. (Lacan, 1974/1990: 1)

The much-discussed "linguistic turn" in the social sciences (see e.g., Rorty, 1999: 24-25, *passim*) has increased the interests for a broad array of linguistic and textual practices and entities in organizations and companies. Methodological frameworks such as discourse analysis, conversation analysis, and narrative studies are all derived from the emphasis on social reality as being based on joint linguistic and symbolic interactions. In this respect, organization theory follows adjacent disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, political science and gender studies. In all domains of the social sciences, society is regarded as an accomplishment embedded in the human capacity for exchanging statements and thoughts. What has not changed very much within this general reconceptualization of social and organizational realities is the form of expression employed by researchers and management writers. Here, one may rather believe that there is a kernel of truth in the dictum 'the more things change the more they stay the same'. The practices of writing is still very much adhering to what

Czarniawska (2004) calls a 'scientistic' form of writing, a mode of expression that favours transparency, objectivity, clear-cut formulations, and, as a consequence, a rather modest emphasis on the written text's literary qualities. Breaking with this received mode of representation remains one of the main challenges for organization theory. To date, there are few and primarily marginal examples of new forms of writing that open up for new forms of expression. Gherardi (1995: 3) writes: "[W]e have few examples of how to writes 'differently', mainly because the scientific community – colleagues and reviewers – is strongly biased toward the 'normalization' of language". In addition, a number of writers have suggested that organization theory should be influenced by literary works (Czarniawska, 2003; Patriotta, 2003; ten Bos and Rhodes, 2003; Fleming and Sewell, 2002; De Cock, 2000; Carr and Zanetti, 2000; Czarniawska-Joerges and Guillet de Monthoux, 1994). It is somewhat surprising that all the fruitful insights and concerns regarding the limitations and possibilities of language are expressed in a rather conventional prose rather than being given a proper expression that would further emphasize that point in the very composition of the text. One of the few examples of such a writing strategy is continental and primarily French post-structuralist writings of philosophers such as Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze. Both Derrida and Deleuze have received massive critique for writing difficult and unnecessarily complicated prose, while at the same time they have been praised for their elaborations on expression. In Rosi Braidotti's formulation, criticizing language for its imposed linearity in a linear form is an impotent form of critique and therefore one needs to transgress such a style of writing: "To attack linearity and binary thinking in a style that remains linear and binary itself would indeed be a contradiction in terms. This is why the poststructuralist generation has worked so hard to innovate the form and style, as well as the content, of their philosophy" (Braidotti, 2002: 8). Enabling for new ways of composing a text may be achieved through two different strategies: On the one hand, one may point at alternative styles of writing that in various ways improve our abilities to give expression to experiences and events. This would be a *positive* approach to writing, opening up for new perspectives and expressions. On the other hand, one may choose a negative approach, that is, to undermine the incumbent and ready-made forms of expression that prevails within a field. This approach would not as much aim at being constructive as being deconstructive or even destructive. Or as Buchanan puts it, speaking about Deleuze's writings: "[T]he most deeply utopian texts are not those that propose of depict a better society, but those that carry out the most thoroughgoing destruction to the present society" (2000: 113).

This paper aims at discussing the literary works of Thomas Pynchon, a noted 'postmodernist' writer, and to point at the deconstructive or destructive *modus operandi* of Pynchon's texts. The paper aims at pointing at the forces inherent to alternative forms of expression that a number of commentators have identified in Pynchon's text. Learning from highly innovative and, for the lack of a better word, 'creative' writers such as Pynchon may make management writers alter their relationship with writing and develop a more affirmative view of other forms of expression. This paper does not suggest a mimetic approach, i.e., that 'one should write like Pynchon' but rather wants to point at the need for what we may call after Buchanan (2000), 'utopian writers' who are willing and capable of breaking with the doxa of writing. This does not however mean that praised authors such as Thomas Pynchon are turned into heroes of literature that one must admire and respect. Instead, it implies that innovative writing may be a

source of influence within the social sciences, and which can be referred to without being discredited for blurring the line of demarcation between science and fiction, truth and imagination. One of the key consequences of the linguistic turn is to overcome such a strict demarcation without throwing out esteemed scientific virtues – whatever such locally enacted qualities may be – with the proverbial bathwater. Writing organization theory after the linguistic turn then means to claim the right to experiment on the form of expression. The working lives in contemporary organizations are worthy of a proper form of expression that does not restrict its writing practices to a narrow range of sources. Therefore, someone as original a writer as Thomas Pynchon is may be brought into discussion to reinforce the prerogative of 'freedom of speech'.

Learning from Thomas Pynchon

The point of departure for this paper is the commonly received wisdom that literary language and scientific language is strongly distinguished; literary writing is poetic and expressive, scientific language is denotative and transparent. This is a pervasive belief in contemporary society. There is however nothing that says that scientific writing of necessity needs to operate within a realm of language bereaved of literary and poetic qualities (Stengers, 1989/1997: 150; Knorr Cetina, 1981: 95; Linstead, 1994). On the other hand, literary works are not hermetically sealed from scientific discourses. Some genres, for instance the genre of 'Science Fiction' (see Parker, Higgins, Lightfoot and Smith, 1999), are even highly dependent on the writers' ability to adapt to a scientific discourse in the literary work. In the same manner, crime stories often draw from a wide body of resources within academic research in disciplines such as psychology, sociology and criminology. Therefore, literary and scientific works are not always located on the endpoints of a continuum.

The American writer Thomas Pynchon is one of the most praised authors in contemporary American literature. Notorious for his refusal to give interviews and the lack of photos of the author in conjunction with his highly personal and idiosyncratic literary *oeuvre*, Pynchon has attained cult status in American literature. Pynchon belongs to a group of modern fiction writers that manage to express what one may call a 'double articulation' in their texts; their texts are never wholly self-contained and transparent but always maintain a sense of heterogeneity in all its formulations and expressions. Other examples of authors praised for these skills include Jorge Luis Borges, Lewis Carroll, Franz Kafka, Virginia Woolf and Herman Melville (see ten Bos and Rhodes, 2003; De Cock, 2000; Deleuze, 1993/1997, 1969/1990; Adorno, 1981; Auerbach, 1946/1968). Since Pynchon's literary work is, if not vast, at least complex and wide spanning, it is not easy to summarize Pynchon's work in a few sentences. For Best and Kellner (2001: 25), Pynchon is representative of what is called the Menippean satire, a Greek literary genre aimed at poking fun at authorities and offering a social critique. In similar terms, Herman (1999) speaks of Pynchon's novels as being parodies, that is, "the comic refunctioning of preformed linguistic or artistic material" (in Margaret Rose's, 1993, formulation, cited in Herman, 1999: 209). To speak of Pynchon's texts as satires or parodies does not imply that they are wholly frivolous. Instead, Pynchon employs a highly complex and heterogeneous language to make

certain social practices and conditions problematic. Here are some of the distinguishing features of Pynchon's texts: The personal form of expression, the adherence to scientific discourses (Pynchon holds a degree in Engineering from Cornell University and worked previously as an Aircraft engineer at Boeing), the mixture of styles and genres, the oscillation between mundane and even grotesque language and highly refined and cultivated speech, and, above all, the blending of genres. In Best and Kellner's (2001: 25) account, "Pynchon scrambles literary codes, mixing styles, genres and discourses in a highly implosive text that disseminates portrayals of chaos, entropy, indeterminacy, and contingency, thus taking on principal themes of postmodern science and social theory" (see also Tabbi, 1995, ch. 3). Pynchon's treatment of language is thus capable of both giving the impression of full mastery over it at the same time as language is crumbling under its own weight, slipping through the fingers as soon as the reader believes he or she understands its workings. Mattessich (2002) explores Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow,* a novel first published in 1973 that today has attained the status of a minor classic. A book like *Gravity's Rainbow* is complicated to summarise in a few sentences but one may argue that it examines the relationship between military technology and military activities and civil society. The book is set in the end of World War II when the Germans were developing their V2 rocket, a technological innovation embodying the latest scientific achievements but in the form of a lethal weapon capable of new advancements in mass killing and destruction. For Mattessich (2002: 75), the ambiguities of the virtues and values of science penetrate the language of the text: "*Gravity's Rainbow* is language as technē, the deployment of metaphor, analogy, repetition, and narrativity to tell the story of a culture's rationalization and objectification by thought. But it is also in some sense a broken language, the text of resemblance gone mad, incited to a proliferation of meanings". The following passage from the novel *Gravity's rainbow*, is representative of Pynchon's blending of science (mathematics) and more mundane matters (here represented by pornography and sexuality):

> Three hundreds years ago mathematicians were learning to break that canonball's rise and fall into stairsteps of range and height, Δx and Δy, allowing them to grow smaller and smaller, approaching zero as armies of eternally shrinking midgets galloped upstairs and down again, the pattern of their diminishing feet growing finer, smoothing out and out into continuous sound. This analytic legacy has been handed down intact – it brought the technicians at Penemünde to peer at the Askatian films of Rocket flights, frame by frame, Δx by Δy, flightless themselves…films and calculus, both pornographics of flight. (Pynchon, 1973: 567)

Here, mathematics and Rocket Science – a synecdoche for all scientific practices – are regarded as a form of indecency, a sort of voyeurism, enabling for increasingly detailed images of reality. Elsewhere, sexuality and fetishism and mathematics are associated; a 'mathematics of pornography' is sketched

> All of Margherita's chains and fetters are chiming, black skirt furled back to her waist, stockings pulled up tight in classic cusps by the suspenders of boned black rig she's wearing underneath. How the penises of Western men have leapt, for a century, to the sight of this singular point at the top of a lady's stockings, this transition from silk to bare skin and suspender! It's easy for non-fetishists to sneer about Pavlovian conditioning and let it go at that, but any underwear enthusiast worth his unwholesome giggle can tell you that there is much more here – there is a cosmology: of nodes and cusps and points of oscillation, mathematical kisses…*singularities*! Consider cathedral spires, holy minarets, the crunch of trainwheels over the points as you watch peeling away the track you didn't take…mountain peaks rising sharply to heaven, such as those holding potent

> mystery…rose thorns that prick us by surprise…even, according to the Russian mathematicians Friedman, the infinitely dense point from which the present Universe expanded.…In each case, the change from point to no-point carries a luminosity and enigma at which something in us must leap and sing, or withdraw in fright. (Pynchon, 1973: 396)

Mathematics and scientific endeavours are here regarded as being interrelated in the domain of the human faculties; they spring from the same human condition. Science and desire are mutually co-dependent; the topology of the mathematician may be applied to the female body that is examined as an object of investigation.

Not only does Pynchon portray scientific work as being entangled with basic human needs and conditions. He also introduces epistemological concerns making scientific work problematic at the level of theory. At the beginning of the book, Pynchon introduces two statisticians, Pointsman and Mexico, who represent different scholarly epistemes or paradigms and thereby are in opposition to one another's views. When trying to figure out some regularities or pattern in the bombing of London during the Blitz, Pointsman and Mexico become aware that they adhere to different scientific projects:

> The young statistician [Pointsman] is devoted to number and to method, not table-rapping or wishful thinking. But in the domain of zero to one, not-something or something. He cannot like Mexico, survive anyplace in between. Like his master I. P. Pavlov before him, he imagines the cortex of the brain as a mosaic of tiny on/off elements. Some are always in bright excitation, others darkly inhibited. The contours, bright and dark, keep changing. One or zero. 'Summation', 'transition', 'irradiation', 'concentration', 'reciprocal induction'– all Pavlovian brain-mechanics – assumes the presence of these bi-stable points. But to Mexico belongs the domain between zero and one – the middle Pointsman has excluded from his persuasion – the probabilities. A chance of say 0.37 that, by time he stops to count, a given square on his map will have suffered only one hit, 0.17 will suffer two…

> /…/'I'm, sorry. That's the Monte Carlo Fallacy [Mexico says]. No matter how many have fallen inside a particular square, the odds remain the same as they always were. Each hit is independent of all the others. Bombs are not dogs. No link. No memory. No conditioning.'

> Nice thing to tell a Pavlovian…If there *is* nothing to link the rocket strike – no reflex arc, no Law of Negative Induction/…/How can Mexico play, so at his ease, with these symbols of randomness and fright? Innocent as a child, perhaps unaware – perhaps – that in his play he wrecks the elegant room of history, threatens the idea of cause and effect itself. What if Mexico's whole generation have turned out like this? Will post-war be nothing but 'events', newly created one moment to the next? No Links? Is it the end of history? (Pynchon, 1973: 55-56)

A theory based on binary thinking and laws of nature is contrasted against a theory of the event, of statistical oscillation between the zero and the one. Pynchon here addresses a major epistemological concern, that of the potential incommensurability of different theoretical systems and frameworks. The grand theory of the Pavlovian program is here depicted as an impotent framework for dealing with practical problems. Furthermore, it cannot become aware of its own blind spots (e.g. 'The Monte Carlo Fallacy') while at the same time its spokesmen draw far-reaching conclusions when confronting alternative and competing explanatory frameworks. Pynchon portrays a crisis of a scientific program and points at its consequences in terms of the moralist standpoints taken.

In addition to the epistemological critique of science in *Gravity's Rainbow,* Pynchon instils a certain anxiety within language, in the very expression he uses to portray the industrial-military complex responsible for the latest techno-scientific achievements (see Melley, 1994: 736). The following section brings together a detailed account on chemistry and a paranoid connection between certain organizations, is representative of this thematic:

> Imipolex G has proven to be nothing more – or less – sinister than a new plastic, an aromatic heterocyclic polymer, developed in 1939, years before its time, by one L. Jamf for IG Farben. It is stable at high temperatures, like up to 900°C., it combines good strength with a low power loss factor. Structurally, it is stiffened chain of aromatic rings, hexagons like the gold one that slides and taps above Hilary Bounce's navel, alternating here and there with what are known as heterocyclic rings.
>
> The origins of Imipolex G are traceable back to early research done at du Pont. Plasticity has its grand tradition and mainstream, which happens to flow as The Great Synthesist. His classic study of large molecules spanned the decade of the twenties and brought us directly to nylon, which is not only a delight to the fetishist and a convenience to the armed insurgent, but was also, at the time and well within the System, an announcement of Plasticity's central canon: that chemists were no longer to be at the mercy of nature. They could decide now what properties they wanted a molecule to have, and then go ahead and build it. At du Pont, the next step after nylon was to introduce aromatic rings into the Polyamide chain. Pretty soon a whole family of 'aromatic polymers' had arisen: aromatic polyamides, polycarbonates, polyethers, polysulfanes. The target property most often seemed to be strength – first among Plasticity's virtuous triad of Strength, Stability and Whiteness (*Kraft, Standfastigkeit, Weiß*): how often where these taken for Nazi grafitti…). J. Lamf, among others, then proposed, logically, dialectically, taking the parental polyamide sections of the new chain, and looping them around into rings too, giant 'heterocyclic' rings, to alternate with the aromatic rings. This principle was easily extended to other precursor molecules. A desired monomer of high molecular weight could be synthesized to order, bent into its heterocyclical ring, clasped, and strung in a chain along with the more 'natural' benzene or aromatic rings. Such chains would be known as 'aromatic heterocyclic polymers'. One hypothetical chain that Jamf came up with, just before the war, was later modified into Imipolex G. (Pynchon, 1973: 249-250)

Scientific progress (in chemistry), politics, ideology and desire ('Hilary Bounce's navel') are again interrelated and mutually dependent. The American company du Pont (a standing reference in the management and accounting literature) and the German company IG Farben, although being separated into two political spheres, share the concern for chemistry and scientific advancement, and inform the political agendas and vocabulary. There is no compartmentalized view of science and politics, mathematics and sexuality, high and low, the mundane and the sophisticated, but all are aspects of human undertakings being folded into one another.

For Mattessich (2002), Pynchon is, albeit in his own somewhat curious ways, representative of the American counterculture of the 1960s and its criticism of militarism and its implied colonialism. But contrary to much of the 1960s 'movements', Pynchon does not suggest that one should overturn this system displacing it with something different, a supposedly more 'human' world order or whatever category one may prefer. Instead, Mattessich (2002: 3) suggests, Pynchon maintains that 'escape', withdrawal and refusal are the only worthwhile strategies vis-à-vis the technoscientific development and its penetration into the life world of everyday life. Mattessich argues: "*Gravity's Rainbow,* principally in the trope of the Rocket, expresses a perspectivist

critique of the technological paradigm at the heart of the scientific institutions and methods. This paradigm is metalinguistic because it links social power to global systems of communication and information that satellitize social, life" (2002: 19). Therefore, as Best and Kellner suggest, Pynchon is not offering positive alternative images of society but is rather concerned with envisioning our contemporary society as something that is problematic: "Like many postmodernists, Pynchon is concerned not with generating positive models of change, but rather with problematizing and deconstructing already existing models" (2001: 48).

In a later book, *Mason & Dixon*, first published in 1997, Pychon returns to the issue of technology and science and its implications for social life. While *Gravity's Rainbow* was set in the turmoil of the end of the World War II, the formative years of our contemporary modern society, fundamentally based on the belief in technological progress, *Mason & Dixon* returns to the Enlightenment period when scientific thinking still had to confront both theological epistemologies and common sense thinking and folk psychology. In *Mason & Dixon*, Pynchon tells the story, again a highly complex and heterogeneous assemblage of genres and styles, of how the astronomer Charles Mason (1738-1786) and surveyor Jeremiah Dixon (1733-1779) draw the line (the so-called Mason-Dixon line) between Protestant Pennsylvania and Catholic Maryland, thus imposing a line of demarcation between the industrious North and the agricultural South of the USA, an (imaginary) line later playing an important role in American history. The text thus combines a number of topics such as science, technology, colonialism, and forms of exclusion and demarcation. Cowart writes: "Here [in *Mason & Dixon*] Pynchon scrutinizes the age in which technology began to come into its own – bringing with it the modern world's spiritual desperation. He exposes the fallacy of scientific rationalism at the moment of its great efflorescence in the eighteenth century" (1999: 342). He continues:

> Dixon, a surveyor with an above-average education, and Mason, a sensitive scientist of the second rank, attempt to be good eighteenth-century empiricists, men of reason, but neither can stop seeking evidence of magic and the supernatural…Mason and Dixon enact within their own intellects the increasingly unequal struggle between reason and magic. (Cowart, 1999: 347)

Pynchon thus seeks to capture the spirit of the emerging scientific communities playing an increasingly important role in what is becoming the modern society. Yet, the old modes of thinking, entangled with religious belief, remain highly influential within the new worldview. For instance, the philosopher Emerson's enthusiasm over scientific progress and refinement is associated with his relationship to God:

> The Telescopes, the Fluxions, the invention of Logarithms and the frenzy of multiplications, often for its own sake, that follow'd have for Emerson all been steps of an unarguable approach to God, a growing clarity, – Gravity, the Pulse of Time, the finite speed of Light present themselves to him as aspects of God's character. It's like becoming friendly with an erratic, powerful, potentially dangerous member of the Aristocracy. He hols no quarrel with the Creator's sovereignty, but is repeatedly appall'd at the lapses in Attention, the flaws in design, the squand'rings of life and energy, – first appall'd, then angry. We are taught, – we believe, – that it is love of the Creation that drives the Philosopher in his Studies. Emerson is driven, rather by a passionate resentment. (Pynchon, 1997: 220)

As an effect of the new scientific *Weltanschauung*, old – or, 'traditional', in Max Weber's vocabulary – modes of thinking, drawing on mythology, folklore and religious beliefs, compete with the new worldviews:

> These times are unfriendly toward World alternative to this one. Royal Society members and French Encyclopaedists are in the Chariot, availing themselves whilst they may of any occasion to preach the Gospel of Reason, denouncing all that once was Magic, though too often in smirking tropes upon the Church of Rome, – visitations, bleeding statues, medical impossibilities, – no, no, far too foreign. One may be allowed an occasional Cock Lane Ghost, – otherwise, for any more in that Article, one must turn to Gothic Fictione, folded acceptably between the covers of Books. (Pynchon, 1997: 359)

Mythology is here reduced from the status of being a legitimate explanatory framework to a form of entertainment ('fiction'). The age of Enlightenment wielded destructive effects on common sense thinking. In addition to being in opposition to mythology, scientific thinking is also conceived of as an ethnocentric form of knowledge, embedded in particular social, cultural and historical conditions specific to the European experience. In one of the passages, Mason discusses the line with a Chinese *Feng-Shui* expert:

> 'The object being [Mason says], that the people shall set their homes to one side or another. That it be the boundary, nothing more'.

> 'Boundary!' The Chinaman begins to pull upon his hair and paw the earth with brocade-slipper'd feet. 'Ev'rywhere else on earth, Boundaries follow Nature, – coast-lines, ridge-tops, river-banks, – so honouring the Dragon or *Shan* within, from which Land-Scape ever takes its form. To mark a right Line upon the Earth is to inflict upon the Dragon's very Flesh, a sword-slash, a long, perfect scar, impossible for any who live out here the year 'round to see as other than hateful Assault. How can it pass unanswere'd?'

> This is the third continent he has been doing *Feng-Shui* jobs on, and he thought he'd seen crazy people in Europe, but these are beyond folly. (Pynchon, 1997: 542)

The scientific practices pursued by Mason and Dixon on behalf of the Royal Society and mankind is then far from being value-free and capable of 'aperspectival objectivity' (see Feldman, 2004) but are closely associated with the Eurocentric culture.

While *Gravity's Rainbow* explored the morally bankruptcy of the ideologies and beliefs preceding and enabling World War II, *Mason & Dixon* conceives of the notion of the line, the geometrical master figure of the novel playing the same role as the parable in *Gravity's Rainbow,* both in practical and metaphorical terms as the main ideological marker of the American and Western societies developed in the Enlightenment years. Cowart offers an explication:

> Pynchon represents the Line as archetypical, emblematic of divisions the Christian West has always construed as essential. The drawing of lines – in division, differentiation, discrimination, and other boundary making – is as old, it seems, as the creation itself. According to the Genesis presumably read by Catholics and Protestants alike, acts of demarcation were among the first items of divine business. They commence a mere four verses in the Old Testament as the deity divides light from dark and ordains the firmament to divide the primordial waters. (1999: 355)

The need for structuring and organizing around the geometrical figure of the line is thus inextricably bound up with the dawn of Western culture. Dividing light from dark has

remained a longstanding and abiding political concern in Western thinking. Pynchon let the philosopher Emerson discuss the historical significance of the Line:

> 'The Romans', he [Emerson] continues, in class the next day, 'were preoccupied with conveying Force, be it hydraulic, or military, or architectural – along straight Lines. The Leys are at least that old, – perhaps Druidic, tho' others say Mithraic, in origin. Whichever Cult shall gain the honor', Right Lines beyond a certain Magnitude become of less use or instruction to those who must dwell among them, than intelligible, by their immense regularity, to more distant onlookers, as giving a clear sign of Human Presence upon the Planet. (Pynchon, 1997: 219)

For Cowart (1999), Pynchon offers a genealogical literary account of this politics. Mason and Dixon were men of the Enlightenment; they were both struggling to overcome their own beliefs inherited from the tradition and for them, in Pynchon's text, drawing the line represented a form of mastery over legitimate and illegitimate forms of knowledge and cognition in the Enlightenment epistemology. Both *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Mason & Dixon* thus share a certain form of social critique that by no means is utopian in terms of offering alternatives and complementary forms of thinking. Pynchon does not provide solutions or give us suggestions. What Pynchon does though, is offer literary works that effectively undermine a sense of certainty, stability and predictability. The high and the low, the right and the wrong, and a number of other binary distinctions are deterritorialized and constitute a *melée* of opposites in Pynchon's novels. Pynchon thus overturns both literary and scientific languages in the very combination and mingling of the two. Cowart writes: "The fluid, unfixed line between history and romance, between the real and the imagined, indicts the very logic of rationalism. Any attempt to firm up this line leads not to objectivity but to the imposition, more or less fascistic, of a single official perspective" (1999: 356). The scientific and the literary are, to use Jean Baudrillard's (1983) term, imploded into one single, yet heterogeneous form of expression, which in itself is fluid and fluxing, moving and in a state of becoming. That is the contribution of Pynchon for scientific writers, e.g., the organization theory writer, the ability to not only join opposites but to actually make them become folded into one another, making them constitute a new form of expression, a new form of language. That is what we can learn from a writer such as Thomas Pynchon.

Discussion

The 'scientistic' forms of writing that have been predominant in organization theory have a number of emotional consequences. For the first, it represents a fear of the narrative, that is, the unwillingness to recognize that all events and occurrences in organizations are capable of becoming expressed in a narrative form, in a plot that emerges as a series of temporally embedded events and actions. Secondly, the fear of innovative writing is an abiding concern operating under the aegis of the presupposed objectivity of scientific writing. Thirdly, very much a consequence of the first two effects, there is an anxiety associated with blending genres and styles which might turn what is supposed to be transparent and reproducible into something that is more messy and confusing.

Historian Hayden White has discussed the use of narratives in historical writing. In White's account, historical events are never enclosed and clearly demarcated occurrences in time that immediately present themselves as something intelligible. Instead, historical events can be accounted for in the form of annals, a sequence of events in time, in chronicles, as stories told but without proper beginnings and ends, or as narratives, in the form of a structured plot with meanings, beginnings and ends. White summarizes:

> What I have sought to suggest is that this value attached to narrativity in the representation of real events arises out of a desire to have real events display the coherence, integrity, and closure of an image of life that is and can only be imaginary. The notion that sequences of real events possess the formal attributes of the stories we tell about imaginary events could only have its origin in wishes, day-dreams, reveries. Does the world really present itself to perception in the form of well-made stories, with central subjects, proper beginnings, middles, and ends, and a coherence that permits us to see 'the end' in every beginning? Or does it present itself more in the forms that the annals and chronicles suggests, either as mere sequence without beginning or end or as sequences of beginnings that only terminate and never conclude? (1987: 24)

As a consequence, there is no longer any clear-cut and epistemologically transparent line of demarcation between the real and the imaginary events (White uses this Lacanian formulation throughout his text without fully explaining his choice of words). White continues: "[W]hat distinguishes 'the historical' from 'fictional' stories is first and foremost their content, rather than their form. The content of historical stories is real events, events that really happened, rather than imaginary events, events invented by the narrator" (1987: 27). The difference between the historical and the fictional is then not a matter of form but of content. In other words, expressing a sequence of historical events in an annal is then no more deceiving than making it appear in its original form. What matters for White (1987) is the ability to communicate underlying, 'real' historical events and not to be overtly concerned with the form. In fact, working within an epistemological tradition that intersects with popular culture, one need to be concerned about even using expressions such as 'real events'. White concludes:

> The fact that narrative is the mode of discourse common to both 'historical' and 'nonhistorical' cultures and that it predominates in both mythical and fictional discourse makes it suspect as a manner of speaking about real events. The nonnarrative manner of speaking common to the physical sciences seems more appropriate for the representation of 'real' events. (1987: 57)

Following a similar line of reasoning as White, Best and Kellner (2001) speak of the difference between 'theoretical' and 'aesthetic' maps giving expression to different aspects of an empirical material at hand. Best and Kellner (2001) write:

> While theoretical maps typically employ the codes of science (clarity, rigor, empiricism, objectivity, etc.) to represent the social world, aesthetic maps offer phenomenological illuminations of everyday life that affords visions and experiences that theoretical maps are unable to supply. If the 'personal is political', then social mappings have to move beyond the co-ordinates of public institutions and the limitations of objective discourse into the emotional and subjective dimensions of private life. (2001: 52)

Theoretical maps thus defy any narrative account because of its disregard of the subjective and the fictional elements in all writing. On the other hand, aesthetic maps may serve as an influence when bridging the personal and the public, the actor with structure. Blending two seemingly incommensurable forms of writing is thus not

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problematic for Best and Kellner (2001) but is rather a form of expression that may overcome or synthesize two different traditions of writing. Herein lies the potential in Thomas Pynchon's fiction; since it effectively 'scrambles the literary codes' and folds the scientific and the fictional (and the mythological and the mundane) into one another, yet never pretends to be anything but fiction, his texts are exemplary in providing a mode of writing that disturbs the line of demarcation between the literary and the scientific. Scientific language is combined and brought together with a variety of uses of language that would not qualify as scientific in all communities. Pynchon's texts are then aesthetic maps that at the same time to some extent are theoretical maps. William Gibson, the science fiction writer who coined the concept *cyberspace*, in the same manner bridges the aesthetic and theoretical maps in terms of providing visionary and creative images – not to be confused with naïve ideas of progressive development – of the opportunities with computer-based technologies. The fictional and the scientific then implode and become entangled.

When making organization theory and management studies become something more than a subset of what August Comte (1830-1856/1975: 77) called 'social physics' and the practices of social engineering Henry Ford (1929: 100) dreamed about, that is, breaking with what Adorno (1981: 64) calls the 'cult of the fact', it might be fruitful to recognize the potentiality inherent to the scrambling of literary codes and imploding theoretical and aesthetic maps. Robert Chia argues: "While the traditional scientific mentality emphasizes the *simplification* of the complex multiplicity of our experience into manageable 'principles,' 'axioms,' etc., literature and the arts have persistently emphasized the task of *complexifying* our thinking processes and hence sensitizing us to the subtle nuances of contemporary modern life" (1996: 411). Chia thus seems to agree with critical theory writers such as Walter Benjamin and Theodore W. Adorno that there is a liberating potential in literature and art. Giving new expressions to managerial practices and organizational undertakings is therefore a contribution to the field in its own terms. Following Erich Auerbach (1946/1968), one may then argue that it is possible to understand a society through its literature, through literary techniques and devices permitted and used. Making science and fiction intersect is not a form of decadence or manifestation of regression but is, on the contrary, indicative of a genre in the making, on the move to explore new domains. Organization theory writers may therefore learn from writers like Thomas Pynchon and his unorthodox relationship with the literary text.

In more practical terms, this implies that a variety of discourses and language games may co-exist within the field of organization theory. Notions such as narratology, messy texts (Marcus, 1998), and rhizomatic writing (Law, 2002) are some examples of concepts that seek to designate a practice of writing that effectively deals with complex or chaotic systems that do not let themselves become captured by conventional forms of writing (see e.g., Hayles, 1991). The movement towards a broader recognition of qualitative methodologies in organization theory represents a decisive step toward a more pluralistic view of the study of organization and management practice. The next domain of debate and discussion may be the inherited views of organization writing that are predominant in the academy and in business schools. In that debate, a variety of resources such as that of the works of Thomas Pynchon may be invoked and serve as role models or sources of inspiration.

Thomas Pynchon and the Scrambling of Literary Codes
Alexander Styhre

Conclusion

This paper has argued that the writings of Thomas Pynchon may serve as a fruitful source of influence within organization theory because Pynchon effectively frustrates the line of demarcation between science and fiction without privileging the one over the other. Pynchon's work thus emerges as a multiplicity of genres, vocabularies, plots, styles of writing, and other materials that are employed in the texts. A writer like Pynchon is then – in an analogy that may be somewhat far-fetched but still applicable – doing the same thing to literary genres as ethnomethodology sociologist like Harold Garfinkel (1967) do to our outlook on social reality: They de-familiarize and de-naturalize what are very much taken for granted, yet rest on fragile epistemological grounds. If Pynchon knows something, it is what Jacques Lacan says of language, that it is not possible to fully master and control it since language is always deceiving, not staying in its place, and moving in parables that are neither easy to understand nor to predict. Therefore, saying the truth is 'literary impossible' – words fail us. As a consequence, there is too much concern for the line of demarcation between science and fiction, truth and false, and (in White's, 1987, use of the terms) the real and the imaginary. In organization theory, one may to a larger extent draw on the innovative use of language developed by writers such as Thomas Pynchon.

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