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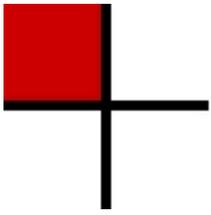
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Responding: To Cooper

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I

The world today: destruction, explosion, collapse, catastrophe. Dark forces are at work, and not just in Mordor, continuously cutting, breaking, di-viding, splitting. ‘What is he building in there?’ “The destructive character is always blithely at work” (Benjamin) producing no wholes but rather fragments, components, pieces, percentages, shares, aphorisms, parts. No vision guides. But di-vision. He is not a collector but a disperser. He never arrives, he is always already de-parted. His daily routine is one of clearing away, he needs fresh air to breath. He is always in a state of un/in-formation. His cutting force is one of non-violent ‘pure violence’; beyond all violence. He sees in every shiny monument the image of the next catastrophe. He is not a member of the parliament of things or the war cabinet. He is the devilish nomad whose body is an open (battle) field. His deepest emotion is an “insuperable mistrust of the course of things and a readiness at all times to recognise that everything can go wrong”. He is “reliability itself.” Nothing is permanent. Destructive paths lie everywhere. What exists he reduces to rubble, not for the sake of the rubble, but for that of the way leading through it. But is there a whole in all this fragmentary debris? Do these scattered fragments of glass just cut endlessly or do they form a work of art? Do these de-parted parts live in uncontested open territory or are they positioned strategically? Do the divided components make up a war-machine or a child’s toy?

II

For a ‘philosophy of responding’! Is there one? No *one* philosophy of responding could call itself philosophy. And also, no philosophy without responding.

III

Should one ever respond in kind, offering back the response which was ‘asked for’? Or is the most effective response the one that transforms the grounds on which one is called to respond? Response as re-production. Response as transformation. If one responds on the same level as the call, is this *responding*, or something else (mimetic reaction, for example)?

IV

Responding implies a grounds of response, the prior formation of a terrain on which one responds. This terrain, or territory, is a network of productions of parts that produces parts that continuously regenerate and actualise the network of processes that produced them. Cooper’s assemblage continuously collects and disperses parts. It is an assemblage that tells us that “things come together and then fall apart, that relations are ephemeral, even ghost-like, events we cannot physically see or touch, that *possibilities rather than actualities* constitute the fabric of our world”. Cooper assembles possibilities or potentialities, responding in such a way that opens a field of actuality. The terrain’s becoming-territory is not only characterised by the sheer potentialities of re-production, but also by the ephemeral ‘closure’ of this virtuality which manifests itself in the actuality of a concrete situation. This concretisation, this actualisation, is an effect of diverse potentialities, but not a random one. Hence for Cooper, as for Benjamin, the critic has “the wind of history in [its] sails. The sails are concepts. It is not enough, however, to have sails at one’s disposal. What is decisive is knowing the art of setting them.” Thus the act of folding all potentialities into an actuality of the here and now requires an energetic intensity, a field of gravity, a pure destructive force.

V

Responding is an act, an *actuality*. The act of response is neither simply material nor ideal. Responding takes place in a field of determined possibilities. Response takes place in time. “The true vocation of a journal is to announce the spirit of its epoch. Such *actuality* means even more to it than its own unity or clarity. A journal would...be condemned to insignificance if there did not take shape within it a life which was powerful enough to redeem even what is questionable by the act of affirming it” (Benjamin). Actuality is the ‘eternal return’ of the different. A journal must always be *ephemeral* in nature, says Benjamin: “this is the just price demanded by its wooing of true actuality.”

VI

Responding means not seeing history historically. When we experience history, its sedimentation is not apparent. As Benjamin suggests, history flashes up as image when

a ‘moment of danger’ interrupts particular junctures of time and space. For Benjamin, therefore, history happens as a frozen flash, at a standstill: “It’s not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words, image is dialectics at a standstill.”

VII

Responding is destruction. Here destruction “must not be understood negatively as involving the doing away” of a past. On the contrary “it seeks to indicate the positive possibilities of this tradition, which also means placing it within its limits” (Heidegger). Destruction is a response to an other that has yet to be questioned. Destruction shows the enabling boundaries of *excluded* possibilities. Destruction deprives pasts of their ‘intended’ or popularly consumed functions; it extracts fragments out of their ‘original’ context and rejoins them. For destruction past is the surface of monumental material. Destruction kills the illusory life of fragments and offers them potentialities.

VIII

A work of art responds. That is, it produces. This is clearly articulated in ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’, in which the work of art exceeds both the artist and the domain of what is called ‘art’ and opens a domain of effects. It performs a ‘worlding’ of the earth, as Heidegger puts it. This is not to say that art is not worldly, but that it is never a simple mimetic reproduction of the ever-same. It is rather a mimesis full of fragmentary spontaneity. This ‘worlding’ is thus a destruction of the world. Cooper is an artist.

IX

One is sometimes called to respond to acts of violence. Here violence is seen as the violation of natural, religious or state laws. The response to such violation then often involves the mobilisation of state power to condemn those responsible and bring them to justice: *just* wars are fought, thousands of people held in prisons, the military is given a gigantic budget, the police has excessive powers of surveillance and interrogation. This power machinery is made legitimate by the force of laws put into operation by democratic parliaments, which for Benjamin “lack the sense that a lawmaking violence is represented by themselves; no wonder that they cannot achieve decrees worthy of this violence, but cultivate in compromise a supposedly non-violent manner of dealing with political affairs.” Hence parliaments are not conscious of the latent presence of their violence and their show an amnesia toward the revolutionary forces to which they owe their existence. In other words, they are not able to recognise the violence that has created them and the violence that they continuously re-produce. Therefore, the state can only respond to violence, because it has codified a specific definition of violence and because it feels threatened in its lawmaking monopoly of violence. To truly

respond, however, involves violating apparently ‘natural’ laws; questioning them, re-reading them; re-formulating the notion of violence. This destruction is a force that stands outside the law; this is what Benjamin calls ‘pure violence.’

X

Responding means seeing potentialities and therefore impotentialities; that is, response always bears a relation to something that comes from without, a call or an invitation to which one constructs a relation. Proactivity is a fantasy of origin, and, as such, is impossible. Responding is re-production and re-presentation. The German *Ursprung* is usually translated as ‘origin’. This hides, however, the forceful movement of *-sprung*, the jump. Origin is bringing forth something; it is ‘worlding,’ which also involves seeing the potentiality of past darkness. Every reproduction and representation is the ‘jump’ into something new; it is the unique collection of parts. Pure repetition is an invention of the logicians. But reproduction requires intensity, an energy that stems from seeing a specific moment of danger. This intensity is actualised in the situation – a fold of actuality, potentiality and impotentiality.

XI

Cooper’s assemblage is a continuous collection and re-collection of parts, which bears in itself indefinite potentialities. For example, the mass-produced product coming off an assembly line is never a ‘finished’ or ‘ended’ product. It always connects to new parts. What we therefore ‘end’ up with is a multiplicity; an assemblage which is in continuous motion of configuration and re-configuration. To theorise his conception of assemblage and re-production, Cooper explicitly connects to the essay ‘The Work of Art in the Time of Technical Reproducibility’, in which Benjamin discusses how new forms of technical reproduction such as photography and film are essential for the rise of modern mass society. The ‘danger’ of these very re-production techniques is that they render themselves as tools for the ‘aestheticisation of politics’ so successfully practiced by the Nazis and the commodity of the culture industry. Benjamin’s destruction of reproduction techniques leads him to ‘invert’ profane actuality and open the possibilities of a ‘politicisation of art’. The specifics of such a project of politics are developed in one of Benjamin’s last writing projects, the collection of aphorisms ‘On the Concept of History’ (which is yet to be considered by Cooper), where time is understood as an ephemeral image that flashes up in the actuality of the Now: “To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognise it ‘the way it *really* was’. It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.”

XII

Responding involves the formation of fragments, parts and allegories with the aim of responding to specific social formations, which means not fetishistically supporting them.

XIII

Cooper responds. That is certain, but what does he respond to? There is no question of responding on a single level. Cooper does not simply write social theory, nor philosophy, nor theories of technology, information or organisation. (But all these are happening too.) There is an assemblage without respect for traditional disciplinary demarcations. Perhaps we are guilty of a specific and unfair territorialisation by setting Cooper in relation to questions of organisation when, as he repeatedly insists, he is *not* a theorist of organisation. Organisation is something in which he has had little more than a passing interest. Here we are neither inside nor outside organisation studies, but perhaps that is the kind of place for *ephemera* to inhabit.

XIV

Cooper is an assembler of fragments. There is no great collection of books, no archive of works, other than one 'little book' and a collection of other fragments. His work will be forever incomplete, infinitely incompletable. The task of thinking. In this there are clear parallels with Walter Benjamin, who equally wrote fragments and stood 'outside' of the university system. In 1925 his book *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, which he submitted as a habilitation doctorate at Frankfurt University, was rejected. But he always mistrusted bureaucratic academic life anyway, so one assumes he preferred a life of financial difficulties and uncertainties 'outside' the safe haven of disciplinary boredom that is called the university.

XV

What you are reading now was not written in isolation. It was written in response – first of all to Cooper, but equally between the two of us, between Auckland and Copenhagen, and also unavoidably in relation to the present moment of danger. How can one not 'respond', in one way or another, to the present historical conjuncture? Responding, also, to a wonderful day that we spend in Staffordshire this July, when we spent six hours responding to Robert Cooper, and calling on him to respond. Then the emails that followed, as we tried to fix the *dynamis* of that day into a static, finished object.

XVI

“A minor literature doesn’t come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language” (Deleuze and Guattari). Playing the refrain of the minor *from within* the major.

XVII

“Then the war in which we had refused to believe broke out, and it brought – disenchantment. Not only is it more bloody and more destructive than any war of other days, because of the enormously increased perfection of weapons of attack and defence; it is at least as cruel, as embittered, as implacable as any that has preceded it...It overwhelms, with blind rage, anything that stands in its way, as though there were to be no future and no peace afterwards. It tears up all bonds of community among the warring peoples and threatens to leave behind an embitterment that will make any renewal of these bonds impossible for a long time to come” (Freud). How do we respond to such moment of danger, timelessly described in this passage? With silence?, as Benjamin contemplates: “where violence rules absolutely, ...everything and everybody must fall silent.” Does one respond by talking, because ‘it’s good to talk’? Does one hide in academic hiding holes, pretending to be blind? What does the intellectual do, asks Luis Aragon, “when confronted by certain basic and very simple facts: the fact that the workers face a police force armed with cannons, the fact that war looms and that fascism is already in power”? The critic’s task is to ‘respond’ to these fragmentary facts by narrowing them down to a few well-chosen weights and seeing them in the light of the possibilities they offer.

XVIII

The German word for ‘response’ is *Antwort*, which implies the reversal, the turning over, of a word. A similar meaning is produced by the word ‘catastrophe’, which in Greek times also meant the reversal (*cata*) of a text, or a rhyme (*Strophe* in German means verse, passage of a rhyme). Hence responding can be seen as the bringing forth of a catastrophe. However: “That things just go on is the catastrophe”, as Benjamin describes the situation. How can one respond to the continuous flow of catastrophic responses? For Benjamin the ‘key’ lies in bringing forth a ‘real’ catastrophe; which is a destruction of fetishised catastrophes of modernity, an arresting of images of so-called catastrophes.

XIX

Could we say that response is linked in some kind of way to questions of responsibility? This is, of course, one of the themes of Derrida’s recent work, particularly following ‘Passions: “An Oblique Offering”’. And here we are in the territory of the aporias of

response. I am called to respond; I know I must (*je sais, je dois*), but I also know that any response which simply followed a programme is unlikely to be responsible. I might have good faith, but not responsibility. Hence the aporia of responsibility – I can only respond responsibly when I don't know how to respond, when I am faced with a call to which I don't know how to respond. If I knew in advance what to do, how to respond, then I would not be *responding* in the strong sense of an engagement with an Other who calls me into doubt.

XX

So how do we respond to Cooper? We are not in the game of hagiography, and we wonder what would be achieved by establishing a new canon of great writers on organisation. Certainly we can be critical enough of certain aspects of his work, and we can let it take us to places which are well outside of it. But we know that in some way any responses we make will jump up from within the very field sown by Cooper (and others). Is it possible to use arms supplied from another against them? If responding is something that can transform an assemblage, then Cooper might reassemble a thinking of organisation. In various ways. But he is not a thinker alone. Further, even: Cooper does not produce revolutionary ideas. And all for the good. The task of the critic is not to produce revolutionary theses, but to transform the conditions in which certain theses are considered revolutionary and others are not (Benjamin). This transformative reassemblage, both in the reassembling Cooper himself achieves and in our reassemblage of Cooper, will be the object we hold before us in this issue. And so we conclude our own minor response as a sort of preface to this, a special issue of *ephemera*, in which we invite Cooper to respond to our responses to him, and also publish a series of responses to certain works by and about Robert Cooper.

discussion

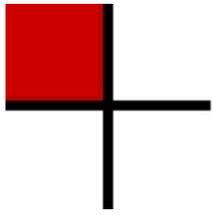
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Un-timely Mediations: Questing Thought

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abstract

In this 'interview' Robert Cooper responds to a series of questions originally put to him by Steffen Böhm and Campbell Jones in July 2001. Developing his answers into a series of short, but self-contained micro-essays, Cooper considers issues ranging from the disciplinary organization of the academic knowledge producing machine, to the decentering of the self, the role of negation in thought, and the concept of the burrow. In responding to Böhm and Jones' questions, Cooper produces an almost rhizomatic piece of writing in which concepts appear, reappear and transform, continually connecting to other writings and thinkers to produce a mapping of his thinking that serves as a contextualizing and positioning device for those readers who are new to Cooper's work, and links to more recent concepts and ideas for those more familiar with his writings.

ephemera: Let's start with a general question. Your work doesn't seem to fit easily into the conventional academic categories and programmes of the university system. It seems much more cross-disciplinary and diverse than the current specialisations require. Would you care to comment?

Robert Cooper: Your question raises some very important general issues about the nature of the social sciences – issues that go back to the historical emergence of sociology and psychology. But we have to understand these issues within the wider historical context of the modern university system in so-called advanced societies. We know that Kant was critical of the new developments in the German university system more than two hundred years ago which transformed the former spirit of intellectual inquiry into an academic production system. Knowledge became a product for the consumption of the emerging mass student and industrial population. In our own time, Kant's analysis has proved remarkably prescient. The universities have become like factories whose main objectives are to produce ready-made products for public consumption. The specialised academic categories and programmes you mention are both a means and a result of what seems to be an inexorable pursuit of the consumable as opposed to the thinkable. In this process sociology and psychology, for example, have become specialised products with their specific places in the supermarket of modern knowledge.

After many years in the academic system, I've become more interested – and perhaps

more concerned – with the limitations that the new knowledge-production system imposes on both its producers and its consumers. Instead of the freedom to raise fundamental questions about the nature of the disciplines that supply us with consumable ‘food for thought’ and the precise roles of academics in this production process, we seem to be hemmed in and constrained by the production system we have produced. The disciplines even define our identities to the extent that we identify ourselves as sociologists or psychologists who think and speak according to specialised conceptual vocabularies and whose professional identities are further fortified by the specialised publication requirements of the academic journals as well as the university career system. While we are all subject to this regime, it is still possible to remind the system – however gently – that its rules of behaviour censor and exclude alternative ways of thinking and writing, ways that are more critically demanding, potentially more illuminating and which can expand our intellectual vision. Max Weber’s work offers some illustration of the problematic I’m sketching here. As a founding father of sociology and social theory, Weber saw his task as one of presenting sociological ideas to the new larger academic audiences of his time; this necessarily meant simplifying complex and sometimes ungraspable ideas. Though he is sometimes criticised for being too rational and orderly in his writing, in his thinking he was well aware of the problems the creative and open thinker made for itself when it addressed social and cultural questions from a more imaginative and visionary perspective. The conceptual vocabulary of sociology for Weber was essentially a collection of *convenient fictions* which summarised ideas which went far beyond rational analysis and understanding. Terms like *society* and *organisation* served no more than to draw attention – but not to focus it too specifically, too tightly – to social and cultural phenomena that defied ultimate intellectual capture. Weber’s *Verstehen* and *ideal type* were really devices that provided at best rough insights into the overcomplicated nature of human sociality. Beyond these convenient fictions lay forces which, despite and because of their immanent yet invisible presence in everyday life, could only be hinted at and vaguely sensed and which ultimately belonged to something Weber called *meaningless infinity*. Meaningless infinity refers to the idea that the world does not naturally offer itself to human comprehension, that it’s intrinsically unreadable and that we have to convert its inarticulation into meaningful signs and symbols. Organised religions were among the first social institutions to do this. In our own time, universities perform a similar role by converting the vague, fluid and even hyperactive mass world into rational and comprehensible messages. From this perspective, social institutions appear as devices for translating the infinite into the finite. Sociology itself is such a device, as Weber recognised. But, for Weber, every finite statement was haunted by a silent, invisible presence that reflected the unsayable of the infinite. Rational (and rationalised) accounts of social life always suggested and alluded to an unreachable infinite space that still evokes in us a deep desire to transcend the knowable and sayable of the here-and-now finite world of the everyday.

All this is a way of backgrounding my own general approach to the social and cultural issues I write about. The specific or finite is essentially a partial and transient makeover – what Weber called a convenient fiction – of the generic or infinite. To exclude the generic is to cultivate a space of academic specialisation where ideas and thoughts are reduced to comforting packages that give the illusion of providing neat, authoritative answers to questions of social understanding. Specialisation in this context means that

specialist communities construct their own rules for thinking, their own vocabularies and their own sense of what's important. As a member of such a specialisation, one becomes disciplined by the discipline rather than by the specific-generic nature of the question being addressed. One consequence of such specialisation is the exclusion of other intellectual approaches that address similar issues. Another consequence is the illusion of intellectual mastery, that as a specialist who uses a specific conceptual methodology and vocabulary, one's controlling a specific way of thinking and a specific language seduces one into the delusion of authoritative and authorial knowing. This leads to a comforting certitude which might almost be said to be the main motive for this approach to the production of knowledge.

What motivates my approach is less the search for answers and more the cultivation of searching as a process of continuous questioning; even answers must lead to more questions. Questioning becomes a form of mental *questing*. And this, for me, necessarily involves the transgression not only of the conventional academic categories but also of the specialised thought styles they impose. In other words, it means that I try to relate the specific to a wider generic context. The specific not only has to be shown to be a partial, transient expression of this wider generic space but the peculiar nature of their interaction has also to be explored. So that the cross-disciplinary and diverse character of my work that you mention I would see as a strategy of reasoned transgression, of breaking down the very barriers of institutionalised thought production in order to reveal the devious and creative cross-currents that animate the rude, untamed and excessive energies that lie beneath the rational glosses produced by the academic disciplines. The development of modern knowledge has quietly edged out the vague and excessive powers we associate with the generic and irrational. Even Freud's treatment of the unconscious – a version of meaningless infinity – has been critiqued for its institutional programming and censoring of forces that instinctively resist such meaningful ordering. Art and literature are perhaps the only remaining fields of cultural expression which address the question of the nature of the specific-generic, rational-irrational interaction but even these fields are subjected to the professional programming of the academic disciplines.

To be cross-disciplinary and diverse, as you put it, in one's way of thinking is to recognise the cross-current and essentially mixed – even mixed-up – character of social existence. It is also to recognise that the academic disciplines censor the complexity within this aboriginal mix in their programme of consumable knowledge production. In a recent essay on culture as symbolic production¹, I have used the image of the newspaper crossword to represent the complex interactive nature at the heart of all social relationships and communication. The crossword tells us that the ordinary, everyday words and ideas we use derive from a primitive, degenerate base where they mix with and cross each other in a process of dynamic interaction which defies rational specification. The crossword thus hints at the heart of darkness at the core of human knowledge and experience; it reminds us of Weber's meaningless infinity and Freud's unconscious, both of which resist being placed in logical categories and ready-made

1 Robert Cooper, 2001, 'A Matter of Culture', *Cultural Values*, 5(2): 163-197.

systems of knowledge. The crossword also suggests that the knowledge and information we produce in order to make a reason-able world has to be extracted from a primal, degenerate mix of matter and while this primal mix has to be repressed by the formalisations of the conscious mind, it is still always with us, haunting us with its ghost-like presence, gnawing away at all our attempts to be rational. Yet the interaction between the irrational primal mix and the convenient fictions of rational practice constitutes a creative source – perhaps *the* source – for all aspects of social and cultural life. Human communication is itself founded on this interaction, including as it does the experience of *community* as an aboriginal togetherness from which all our connections – with each other, with language, with the objects and technologies of the world – derive. Hence the importance of including the transgressive with its *crossings* and its *double-crossings*, with its diversities as lateral expressions or di-versions of the clear and rational.

As we've already noted, art and literature are perhaps the only remaining fields of cultural expression that begin to do justice to the specific-generic, rational-irrational interaction. The art theorist Anton Ehrenzweig² has drawn out some of the main implications of creative thinking in art and music for the more general task of how we perceive and experience ourselves in the world. His ideas help us to get nearer to the problem of cross-thinking in the social sciences and, incidentally, to the methodological questions posed by Max Weber. Ehrenzweig expresses the specific-generic question in terms of *differentiation* and *undifferentiation*. Differentiation sees the world in terms of bounded, separate and static structures whereas undifferentiation sees it as a wider dynamic field in which structures lose their distinct, separate features and merge into a more diffused field of 'blurred plasticity'. Where differentiation has a narrow focus on specific forms and events, undifferentiation provides a more mobile and more comprehensive way of approaching the dynamic and interactive reality of life. Instead of the precise, focused attention of differentiation, Ehrenzweig shows us what he calls the 'scattered attention' of undifferentiation through which we see the world as a flow of transient, incomplete and often vague impressions. Undifferentiation and scattered attention offer themselves as strategies for bridging what Weber sensed as the undivided wholeness between social and cultural products and their origins in meaningless infinity. The more specialised strategies and vocabularies of the modern academic disciplines emphasise differentiation and focused attention at the expense of the more open, more mobile – and Ehrenzweig would say more fertile – thinking styles of undifferentiation.

For such reasons, I favour a generic way of thinking which calls upon a range of ideas and subject areas. The generic meaning of 'diverse' refers to the scattered attention and blurred plasticity that mark all our relations with the world. While within any one essay I may draw on themes and writings from philosophy, art or literature, my purpose is to show that these so-called specialised academic fields derive from a more aboriginal source which suggests, despite their different languages and thinking strategies, they are more like kaleidoscopic and variable expressions of an implicit power that, like the

2 Anton Ehrenzweig, 1967, *The Hidden Order of Art*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.

crossword's heart of darkness, ultimately resists all our attempts to capture it in rational discourse. This is how I approach the concept of *information* which the globalisation of information technology has made into a common and pervasive commodity of our everyday existences. We now – and perhaps *only* – understand information as the answer to a specific question. It's the answer rather than the question or questioning that gets the emphasis. But information has also to be understood in a generic – even irrational – way. Its pre-modern meaning emphasised its origins in shapeless, formless matter. Any specific form of information is simply a transient and partial expression of this infinite and meaningless origin. Put another way, any specific form of information is already inhabited and meaningless origin. Put another way, any specific form of information is already inhabited by its *unformation*, its scattered attention and blurred plasticity, its openness to other interpretations, its tendency to resist focused meaning and to be other than it seems.

Let me sum up. The conventional academic disciplines implicitly impose rules of thinking on their professional practitioners. These rules are necessary to give coherence to the discipline and to provide professional identities to these practitioners. A necessary feature of this coherence and identity is a shared way of thinking and language which serves to differentiate the discipline from other academic fields. This means that the main ideas of the discipline tend to serve the requirements of the disciplinary system itself rather than reflect the complex human reality it assumes to address. Again, this was the problem that Weber faced, at times with deep uncertainty and anxiety. One way to gloss the general is to focus one's thinking on *answers* to questions rather than the nature of the questions themselves. My interpretation of diverse, cross-disciplinary thinking – to use the terms of your question – is that it is far less concerned with answers and far more concerned with the process of questioning itself. The act of questioning seeks *beginnings* rather than ends and, as we know, beginnings are always yet-to-be determined states that await some sense of an ending, that suggest, to quote Hans-Georg Gadamer, “a movement that is open at first and not yet fixed but which concretizes itself into a particular orientation with ever-increasing determinateness”. One might say that the conventional academic disciplines favour the translation of rough beginnings into specific, determinate ends. Questioning as questing reverses this process. This importantly means that the accumulation of knowledge is not its goal. Instead, intellectual questing seeks un-knowledge, it is animated by a spirit of *unlearning*, for once it thinks it knows something, it turns this knowledge into yet another question. There is, of course, a long and even ancient tradition to this form of generic thinking – over historic time it has been variously called *learned ignorance* and *negative capability*. Nearer our own time, Max Weber's work testifies to its universal incipience, its immanent power to remind us that rational, systematic knowing is always haunted by an intriguing infinity.

ephemera: Although you have written on the general theme of organisation, you appear not to be specifically interested in organisations as such. Is this a fair way of describing your approach to the general field of organisational analysis?

RC: My earliest interests in the systematization of social production systems, including industry and commerce, developed in the more general context of *social organisation*. This is a term we rarely hear these days but it was a major theoretical concern of earlier

social theorists such as Alvin Gouldner. Whenever Gouldner thought about work systems and organisations, it was always in the wider context of social organisation. In other words, he was less interested in organisations as specific structures and more concerned with work and organisation as general *processes* of society and social organisation. This, too, was my approach to the understanding of work systems in the development of modern organising. I discussed some of Gouldner's ideas in a paper I wrote on the theme of 'Organization/Disorganization',³ which dealt with the mutual relationship between order and disorder in social and institutional life. I drew attention in particular to Gouldner's way of thinking two types of social organisation – the 'rational' and 'natural' models – against the wider social and cultural backgrounds of Classicism and Romanticism, which he saw as two 'deep structures in social science'. The 'rational' model stresses Classic control and sees the world in terms of fixed, definite forms and neat categories of thought; the 'natural' model is nearer the Romantic view of reality as an 'intrinsic vagueness' in which objects and events blend into one another and so lose their specific identities.

Since Gouldner's time, the concept of organisation has lost its more general meaning of social organisation and has been increasingly narrowed down to the specific, instrumental meaning of an industrial or administrative work system. The wider social, cultural and philosophical implications of organisation raised by Gouldner have been almost completely forgotten. No doubt this is largely due to the emerging power of big corporations, especially in the last half-century, which has made the term *management* into a major icon in contemporary public thinking to the extent that it has become almost synonymous with organisation. Corporate power has no doubt also been the force behind the huge development and presence of management as a validated academic subject in the modern university system. What interests me in this context is how concepts can be appropriated and lose their more general and more variable meanings. We saw this earlier when we discussed the older meaning of information and its technologisation and narrowing down in the contemporary world with the universal usage of information technology. I suspect this narrowing down in the way we view our conceptual vocabularies is rather like the process that Weber noted in the tendency of rationality to censor the irrational. In order to understand this rationalisation process with regard to organisation, we need to place it in the wider setting of social organisation just as Gouldner did. Industrial and administrative systems are never simply objectively and ideally rational. An industry, for example, is never just a mechanism for efficient production; it insinuates itself into all aspects of social and cultural life. So much so that the idea of a specific production system has to give way to Gouldner's observation that all systems, however seemingly formal and rational, blend into each other and thus lose their specific identities. We see this all around us in our daily lives. The industrial product is also a social product in that we eat it, we wear it, we speak it; it enters our minds and bodies in such a way as to constitute us as a corporate body.

3 Robert Cooper, 1986, 'Organization/Disorganization', *Social Science Information*, 25(2): 299-335.

Richard Poirier⁴ has used the term *corporate humanity* to describe the modern social world. By this he means that institutional products of every kind have come to dominate our individual existences. It requires a very special effort ‘to be yourself’ when you are constantly defined through the corporate images of television and the mass media, the products on the supermarket shelves, the commercial logos, pop music, cinema, as well as the institutionalised messages sent out by art galleries and museums, schools and universities. The products of these corporate sources diffuse into the common culture and provide the conceptual and verbal vocabularies for much of our thought and experience. The term *corporate* was originally a way of expressing the idea of social organisation since it imaged the human community as a *social body*. Included in this idea of the social body was the recognition that it was a collection of physical bodies which related to each other and their environments through their various *organs*. In this very basic sense, corporateness leads us back to an archaeology of social organisation through the concept of the collective human body with its various sensory organs that help it make sense of its world. The modern corporation is a development of this primitive idea, especially in its ceaseless production of objects, images and expressions that our sensory organs consume in the ceaseless transmission of the noise and chatter of the hyperactive modern world. Corporate products thus circulate as mental and linguistic scraps and fragments that enable us to express and transmit ourselves through such physical organs as brain, sight and vocal apparatus. This view of social organisation also reminds us that corporate production doesn’t stop at the boundaries of the corporation – the principle of diffusion and loss of object identity I mentioned earlier means that we as individuals also become raw material in the corporate production process. At this point, everything blends together in a dynamic mass mix and it becomes difficult, and perhaps impossible, to separate one thing from another. Like Weber’s convenient fictions, whatever terms and images we extract and isolate from this moving mass are no more than transitory stopping places, transient forms which ultimately have to return to their aboriginal sources.

Social organisation in this complex, mobile sense can only be approached through the indirect methods of scattered attention and blurred plasticity discussed by Ehrenzweig in the contexts of art theory and the Freudian unconscious. Every specific structure we posit in the social sciences is subject to this generic displacement, and this reminds us yet again that it is not so much the actual contents of the human world we are trying to capture and represent but the very movements of our thought processes. The idea of a specific organisation or institution is no more than a positioning strategy that we use to locate the slippery contents of our conceptual mindscapes. Seen against the complex, mobile mix of social reality, the image of a specific organisation or even a human individual is no more than a provisional placement or transient impression. We come back to the powerful model of the human world that the crossword provides in which individual meanings seem to emerge out of an aboriginal source of dynamic displacement and degeneration. It’s this dynamic displacement and degeneration that, for me, especially characterises social organisation as *common* culture. I don’t mean

4 Richard Poirier, 1971, *The Performing Self*. New York: Oxford University Press.

common in the sense of vulgar or low quality but in the sense of *community* where we find Ehrenzweig's idea of undifferentiation at its most basic – no differences, only sameness. It's this sense of community applied to social understanding and self-reflection that we see in art and literature and which makes them into forms of social analysis that creatively complement the academic social sciences. Pop Art, for example, has been recognised not just as a vivid expression of common culture in the modern industrial world but also as a revealing intellectual commentary on its intrinsic tendency to merge everything together in a continuous movement of mass dedifferentiation. In this sense, Pop Art reveals social organisation as the crossword of community, especially in its portrayal of the blurred plasticity and ephemerality of modern life where things come and go in a continuous stream of experience in which the specificity of forms gives way to a diffused sensing of impressions. As the art theorist John Russell points out, Pop Art drew our attention to the productive profusion and confusion of modern society; it reminded us of the necessarily mutual definition between positive and negative, that at the heart of reality there was no possibility of choice, no yes or no, no either-or, just purely degenerate criss-crossings. Differentiation took second place to undifferentiation, and there were thus no ultimate distinctions between high and low culture. The taken-for-granted differences of everyday life receded into a general perception of vagueness which, for Russell, is exemplified by Andy Warhol's painting of an early designed Coca-Cola bottle. At one level, a painting of a simple coke bottle seems so ordinary, so familiar, even trivial, but when we look at Warhol's picture long and hard enough, it loses the temporal identity it had as the representation of a 1950s consumer product and takes on the appearance of an abstract and even degenerate form. Like the crossword and the complex, mobile profusion of mass society, Pop Art moves us back to a stage in human understanding where knowledge becomes un-knowledge, where the framing and forming of taken-for-granted reality has yet to take place, where the tracing of shapes and boundaries are still dubious and open to chance. Pop Art also announces itself as part of this unlearning process when it implicitly says it goes beyond the canons of institutionalised art in order to approach the fundamental community of common culture. It doesn't know if it's an artistic creation or an industrial product, preferring perhaps not to ask the question in terms of such disciplinary divisions and leaving it as a version of scattered attention.

When we think of organisations and institutions in the larger context of social organisation, it seems to me that we have to think them differently from the conventional view that they are commercial and administrative structures directed by specific goals. The bigger picture shows them to be strategies for ordering disorder, for making sense out of the senseless, and for providing a language of images and mental maps for dealing with the meaningless infinity that Weber saw as a prime motivator in human society. It's in this sense that I have preferred to call the different systems of social organisation – from factories to supermarkets, universities to professional disciplines, newspapers to television companies, hospitals to churches – *human production systems* whose general purpose is to recreate and reproduce meaningful categories and narratives of thought out of the blizzard of noise and mutterings at the degenerate core of human community. In this context, *production* is not merely the provision of functional goods and services, for the term itself is subject to the condensation or degenerate recession endemic to all social organisation: *production* is also *prediction* in the sense of laying out meaningful cultural codes to shape ourselves

in time; it is also *protection* in the sense of shielding ourselves from the vagueness and irrationality that shadows all human sense-making in its inveterate tendency to condense into the unreadable density of its aboriginal sources. Social organisation is thus not to be seen as a static structure to be captured in the interests of academic explanation; it's much more like a frenetic but life-creating contention between the generic forces of organisation and disorganisation.

ephemera: Your comments on going beyond institutional boundaries remind us of your early paper on 'The Open Field'⁵. Was that essay a sort of philosophical statement for you later work?

RC: The thoughts and feelings I explored in 'The Open Field' essay were the result of a personal reevaluation of my academic knowledge of social science and my attempts in the late 1960s and early 1970s to apply some of this knowledge to practical problems in industry and urban communities. The essay also directly reflected some of the main critical social ideas that emerged during the famous May 1968 political protests in France. This was a period of intense social turmoil which at times generated extreme emotional and conceptual reactions to the political and ethical aspects of capitalism at that time. Issues of people power were raised against the developing powers of political and commercial systems. The essay looked at certain aspects of people power from an experiential point of view – how this power might be thought about through the works and writings of philosophers, social theorists, poets, artists, mathematicians and others who had directly addressed questions of the personal implications of freedom, authentic experience and creative possibilities. It was also a reaction against what I saw as the routinisation of human life as depicted in the academic social sciences. This necessarily meant that any sense of people desiring more than the routine and ordinary was played down and even neglected; any human wish to transcend the pervasive, ready-made programmes of work and leisure provided by corporate systems was viewed as abnormal by the increasingly normalised thought systems of organised life, including those of the academic disciplines. My essay was a heartfelt attempt to call attention to the need to see human life in bigger terms than those laid down by the corporate mentality, to think life not merely as a forever open and unfinished process but also to stress what I saw as an innate human compulsion to seek the open and unknown, the vague and indeterminate.

Instead of the roles imposed on us by corporate thinking, I was also asking how it might be possible for individuals to create and recreate themselves. Instead of the determinate world laid out for us by corporate society, I asked myself what were the conditions necessary for thinking and feeling one's life as an open field of *rough beginnings* where *learned ignorance* became more important than the limiting corporate 'ignorance' that patterned our existences. The general theme of the essay I have continued to explore in various ways in more recent work. The way I interpret information, for example, is inspired by an open field approach in which questions and not answers are the driving force of human action. The way I transgress conventional boundaries of thought and

5 Robert Cooper, 1976, 'The Open Field', *Human Relations*, 29(11): 999-1017.

mix together approaches from social theory, art and literature in order to reveal the infinite complexity of any theme I might address is another example of the open field approach. And, more generally, this is how I think human and social phenomena – as a dynamically generic, indeterminate mix that requires an open and mobile intelligence in order to do justice to that strange commerce between what I called in my essay “the pristine continuity of form-not-yet-realised” and the finished, specific forms that make up our daily lives and which we take so much for granted.

‘The Open Field’ was just as much a plea for a return to the beginnings of forms-not-yet-realised as it was an attempt to think through the general question of open beginnings. It essentially asked how it was possible for people to live their lives more self-creatively and less through the packaged and commodified end-products of the corporate system. The literary theorist Richard Poirier addresses the same theme in his idea of ‘the performing self’ which examines the conditions under which the self performs itself rather than being performed by corporate structures. Through television images, public advertising, manufactured pop music, supermarket products, our lives become more like responses to the ‘implantations in our heads’ placed there by corporate humanity. Instead of reacting mechanically to this regime of corporate signals, the ‘performing self’ sees them as raw material or rough beginnings for creative play. Poirier analyses the later work of the Beatles to exemplify this translation of corporate products as specific signals into a generic medley of images, voices, sounds, etc., in which there are no identifiable subjectivities, no recognisable authors or sources, but simply the anonymous media through which we live. This anonymous media becomes an open field of creative possibilities through which the later Beatles creatively found themselves. Poirier discusses *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* as an example of the Beatles’ creative effort to go beyond themselves by *alluding* – that is, not directly expressing or representing – to a world they sensed but did not completely grasp, to a world of half-forms and blurred bits of old Beatles’ hits, all came together in a kind of common generic culture to create what Poirier calls a ‘kaleidoscopic effect’ which infused “the imagination of the living with the possibilities of other ways of living, of extraordinary existences, of something beyond ‘a day in the life’”.

The openness of the field of human experience now extends to include all that which lies beyond the ordinary, the routinised and rationalised, beyond the familiar and known and even the knowable. At its most adventurous and demanding, the open field seeks that which exceeds explanation, for what can be *explained* or laid out on a *plane* suffers from the *plainness* of the ordinary. It’s this understanding of the open that Philip Fisher examines in his provocative essay on *Wonder, the Rainbow, and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences* in which he dramatizes for us the nature of undifferentiation, rough beginnings and aboriginal sources through the experience of wonder. Wonder, for Fisher, is the exact opposite of Max Weber’s account of modern rationality and organisation as the de-magicification or disenchantment of the world. Rationality and formal organisation fill the world with order and instrumental purpose, leaving little room for the magnificence of wonder and aesthetic surprise. Re-enchantment begins with the substitution of the open field for the closed field of rational explanation and its pursuit of a world where answers reign supreme and every big question has disappeared. Wonder is a basic human response to the open nature of experience but this aspect of experience is concealed from us by the closed nature of everyday, practical

consciousness. Wonder is a sudden, lateral intrusion into this closed consciousness; it reveals what Fisher calls ‘the deep interconnections of things’ which we have mostly forgotten, and where ‘the play of thought’ (as opposed to the structure of knowledge) opens to us the “remarkable cluster of submerged and tangential energies” that lie (usually hidden) within the most ordinary, taken-for-granted experiences. Rare experiences are the sources of wonder; aesthetic experiences that hit us unexpectedly, instantaneously and usually for the first time. Wonder, in other words, hits us when we’re not looking. For Fisher, the sight of the rainbow is one source of wonder that enters the lives of most people from time to time and which has the capacity to make them stop in surprise and admiration. Because of its power to stimulate a deep aesthetic response, the rainbow has incited a rich range of thoughts and emotions from poets, philosophers and scientists which Fisher discusses in some detail. Fisher reveals the special communal character of these responses inasmuch as they reflect ‘the deep interconnections of things’ and their blurred plasticity. The aesthetic experience of the rainbow thus reminds us of the specific-generic interconnections of the crossword as well as the unexpected and rich interconnections we find in the common cultures of both Pop Art and the words and music of the later Beatles.

My essay was thus a spirited call for us to recognise the significance of vision, imagination and wonder in people’s lives and to include these as central features of social science thinking. It was also a call to extend the conventional categories of thought and vocabulary in social science by being more sensitive to the potential richness and complexity of the ideas and language that reside often unrecognised in our habit of producing formal academic papers that focus on specific statements rather than generic questions, on representing social reality as a system of ready-made, easy-to-read structures. The approach of the open field starts where conventional approaches finish; it opens up issues which normalised, routine thinking glosses over as already known; it sees human life as a complexly mixed and plastic stream of experience that is open to as-yet unnoticed perspectives and lateral ways of thinking. A necessary aspect of this open strategy is the critical questioning of the capacity of the conventional social science disciplines to do justice to what other more exploratory areas of human inquiry such as art, literature and music had long ago revealed as essential forces in social and cultural life.

ephemera: And yet the passionate spirit of ‘The Open Field’ seems so different from of your later work, e.g., ‘Assemblage Notes’⁶. Would you agree?

RC: Although passion, as you call it, was a vital part of the writing of ‘The Open Field’, my main purpose in the essay was to draw attention to neglected possibilities in the academic institution of social science and to plead for a more cross-disciplinary and hence more creative and more fluid approach to its subject matter. While this more open approach assumed that feeling was a necessary component of all sensitive conceptual analysis and understanding, it was more concerned with tracing the main conceptual

6 Robert Cooper, 1998, ‘Assemblage Notes’, in Robert Chia (ed.) *Organized Worlds: Explorations in Technology and Organization with Robert Cooper*. London: Routledge, 108-129.

outlines of the open field and with developing their implications for rethinking the study of social and human experience. One such outline was the viewing of social forms – individuals, groups, institutions, etc., – from a perspective of dynamic movement and transience. Instead of individuals or institutions as bounded, quasi-solid structures, they were to be seen in a much wider and more diverse context which revealed their transience and even their kaleidoscopic potential to be understood from a vast variety of different perspectives. Instead of the rigid definition of a social form, we were challenged to see society as a massive mix of temporary, mobile outlines. Instead of fixed theoretical concepts, we were being asked to substitute *provisional impressions*. An impression had an inbuilt vagueness about it; it was a combination of feeling and mental concept. It was more like Max Weber's *Verstehen*, a way of understanding which combined intuition or gut feeling with reasoned elaboration. We spoke earlier about the *diverse* character of my work. The idea of provisional impression helps us to understand *diversity* from a more 'open' point of view. *Di-verse* literally means divided and multiple versions, and a *di-version* refers to the moving attentions which multiple versions of the same experience impose on us. The multiple and moving attentions of *di-versity* are thus like provisional impressions which come and go with the constant changes in perspective we are all continuously subjected to. And every di-verse impression is also made up of a di-verse mood or feeling.

I'm therefore less interested in passion as such and much more interested in developing, if you like, the fruits of passion. In this programme of development, passion – necessarily perhaps – loses some of its power and gets translated into feeling, into a feel for ideas. The contribution of feeling to perception and understanding is vividly expressed in the personal philosophy of the novelist-poet Thomas Hardy who spoke of images and ideas as 'provisional impressions' which embodied feelings – and sometimes passions – that were less like finished products of intellectual theorising and more like temporary intereffects of the everchanging associations between objects and forms. Hardy called these changing intereffects *seemings* because they were transient effects rather than permanent truths and hence only *seemed* to be. Hardy's linking of feeling and image in *seemings* was his way of emphasizing the significance of the irrational over the rational, especially in the common culture from which he came and which he wrote about. Hardy's *seemings* are a version of Ehrenzweig's scattered attention and blurred plasticity as well as being examples of open-field thinking.

Although at the time of writing 'Assemblage Notes' I wasn't aware of Hardy's philosophy of *seemings*, the theme of that essay is strikingly similar to Hardy's thinking. A central feature of the argument is the definitive role of temporary associations in our making sense of the world. Forms and events emerge out of associations or interactions with other forms and events; the mobile kaleidoscopic mixings and changes that constitute our dynamic associations with the di-verse forms of daily existence are transient creations out of the *seams* that serve both to join and separate individual outlines from the wider irrational and infinite stream of experience. The social and cultural products of corporate society are, therefore, more realistically seen as moving assemblages that only *seem* to be. The assemblage essay does not directly address the theme of feeling as an immanent feature of the common understanding but at various points it explicitly raises the related question of the human body and its various limbs and senses which it reinterprets less as tools of an

autonomous, self-directing organism and more as organs which 'feel' their way in an open field of *seemings*. The essay's extensive play on *seam* and *seem* (and related terms) is also intended to illustrate the idea of provisional impression as *di-version* or the rough feeling of a complex, multiple, interconnected presence that is pre-conceptual, pre-linguistic and thus can't be located in any conscious system of thought. Instead, the unplaceable *seemings* of *seam* and *seem* move *between* conscious locations. We can't say who or what thinks or senses them for they are more like mutable spirits that can never be pinned down. They move between and beyond the locatable points of consciousness that enable us to assert who said what and when they said it. The *seam* itself is an unlocatable origin into which sense recedes and from which sense emerges. The cultural theorist Leo Bersani has described this ontological point of appearance-disappearance as an 'estheticising movement' of primal perception marked by a simultaneous 'coming-into-form' and 'subversion of form'. The term 'aesthetics' in this context takes us back to its original meaning of pre-conscious feeling so that Bersani's insight also recognises the origin of all conscious and rational thought in pre-conscious and irrational feeling. We are reminded yet again of the powerful image of the crossword.

The general theme of the feeling-thought interaction is always at least implicit in my later work but it appears not as emotional statement. Feeling, for me, is a way of approaching the vague intuitions, the passing moods and unconscious desires that 'feel' their way through us and which we later gloss as conscious thoughts for which we are rationally responsible. 'I feel, therefore I think' would be one way of summarising the logic of this approach.

*ephemera: Organized Worlds*⁷ was the title of a recent book edited by Robert Chia that dealt with some aspects of your work on technology and organisation. The title seems to suggest a Heideggerian way of thinking about the relationship between technology and organisation as general strategies for creating the forms of the modern world. Is this an appropriate way of approaching your work? And has Heidegger influenced your thinking?

RC: The expression 'organized worlds' I first used in an unpublished paper I presented at a conference in Lancaster some ten or more years ago. The purpose of that paper was to draw people's attention to the neglected but highly significant theme of *human organising*. Organisation had been reduced, in my view, to a fairly specific functional structure – that of the administrative-economic unit. The wider human context of social organisation had been censored as a marginal irrelevance to the functional concerns of the new corporate society. I was especially interested in looking at organisations and institutions in the context of what I have more recently called *human production systems*. Instead of thinking of organisations as simple providers of goods and services, I saw them as forces that actively constituted and defined the very act of being human, that produced and re-produced the structures and textures of daily existence, that even

7 Robert Chia, ed., 1998, *Organized Worlds: Explorations in Technology and Organization with Robert Cooper*. London: Routledge.

provided the vocabulary and syntax through which we made sense of ourselves and the worlds we lived in. The church had always been a form of human production system, constructing images, ways of speaking, belief systems, moral codes, etc., for the express purpose of making human life humanly meaningful. In our own times, this role has been appropriated by the big – usually commercial – corporations. And a major new meaning has been added to the definition of the human in the new corporate society – the human being is now a *consumer*. These observations were also intended to recontextualise our traditional ways of thinking about people in society, to move beyond sociological concepts such as roles, groups, organisations, and society, and to begin thinking about the human context as a general process of human *being* or *being* human. The key term here is *being* as the *act of being*.

The act of being is a much more fundamental way of approaching the human condition than the sociological study of people in occupational or consumer roles, of cultural values and social hierarchies, of institutional power and corporate control. Despite their importance in understanding the sociology of society and social relations, because these themes are necessarily couched in a societal framework of already-constituted functions, they cannot ask fundamental questions about the nature of being itself. As an example of what I mean here, let's again take the big question of information and our increasing preoccupation with it both in theory and practice. Information is seen as a commodity that is sent round the world at great speed through the globalised information technologies. The world is now not so much a physical territory but a space of virtual networks where information is defined, at a technical level, by the binary digit, and, at a social level, as the transmission of messages. One result of this technologisation has been a narrowing of our former understanding of information to messages sent from one electronic point to another. The big, wide physical world we used to know and imagine has almost disappeared – those faraway places with the strange-sounding names, of the old popular song, no longer call on our imaginations; instead, it's the computer screen and its informational contents that draw us and which engender a state of mind where we seem to be excommunicated from direct sensual contact with the world as a habitat of human possibilities. Without our realising it, we are in danger of becoming technical products of the technology we have produced. The older understanding of information emphasised a non-technologised version of knowledge and experience: information was more like *unformation*, a generic condition of rough beginnings and creative possibilities which remained always open and unfinished, whose unformed vagueness stimulated mind and body to yet further horizons of varied feeling and thought. The technologised definition of information almost pre-defines its human operator as an adjunct to the computer and even as an information-processor. The pre-technologised definition places information in the more basic and wider question of human forms, their nature and origins. Expressed in this way, we can perhaps see that information-unformation is yet another version of the specific-generic relationship we discussed earlier. And with reference to your question, we may note that it's an example of the theme of 'organised worlds' in which corporate society increasingly structures the social body and its modes of being. There are Heideggerian echoes in this theme, as you suggest, but they tend to take second place to the emphasis on the corporate production of the social body as a system of determinate and determinable behaviours. This effectively means that the question of human being remains concealed within the general idea of 'organised worlds'. To begin to unconceal

– and, hopefully, more fully reveal – the being question we need to recognise that the big modern corporate systems create the various *worlds* that constitute the modern experience, so that we're not talking simply about the administrative-economic systems that provide our goods and services. These goods and services are also 'good' to think with and not merely 'good' to consume. They are not merely physical supports for living but increasingly constitute the inner makeup of our lives.

In trying to understand the contribution of the corporate society to the question of modern human being, we have to relax our conventional ways of thinking society as a collection of bounded terms – individuals, groups, institutions – and try to develop an approach that recognises social life as a stream of experience in which the separate terms also join together in a kind of corporate flow. Ehrenzweig's strategies of scattered attention and blurred plasticity are clearly ways of realising this more open and fluid approach. When I spoke earlier about social organisation as a *social body of organs* I had in mind that the concept of *organisation* should itself be included in this definition just as Thomas Hobbes, in his *Leviathan*, saw the social body of society as the living enactment of human limbs and organs. In this context, specific organisations mediate between the wider world and the specific organs of individual bodies. The mass media organisations structure their products for the convenience of the human body: the tabloid newspaper is made to be easily held in the hands and easily read by the eye; television brings the distant world into the visual comfort of our homes; the supermarket is an emporium for the visual promise of taste and digestive satisfactions. In these everyday examples of what I called 'organised worlds', it's *organisations* that *organise* themselves and their products for the *organs* of the social body. And it's in this sense that organisations as human production systems both constitute and maintain *human being*.

Acts of being are more than acts of consumption. They are the basic acts by which we construct and compose our worlds. Before the taken-for-granted meanings and ready-made narratives that routinely guide our everyday actions, something more primal works to convert the meaningless into the humanly meaningful, or what Leo Bersani⁸ has described as a coming-into-form of the formless – that moment in the crossword when the individual ideas and words both emerge out of and merge into a primal recession of sense. That moment is the moment of being which underlies – mostly unrecognised – those secondary actions laid out for us by our social institutions. The term 'organised worlds' refers to this double-levelled movement in which primal acts of being are made over into the secondary products which structure the unquestioned comings-and-goings of our everyday behaviour. Human being in this sense can be viewed as a complex process of making *beings* – secondary products – *present* to the various senses and organs of the human body. Our worlds are structured primitively around this idea. We *handle* problems in general as though with our *hands*. Future time is always *a-head* of us. We measure local space with our *feet*. Presencing is thus the conversion of absent or vaguely sensed possibilities into forms – or 'organised worlds' – that the human body can see, grasp, and manipulate. The daily use of our personal

8 Leo Bersani, 1986, *The Freudian Body*. New York: Columbia University Press.

computers is a significant contemporary example of such presencing which has brought about the conversion of the giant computers of some fifty years ago to the eye-hand convenience of today's laptops.

The idea of 'organised worlds', as I've briefly described the term, is not obviously Heideggerian, although there are superficial connections with certain of Heidegger's ideas. Heidegger's conception of *Being* – the capital letter is important here – refers to a condition which can never be known which is always too much for human knowing, and yet it's invisibly immanent in all we do. Totally negative Being lies like a ghostly background to the everyday things – what Heidegger calls *beings* – we knowingly, routinely and habitually deal with. Being in this ungraspable sense is, for Heidegger, only to be approached through an endless questioning which never provides answers. The strategy of 'organised worlds' is in some respects like this, especially in the idea that modern organising, with its heavy reliance on techno-science, is subject to a continuous reaching out beyond itself to an unrealised set of possibilities. Other thinkers have made the point. Georges Bataille has also thought of being as a negative condition, subject to what he calls *a principle of insufficiency* in which we as individuals are parts of 'particles' that exist in an 'unstable and tangled' stream of experience which always exceeds common sense and rational thought. Leo Bersani, too, has written of being as that which can never be properly grasped but only alluded to, and, significantly, has argued that art and literature are the only forms of reflective expression that can begin to do justice to this peculiar negative depth of being. It's this sense of there being something much more to the familiar things and structures of daily life that Heidegger senses and wants us to open our imaginations to. Common sense thinks it fully understands the objects it sees and uses but it seems unable to recognise the obvious point that every positive – that is, *positioned* – object or event depends for its existence on a negative background that cannot be made obvious. As an example of being, an organisation is always more than any rational description can provide. We know what an organisation such as the church does, what it means and what its buildings look like – these features we can easily identify and communicate to others, but the spiritual being of the church as expressed in its words, music and symbolism can only be *felt* at the level of the body's organs since this aspect of being far exceeds any external description or form of knowing. The organisation is a being *at the level of the sensing and feeling of its members' organs*. This, again, is one way of looking at the idea of 'organised worlds' where the meaning of 'worlds' suggests an imaginative territory that lies far beyond what we ordinarily consider to be the useful roles of organisations in keeping society going. Your question asks about the relationship between technology and organisation as strategies for creating the forms of modern life. It's in this relationship that we can perhaps begin to sense some of the more dramatic aspects of Heidegger's vision of positive *beings* in the wider context of negative *Being*. The relationship between so-called high technology and corporate organisation promises to be a major area for the future demonstration of the power of Being – though it would perhaps require the imagination of a science-fiction writer to bring this out – when we consider current techno-scientific scenarios for human cloning and holidays in outer space. Though Heidegger himself would probably not see Being in this way – he saw it as an expression of our immediate sensory experience of the world where imagination developed itself through a continuous questioning of those (usually taken-for-granted) things such as language that make up the physical and mental reality of daily living – it

seems to me appropriate to apply his notion of the *call* of Being or the call of the not-yet or yet-to-be to the profound stirrings which move techno-scientific organisation beyond itself.

‘Has my thinking been influenced by Heidegger?’, you ask. Heidegger has been one among many thinkers from whom I’ve drawn inspiration and who have exemplified for me an open-field approach to general human questions about society and culture. Reading Heidegger in the context of these other thinkers – and vice versa – has been especially revealing because of the complexly mobile nature of his thinking. The idea of Being in his work is like a receding horizon: at best, it can be approached but never possessed. Heidegger’s Being, along with other of his thoughts, is best approached in *di-versionary* terms; one senses it only as an ever-changing montage in which each piece or aspect is revealed as a transient reflection of the others. At times, Heidegger’s method of thinking reminds me of Hardy’s *provisional impressions* or *seemings*. In Heidegger’s writings, Being assumes a number of different guises according to his contexts and the overall development of his thought. In his early work, it appeared as Being which we could only approach through its specific expressions of beings in the world; in later work, the Being-beings relationship reappears as the *Earth-World* duality, which I have used in some recent work that looks at the nature of modern mass society.⁹ Earth and World are clearly ways of rethinking ‘organised worlds’ in the wider context of Being. Earth is the unlocatable, forever mutable matter from which World has to realise itself. World gives human meaning and significance to Earth and its obscure and inexhaustible sources. Techno-scientific organisation represents modern World’s attempts to capture the continuous recession and dissolution of sense that characterises Earth. Yet again we meet the model offered by the crossword. A further aspect of Heidegger’s thinking is indirectly reflected in Max Weber’s thoughts on the methodology of sociology and especially in his reservations about the supposed rationality of sociology when questioned by concepts such as convenient fictions and meaningless infinity. Heidegger’s Being can be seen as another version of Weber’s meaningless infinity just as convenient fictions may be viewed as versions of Heidegger’s beings. In a different and non-Heideggerian context, Richard Poirier’s analyses and insights into ‘the performing self’ help us to approach Heidegger’s ideas of *authentic* and *inauthentic being*. By ‘performance’, Poirier means creative self-questioning, self-discovery and self-forming in contrast to the corporate shaping imposed on the social mass by the institutions of corporate society. Poirier’s analyses and illustrations of ‘performance’ help us to understand Heidegger’s concept of authentic being as a continuous questioning of the state of being human, of being creatively and critically sensitive to the intrinsic strangeness that lies hidden within the acts of everyday living, in contrast to inauthentic being which simply accepts and acts out the automatic instructions of the anonymous They of the social mass, a version of what Poirier has called ‘corporate humanity’. Heidegger’s Being can also be elaborated through Philip Fisher’s work on wonder and rare experiences where ‘the play of thought’ reveals ‘the deep interconnections of things’ and the ‘remarkable cluster of

9 Robert Cooper, 2001, ‘Interpreting Mass: Collection/Dispersion’, in Nick Lee and Rolland Munro (eds.) *The Consumption of Mass*. Oxford: Blackwell/Sociological Review Monographs.

submerged and tangential energies' that shadow even the most mundane of human expressions. These different examples merely indicate how I use the ideas and approaches of various thinkers, including Heidegger. They illustrate the nature of the cross-disciplinary and diverse strategies we discussed earlier as well revealing the cross-fertilising and di-versionsary potential of Heidegger's way of thinking.

ephemera: A persistent theme of your work seems to be about going beyond the self, beyond the anthropomorphism of the subject. In this attempt to decentre the subject, how and where do you see the role and nature of the so-called 'subject'?

RC: When I stop to observe and think about the everyday actions of individuals in society, I'm struck by one major impression: that we are essentially transmitters of messages, that we are defined by acts of sending and receiving signs, signals and symbols. Social life is a dynamic stream of communication in which we as individuals are forever caught up and moved along. It's as if the signs and symbols of the messages use us as material means for their own movement rather than us using them to communicate our thoughts and feelings to each other. This seems to be what Georges Bataille had in mind when he noted that human society was a mobile 'labyrinth' of communication through which individuals had to find themselves as well as find their ways: "I am and you are, in the vast flow of things, only a stopping-point favouring a resurgence". In this context, the concept of the individual self or subject is better understood as a secondary product of this primary and autonomous stream of transmission.

Since we're so used to thinking of ourselves as reasonable and responsible human agents with a natural capacity to think and speak for ourselves, to have our own feelings which we can communicate to others, and to rationalise ourselves collectively as the source of what we still sometimes call human civilisation, the suggestion that something other than ourselves courses through all aspects of human living seems almost chillingly gothic. And yet the history of human reflection from ancient religions to psychoanalysis tells us that we were never completely ourselves but were always haunted by unknown forces that we tried to mollify by re-presenting them as extensions of ourselves. Within this history, the idea of the rational subject begins to look like a defensive construction and a denial that we are other than ourselves.

Faced with this primal unknown, this autonomous 'vast flow of things', we have to humanise it, convert it into a language we can understand and, hopefully, control. All this necessarily involves the way we think about ourselves as subjects and agents in the wider scheme of things. In short, we convert the unknown into the known by *mapping* ourselves and our contexts in space and time. The mapping of the self is essentially a question of *locating* or *positioning* itself in these everchanging contexts. It rests on a series of basic questions as to *who*, *what*, *where*, *when* (and often *why*). These are the techniques we use to sort out the rough beginnings and aboriginal sources of human being. The example of the newborn baby well illustrates this initiatory process of human mapping. Prior to the long programme of humanisation transmitted initially through its parents, the newborn has no conscious knowledge of what it is to be a self. It is *told* what and who it is as the first locations of its human identity. In other words, it is *positioned* as to age, gender, nationality, class, etc., so that it begins to know itself

through a developing series of social and cultural placings which not only give it a sense of identity but instruct it in how to *behave* that identity in travelling its social map. But since the sense of self comes from the parents and since the parents themselves were given their 'selves' in the same way, we are left with the strange suggestion that the force driving the human mapping process seems unlocatable and nowhere in particular. We are even led to ask who or what ultimate power speaks and thinks these strategies of self-mapping. Is it us as individual subjects who speak and think or is it something beyond us that speaks and thinks through us. Difficult questions – perhaps impossible to answer. But they do at least raise the bigger question about the nature of the human self or subject: can we really know it, can we really know ourselves or are we simply temporary stopping-points in the wider, unmappable flow of things, as Bataille suggests?

We can perhaps suggest that these rough speculations enable us to rethink the sometimes oversimplified view of the human subject as over-individualised, autonomous and self-contained. When we think of the subject or self as the result of a locating process, we taken on a much looser understanding of it. We see it less as a known, bounded structure and more as a continuous searching to know and define the subject. This slant on the subject clearly admits the necessary role of the unknown and indefinite in its constitution. It suggests that the subject or self is permanently *incomplete* and that it is precisely this sense of incompleteness that motivates the very idea of the subject as a term forever in search of itself. The human body and its organs can be seen in the same way. The hands, for example, seem made to create flexible spaces, to reach out and bring the far near, and the manipulative dexterity of the fingers in particular seem to call for a variety of tools and objects to extend their dexterity even further. Here again we begin to see the subject less as an independent, rational mind-body entity and more as a temporary stopping-place or transient marker which continuously defers itself, which recognises that its sense-making – including the making sense of itself – is the radically problematic product of something that refuses to be made transparent to rational understanding. At best, sense is di-versional, multiple, mobile and intrinsically 'unreadable'.

For you and I as so-called human subjects, all this means that experience of the world cannot be reduced to packages of knowledge or disciplines that can be used to delude ourselves that we truly know and understand things, that we can locate the unlocatable, which includes the locating of ourselves as definable subjects. The incomplete self, the subject as temporary stopping-place, now begins to see itself as a moving part of an open field of eroticised, auraticised and even erraticised possibilities.

ephemera: In talking about the self in this way, we are led to another aspect of your work – the recognition that so-called positive forms such as the self necessarily depend upon the 'existence' of negative forms such as the *un* or negative Other. Could you elaborate on this?

RC: The idea of the negative has a long and honourable tradition in human thinking, as Robert Kaplan's recent book, *The Nothing That Is*, so beautifully reminds us. Kaplan's title is significant in that it also reminds us that nothingness doesn't mean a condition of non-existence; rather, it is a quality or power which is always with us, always co-present

with the somethingness which we normally consider to constitute the physical reality of our existence. To do justice to the negative, we have to think more subtly and more deviously than when faced with the already-constituted, taken-for-granted facts of the positive somethings that surround us. This involves a radical loosening up of the oversimplified interpretation that the negative is what opposes the positive, that it's simply that which does not exist.

Dictionary definitions of the negative are not in themselves overly helpful here. Negation is usually said to be the absence of the positive, and its verbal form, to negate, is said to mean non-existence or the denial of something. More supple definitions are sometimes offered which suggest that negation can also mean a failure to affirm or a neutralising of the positive. We begin to suspect that negation is a necessary and intrinsic element in every act of positive thinking since to be positive also means to affirm by *denying* the negative. To be positive is to assert form, to fix it so that it has clear, definite and stable meaning. To negate, in contrast, is the resistance to the fixity of positive meaning and form; and, importantly, it also implies the dissolution of meaning and form. Clearly, the positive needs the creative antagonism of the negative in order to be positive; and vice versa. Where the negative disfirm and dissolves, the positive confirms and solves. What the positive does, the negative *undoes*. All this helps us to see the negative as a necessary and constructive force in the general creation of reliable and certain structures. The negative may be difficult to define because of its intrinsic resistance to clear definition and positive form but it can never be seen as simple non-existence. Here again we require more open, more subtle ways of approaching the creative deviousness of the negative.

In explaining the nature of the Freudian unconscious, Jacques Lacan has dealt directly with the creative capacity of the negative to initiate the human world. He tackles the negative in the form of the *Un* of Freud's *Unbewusste* or unconscious. The *Un*, for Lacan, is not a condition of inexistence but rather of *lack* or what we earlier called incompleteness. Lack is that which exceeds the differentiation that Ehrenzweig observed to be the main feature of conventional thinking; it's more like his *undifferentiation*, a space of rough, aboriginal beginnings where everything mixes together like the core of the crossword. Because it exceeds the divisions of ordinary, practical life, lack can't be rationally grasped and hence must always be seen as a mistake, di-ersion or, what Lacan calls, a vacillation in sense. It takes us by surprise as in spontaneous jokes or surreal events which, when we try to reduce them to rational sense, lose their power to surprise, to stop us in our tracks, to reveal the immanently irrational. Derrida's 'idea' of *différance* as that which is neither word nor concept but simply a trace of that which can't be properly named is another way of intimating the negative of lack. Lack may retreat under threat from rational differentiation and identification but it is always primordially present. Strangely perhaps, it is differentiation that reveals the *undifferentiation* of lack as well as their necessary interdependence, just as positive and negative echo each other. Lacan underlines the special character of this relationship in the example of sound and silence. A sudden sound such as a cry does not merely stand out against a background of silence but actually makes the silence emerge as silence. In the same way, the positive makes the negative emerge as nothingness, as a creative void which recedes at the approach of common sense. This, too, is the significance of the crossword as a simple model of

human consciousness: the conventional words and meanings of the crossword crisscross each other to reveal the vacillations of sense they secretly contain and which are normally censored. The individual terms reveal their origins in a dense, amorphous core of what Lacan would call the *Un* as lack.

The unreadable excess of lack has to be subjected to a programme of rational differentiation or what I've elsewhere also called the labour of division. This involves the translation of lack as undifferentiated excess into clear, positive divisions through a strategy of *positioning*. Here we see that the positive is an effect of positioning (or positing) objects and events in a space-time grid. To be positively identified and known, each object or event must have a 'positioned address' (to use Leo Bersani's term) in a social-cultural system. To address a position is to dress, arrange or set it in order so that meaningful messages can be directed its way. All human communication turns around the positioned addresses we take on in mapping ourselves. The positioned addresses that constitute us as social beings answer the basic human questions of who, what, where and when. The defining of the positive in this way reminds us that our world is founded on *un*foundation, on negative excess. This means that there is only positioned sense, and no substantive truth. The negative *un* is what mobilises us continuously to tame its irrationality, its exuberant spirit, as well as constantly reminding us that the positivities which secure the human world are in themselves never enough.

ephemera: The question of the negative raises a number of important issues for the way we think about the subject matter of social science. Among these is the question of slowing down when we think and write, of hesitating in the face of complex questions we can't easily answer. All this underlines the significance of the negative as a motivating force in life in general and in intellectual enquiry in particular. How do you see this?

RC: In our general preoccupation with the world as a positive reality we tend to marginalise and even deny the idea of negative forces creatively complementing our mental and physical efforts to construct knowable, stable and usable structures to reassure our existences. It could even be said that the modern invention of busyness is motivated by a deep mass desire to censor any thoughts and suggestions which might threaten this reassuring illusion of life as an exclusively positive experience. It might also be seen as an exaggerated concern with making things present, with grasping presence as opposed to non-presence or absence, which, as I've already suggested, is a major feature of human production systems and 'organised worlds'. Lyotard has addressed this problem as one of 'gaining time'. The mass media in particular focus on the quick transmission of 'messages' which condense brief information content into the shortest possible time slots. All this means that the 'gaining of time' is the loss of time for *reflection*. Reflection requires that 'you don't already know what's happening'; it begins in ignorance and rough beginnings; it explores questions rather than seeks answers. In short, reflection is the patience and slowness of thought as it loses itself in questions of negation. In the contemporary world of fast positivities – from fast food to fast thoughts – reflection as the slow and endless drifting through negation is downgraded to 'a waste of time'.

Your question returns us to our earlier discussion of the role of academic institutions in

the construction and transmission of knowledge and the constraints on reflection they impose. Knowledge begins to look more like information as the answer to a specific question where it's the answer that gets the emphasis rather than the question or the questing. The critical theorist Samuel Weber has examined the distinction between institutionalised knowledge and creative reflection through the writings of the philosopher of science, Gaston Bachelard. The language of the traditional academic sciences – and one could generalise this observation to perhaps most academic disciplines – is *differentiating* and *representational*. It assumes a reality which is already 'out there' for our understanding and analysis, and this reality is seemingly already divided for us into psychology, sociology, philosophy and of course many other disciplinary boxes. Since it's already divided up and defined for us, we can simply go ahead and represent it. Bachelard offers us a vastly different view of the process of human knowing, one which foregrounds *diversity* – what I call *di-version* – as the basis of the knowledge experience. Diversity refers to the ambiguity and intrinsic play of things which underline the undifferentiation and negation within all expressions of positive presence. Positive presences are merely transient and partial perspectives of something that we can never capture in formal knowledge systems. Instead of the differentiating-representational model of knowing which fixes things in categories and definitions, Bachelard argues for a mobile, ever-open view of reality. He sees this latter approach most vividly in modern science where the objects of analysis are marked by uncertainty, duplicity and conflict; the objects of science seem less *objective* than they used to be, almost impossible to pin down. Instead of the traditional object of knowledge, Bachelard posits what he calls the *non-object* which can be seen as a *di-version* of negation's non-presence.

Both Weber and Bersani have investigated the broader implications of these different forms of knowledge and knowing in various professional and academic contexts. Both have analysed Freud's approach to the unconscious – a space of negation or non-presence – as an example of a conflict between the differentiatonal-representational and the undifferentiatonal-nonrepresentational approaches. Both have exposed Freud's desire to project psychoanalysis as institutionalised truth despite the anti-institutional nature of its raw material. When unconscious forces are represented as conscious concepts, when they're made rationally present, then they lose any sense of their aboriginal beginnings, their anti-conceptual roughness. For Freud, this often – though not always – meant that his thinking was so mixed up that his writings seemed completely at odds with what they were trying to say. Bersani has applied the same argument to the academic study of literature which he sees largely as an institutionalised methodology to render the meaningless infinity of negation finitely present and significantly knowable. But, like modern science and psychoanalysis, literature is also pervaded by the *un* of negation – for Bersani, literature is essentially *unlocatable* and to appreciate its ghostlike quality of *unlocatability* we have to *unlearn* those methods which present only locatable presences. Instead of demanding that everything makes only positive sense, that literature is able to reveal the hidden and profound messages within human experience, we are faced with the possibility that negation implies the 'dissolution of sense' and that all our mental graspings are ultimately merely attempts to redeem transient, positive presences from the ungraspable flow of the *unpresent*.

In extending these ideas of presence-nonpresence, locatability-unlocatability, to the

social sciences, we come back to the question of sociology and psychology as institutionalised disciplines which think mainly in terms of the logic of positive presence: social experience is structured around bounded, identifiable, knowable entities that can be directly represented in disciplinary discourse. In introducing the negatives of non-presence and unlocatability into the analysis of social life, we move social science into the more basic question of *being*. As we saw, Heidegger's concepts of Being and being rely explicitly on an unplaceable, unknowable negative space which, despite its ungraspability, infuses and moves every aspect of our lives. Heidegger's beings are the positive instruments and elements through which we live our being but they're never self-sufficient nor self-defining; they point always in the direction of the unknown, the vague and incomplete, or what we earlier called the recession and dissolution of sense. As we saw earlier, the increasing absorption of contemporary society in information as answers to questions excludes being from its practical and positive concerns. But Being is already invisibly present in information as both concept and word: the *un*form and *in*firm of the negative *un*formation make *in*formation an expression of Derrida's notion of *différance* which, as we've seen, is neither word nor concept but merely a trace or hint of the negative beyond that can never be positively positioned. This is the challenge for social science thinking as it recognises itself as a producer and product of being.

ephemera: Deleuze and Guattari¹⁰ describe Kafka's work as a burrow in which there are multiple points of entry and, once you're in the burrow, you find there are so many different ways of approaching the same question. Your work seems to be a burrow of sorts. For those who like some simplicity, is there a way of simplifying the complexity you present?

RC: The metaphor of the burrow can be viewed as another way of expressing the themes of cross-disciplinarity and diversity raised by your first question. The burrow crisscrosses and diversifies in such a way as to suggest a maze or labyrinth in which thought can either lose and get cross with itself or wander and wonder in amazement. Serious thinking requires the burrower to be patient and passive, open to the unanticipated and, hopefully, to do further burrowing. This kind of burrowing was what Foucault expressed in his *This Is Not a Pipe*, which explored the lateral and di-verse character of René Magritte's artwork in such a way as to reveal its negative probings into the unplaceable. The burrow thus became a di-version of negative non-presence. In analysing the non-representational play in Magritte's work, Foucault used the expression 'burrowing words' to indicate the artist's preoccupation with the strange relationship between words and things. Language was not just a tool for expressing ourselves or helping us to cope with the world. As with Heidegger, Magritte saw that language actually constitutes us as human beings. What's more, language has a life of its own; it melds together words and images of objects, so that it's not possible to separate them. The word burrows into the object just as the object burrows into the word. In this process, the burrow buries the conventional distinction between language and its referents. In other words, Magritte and Foucault make us aware that burrowing is

10 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1986) *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

not just a multilateral activity – it works beneath and beyond our conscious awareness, which is why we can say that the *burrow* is where we *bury* things, and where *burrowing* is a form of *burying*. Magritte's approach underlines the intense interdependence between human life and its objects to the extent that an individual life cannot be understood as being separate from the objects that support its existence. The life and the objects *borrow* their existences from each other. It's in this sense that the burrow is another version – a di-version – of community, the common, and communication. For what is common in the most radical sense is that which is shared by everyone and everything and owned by no one in particular.

The crossword is a simplified model of the much more complex argument presented by Magritte and Foucault. The crossings between words and concepts not only highlight their inextricable entanglement of community but also their burrowing-borrowing movement. At the core of the crossword, words and their things recede and even begin to dissolve in a common mass of burrowing, borrowing and burying. The crossword illustrates burrowing-borrowing through *displacement* and *condensation*, which happen to be – though not by chance – the defining features of the Freudian *unconscious*. Displacement refers to the *unlocatability* of terms and hence their continuous interchangeability, while condensation is the intersecting of various terms and their concentration in one common idea. At this point, we begin to see social and cultural life less as a contents list of thought and more as the very movement of thought itself. Where representational thinking presents its objects as finite, finished products for the convenience of our mental consumption, burrowing brings out their partial, lateral and transient character; burrowing shows human being as a process that Bersani has described as “multiple, indeterminate, undecidable, mobile, intervallic”, forever refinding and recreating itself from the *unfoundedness* of non-presence and negation.

So, it's the movement of thought that intrigues me rather than the formal representation of the objects of thought. In the social context, it's the movement of the social mind – not so much society and its institutions – that draws and stimulates me. This necessarily involves the questioning of representation as a taken-for-granted methodology and the rejection of fixed, determinate concepts and definitions through which representation works. Instead, I prefer to think of re-presentation as ongoing movement by which we work and rework ourselves, movement in which we ourselves are more like *seemings* or *traces* or *différences* that appear and disappear in the dynamic burrowings and borrowings of the stream of positive-negative experience. For such reasons, I have to see society and its institutions *in flow*. An organisation, for example, can never be caught in a definition, to repeat a point I made earlier. The noun it represents is more than a convenient fiction. When we burrow into its buried di-versions we can see it as part of the social body whose collective sensory organs work through a reciprocal borrowing between themselves and their objects to originate a corporate society. A constant agitation between presence and non-presence results in an equally agitated movement of the social mind to realise itself as a human production system whose desires must be forever deferrable. In this context, organisation recedes and dissolves into an *erogenous origin of organs of organisation* where *organ*, *origin* and *erogenous* burrow into each other through *unconscious displacement* and *condensation*. At the level of the social body, we have to understand society and social organisation as the *erogenous movement of desire* – individual or mass – towards the continuous letting go

of formalised and formulaic sense and the excited embracing of the lateral and diverse wandering of burrowing-borrowing. This is the only 'place' where we can find our 'performing selves'

ephemera: We've spoken about the interdisciplinary, diverse and even complex approach you take in your analyses of social and cultural themes. We know that more recently you have begun a project that looks at various aspects of modern mass society in contexts such as the new information and communication technologies. Could you tell us something about this project, and how it might connect with the theme of social organisation you raised earlier?

RC: I had been fascinated for some time with the image of society as a social body or corporate human organism. My current project on the nature of mass society stems from this early interest. One of my first problems was how to understand the term *mass* itself, for it seemed to have a range of quite different meanings, seemed to change according to the context it was used in. This itself fascinated me and even suggested that there was something about *mass* that placed it in the category of the negative. I also looked at its early religious meaning mainly because I suspected that its religious context could provide some insight into its relationship with the big question of *human being*. I soon found that the religious significance of *mass* stemmed from its felt sense of vagueness and other-worldliness, the feeling of a mystical presence that attracted exactly because of its power to call us into the beyond. We see this power in the Christian and Buddhist Masses where a felt absence is made present through vague words and unearthly music. At best, the Mass only intimates and suggests, as if to say that what it senses can't be made rational and explicit, can't be spelled out in fully conscious terms. It's this implicit vagueness of Mass that leads to its *tropes* or creative embellishments of its words and music. Troping seemed to indicate that these early conceptions of *mass* recognised that its essential indeterminacy and vagueness was perhaps *the* source of human culture and meaning. Religion seemed to view *mass* as an inarticulate and infinite source of possibilities that had to be expressed through human forms, a creative void that had to be both filled in and filled out. It also suggested that this inarticulate source was *infinite* in a special way – it could never be pinned down, it seemed to evade complete capture, it was deviously mutable like the mythical story of Merlin the magician who, when pursued, kept on changing into different kinds of creatures from a fox to a rabbit, then a bird.

All this made sense for me in terms of similar interpretations of human express from modern science with its emphasis on the uncertain nature of physical matter, through William James's philosophy of pragmatism, to Ehrenzweig's insights into modern art which also revealed the infinite and mutable vagueness at the heart of art. And it provided insights into various aspects of the modern world, including especially its globalisation through electronic information theory viewed information as a process of making a choice from a range of equally probable alternatives. This is the basis of the information *bit* or binary digit. I began to interpret this definition in the wider, non-technical context of *mass* as a kind of primordial source of forms, a primal void from which we created the forms and meanings we put into social circulation. Instead of thinking of information in terms of equally likely possibilities, I saw it as *unformation* or that which preceded any and all kinds of form and meaning. Unformation was like

Merlin the magician – a negative condition you could never find because it had no foundation in the so-called real world. Whatever forms we used to help us communicate and understand the world were simply partial and transient expressions of this always receding source. Early religious conceptions of *mass* and modern information theory were strangely alike inasmuch as they, too, were different ways of reaching out to the inexpressible void of negative *unformation*. And they, too, could only be understood as partial and transient *di-versions* of the ultimately unknowable and unsayable.

This way of looking at mass can be applied to other features that distinguish modern mass society from pre-modern societies. Mass production well illustrates the partial and transient character of mass as a negative origin. Mass production concentrated on the manufacture of parts rather than the whole objects made by the craftsman. Whole products suggest completion, finiteness, whereas parts suggest transition, transience. The motor vehicle leaves the factory as a seemingly complete product but its completeness is secondary to the part-assembly strategy of mass production in general. The finished vehicle is still incomplete – it awaits its human driver who is simply another part in this moving, unfinished assemblage. It's in this sense that parts are 'carriers of 'being'' and wholes 'no more than the provisional array of parts' as Philip Fisher has noted. And it's as if we needed parts to remind us of the significance of the gaps or holes between things that keep us moving mentally and bodily. Parts animate us because they are partial and incomplete; wholeness as completeness is finality, ending, expiry. It's as if the part reminds us of the void of the religious Mass which almost demands to be completed, at least temporarily, as a means of supplementing movement. The Mass gives us the same ontological message as the motor vehicle factory: parts constitute our very being and they make us just as we make them.

Parts underline the intervals between things and it's the intervals that keep us going in a continuous movement of *transmission*. This is the point that the philosopher Gianni Vattimo makes about modern mass society – there's nothing stable about it, it's just endless, unremitting movement. Vattimo calls it the *society of generalised communication* where the practical presences of things are secondary to the intervals between them. In other words, it's the *displacement of presence* that Vattimo's analysis reveals. From the transient consumables of the supermarket to the evanescent images of the television, the products of mass society seem no more than vehicles for communicating absence or non-presence. The mass media are motivated by more than the wish to inform us of the news of the world – they will also create news when it does not exist. This development seems to be directly tied in to my previous point about mass production revealing a world of moving parts rather than static wholes. In the 1920s the telephoto lens radically changed the nature of journalism; it enabled the photojournalist to photograph hitherto unreported aspects of public life: from a safe distance, he could capture a public figure in an unguarded moment of sexual dalliance or inebriation. Later developments in phototechnology of provocation showed the dark and devious side of institutionalised public life in 1950s Italy. Here again we see the overturning of finished, stable, permanent forms through the introduction of technologies which promote the idea of moving parts and through them the multiple, undecidable, mobile and indeterminate, all features intrinsic to the old religious interpretation of mass.

Transmission in this sense is not the conventional idea of sending and receiving messages and signals. It draws attention to a much neglected aspect of human communication we've already mentioned – namely, the hidden or negative presence of unlocatability, undifferentiation or lack in all our conscious forms. As we noted, *information* is already haunted by *unformation*. Derrida's *différance* as that which is neither a word nor a concept summarizes the point I wish to make – that form is not only made out of non-form but that form always carries within itself the inclination to break up, to dissolve into the formless. All this means that transmission not only carries meaningful messages but it also carries the potential negation of these messages. This, again, is the significance of the crossword which, like the religious Mass, tropes its inarticulate, infinite core of possibilities which still inhabit the quick and practical glossings we give to our everyday communications. Transmission in this fundamental sense is the crossing (the *trans*) of that which must necessarily be left out or missed (the mission and *missive* of *mass*) in any conscious attempt to communicate and this must include the communication of the infinite and negative. Transmission, therefore, is more like what Bersani has called the 'crossing of intervals' or negative gaps than it is the communication of ordinary sense.

Mass and transmission, in the ways I have sketched here, take us back to our earlier discussion of Max Weber's view of the social as the presence of convenient fictions grounded in the non-presence of meaningless infinity. Presence and absence, positive and negative, are active co-ingredients of social mass as it transmits itself through a field characterised increasingly by blurred plasticity and scattered attention. Social organisation is perhaps today to be better understood in this context of the organisation of social mass where the significant action has far less to do with self-contained, bounded, completed individuals and their objects and much more to do with the movement of parts as carriers of being which itself has to be understood as partial, transient, forever incomplete.

discussion

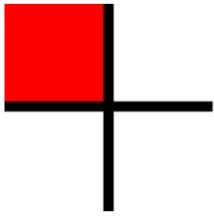
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Processing The Body: A Comment on Cooper*

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abstract

This paper seeks to give a summary of Robert Cooper's process perspective by investigating two of his most significant articles: 'The Open Field' and 'Organization/Disorganization'. The paper, which was motivated by a more general attempt to bring the body into organization theory, ends by asking where the body is in Cooper's process perspective.

As social scientists, we are probably less attentive than we should be to the wavering balance between structure and process in understanding human action. (Robert Cooper, 1976: 999)

[...] we map the world in terms of significant differences, selecting certain features and excluding others. (Robert Cooper, 1990: 169)

In philosophy, the greatest offence is to accuse one's colleague of not doing philosophy. In organization theory, the same rule does not seem to apply. Indeed, someone like Robert Cooper might feel more offended by attempts to label him an organization theorist than by people who refuse to accept his texts as works of organization theory. The fact of the matter is that Cooper, whose graduate training was in the borderline discipline of social psychology, much prefers to be seen as a social theorist, or even better, as a social philosopher.

In this paper, I dare not accuse Cooper of not doing philosophy, or social philosophy for that matter. But I shall, despite Cooper's dissatisfaction with the narrow research agenda of *mainstream* organization theory, treat his work as an exercise in organization theory. After all, it is in this discipline that Cooper finds the vast majority of his readership and

* I would like to thank the editors for being patient with me and for giving incisive and intelligent comments on an earlier draft. Unfortunately, I was unable to take all of them on board. I would also like to thank Mr Magnus Aronsson, Dr Chris Steyaert and the staff at the Entrepreneurship and Small Business Research Institute (ESBRI) in Stockholm, Sweden for providing me with office space, administrative facilities and a friendly work environment during the Autumn of 2001, thus making it possible for me to finalize the paper for publication.

it is to this discipline that his contribution has been most significant. Moreover, during the last few years organization theory and its related fields have experienced a growing interest in his work. In November 1997, Eric Lefebvre organized an international conference entitled 'Uncertainty, Knowledge and Skill' at the Limburg University Centre in Belgium dedicated to Cooper. The following year, Robert Chia (1998a, 1998b), a former student of Cooper's, edited a two-volume festschrift with articles written in his honour. Contributors to these volumes included, in addition to Chia himself, Jannis Kallinikos, John Law, Rolland Munro, Haridimos Tsoukas and Hugh Willmott. This rather impressive amount of already existing commentary on Cooper does not, however, mean that his work is drained as a topic of investigation. On the contrary, the celebratory feel of previous work suggests that a more critical engagement with his texts is long overdue, and it was this task that I, like the other papers in this edition of *ephemera* dealing with Cooper, initially attempted to embark upon. But given my own respect and admiration for his work, this has not been easy.

Somewhat ironically, the paper is a result of my own ongoing interest in issues of embodiment and my own attempt to bring the body into organization theory. Throughout my doctoral research of the past four years, I have tried to understand how different strands of the field did – or did not at all – deal with the problem of the body and the ability of bodies to disrupt the boundaries of organization. It was with this in mind that I started to investigate Cooper's process perspective and the concept of organization emerging out of it. More specifically, this led me to investigate two of Cooper's most significant articles: 'The Open Field', which was published in *Human Relations* in 1976, and 'Organization/Disorganization', which was first published in *Social Information* in 1986 and republished in Hassard and Pym (eds.) in 1990. Before proceeding, I should point out that my references to 'Organization/Disorganization' are to the 1990 edition, and I should warn the reader that this paper, which seeks to deal systematically with Cooper's argument in both 'The Open Field' and 'Organization/Disorganization', might read more like a summary than a fully fledged critique. Where the body is in Cooper's work is initially an open question to which I shall return in my concluding section.

The Open Field

Though inscribed in a highly gendered and male-centred language,¹ Cooper's paper 'The Open Field' is an unusually creative piece of work. Creativity is not, however, a guarantee for clarity and rigour, and Cooper's argument is, as we shall see, sometimes opaque and under-developed. Perhaps this is the inevitable result of five years of

1 This is obvious in his references to 'man' and 'he', which renders the female subject absent (e.g. Cooper, 1976: 1001; 1005). My own use of the terms 'the human', 's/he' and 'her' do not reflect Cooper's language, but is a minor attempt to de-masculinize Cooper's writing.

thinking during which Cooper enjoyed a Baxi Fellowship at Liverpool University and at the end of which he published 'The Open Field'.²

With 'The Open Field', which is not explicitly concerned with the concept of organization, Cooper not only becomes the first writer within organization theory to think radically differently about human action, but in doing so, he also comes to mark the beginning of a whole new trend in organizational theorizing which is to complement, but more importantly contradict mainstream organization theory. In order to understand what is going on in 'The Open Field', it might help to get an insight into Cooper's own retrospective reflections. Looking back on this article in an interview with Chia and Kallinikos conducted more than twenty years after its publication, Cooper aligns his own project at the time with that of Weber:

The concerns addressed by 'The Open Field' were [...] related, I felt, to Max Weber's critique of the modern world's pre-occupation with rationality and purging of magic from the world' (Cooper in Chia and Kallinikos, 1998: 153).

More generally, what Cooper tried to do with this piece was "to open up social science to neglected and excluded possibilities, to draw attention to its dereliction of intellectual duty, to its lack of vision, to its limiting positivism and its squeamish obeisance to the mundane" (Cooper in Chia and Kallinikos, 1998: 152). Although Cooper's social psychology background is reflected in 'The Open Field', this concern led him to study intellectual developments in the humanities and the natural sciences, including controversial ideas within philosophy, poetry, physics and mathematics.

It is what Cooper calls "the wavering balance between structure and process" that marks the starting point for his analysis of human action in 'The Open Field'. This, he argues, is something that "As social scientists, we are probably less attentive [to] than we should be". Whereas "Structure is the invariant pattern of relationships among functional points in a system, [...] process is the continuous emergence of new elements from those already existing." And as becomes clearer throughout the paper, it is the privileging of structure (*qua* stability) above process (*qua* change) that typically leads social scientists to pay insufficient attention to the balance between the two. The problem according to Cooper is that "Though seemingly in contrast, structure and process complement each other both as concepts and in the real world" (Cooper, 1976: 999).

From this starting point, Cooper proceeds first by pointing to the limitations of structuralist approaches to human action and perspectives showing a structuralist bias in understanding process, and second by developing a more genuinely processual perspective of human action. Dissatisfied with the initially interesting but teleological conceptualization of process in systems theory, Cooper (1976: 1001) decides to break

2 In order to appreciate Cooper's early work, it is also worth noting that he in 1974 published the fairly standard textbook *Job Motivation and Job Design* written in a style and expressing a set of ideas that stand in some contrast to his later publications. Moreover, the kind of ideas that Cooper was engaged with at that time were not exposed (to my knowledge) in any publications prior to 'The Open Field'.

out of “social science proper” in search for “a conceptualization appropriate to the process view of man.” This involves two things. First, adopting the Whiteheadian view that “man and environment [are] mutually immanent in a unitary field.” In other words, recognizing that humans are neither passive reflectors nor dominating actors but a node in a larger network of ‘to-and-fro influences’. And second, adopting Heidegger’s concept of *Dasein*, which implies that the human is ever open and unfinished; as humans we experience ourselves and our world as an ‘open field’. But since concepts pin down and freeze processes, simply defining the open field is insufficient. The really important task is to enact it. In the main part of this paper he is therefore concerned with (i) discussing the conditions of process that enable the open field, and (ii) outlining a methodology for how process can be used on a personal level for the creation of an open field. Cooper identifies five such conditions: *unstructured action*, *chance*, *projectability*, *the situation* and *the abstract field*.

First, Cooper examines *unstructured action* or ‘the primacy of action’, which involves the creation of ‘pure action’, that is the liberation or independence of action from some guiding image or purpose that would normally put certain constraints and requirements upon action. Here, he highlights three ‘mechanisms of change’ through which action intervenes into the social world. These are (i) the open model form of planned change, (ii) crisis, and (iii) rupture. Exemplified by action research and broad-aim programmes in community development, *the open model form of planned change* is a type of change programme that starts from a broad conception of what change is desired and avoids privileging specific strategies and solutions from the outset. *Crisis* is an externally generated experience that “destroys or radically questions” core values in ways that human actors lose control and leaves humans with no ready means of coping. And *rupture*, which Cooper relates to Surrealism³ and the May 1968 French Revolution is “a self-generated break with established structures” whereby the human actor may be liberated from oppressive living and working conditions (Cooper, 1976: 1003). This emphasis on rupture places Cooper in relation to the *coupurism* of twentieth century French philosophy, exemplified in the works of Bachelard (1984, 2000), Canguilhem (1989, 1994) and Foucault (1970, 1972, 1979). But like Canguilhem, whose support towards the events of May 1968 was limited – after all, Canguilhem had worked to consolidate the very institutions under attack (Macey, 1998) – Cooper’s prescription of rupture is in some contrast to his own personal attitude towards May 1968. Having once had to break off a lecture he was invited to give at one of the Parisian academic institutions around 1970, Cooper has not been too comfortable with the activities of student protesters.

Second, Cooper (1976: 1003) discusses the nature and importance of *chance*, i.e. “when the unexpected coincide.” Since it is through chance that human actors start interacting with possibilities, it is chance that augments our capacity for ‘spontaneous growth’.

3 Relating back to my brief point about Cooper’s malestream language, one could dwell on his apparent interest in Surrealism, whose male front figures regarded women primarily as objects of masculine desire or fear (cf. Caws, Kuenzli and Raaberg, 1991). However, given the focal and spatial constraints of this paper, such a discussion would have to be developed elsewhere.

According to Cooper, the experience of chance and the capacity for spontaneous growth can be realized through two strategies: (i) suspended purpose and (ii) induced disorder. *Suspended purpose*, which is a matter of enhancing the mind's awareness of the world, means that the mind must give up its right to control. *Induced disorder* is the way in which the human actor can challenge herself through self-imposed chaos – either by disordering herself or the outside world. This may in turn enable her to enter into another beginning of creative renewal. These are however private acts, and enabling humans to remake themselves, they must be developed into “a principle of social design” if human beings are to remake each other. For Cooper, this is similar to Richard Sennett's (1971) “vision of urban life where the ‘brute chance’ of spontaneous social intrusions becomes a major means of personal and interpersonal growth” (Cooper, 1976: 1005).

Third, Cooper directs his focus on *projectability*, which he defines as (i) “the power of men to project their unconscious forces into the external world”, and (ii) “the power of external forms to draw out and give substance to the unconscious content.” As such, “Projectability is [...] a quality that pervades the total field” (Cooper, 1976: 1005). Cooper establishes the project, or “that which is ‘thrown forward’ to modify the future”, as the instrument for projectability. As a process moves between projection (i.e. the “*coming into being* of [...] inner content”) and construction (i.e. “the *form* taken by the projection in the external world”), the project may either move ‘naturally’ from projection to construction or ‘epigenetically’ from construction to projection. The management of individual products and the relations between individual products are central to the former type because the relations between products and the continuous emergence of new products necessitates an ongoing redefinition of any individual product. The latter type of project, which is “impatient to be realized” (Cooper, 1976: 1006), realizes a form in the outside world before having a content with which to fill that form. Consequently, it is the elaboration and expansion of the project's repertoire of structures that enables it to change. Unfortunately, Cooper does not confirm whether in this context structure is a matter of form or content or both.⁴ However, attacking him for reintroducing a structuralist bias here would be to misunderstand his intentions. As I noted above, Cooper does not want to replace structure with process. In an attempt to move away from the structuralist bias, he shows how structure and process contradict and complement one another. Rather than reaffirming the stability of structure, his emphasis on process in the context of the project undermines any such stability.

Fourth, Cooper examines *the situation*, which is “the immediately perceived field of actualities (objects, events), i.e. the concrete context in which we carry out our lives” (Cooper, 1976: 1006). Concreteness is a key dimension here because the situation “is full of definite objects and events which strike our perception in definite ways” and give us power to act as well as a target at which action can be directed. Further on, since the

4 It seems that structure is initially a matter of form, which in turn writes itself onto the content filling that form. Hence, it could be argued that in spite of the project's ability to expand and elaborate its structures, its content (i.e. what it actually can do) is bound by its outside form. But as we shall see below, Cooper's understanding of form is more radical than that.

situation is a matter of difference and autonomy, it necessitates “a theory of discontinuous and heterogeneous experience” (Cooper, 1976: 1007). It is this that enables us to view as individually active the multiple parts constituting the situation. And it is this that enables us to understand that it is its local and variable nature that makes the situation unique. The situation is about the here-and-now. Avoiding viewing the thing in terms of abstracted images, Cooper insists that situational experience must focus on the things themselves and their interactions. Indeed, the thing must neither be separated from itself nor from activity. This leads Cooper to two conclusions. First, the somewhat confusing point that the situation follows “the logic of discursive action” rather than “the logic of linear structure”, which is his way of saying that “things can and do happen according to their own impulse and action.” Appreciating Cooper’s point about impulsiveness and self-direction, what I find confusing here is simply Cooper’s use of the term ‘*discursive* action’, as there is not necessarily anything about the ‘discursive’ which is nonlinear. If it were, Cooper would have to explain this.⁵ Cooper’s second conclusion is more interesting, however; things are both cause and effect. They both act and are acted upon, and as a result, the human cannot merely be understood as a creative being. Whatever is created by a human being “turns back and creates him” (Cooper, 1976: 1008). This is a particularly interesting point, as it decentres the human subject and undermines the anthropocentrism of conventional social science and philosophy.

Fifth, Cooper discusses what he terms *the abstract field*, or what Whitehead would call an ‘extensive continuum’ and Bergson and Deleuze would refer to as ‘the virtual’. As it stretches beyond the situation, it is through the abstract field that process is given a larger meaning, ‘the many become one’, and the world becomes one big and united cosmic Whole. Relationship is the central dimension here. Relationship as connection is the basis of meaning; relationship is what unites the many into one; and “the combinatorics of relationship” is what enables the many to combine in an infinite number of various ways, thus producing “a unity of difference” (Cooper, 1976: 1008). Moreover, it is through the processual cosmology of the abstract field that the development of individuals is connected to the evolution of the world as a Whole. This world is however both noumenal and phenomenal, both abstract and literal, and Cooper insists that it is only through the latter that the human can grasp the former. That is, the human can only make sense of the noumenal abstract field insofar as s/he is firmly grounded in the phenomenal literal field of spatially and temporally discrete and denotable things and events. This is because the abstract field is a continuity of not-yet-realised forms. But sense-making and the search for facts and reason is not really what is at stake here. First and foremost, what Cooper seeks to show, is that the abstract field enables the human to live amongst uncertainties and in a condition of indeterminacy that expands and diversifies the area in which human action can take place.

5 Moreover, even the emphasis on self-*direction* might undermine the simultaneous emphasis on impulsiveness, and perhaps Cooper’s point could have been more directly made if he stressed a sense of unpredictable *multi-directionality*.

In the final section of this paper, drawing upon ideas from the structuralist anthropologist Gregory Bateson, the American poet Charles Olson and yet again Whitehead (whom we also know as an affiliate of the Harvard Pareto Circle that in the 1920s and 1930s laid down the grounds for what later became mainstream organization theory), Cooper seeks to envisage how the open field, being the condition of process, can be used rather than just analyzed. Use involves two endeavours: 'to find out' and 'to make'. 'To find' out means to acquire knowledge or information about a process. This is achieved by placing oneself within and experiencing the process, and by carefully drawing upon other people's experiences of the process. Information in this respect is (i) difference (in the cybernetic sense, which means that one piece of data is compared and contrasted with another) and (ii) "what goes into form, i.e., [that which] in-forms" (Cooper, 1976: 1012; emphasis omitted). In other words, "difference is the key to form" and "to find out is to be in form" (Cooper, 1976: 1012). In conclusion, knowing oneself more fully requires knowing oneself in the world and not as separate from the world. 'To make', on the other hand, is to present the content you have found within an adequate form that enables you to express the diverse nature of process (Cooper, 1976: 1012). But as well as enabling expression, 'to make' is a moral act of impression that has an effect upon the outside world. Consequently, it is clear that 'to find out' is also a moral act: "the more you find out, the more you can make" (Cooper, 1976: 1012).

Finally, Cooper discusses the challenge of inventing a set of practical mechanisms that may enable people to actually use the open field and suggests four starting points from which a practice of process can be developed and activated: *force*, *medium*, *form* and *meaning*. *Force* is central to all processes because process involves the transfer of force from an agent to an object, and because force – being the energy of process – is what makes action possible. Force can be applied in two main ways, either as a means to resolve, complete and bring a process to an end (by which one finally loses force), or (and this is the approach suggested by Cooper), it can be applied continuously as a means to get involved with and stay in a process without terminating it. The human is her own *medium* for process. For process to be possible, however, s/he must perceive through her senses rather than through her ego. It is this decentralized kind of perception that enables the human to open up towards the rest of the world and become attentive to difference. *Form* refers back to Cooper's notions of the abstract field and information discussed above. Rather than forcing content into a categorical form, one must enable form to contain difference and recognize that form is a unity of difference and not unity as such. Consequently, form is an 'unfinished business' that continuously changes with the content that dwells inside it. Finally, Cooper argues that *meaning* resides in individuated wholeness, i.e. the process by which the psyche realizes itself. The paradox is that whereas individuation means separation, wholeness means integration. The challenge here is therefore to remain united and differentiated at the same time.

What this boils down to is the self-management of all our activities. In order to develop a processual practice for the open field, one must start with oneself, change how one uses oneself and from there move into and change the outside world. Since they work through institutions, Cooper argues that Marxism and democracy do not allow sufficient space for our 'real selves'. "Democracy is not enough" (Cooper, 1976: 1016). Instead, we are encouraged to recreate everyday life. One might ask what audience Cooper

invites and encourages to do so. It is unlikely that just anyone and everyone would be attracted by his invitation. First, given the theoretical bias, density and complexity of his argument, it runs the risk of becoming an appeal confined to a small intellectual elite. Second, given his mainstream language, it is more likely to appeal to a male readership than a female one. And third, one might question the politics implied in 'The Open Field'. Cooper's (almost one-sided) emphasis on process leaves little feel for the permanency of social relationships and the boundaries that obstruct resistance and prevent things from changing.^{6,7}

Organization/Disorganization

Having sought "to define an epistemology of process as a basis for the development of expressive and creative action" within a world that he understands as an open field (Cooper, 1976: 999), Cooper (1990) returns to the problem of process in 'Organization/Disorganization'. But whereas 'The Open Field' seeks primarily to develop a processual understanding of the world and a processual strategy for creative human action, 'Organization/Disorganization' applies processual thinking to a rather different problem, which is more strongly related to the concerns of organization theory and the concept of organization. Here, Cooper emphasizes the point that organizational processes order social life within and more importantly without organizational entities.

The starting point of this text is the concept of organization in mainstream, or more specifically structural-functionalist organization theory, which according to Cooper is biased towards the formal-functional aspects of organization. More specifically, this means that this conceptualization of organization, if not exclusively, is at least primarily concerned with organizational entities. This bias amongst organization theorists is specifically due to their preoccupation with systems. When seeking to understand the relationship between systems (such as an organization) and their environments, the main focus remains with the system. Little attention is given to the drawing of boundaries that makes the system possible in the first place.

Taking systemic boundaries for granted has important consequences for how we understand systems, environments and the relationship between the two. First, this leads to the privileging of systems above environments and the viewing of the boundary as an attribute of the former rather than the latter. Consequently, the boundary is not imposed upon the system from the outside, but is instituted by the system to separate it from its environment. Separation is made possible because this boundary is stable and complete. This also means that the system is regarded as a stable entity enjoying a unity and order that stands in stark contrast to the disorder associated with its outside environment. The

6 It is these problems *inter alia* that have been the focus of much work in labour process theory, exemplified by the joint writings of Knights and Willmott (1985, 1989, 1999).

7 Unfortunately, the focal and spatial constraints of this paper once again mean that an in depth consideration of these points would have to be developed elsewhere.

trouble with this position, Cooper explains, is that a boundary is neither stable, complete nor simply an attribute of the system. Instead, boundaries serve the dual function of both separating and joining systems and environments. They are an attribute of system and environment. And as such, a boundary is a complex and ambiguous structure “around which are focused both the formal and informal organizing processes of social life” (Cooper, 1990: 169). In other words, organization is not just a matter of formal entities, but also a matter of processes residing at the boundaries by which systems are joined with and separated from their environments. In order to understand organization, we should therefore not limit our inquiry to systems such as formal organizations, but pay more attention to the role of boundaries. Cooper does not say it here, but I would like to add that by taking ‘boundary’ as our centre of attention, it is possible to understand how organization operates both within formal organizations and as processes of ordering in the environment outside organizational entities.

Cooper elaborates on the role of boundaries, both by problematizing the way in which studies of social and other systems subsume boundaries to systems, and by offering an alternative understanding of boundaries. As in previous paragraphs, what he finds particularly problematic about social science research is that it tends to understand the social world in terms of reified objects and artefacts without showing much appreciation for the medium that actually constitute them. Social scientists do not know the world directly, but typically acquire knowledge about it by distinguishing and differentiating between phenomena. Whereas certain phenomena are selected and included into a particular concept and seen to belong to a particular object, other phenomena are excluded. Consequently, the concepts and objects that emerge are largely homogeneous; when studying systems, one finds unity. In the words of Cooper, “Systemness relies singularly on a conception of unity” (1990: 169). This means that typically, what lies inside a system’s boundaries is assumed to be orderly and organized whilst what lies outside is assumed to be less orderly, less unitary and less organized. And insofar as social scientists privilege the study of systems, what does not belong to a particular system is devalued.

Further on, Cooper argues that boundary-maintenance is seen as a key dimension in the study of systems. In order to maintain its order, a system needs to protect itself from the outside and maintain its boundaries against the environment. Again, he shows that systems are privileged above boundaries and environments. Boundary-maintenance is an activity of the system and not of the environment. In the same paragraph, he deals briefly with the notion of boundaries and boundary maintenance in relation to the now common distinction between closed and open systems. Despite the general recognition that boundaries are more or less perforated and that systems are more or less closed or more or less open, this has done little to remove the binary distinction between system and environment, and systems are still privileged above environments and above the actual boundaries that join and separate the two. The implications of this are somewhat paradoxical. Whereas “the social system”, Cooper explains, “is defined as a pattern of relationships, the concept of relationship is its least systematically analyzed feature” (Cooper, 1990: 170). Since the relationship between system and environment is constituted by a frame or a boundary, the lacking attention to boundaries inhibits an adequate understanding of this relationship.

Cooper's alternative is to view boundary as an attribute of both system and environment. Since this view acknowledges that boundaries perform a function on behalf of systems and environments, it allows a non-static understanding of boundary. But before outlining this in further detail, he critiques a social systems view typical of and influential in organization theory: that of Parsons and Blau. According to Cooper (1990: 171), Parsons (1951), whom he claims to represent the traditional systems view within the social sciences, understands the system boundary as a "container which holds the system parts together and thus prevents their dispersal." Furthermore, Parsons not only conceives of systems as bounded entities. By viewing systems as ordered structures, he also imposes a boundary upon how the system is to be understood. Cooper directs a similar critique on Blau's (1974) work on formal organization, which shares Parsons' structural-functionalist foundations. More specifically, Cooper argues that Blau's concept of differentiation in organizational structure, which merely refers to the internal divisions of labour and authority in organizations, presents a static view of differentiation. Preoccupied with the instrumental order of static differences in role and status, Blau ignores the very process of differentiation that makes such differences and such order come about in the first place. And consequently, he regards the social organization within which formal organizations are seen to exist as "already formed" (Cooper, 1990: 172).

If one were to focus on boundary and conceive of differentiation in processual terms, one would end up with a fundamentally different understanding of organization; neither as bounded entities characterized by a static internal order nor as an already formed division of social life, but as a process of differentiation that works to transform "an intrinsically ambiguous condition into one that is ordered" (Cooper, 1990: 172). And since organization is not about already established differentiation and order, it is always caught up with its disorderly and contrary state, which Cooper calls disorganization. Cooper seeks to demonstrate that this constant opposition between organization and disorganization has serious implications for how one is to understand social organization and social action.

Given Cooper's emphasis on process, it may seem ironic and confusing to find that the term structure figures centrally in his definition of social organization:

Social organization may be defined as a structure which relates people to each other in the general process of managing nature and themselves. (Cooper, 1990: 172)

But even though some emphasis is removed from the way in which social organization works as a process and put on the way in which it has the consequence of involving people in "the general process of managing", Cooper's reference to structure has not become less dynamic than it was in 'The Open Field'. His somewhat unfortunate wording does not lead him to reaffirm the static concept of organization presented by structural-functionalism. Like information, which Cooper also defines as both a process and a structure that makes form out of non-form by dividing matter into sets of binary terms, organization creates order by drawing boundaries between elements in social life such as social actors. Furthermore, the binary division that Cooper associates with information and organization is not a simple binary structure that limits focus to the parts lying on each side of the binary divide. Instead, it directs focus on the division itself, which puts simultaneous attention on the parts and the whole that these two parts

constitute. In conclusion, the binary divide or boundary that Cooper talks about not only separates, but also joins, and it cannot be subsumed to one part.

Cooper then discusses the undecidable nature of boundary, first in light of Saussure's structuralist linguistics and Bateson's structuralist anthropology (focusing on Saussure's system of signs and on Bateson's system of difference), and then in light of Derrida's poststructuralist concept of *différance*. Cooper invokes Saussure's (1974) *Course in General Linguistics* to show that on the level of semiotic systems (i.e. systems of signifiers and signifieds) the signifier is not simply a static carrier of meaning. Meaning is never given by a particular signifier, but is an outcome of differences between various signifiers. Semiotic systems are constantly caught up in processes of signification by which different meanings are attributed to a certain signifier depending on the semantic context in which it finds itself. In other words, since the meaning of a signifier depends on which other signifiers it is surrounded by, and since signifiers are constantly moving between different semantic contexts, the meaning of a signifier is always deferred and unfinished and the process of signification is never brought to an end.

In Bateson's (1972) *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, Cooper finds ammunition to the view that the world is not experienced in terms of reified objects and events, but in terms of differences:

To talk about things in the mind is to commit the intellectual sin of reification. There is even a problem talking about *the* mind since this gives the impression of a localable place, a thing which contains other things. (Cooper, 1990: 175)

Difference, on the other hand, is not "locatable" because "it is dimensionless" (Cooper, 1990: 175). That is to say, difference cannot be localized because unlike reified objects it has no spatial dimensions such as length, height, width and depth. Instead, following Bateson, Cooper views difference as some kind of process that guides how we experience the world. Earlier on, Cooper (1990: 170) referred to the boundary as a frame that includes certain phenomena and excludes others. With Bateson's term 'framing', the processual nature of frames and boundaries is more clearly recognized.

Derrida's (1982) concept of *différance*, which is influenced by Saussure's thinking on language as a system of differences, can be seen as an even more explicit attempt at thinking about the undecidability of boundary. But *différance* is not simply about differing in space. It is also about deference or deferral, i.e. the postponement of something in time. More specifically, this means that a word or concept that is invoked to represent a thing currently absent from us can never do so. Not only does the word differ in space from the thing (the word is present, the thing is absent). Since the word succeeds the thing, the word is also a presence deferred in time. Moreover, Derrida's concept of *différance* implies that the meaning of a word is deferred, just as in Saussure's conception of difference, Cooper argues. Consequently, *différance* is the "ever-active play" of differences that "cannot be located in any particular place" (Cooper, 1990: 179). This heterogeneous nature is obvious with regards to the concept of *différance* itself, which can refer to two different things but never at the same time. But it is also how other words must be understood, according to Derrida, who demonstrates this by deconstructing the Greek word *pharmakon* in his text 'Plato's Pharmacy'. Deconstructing or subjecting *pharmakon* to a process of *différance*, he

shows that the word entails two different and deferred meanings (remedy *and* poison) that both cannot be grasped at the same time or in the same place. And it is this that not only invests any and every word or phenomenon with undecidability, but also underlines the undecidability of *différance*, difference and boundary.

According to Cooper, all three ways of thinking difference bring out the undecidable nature of boundary. And as such, they bring out the undecidable nature of the relationship between social systems and environments as well as the undecidable nature of social systems *per se*. In other words, social systems are not as unitary, ordered and organized as one is led to believe by conventional ways of thinking. Instead, as results of ambiguous processes of framing, boundary drawing and differentiation, they “reveal their essentially precarious foundation”, a foundation that is constantly resisted by what Cooper calls processes of disorganization or the “zero degree of organization” (Cooper, 1990: 182). Thus, Cooper’s understanding of disorganization is far more radical than that suggested by Tsoukas (1998), which reduces disorganization to a matter of organization.

Cooper (1990: 182) defines the zero degree of organization as “a process of undecidability that pervades all social organization.” Having no specific order, organization or direction, the zero degree of organization can be understood as “an excess to order or meaning”. Drawing on Derrida, Cooper (1990: 184) argues that the zero degree of organization is that which falls outside of and has “no founding source or centre”. And similarly, drawing upon Simmel’s inside/outside distinction, he argues that this is the outside that is excluded from the inside, thus lacking what the inside has. In conclusion, “Zero-degree is [...] a theoretical condition of no meaning, no form, of absolute disorder which one might call the primary source of form or organization” (Cooper, 1990: 187). This does not mean, Cooper insists, that zero-degree is “an absolute origin which [is] itself organized”, but simply that it is “The disorder of zero degree [...] which energizes and motivates the call to order or organization” (Cooper, 1990: 187).

From this discussion, Cooper moves on to consider organization itself, arguing that “If zero degree is an excess [...], then order and organization must necessarily be a reduction” (Cooper, 1990: 187). In a quest for order and organization, social systems seek “to deny the existence of undecidability by erecting systems of ‘logical’ and ‘rational’ action” (Cooper, 1990: 187). Utilizing Marcuse’s (1964) reading of Weber, Cooper adopts the view that rationality is not simply a matter of calculable efficiency, but “a form of unacknowledged political domination which serves to privilege the interests of particular groups” (Cooper, 1990: 187-188). This means that rationalization depends upon the ability to control, master and dominate the excess of disorganization or zero-degree that roams all social systems. According to Cooper, such control is specifically aimed at what he calls the ‘metastructure’ and the ‘metalanguage’, and without explaining these terms, he turns to discuss the issue of communicational domination in an example from Herman Melville’s (1970) novel *Billy Budd, Sailor*. From this discussion, however, Cooper concludes with Marcuse (1964) that the management of language, the elimination of undecidability and the solidification of boundaries is “a significant process in the creation of systems of technical rationality” and “formally organized systems” (Cooper, 1990: 191). In other words, if one is to

create formal systems of rational organization, one needs to reaffirm the boundary between disorganization and organization.

In the final section of the paper, invoking Canguilhem's (1978) analysis of the concept of organization, Cooper deals with what he calls "the normalizing function" of organization (Cooper, 1990: 193). Canguilhem's study, Cooper argues, "showed how the concept of organization developed in the nineteenth century through the normal-abnormal opposition" (Cooper, 1990: 195). Requiring the elimination of the abnormal or the pathological across all fields (the social, the biological, the psychological, the linguistic, etc.), organization was a matter of normalization. More specifically, the development of normalization was based upon the institution, formalization and following of rules and norms. In nineteenth century France this did for example take place through the establishment of a new grammar conveying formal rules for the correct use of language and the institution of the metric system. According to Cooper, the norm had two functions: first, to restore normality by eliminating deviance, and second, by "providing an order of knowledge" that enable particular systems to conceptualize themselves. Although Cooper does not say this, I would like to add that such an order of knowledge is exactly what gives self-reflexivity to systems, thus enabling them to adjust when necessary and make possible the normative order that they seek to institute.

Canguilhem's conceptualization has serious implications for the concept of organization, even for what one might choose to refer to as formal organization. The component features of formal organization – be they a hierarchical division of labour, administrative centralization, standardization or rational planning – are not simply the innocent inventions of modern administration. Instead, Cooper insists, they must be understood as "instruments of a process of technological normalization motivated by a therapy of power" (Cooper, 1990: 196; emphasis omitted).⁸

What, then, can thus far we take with us from this highly dense text by Robert Cooper? The emphasis on *boundary* and *process* is obvious. Cooper pursues the challenging idea that boundary, i.e. that which differentiates between a system – such as an organization – and the environment does not finalize or stabilize the relationship between the two. As they separate *and* join organizations and environments, boundaries are continuously engaged in processes of differentiation. Hence, they define and redefine not only organizations and environments, but also the relationships between them. In other words, boundaries produce and reproduce organizations and environments, becoming processes of organization and disorganization themselves, and turning organization as well as disorganization – as the zero degree of organization – into processual rather than static matters. And as such, the notion of disorganization developed by Cooper is to some extent capable of recognizing the ways in which the boundaries of organization are disrupted and destabilized.

8 Though not straightforward, Cooper's reference to 'therapy of power' simply underlines the point that therapies (of normalization) are not just concerned with the solving of problems, but always embedded in the politics of what is normal and what is not.

Cooper's final point concerns the social sciences and organization theory more specifically. The production of organization is not merely an ordering process that inscribes itself onto the social world, producing formal organizations *inter alia*. As a research object, formal organization is also the result of intensive processes of knowledge production taking place within organization theory. And by constructing organization in a particular way through a particular concept of organization, organization theory also *organizes* organization, thus "making it impossible to disentangle the content of organization studies from the theory or methodology that frames it" (Cooper, 1990: 197). Although Cooper does not spell this out explicitly, the consequence is that the production of the concept of organization is not only the result of political decisions about the constitution of organization as a research object. As the concept of organization is constituted and used in a particular way by the majority of organization theorists, it will also have certain implications for the events and people who are and are not studied by this organization theory. But Cooper's contribution here lies not only in his problematization of the concept of organization. Having complexified and disrupted the boundary relations between organization and environment by replacing stasis with process, he has also upset the boundary relations between organization theory and its neighbouring fields. Not simply by drawing heavily on thinking about organization from other disciplines, but more importantly by re-producing and re-organizing the concept into a research object that, with its precarious and processual nature, is fundamentally different from the concept of organization implied by classical and mainstream organization theory.

Despite the title of his paper, Cooper does not place as much emphasis on the concept of organization as one might expect, but does instead coin at least the first part of his discussion around the concepts of system and environment. Moreover, given that he attempts a processual understanding of organization, it may seem ironic that so much of his discussion revolves around the terms system and structure. Dismissing his argument on such grounds would however be to invoke a highly dualistic reading, and it is exactly such dualism he seeks to avoid. Cooper neither argues for the stability of system, structure and organization, nor does he argue that systems, structures and formal organizations do not exist. Instead, he seeks to undermine any static underpinnings of these terms and rid them of the stable reified nature so typically attributed to them by mainstream organization theory and social science.

The Missing Body

Cooper's efforts to destabilize and undermine the static underpinnings of the concepts we use to make sense of the world is an impressive one, and it is this theme that joins 'The Open Field' and 'Organization/Disorganization'. No matter what status Cooper enjoys as a philosopher, there is little doubt that he has had a leading impact on recent thinking in the outskirts of organization theory. Most importantly, his epistemic privileging of organizational process above organizational entity has produced a discontinuity in organization theory – between the conventional mainstream that takes for granted a concept of organization limited to formal organizational entities and problems having to do with the organization of production and the more radical

periphery that problematizes the concept of organization by studying the processes that organize our acting and thinking and social life as a whole – within and without formal organizations. Organization theorists whose work – more or less easily – seems to fall within this tradition include Gibson Burrell (1984, 1988, 1997), Barbara Czarniawska (1996), Jannis Kallinikos (1995, 1998; cf. also Cooper and Kallinikos 1996), John Law (1994a, 1994b, 1998; cf. also Cooper and Law, 1995; Law and Mol 1998), Rolland Munro (2001; cf. also Hetherington and Munro 1998), Martin Parker (1992, 1998; cf. also Parker and Cooper, 1998), Haridimos Tsoukas (1998) and Robert Chia (1995). It would be to overemphasize Cooper's influence to say that these organization theorists are simply followers of a 'Cooperian' paradigm in organization theory. It seems fair, however, to say that Cooper has inspired and/or provoked these and others to adopt a processual or generic focus in the study of organization and to do so through serious engagement with thinkers outside organization theory (e.g. Foucault, Derrida, the Frankfurt School, Whitehead and Bergson). In my opinion, it is this that is Cooper's main contribution to organization theory. Beyond this, Cooper – through 'The Open Field' and 'Organization/Disorganization' – has also gone beyond organization to an extent that has been little recognized by organization theory. In addition to recognize how social life is organized outside the boundaries of formal organizational entities, his appeal for creative action and his concept of disorganization draw attention to the fragile nature of any organizational project.

There is however no mention of the body in either of these articles, which seems to be quietly processed as a non-topic. Cooper is consciously neglectful of feminist research, which means that the stream of thought that has been most significant in turning the body into a research object in the social sciences and humanities is apparently unknown or of no interest to him. And when Cooper and Burrell (1988) (in an article mostly written by Cooper) and Cooper (1998) mention the body twice in an interval of ten years, it is only as a very side-lined issue of which little discussion is provided. Insofar as Cooper has had any influence on the embodiment of organization theory at all, it seems more accurate to say that this has been merely indirect. By putting organization theory in touch with poststructuralism, he has opened up the discipline to a stream of thought in which the body figures as a key dimension. And second, by conceptualizing organization in terms of processes rather than entities, he has developed a way to think about organization that later organization theorists concerned with the body have taken on board (e.g. Brewis and Sinclair, 2000; Dale and Burrell, 2000; Dale, 2001).⁹

The absence of embodiment is not necessarily a fundamental problem with Cooper's work, and the reader might question *why* the body should be brought into the realm of a process perspective on organization in the first place. In my opinion, inattentiveness to issues of embodiment means that one misses out on an important opportunity to think critically about how organizational processes operate throughout social life. It is

9 Cooper's (1998) notion of raw matter and his discussion of the ways in which raw matter is turned into distinct, reified and manageable things by processes of information and organisation does not directly deal with the body and has not, as far as I know, been utilised by organisation theorists interested in the body (cf. Cooper 1998).

necessary for example to introduce the body if wanting to study the ways in which an organizational regime such as public health seeks to organize how we live our lives on an everyday basis. Constructions and experiences of health and wellbeing, disease and illness are most certainly embodied. And it is at least problematic to dissociate the activities preoccupying public health – such as eating, drinking, sex and exercise – from the organization and conduct of the body within and without formal organizations. On a more general level, one should also note that the epistemic organization of the world to which Cooper (1976, 1990) pays so much attention covers only a part of how social life is organized – through the discursive arrangements of language. Whilst it is possible to see how language and discourse might organize the body indirectly, it is also necessary to study how the body is actually organized in social life – according to dress codes, expectations about body language, medical notions of what a body is and what a body can do, and socio-cultural norms of how particular bodies should behave and move in particular contexts – at work, at home and in public space. Finally, and insofar as the body is an unruly and messy matter of flesh and blood, bones and tissue, pains and pleasure, habits and desires, it also poses a fundamental problem for organization in a way that underlines the processual, dynamic and unfinished nature of the latter. Because the body disrupts, undermines and escapes the purposive and boundary-drawing processes of organization, these processes are never brought to an end in a complete state of affairs. Even if it might be possible to study the disruption of organization through more general terms such as Cooper's (1990) concept of disorganization as the 'zero degree of organization', the carnal body described above may give a very concrete insight into the forces that disrupt the boundaries of organization. These are three reasons why it is important to bring the body into a processual organization theory keen to study organizational processes across modern social life, within and without formal organizational entities. More specific strategies as to *how* the body can be brought into an organization theory concerned with organizational processes must be addressed elsewhere. It might be useful, however, to provide a brief – obviously simplistic – suggestion as to how this can be done.

From a feminist starting point, Karen Dale (2001) has employed the thought of Merleau-Ponty and Foucault in an attempt to embody organization theory. Whereas Merleau-Ponty enables Dale to focus on the embodied nature of experience and subjectivity, Foucault enables her primarily to investigate what organization does to the body – within and without formal organizations. This is complemented by a feminist reading (based on Irigaray and Butler *inter alia*), which emphasizes bodily difference; that bodies of different sex, gender and sexuality (etc.) (i) experience life differently and (ii) are subjected to organization in different ways. But this may also be complemented by a Deleuzian and DeleuzoGuattarian perspective that more explicitly, through notions such as the body without organs and the Spinozist body, recognizes how bodies may live independently of organization (e.g. Deleuze, 1992; Deleuze and Guattari, 1988). Thus, bodies are not necessarily organized and embodiment is not merely a matter of organization. Rather, bodies are penetrated by forces so creative, unpredictable and unmanageable that they may disrupt, undermine and escape the boundaries of organization.

Postscript

In a recent review in *Organization Studies* of Hassard, Holliday and Willmott's (2000) edited essay collection *Body and Organization*, Yiannis Gabriel (2001: 518) ridicules the genre to which he claims this book belongs: i.e. '*X and Organization*'. Admitting his own contribution to such volumes, Gabriel argues that the general formula of these books is to criticize the rest of organization theory for having completely ignored X and for not having realized how important this subject matter is for the further development of the discipline. As one can see from the first two quotes above, Gabriel could have accused Cooper (1976, 1990) of the same. And he could have made similar accusations against this paper too, as it bluntly, and perhaps naively, have asked where the body is in Cooper's process perspective. But with Cooper's otherwise inspiring work, this is the key thing I see missing.

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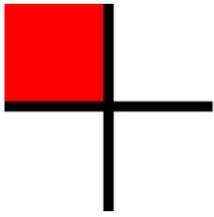
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Assemblage Notes, or, A Comment on the Factory of Things

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abstract

The following comment focuses on Robert Cooper's well-known and rightly celebrated deconstructive style of writing, especially as it is played out in the article 'Assemblage Notes', which appeared in *Organized Worlds*,¹ a book dedicated to Cooper. As the present reading progresses it outlines the actual plateaus that 'Assemblages Notes' establishes, and also the rhetorically forceful use of repetition it deploys. As the themes explored in the original text are touched upon as well as the theoretical landscape in which it travels is depicted, a critical voice is never the less raised regarding the level of affirmation and critical potential produced by the text. It is claimed that social analysis cannot be satisfied alone with a (maybe even by definition) endless deconstruction, which in the end betrays the text, making it become just another prisoner of that despotic signifier it set out to destroy. This should not imply a (equally absurd) 'general' rejection of deconstruction as such, but remind us of the, perhaps subsequent, need for new lines of flight, that is new possibilities for the creation of worlds.

RoboCop is a walking Swiss army knife with unlimited resources designed to combat the most sophisticated villains. (www.mgm.com)

The author is a subject of enunciation but the writer – who is not an author – is not. The writer invents assemblages starting from assemblages which have invented him, he makes one multiplicity pass into another. (Gilles Deleuze²)

In 'Assemblage Notes' a machine is built, a machine that is constantly performing and performed by collective assemblages, creating repetitions 'with a difference'. But what's the problem in the first place? The problem is the three dominant stratifications binding human beings in modern time: the three great strata are the organism, signifiante and interpretation, and subjectification and subjection, that is

1 Robert Cooper, 1998, 'Assemblage Notes', in Robert Chia (ed.) *Organized Worlds: Explorations in Technology and Organization with Robert Cooper*. London: Routledge, p.108-129.

2 Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, 1987, *Dialogues*. New York: Columbia University Press, p.51-52.

psychoanalysis, structuralism and Marxism respectively.³ Reduction is a too reductive term for characterising the three strata, rather are they fixations and stultifications. It is these fixations and stultifications, these ‘sophisticated villains’, that the RoboCop’er is smoking out of their (w)holes: the politics of identity, ideology, idealism and the corresponding transcendental philosophy of being.

The text is an assembly of textual fragments, or bits and pieces cut (off) from their original flow, which is shown to be no more original than their present deployment: “when one writes, the only question is which other machine the literary machine can be plugged into, must be plugged into in order to work”.⁴ Also the text has its form: there are books (and articles) of the rhizomatic type, and books (and articles) of the root-type, that is, there are texts clinging to centrality, definitions, representations, and there are texts exploring molecular flows, *schizzes*, breaks. Texts drawing maps.

There are even oeuvres of this kind, Cooper’s whole work⁵ is composed of a number of textual plateaus (‘articles’ surely is not the satisfying term here), all rhizomatically interlinked as the current issue of *ephemera* shows.

Furthermore can there be no representation of the world ‘in’ a text, the relation between the book and the world is non-parallel evolution: their relation is rhizomatic.⁶ The book opens the possibility of the de-territorialisation of the world, the world is constantly re-territorialising the book, which then in turn tries again to deterritorialise itself, if, as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari underline: if it can, if it is capable. It is a constant struggle between the war machine-book and the State apparatus-book: an *internal* struggle, as it is played out on the same plane. The war machine is the possibility of creativity within the royal sciences, within the root-type book, it is the possibility of new lines of flight, new bearings for the existence of a new people yet to come.

Different regimes of signs are brought to work in ‘Assemblage Notes’, which are not just notes that have been assembled, but also assemblages that stratifications are trying to note or to knot, to de-note or to knot down firmly. The machine works by repetition, and repeats different textual cuts from other texts: difference must be shown differing, as Deleuze puts it, and this telling-and-showing is the product of the text machine in question.

Thematically the text is occupied with the Durkheimian division of labour, and is in itself performing a division of text: it is a text of division, of di-vision, as “we must

3 Cf. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, 1987, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, p.134; and Ian Buchanan, 2000, *Deleuzism. A Metacommentary*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

4 Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p.4.

5 One fact, among others, that the editors of this issue enriched the present commentary with.

6 Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p.11ff.

learn to look out of two eyes, not in the same direction but in two different, and indeed divergent, directions at once” (p.118, quoting S. Weber⁷).

As a result, a number of plateaus are constructed: ‘Assemblage’, ‘Otherability’, ‘Part-whole’, ‘Mediations of assemblage.’ These four assemblages are progressively iterative: whereas in the first couple of plateaus only a few ‘bricks of text’ are used, these bricks as well as others are extensively repeated in the last two plateaus.

The configuration of the text is lined up in the ‘Introduction’, and as in every functional introduction a *Bedienungsanleitung*, an instruction for use, is formulated: how is this machine working, which are its elements, from where does it draw its energy, which are its fields of forces. This as opposed to a traditional signifying introduction, which as a rule puts forward instructions on how to read, how to interpret that is how to delimit and disconnect the text in order to answer the preconditioned question: what does the text mean? Parallel to this machine of signification another semiotic system is at work in a traditional, signifying introduction, which is the machine of subjectification: an introduction as a rule also introduces the reader, the possibilities of being a reader, the subjectivity of the reader. Even if it is happening right before your eyes, it is precisely happening behind your back which is where your eyes - in fact your whole face - is produced in the first place by the machines of faciality.⁸

The approach in ‘Assemblage Notes’, that is the functional introduction, leaves open the question of the reader, a reader that turns out rather to be a *user*, in the same sense as a lawn mower tends to mow the lawn regardless of who is moving it. The death of the author seems to have been followed by the death of the reader, in the same way as one now is able to invest in lawn mowers that mows the lawn without the need for an external mover, a user or any human steering capacity whatsoever. Similarly your house can be pre-programmed to turn the lights on and off without you being there, the GPS system can take over car driving (there goes the last hero assemblage of the American man), and when you have left both your house and your car, you wouldn’t need to return back home, as your gated community is pre-programmed to do without the community, only needing the gates, the limen, to function. Hadrian’s wall surrounding the Empire did not represent the periphery of the Empire: the wall was the machine that produced the Empire, regardless whichever side you might find yourself in, as it produced both villains and civilians.⁹

7 In the present text, whenever a page number with no other reference occurs, it refers to ‘Assemblages notes’ as published in *Organized Worlds* (as cited above). The notion of this di-vision is explored by Cooper in his contribution to *Ideas of Difference*, edited by Kevin Hetherington and Rolland Munro, 1998, Blackwell.

8 Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p.167ff. The first place, notably, being nothing else than a fold in the surface of the stratum in question.

9 Cf. Thomas Basbøll ‘Hadrian’s wall’, forthcoming. One only needs to imagine the consequences of the atrocity of Tiannamen Square taking place not in Beijing, but at the Chinese Wall, that is at the ‘centre’ of the territory and not at its limits. The destabilisation of the country and the whole international response and long-term effects would have been of another quality altogether.

In the end, then, the consumer durable can do without the consumer, who is then able to escape the general economy of the production of mass (p.109), creating a smooth space in which to experiment on the much more potent question: to which degree can the consumer do without the durable?

The introduction of Durkheim's "division of labour" (p.108) is launched as the functional societal equivalent to what is actively being followed in the text: how can the labour of division become visible? So P. Fischer's "provisional array of parts" (p.109) is the way the text is describing the production of text rather than being a text of production, the same way as mass production is the production of mass *before*, historically and semantically, it is a mass production.¹⁰ The re-focusing from the entity of mass (production) to the relations of production (of mass) is reflected in the move from a philosophy of being to a philosophy of becoming. Where the former is preoccupied with the essences of things in themselves, the latter treats relations as external to what they relate. This is what is implicated in Whitehead's "mutual relatedness" (p.108), which points out the rhizomic qualities of the assemblage. In this first (or second, or n-1'th) plateau, the plateau named 'Assemblage', Whitehead's "mutual relatedness" (p.110; 112) is related to movement, which, according to Deleuze, "always happens behind the thinker's back, or in the moment when he blinks" (p.112). The key element of this plateau is its quality of becoming-other, its relatedness to the historical matter-flow, the evolution of the stirrup from the nomads to chivalry: is it the becoming of a nomadic war machine of the text? Indeed, de-territorialising the author, the assemblage produces new becomings: of a writer who is not a new ghostly Author, but a becoming of different kinds. (It's not possible to become-ghost - you might become a trickster - nor is it possible to become majoritarian.¹¹) Writing itself produces becomings: becoming-animal, for instance, that is becoming-minoritarian.¹²

Becoming-other: in 'Otherability' the next plateau, a new machinic function is described as a consequence of abandoning identity and First Difference, since identity is in need of a difference to sustain it, and this first difference lives on the mercy of what comes next, the first difference being as unsustained as identity itself. The hinge in this plateau is Merleau-Ponty's: the hinge around which inside and outside turn (p.116; 117), thus creating a space, a sort of matter-space of movement, deferring difference – and introducing a Derridean 'iterability' being "that which *splits an element while constituting it*" (p.115).

However, at this point of the text, or at this passage of the plateau, the function of constituting seems totally to give way to the de-territorialisation of splitting, the seam that seams is seemingly entering a roundabout: is the war machine beginning to lose its movement and its inner connectedness? Can the war machine survive without choosing

10 Cf. also Cooper's latest article 'Interpreting Mass: Collection/Dispersion' in *The Consumption of Mass*, edited by Nick Lee and Roland Munro, 2001, Blackwell.

11 Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p.291.

12 Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p.291ff. Deleuze and Guattari's book on Kafka has as its subtitle 'Toward a minor literature'.

between 'Part-whole' in the next plateau? Not as a normative judgement from without, but as an immanent critique from within the part towards the whole, not as identity but as lines of flight that break free from the assemblage, seeking to transgress its inner limits to reach a new level of potentiality and intensity. Will it circulate around the hinge like a *perpetuum mobile*? To de-stratify is of course to attack the stratification, showing new possibilities, becoming a 'Body without Organs', that is pure intensity and movement, with no longer a Self, but only speeds and affects. But even so, on the stratum in question there is also a BwO that re-produces the organisation of the organism, in the shadow of the organisation of the stratum itself.¹³ The BwO exists both on the de-stratified plane of consistency *and* on the strata, because the organism must re-stratify at all time, maybe it is a cell threatening to become cancerous. This in order to *be able* to produce the 'other' BwO on the plane of consistency: there are specific dangers of a too sudden de-stratification or a de-stratification that does not preserve in and for itself some of the organisation of the stratum.

Furthermore, to see a *Gestalt*, one by convention has to perceive the constructed figure-ground in one sight. This would need two eyes, and, as will be remembered, a slight movement, a *différance* to take effect. Seeing the part-whole "out of two eyes, not in the same direction but in two different, and indeed divergent, directions at once" (p.118) is more likely to create Cubism (p.116; 121) than criticism, even if Cubism at its best is indeed capable of enabling criticism. The fact that we constantly have to ask the question "Where does consciousness begin, and where end? Who can draw the line? Is not everything interwoven with everything? Is not machinery linked with animal life in an infinite variety of ways?" (p.119), as Butler's marvellous *Erehwon* keeps doing, must rebound us from the ontological flow into describing the actual machines at work. Not Nowhere but Now, Here, and Everywhere, machines that *do* define, *do* cut off, *do* signify.¹⁴ Even conceiving the body as a hinge (p.121) is a stratification that has political implications, as being an organism is one of the great stratifications of the assemblage.

The 'last' plateau, 'Mediations of Assemblage', takes correspondingly the principle of deferral and difference to its zenith:

Movement always happens behind the thinker's back, or in the moment when he blinks' *and* 'we must learn to look out of two eyes, not in the same direction but in two different, and indeed divergent, directions at once' *and* the division of labour *and* the body as a hinge *and* 'the medium is not only the message but is nothing less than reality itself' *and* Whitehead's 'mutual relatedness'

– a list that occurs if we constrain us to the conjunctions on page 124 alone. It has powerful effects, as it follows the deleuzoguattarian principle of conjunction:

13 Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p.162ff.

14 Machines that are "at work everywhere, functioning smoothly at times, at other times in fits and starts". Cf. the very opening paragraph of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, 1977, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. New York: Viking Press.

The tree imposes the verb “to be,” but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, “and...and...and...” This conjunction carries enough force to shake and uproot the verb “to be.”¹⁵

In the text the assemblage obviously functions as a powerful analytical concept, but the question remains - as indicated above - to what extent (if at all) the two different analytical strategies of Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze are in the end compatible. Do Deconstruction and Schizo-analysis (or Pop-analysis or Nomadology) work productively together?

The fact that Deleuze ‘himself’ recognised deconstruction as such, but did not relate it to his own project is hardly an argument for not combining the two strategies in that particular schizzoid compilation one is befitted to use, and then see how the text works. However, one is tempted to follow Kenneth Surin’s argument, that the assemblage in itself is a concept created to oppose exactly deconstruction.¹⁶ The assemblage has two sides or components: from the one perspective, it is a collective assemblage of enunciation, occupied with expressions and their codings and conditions on the strata. From the other perspective it is connected, by prolongation, to the massive Body without Organs and its collective of materials and intensities. In other words, the abstract machine of the assemblage is *bipolar*, like a double pincer: on the one side it organises form-substance of expression (the collective assemblage of enunciation) and on the other it organises the form-substance of content (the machinic assemblage).¹⁷ The play on inter-textuality, the floating nature and arbitrariness of the signifier-signified chain and the instability of dualisms and their hierarchy must be recognised as productive reading strategies. It stands out, however, that Derrida (and Robert Cooper), in order to ‘de-centre’ and ‘de-stabilise’, have to cling on to the structures exactly in order to *show* these characteristics of the text in question.¹⁸ Deconstruction remains occupied with the signifier-signified relation (which is important), and consequently has to negate the extra-textual matter-flows, resulting in the strong bias the strategy has towards the expressive part of the assemblage.¹⁹

From a Nietzschean perspective, what is lacking is a positive affirmation, a will to power, indeed a will to another life, another people. The productivity of ‘Assemblage Notes’, that is, its capability to connect to extratextualities and disconnect unproductive passions (‘sad passions’ is Spinoza’s term), is to a very large extent thwarted by its endless deconstructions: rather than building a war machine, an immanent ‘counter-Fordism’ perhaps, the threat of a paralysing flow of debris is alarmingly real. The

15 Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p.25.

16 Kenneth Surin: ‘A Question of and Axiomatic of Desires: The Deleuzian Imagination of Geoliterature’, reprinted in Buchanan and Marks, 2000, *Deleuze and Literature*. Edinburgh, Edinburgh University, p.172ff.

17 See Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p.140ff, and Brian Massumi, 1992, *A User’s Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, ed. A. Swerve. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, p.27ff.

18 Kenneth Surin, 2000, p.173.

19 See also Peter Engelschmidt, 2001, ‘The War Machines of Madness. A Transversal Inquiry into the Sectorised Psychiatry in Denmark’, Copenhagen Business School, p.49.

deconstructions themselves are indeed vivid, surprising and thoroughly encyclopaedic and scholarly in the most positive of senses, but the whole endeavour avoids the affirmative and hence the political project of countering, pointing towards new ways of struggle.

On p.111 Cooper quotes Deleuze:

The minimum real object is not the work, the idea, the concept or the signifier, but the assemblage...which is always collective, which brings into play within us and outside us populations, multiplicities, territories, becomings, affects, events.²⁰

The original text by Deleuze reads differently: “The minimum real object is not the *word*” (my emphasis). The minimum real object might in fact *be* the *work*, namely the work of the abstract machine that produces the collective assemblage of enunciation and the machinic assemblage of desire. This certainly does take place in the text, but also elsewhere, in fact, *everywhere*.

the author

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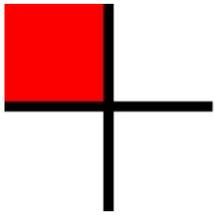
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²⁰ Deleuze and Parnet, 1987, p.51, never mind that it reads p.52 in ‘Assemblage Notes’.



Life Enhancement Now, Now, Now*

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abstract

This paper is a critical and creative commentary on the modernism/postmodernism debate in organisational analysis. It examines the influence of Nietzsche's work on the study of organisations and provides an exposition of Nietzsche's will to power, active and reactive forces and life enhancement. It argues that Nietzsche's account of forces is more nuanced than it is often thought to be and that this is particularly relevant for rethinking *either/or* dichotomies in organisation studies. The paper develops a *technico-affective history* of the human that is a *both/and* relation in an expanded field of forces. The conclusion sets out the implications for what is termed an *ontological turn* for the human condition and for the study of organisations.

Introduction

'I is an other'. So said Arthur Rimbaud, the French poet and explorer, who scandalised post-Commune Parisian society with his satirical and sarcastic poetry that revolted against bourgeois values, Christianity, conventional poetry and common sense visions of reality. From only three years of writing his work has been taken up by Surrealists in the mid-1920s and the 1968 student revolutionaries, attaining a cult status with his attacks on the corruption of established political orders and a creative method of 'deranging the senses' brought about by self-induced chaos through combinations of hunger, drugs, alcohol and pain.¹

In *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, Gregory Bateson sets out the *double-bind* as a 'no-win' situation. Bateson gives the example of a Zen Buddhist master attempting to bring about enlightenment in a pupil. He holds a stick over the pupil's head and says fiercely: "If you say this stick is real, I will strike you with it. If you say this stick is not real, I will strike you with it. If you say nothing, I will strike you with it". How does the pupil

* Thanks to the editors of *ephemera* and to the insightful comments of two anonymous reviewers.

1 See <http://www.sunderland.ac.uk/~os0tmc/rimbaud/rimbmain.htm> for an introduction to Rimbaud. See also Cooper's (1976: 1004) reference to Rimbaud's method of 'induced disorder toward the self'.

respond? The Zen pupil might take the stick from the master, a response that might be accepted by the master; others might be completely disorientated by the Zen master eventually displaying pathological responses like paranoia and schizophrenia or intensify their acquiescence to the Zen master. Bateson claims double-binds are a source of pathologies, but that if these “can be warded off or resisted, the total experience may promote creativity” (Bateson, 2000: 278).

What do Rimbaud and Bateson do for life enhancement? Some introductory remarks to situate this paper are useful. Bob Cooper and Gibson Burrell wrote an influential piece in *Organization Studies* in 1988 that included a substantial section on Friedrich Nietzsche. Their article and the others in a series of articles for *Organization Studies* on Derrida, Foucault and Habermas bequeathed a series of problematics and opened up the study of organisations to theorising across the social sciences and humanities. In writing this piece for *ephemera* I have sought to make explicit Cooper’s Nietzschean influence, made visible largely through Derrida, Foucault and Deleuze, by providing a reinvigorated exposition of key Nietzschean themes: the will to power, the movement between active and reactive forces and life enhancement. Indeed Cooper presages such concerns in the opening sentence of ‘The Open Field’ when he writes, “As social scientists, we are probably less attentive than we should be to the wavering balance between structure and process in understanding human action”. Similarly, in the recent ‘Assemblage Notes’, he says, “We are not good at thinking *movement*”. In writing this piece I have drawn inspiration from concerns that have sustained Cooper throughout his scholarly endeavours and particularly from ‘The Open Field’ published in *Human Relations* (Cooper, 1976) and ‘Assemblage Notes’ published as part of a two-volume collection on Cooper’s work edited by Robert Chia (Cooper, 1998). Throughout the paper I aim to stake out a critical and creative response to these pieces.

This paper is organised into four sections. In the first section my concern is to set out the practical requirement for the human of order and regularity. After I have established this I introduce Nietzsche’s three criteria for life enhancement and discuss how these criteria relate to his account of active and reactive forces. In the second section I describe Nietzsche’s description of active and reactive forces and introduce Cooper and Burrell’s (1988) Nietzschean inspired depiction of organisations. My claim is that Nietzsche’s account of active and reactive forces is more nuanced and sophisticated than it is often thought to be and this entails the claim that life enhancement cannot be simplistically equated with active forces and life denial with reactive forces. In order to rethink a tendency to dichotomise active and reactive forces I draw on May (1998) to argue that the mediation between active and reactive forces is a *both/and* rather than an *either/or* relation. The third section develops the arguments set out in section two and argues for an expanded field of forces as constitutive of the human. Here I draw on Beardsworth’s (1996, 1998, 2001) recent work and his delineation of a technico-affective history of the human. My aim here is to discern the proclivity to consider active force as pure force and reactive force as epiphenomenal as a dichotomy that posits an ahistorical field of *a priori* forces. My alternative conception of the human emerges out of a non-human technico-affective history that culminates in the ability to make promises through the deferral of force. In the final section I draw together ontological and epistemological implications for this technico-affective history – what I term an *ontological turn* – for individuals, organisations and cultures. My conclusion is

that active and reactive forces thought of as an expanded field of forces that is a *both/and* relation inaugurates an immense cultural adventure that opens the human to indeterminacy and creativity.

The Human Condition and Life Enhancement

For Nietzsche (*WP*, *BGE*) and Bergson (1962, see also Ansell Pearson, 1999; 2002) order and regularity are practical requirements of workaday human life rather than something that precedes or transcends life. It means that knowledge is “Nothing more than this: Something strange is to be reduced to something *familiar*.... Look, isn’t our need for knowledge precisely this need for the familiar, the will to uncover under everything strange, unusual, and questionable something that no longer disturbs us?” (*BGE*, 355).² Through order, prediction and identity humans become calculable and acquire the ability to act over time and space (see, for example, Porter 1995). And yet because the categories that render the world calculable through clear-cut identities come out of an ordering that does not precede the world Nietzsche describes this as “a misty shroud of delusion” that is a common sense realism (*BGE*, 58).³ Nietzsche describes this giving of form in terms of the *will to power* because it is this that imposes order on chaos and constitutes being. Similarly Bergson describes the emergence of consciousness as the product of selection such that consciousness or “cerebral interval” (Deleuze, 1988b: 24-25) occurs when particular aspects of the world are selected or ‘actualised’ and a new entity comes into being that is relevant to the human will. It is out of selection that a “zone of indetermination” (Bergson, 1991: 31) is created from which responses can take a variety of forms.

Life enhancement is the maximisation of three criteria, says Nietzsche: *power*, *sublimation of power* and *form creation* (May, 1998: 27-54). Nietzsche’s *will to power* is, as I alluded to above, the name for *form giving*, structure or organisation given to becoming (*GM*, II, 18). Here the ‘supreme will to power’ is the ability to mark *becoming* with the character of *being*. The *sublimation or spiritualisation of power into knowledge* is Nietzsche’s second criterion of life enhancement because it increases the ‘range and multiplicity’ at work in the human. Sublimation is the use of power for tasks that require “receptivity, attunement, and discipline of one’s senses and thoughts, rather than the crude, heedless eruptions of their raw ‘instinctual’ state” (May, 1998: 28).⁴ The

2 References to Nietzsche use the standard English abbreviations and refer to sections rather than page numbers: *TI* for ‘Twilight of the Idols’; *BGE* for ‘Beyond Good and Evil’; *EH* for ‘Ecce Homo’; *WP* for ‘The Will to Power’; *GS* for ‘The Gay Science’ and *GM* for ‘On the Genealogy of Morality’.

3 See Cooper (1976: 1010) for a brief description of Plato’s ‘flawed program’ that “separates the knower from the known ... to give man control over nature (including himself) by developing the twin functions of intellection and reflection so that he could stand apart (a ‘thinking reed’) from the vivid flow of experience”.

4 For Nietzsche, ‘spirit’ *is* life and ‘spiritualisation’ is the movement from ‘spirit’ to ‘free spirit’. “‘Spirit’ designates the emergence and stabilisation of the nervous system as a whole, one not simply prior to, but engendering and always exceeding, towards greater complexity, the metaphysical

critical point here is that self-control and discipline is fundamental to 'higher culture' in so far as it 'hones and refines' power rather than simply suppresses. Here sublimation is life enhancing because it brings about the ability to "harness to creative end drives ... whose violence might otherwise annihilate or paralyse us, and, moreover, to accommodate a great variety of opposing values..." (May, 1998: 29).

Nietzsche's third criteria of life enhancement is the *creation of new forms*. By form creation Nietzsche does not mean arbitrary declarations but expressive actions that are conditional on and emerge out of willing the necessity of a particular history that is 'what one is'. New forms come out of the freedom of willing the necessity of one's past so that it can be overcome. Elsewhere, Nietzsche complicates the notion of 'what one is' with another key idea that to "Become what one is, one must not have the faintest notion of *what* one is" (*EH*, II, 9). Here then overcoming 'what one is' is premised on not being able to know fully 'what one is' – like the dream of delving into a filing cabinet to get a complete record of everything that has happened – before engaging with actual living. More than this, the human cannot know 'what one is' before experience and thus it is inevitably a performative past that is to be overcome with future forms. Hence for Deleuze and Guattari (1994) the proper task of philosophy, science and art is to create assemblages that are both for and against the chaos in oneself. Deleuze and Guattari's pragmatics is itself based on a Nietzschean claim that the human imposes on chaos as much form and order as practical needs require for the present *and* on an attempt to "institute the chaos which creates" that gives rise to the unpredictable in the future. Here then there is the purposefulness of present practical needs that entails the constitution of necessary form of order in response to the human condition's double-binds, but there is no other purpose behind or above this purposefulness than "instituting the chaos that creates". It is a rhizomatics that explicates transformation through stratification and lines of flight. "Make a rhizome. But you don't know what you can make a rhizome with, you don't know which subterranean stem is going to make a rhizome, or enter a becoming, people your desert. So experiment" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 246).

May (1998: 13) suggests that for Nietzsche forming is an *achievement* rather than an *intention* and that this is critical as it undermines the dichotomy between will and effect, actor and action, as anthropocentric and an 'atomistic need'. Even though in the following I argue for making the world into a *creative, complexifying and problematising becoming* that is constituted from the first instance by non-human agencies, it remains critical to be aware of what is at stake when attributing to Nietzsche the assumption that life enhancing values necessarily mean affirming how the world actually is in its most basic and universal sense – becoming – as the only source of value and creativity, and the assertion that human values that deny becoming – the 'atomistic need' for interpretation, for example – are necessarily a denial of life. In other words, the fact/value conflation that May (1998: 15-17) wants to problematise is

divisions between 'spirit' and matter, consciousness and instinct, intelligence and affect, the brain and the stomach [it] is both a *genealogical concept* and a *vector of re-evaluation*...." (Beardsworth, 2001: 44, emphasis in original).

between reality as becoming and the affirmation of becoming as the only source of life enhancement. On this conflation of fact and value, May suggests that, firstly, falsification of the world as made up of enduring continuants, identities and structures is often essential to a *flourishing life* and that, most importantly, Nietzsche *only* opposes this falsification inasmuch as it results in an *impoverished life*. Secondly, the claim of falsification is complex because, despite the contingencies of identities and structures, such identities and structures must be willed as necessities so as to be overcome and enact the openness of the world. I return to these issues below but before doing this I introduce Nietzsche's account of sovereign and reactive forces.

Sovereign and Reactive Force and Life Enhancement

Nietzsche's First Essay in *On the Genealogy of Morals* "Good and Evil", "Good and Bad" sets out the cultural battle between different modes of valuation: the noble against the slave, the spirit of Rome against the resentment spirit of Judea. "For Nietzsche, what is good is *originally* what is noble, that is, what discharges spontaneously, what is oriented towards the outside. The bad in this schema constitutes that which blocks the path of this *original* affirmation" (Beardsworth, 2001: 45, emphasis added). This original valuation of spontaneous discharge and interiorised delay is reinterpreted in the valuation 'good and evil' so that what is good in the original valuation – spontaneous discharge – becomes bad and evil, and what is bad – delayed discharge – becomes good. Here evil is defined as that which ignores the choice of whether to use its force, to discharge force, or not. Beardsworth writes that

it is through this strategy of separation, and through the consequent concept of 'choice', that the Judaic re-evaluation imposes on activity the invitation to nonactivity and reactivity. The invitation is disguised under the new value system of an 'agent' free from, and responsible for its acts, that is, of a 'subject'. (2001: 46)

The important point here is that the second evaluation is based on a different organisation of forces. In the first, noble or Roman valuation, what is good "moves from inside to outside, with little understanding, and need for understanding, of any limit between the two" (Beardsworth, 2001: 46). It means that what is bad is merely a secondary effect of what is good. In the second, slave or Judaic valuation, what is good is "what has sanctified the difference" between good and evil. This is an evaluation based on resentment in which what is evil is that which ignores the sanctified difference between good and evil. It is by invoking a subject that is responsible for its acts that the active forces of the strong, of spontaneous discharge outwards, yield to the reactive forces of the weak, reacting only to other internal forces. The world is henceforth split into active and reactive forces.

Nietzsche is "perhaps *the* major influence on postmodern thought", say Cooper and Burrell (1988: 99). It is Nietzsche's exposition of active and reactive forces that they suggest is instructive for rethinking the study of organisations. Cooper and Burrell (1988: 92-3) trace the historical displacement of the "object of organizational analysis" from "a process in the continuing mastery of the social and physical environment" to "organization as a quasi-stable collection of things or properties". From this, it is

possible to delineate two general ways of evaluating organisation that equate to active and reactive forces: “the one, automatic and autonomous in operation, defying logical closure; the other, calculative and utilitarian in intent, reassuring in its substance” (Cooper and Burrell, 1988: 93). This distinction between an active force as superior or a “kind of prime energizer” – that is, drives beyond direct control – from which human action emanates is counterposed to an inferior or reactive force that is representationalist and ‘talking about’ *something*. It is the human’s tendency to make the world thinkable, that is to say, a will to know that makes the world determinate and calculable, that Cooper and Burrell suggest is critical to Nietzsche’s philosophy. It is this will to know that is hidden with the emphasis on unity and consensus of modern thought. Hence Cooper and Burrell invoke the human condition as irreducibly contingent, as emerging out of difference. They do this by reclaiming Nietzsche’s distinction between active and reactive forces for the study of organisation. They (1988: 99) suggest that “For Nietzsche, the force of difference is *the active*, that which possesses power of self-transformation, i.e., self-reference; opposing it is the *reactive*, a form of action which is at once inferior to and dependent on the active”.

Active force is superior and constitutes the reactive which denies its origin in the active. Cooper and Burrell quote Deleuze (1983: 56) who writes “... it is characteristic of reactive forces to deny, from the start, the difference which constitutes them at the start, to invert the differential element from which they derive and give a deformed image of it”. It is with the inversion of the active and the reactive into representationalism that brings forth a search for “pure and ideal forms which pre-exist our profane everyday world”. Cooper and Burrell (1988: 101) continue that “[w]hat we find at the so-called origin of things is not a reassuring state of perfection, now lost but still reclaimable; instead there is disparity, difference and indeterminacy”. The modern’s claim of perfect origins is replaced with a postmodern “search for instabilities” that is a process of “differential contestation”. “Postmodern thought begins with the insight that all discourse suffers from an intrinsic *reactivity*”, according to Cooper and Burrell (1988: 104). The active is, conversely, the “essential priority of spontaneous, aggressive and expansive, form-giving forces that give new interpretations and directions” (Deleuze, 1983: 41, quoted in Cooper and Burrell, 1988: 104). It is this ‘essential priority’ – that is, *a priori* forces – which Cooper and Burrell suggest “must be tamed, even denied, by the countervailing forces of the reactive which thus function remedially”.

The implications for individuals, cultures and, in this instance, the study of organisations, of active and reactive forces are considerable and summed up by the often cited aphorism ‘from the organisation of production’ to the ‘production of organisation’. Emphasising the ‘production of organisation’ means that the ontological status of an organisation is reconfigured so that it is ‘a unity or coherence of forces’, that is to say, an immanent organisation of forces that attain more-or-less durable epistemological effects. The first move towards this, Cooper and Burrell (1988: 105) suggest, is the recognition that all organised activity is reactive and defensive and that active force is superior; this entails a “genealogy of system and organization [that] begins with the recognition that representations and structures derive from a more fundamental process of materiality and energy”. The second is to conceive of the human as a material flow and foreground indeterminacy and instability.

Nietzsche is similarly concerned with the general way in which values are evaluated and whether these arise in a sovereign/active/master or reactive/slave manner.⁵ The critical meaning of *sovereign* or *master* that I want to bring out here is a relationship to oneself and not a domination of others. Such a sovereign individual is, I suggest below, passive in the sense of acknowledging a contingent history but active in willing the necessity of this history so as to overcome its life denying functions. It denotes a strength of spirit that endures the truth of becoming through a creative suffering. In contrast, the *slave* always defines itself against something that is more powerful and higher as the cause of suffering. Slavish forces are aligned with the affirmation of being, with a weak spirit that cannot endure the truth of becoming. The question to which I now turn is how are the sovereign/master or reactive/slavish modes of valuing related to life enhancement? In the following I set out Nietzsche's response to this question.

Evaluating Nietzsche's three criteria – *power*, *sublimation* and *the creation of forms* – for life enhancement requires more than a simple denunciation or declaration of slavish or masterly values because different emphases on the three criteria will produce significantly different evaluations of values. May (1998) argues that Nietzsche does not condemn any value (such as organisation, pity, calculation, and so on,) outright but demands a more subtle approach that is concerned with *the motives that values express* in terms of their *life enhancing functions*. It is worth quoting May at some length on this:

First, there is, prima facie, no reason why any given value or, in general, any particular ethic, should not produce a high score by one criterion and a low score by another.... Thus the 'ascetic ideal' generally scores highly in terms of power, highly in terms of sublimation, and poorly in terms of form-creation.... Creators of states, on the other hand, score well in terms of power, badly in terms of intelligence, and well in terms of form-creation. Second, one cannot assess the performance of a value on any of these criteria in the abstract; one can only do so in relation to the features of a particular life or person, because values are conditions 'for the preservation of a *certain type* of life'.... Thus, a given value may enable one type of person to find power and enhance his life, while achieving the opposite for another. Third, any given value may also score differently depending on how life-enhancing are the functions it serves. Thus, pity is bad when, *inter alia*, it has the 'insane' aims of abolishing suffering – insane because suffering is inseparable from living, because suffering is in large part, both cause and effect of our growth in power and creativity and 'sovereignty'.... By contrast, pity is good when it has the 'converse' object: namely, those who resist suffering, those who cannot bear to be (or to witness others being) 'broken, forged, torn, burnt, made incandescent, and purified'. (1998: 36-7)

The critical distinction between master and slave turns therefore on the third criteria of life enhancement, namely *form creation*, says Nietzsche.⁶ Yet even though form creation is *masterly*, the constitution of this comes out of slavish values of self-doubt. Here then what determines whether *resentment*, *bad conscience* and an *ascetic ideal* is

5 I prefer the term 'sovereign' rather than 'active' as the word active is usually counterposed to passive. Two points are relevant to this usual association. Firstly, passivity is critical for 'masters' in submitting to the historical determination of the past that is willed as necessity. Secondly, 'slaves' are active in search of power.

6 Masters and slaves are both capable of the will to power and the sublimation of power (see May, 1998: 45-6 for more detail).

life denying or an inducement to life enhancement is more productively thought of as the relative mixture of master and slave values and the relative ability to mobilise such values. May writes that:

Nietzsche interestingly suggests that slavish traits are crucial to motivating it [form creation] – especially to generating its variety and subtlety. For the slave’s feeling of vulnerability, the gnawing question mark he (in contrast to the master) places over his identity and power, and his restless dissatisfaction with his lot, can all provide decisive impetus to the highest realms of thought and art and self-mastery – in other words, to maximal life enhancement. He, unlike the master, is a painful problem to himself; and in his search for relief from the pain and for a solution to the problem he is driven to feats of thought, imagination, self-discipline, and artistry for which the self-assured master simply lacks comparable motivation. (1998: 46-7)

Sovereign individuals and cultures, Nietzsche says, are a *composite or mixture* of master and slave values such that *neither alone* can maximise life enhancement: “in all the higher and more mixed cultures there also appear attempts at mediation between two moralities ... and at times they occur directly alongside each other ... within a *single soul*” (*BGE*, 260). Here then it is not so much masters being coerced into slavish values because there is always, from the first instance, mediation between the masterly and slavish values. Masters require slavish values to produce the most powerful, sublimated expressions of form creation into knowledge and intelligence, says May (1998: 48, emphasis added), because slave values provide, firstly, *something to overcome*; secondly, slaves “themselves supply much of the *motivation for that overcoming*” through a will to be rid of self-doubt and resentment; thirdly, overcoming engenders *abstract thought and discipline*. Hence, May continues, without these three the creation of new forms would not occur as “the masters’ expression of power would ... remain crude and unreflective”. It means, by implication, that to “be a malcontent one does not need to be ungifted, nor to be sovereign must one be one of nature’s talents” (May 1998).

My contention is that Nietzsche’s sovereign human cannot be equated with the depiction of a master discharging ‘raw’, original force in unabashed expression; this is something to which I return below. A sovereign form of life is rather the ongoing and never-ending “genuine battleground of opposed values” (*GM*, I, 16) against slavishness through the imposition of order on oneself through discipline. Reactive forces do not so much extirpate active forces but are simultaneously dependent on them for sublimation into knowledge *and* for the becoming of forces, that is to say, the *becoming of becoming out of a technico-affective history* (Brigham, 2001). The key point here is that discipline and self-control can be used for creativity and alertness *and* for suppressing and narrowing the range of sense of human experience.⁷

I desire for myself and for all who live, *may* live, without being tormented by a puritanical conscience, an ever-greater spiritualization and multiplication of the senses; indeed, we should be

7 May (1998: 133) writes that “To put the matter in terms of power and sublimation, two of Nietzsche’s three criteria of life enhancement, we may say that power is both a measure of life enhancement and yet may also endanger it”. May’s point here is that power sublimated into civilisation and ‘higher culture’ may also be re-released in destructive forms like instrumental practices to specific ends.

grateful to the senses for their subtlety, plenitude, and power and offer them the best we have in the way of spirit. (WP, 820, quoted in May 1998: 28-9)

Here then Nietzsche's concept of the human condition emerges out of an unfathomably complex history. The human is, critically, its history, or as I discuss in the next section, a *technico-affective history*.⁸ In relation to this at the beginning of the Second Essay in *On the Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche poses the following: "To breed an animal *which is able to make promises* – is that not precisely the paradoxical task which nature has set herself with regard to humankind? is it not the real problem of humankind?" (GM, II, 1). Here it is the learning, training and life's circumstances that "change us" (BGE, 231) that are explicit in Nietzsche's genealogical project for thinking the human condition "with its expectation that if we see *why* we pursue the valuations, practices and assumptions that we do, the latter will either be confirmed – though perhaps '*for other reasons than hitherto*' – or else undermined" (May, 1998: 18, italics in original). The genealogy of a particular human or history in general is indeed contingent (i.e., things could have been otherwise) but for those affected by them they are a necessity. Or put another way, "[t]hus, what may be contingent as one's history [nature, nurture, life circumstances] is necessity as one's fate; and only by maximally expressing – i.e., 'willing' – that necessity can one be free" (May, 1998: 22). Here a strong individual is a mixture of the passive and the active. *Passive* in the sense of *submitting to the necessity of a technico-affective history* and *active* in that *this necessary history is willed so as to express configurations of power that it constructs* (May, 1998: 25).

Why might this type of encounter with life be desirable? Deleuze and Guattari respond to the question 'critique in the name of what?' by submitting that the *creation of concepts* or *form creation* resonates with Bateson's counteractualisation of the double-binds of human experience (Bateson, 2000: 206-12). For Bateson, double-binds are actualised to be countered – that is counteractualised with the creation of new forms – thus subverting the tendency toward mutually exclusive actions of *either/or* and to various human pathologies.⁹

8 Philosophy, art and science creates assemblages where chaos and order is a both/and relation. Here Deleuze and Guattari (1994: 203-4) describe what produces poetry: "people are constantly putting up an umbrella that shelters them and on the underside of which they draw a firmament and write their conventions and opinions. But poets, artists, make a slit in the umbrella, they tear open the firmament itself, to let in a bit of free and windy chaos and to frame in a sudden light a vision that appears.... The painter does not paint on an empty canvas, and neither does the writer write on a blank page; but the page or canvas is already covered with preexisting, preestablished clichés that it is first necessary to erase, to clean, to flatten, even to shred, so as to let in a breath of air from the chaos that brings us the vision".

9 See Deleuze and Guattari's later work (1988: 21-2) for an explicit acknowledgement of Bateson's work and his use of the word 'plateau' in relation to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of a rhizome. (cf. Deleuze and Guattari's (1984: 79) earlier collaboration for a more critical account of Bateson and the tendency of double-binds to intensify oedipal relations). For Deleuze and Guattari the either/or of an external relation of form-uniform is an *exclusive disjunction* and an internal relation of both/and is an *inclusive disjunction*. See Cooper's (1998: 157-61) discussion of the overlapping concerns of Bateson and Derrida (and albeit, in passing, Deleuze). He writes "Derrida's *différance* is like Deleuze's *becoming* ... since it's always *deferred* or 'differed' in space and time. But there's always a

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Beardsworth (2001) sets out the human condition as constituted by an *originary technics* and it is from this that he provides a novel approach to willing and to active and reactive forces. Like May, it is the dichotomy between active and reactive forces that Beardsworth wants to reorient. But critically for my purposes, Beardsworth adds to May's willing of a contingent but necessary history an explicit account of willing as non-human from the first instance. Here willing is constituted through a technico-affective history of the human that is always imbricated with non-human forces.

Before I discuss this technico-affective history and willing in more detail I need to set out why Beardsworth considers the dichotomous demarcation of active and reactive forces problematic. Firstly, he states that the dichotomy between active and reactive means that the human is reduced to *dispositions of force or flow* and that, secondly, this field of flows remains an a priori continuity. Here it is not so much the forces that transform as the *relative organisation* of forces that changes. Thirdly, this reduction to flows lapses into new orthodoxy, that is, *metaphysics of force or energy* that risks losing the mediations so critical to the designation of these forces in the first instance – a designation of force that does not include cultural differentiations and thus is unable to provide an *historical account of force*. Fourthly, the conclusion from this is that the implication for overcoming the nihilism of reactive evaluation “is nothing but a question of re-organising the forces underlying the metaphysical re-evaluation of the noble valuation” such that “It is not a matter of inventing the new as such: the overhuman is already with us in this sense”, that is to say, there is no becoming of becoming (Beardsworth, 2001: 47). This is a critical point because it

risks being located by Nietzsche in a *move back* to the ‘original’ valuation, the original noble valuation. At such moments the active destruction of metaphysics (‘active nihilism’) becomes a pure regression to the fiction of spontaneous discharge. (Beardsworth, 2001: 47, emphasis in original)

This is a desire for a metaphysical purity of force – of forces prior to life – that constitutes not so much an overcoming of the human as simply an inversion of the Judaic schema of evaluation. Put in other words, overcoming the Judaic mode of evaluation is based on a return to an original and abstracted field of forces that is particularly problematic because it posits a fictional point in history of pure force. It inaugurates a *metaphysics of becoming that is pure force outside of all historical differentiations*, leaving the dichotomous relation between active and reactive forces intact.¹⁰ Following Beardsworth and May, I am interested in going beyond the sovereign

suggestion of *linear form* in the idea of something deferred, something yet to come, and Derrida is at pains to remind us that *différance* is the continual contamination of form by unform, chaos.... Bateson sees unform as interference or noise that is somehow *external* to form, although his concept of the ‘double-bind’ has more than a hint of Derrida’s *différance* as form that is already disturbed from the *inside* by unform” (Cooper, 1998: 158-9, emphasis in original).

10 Ansell Pearson (1999: 216-218) takes up the criticism that Deleuze and Guattari neglect the way in which the human is inscribed by meaning and memory and lose sight of the genealogical specificity

and reactive conceived as a dichotomy. It is Nietzsche's Second Essay in *On the Genealogy of Morals* that Beardsworth (2001: 48) turns to in order to develop an account of forces as "organisations of force [that] are immediately posited beyond biological, physiological and psychological force to include other types of force (notably technical)". This means that "these organisations [of force] are seen to form a *mediated* history of the organism in relation to its environment from which, precisely, distinctions like the physiological, the technical, the psychological, the social *emerge in the first place*". Without this reconfiguration of Nietzsche, the risk is that an account of the discharge of pure force returns the human to a metaphysics of active force as pure force.

Technics, Memory and the Ability to Promise

In the following I draw on Beardsworth (1996, 1998, 2001) to introduce in more detail what is specific about human development. Beardsworth argues that what has to be rethought is the general poverty of debate surrounding the *processes of hominisation*. Currently, he claims, debate is delimited to four regressive and dogmatic claims. Firstly, cynical assertions that the last three hundred years of European history have been a mistake and should be exorcised. Secondly, fundamentalist claims that we must return to the human essence. Thirdly, the continued necessity of a dichotomization between the sciences and humanities, that is, a dichotomy between science's disembodied chronological time in empty space and the humanities embodied time in inhabited space. Fourthly, attempts generalise and intensify a scientific worldview across all human experience. Rethinking this debate means examining the relations between science, culture and technics, says Beardsworth.

Latour (1987, 1993) has convincingly shown how science is constituted through technological devices and how a 'purification process' erases this technical mediation; Latour demonstrates that the human is bound up with an *original technicity*. Strum and Latour (1999) compare baboons with humans and claim that what is distinctive about the human and modern science is the replacing of a complexity of changing, often ambiguous behaviours, relations and meanings with a complicated array of simple, symbolic, and clear-cut items. It is, they suggest, "an enormous task of simplification." This shift from what they denote as *social complexity* to *social complication* occurs through language, symbols and material objects. Thus to the extent that science can disavow its own constitution through technics, that is, that scientific work is inhabited by technics, it can maintain a claim on abstract chronological time and an evolutionary accumulation of knowledge. Beardsworth (1996) states that this is a metaphysical claim because it refuses to think about the *relation between the human and technics for human*

of complexity of the human. He suggests that criticism "may prove incisive when applied to certain of Deleuze's texts", particularly Deleuze's book on Nietzsche, but not to later, collaborative work (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994).

life. The example that Beardsworth (1996) quotes is from contemporary molecular biology:

[For] as soon as molecular biology makes possible a manipulation of the germen [genetic splicing, for example] through the intervention of the hand, the [genetic] program receives a lesson from experience. The law of life [evolution as slight variation] is thereby purely and simply suspended.... Molecular biology, in its technical actuality, makes the exit from the laws of evolution possible, or ... only apparently; for one should in fact affirm that molecular biology reveals that the 'laws of evolution' have been suspended for a very long time – at least since the invention of man, that is, of technics, and that it is no longer possible to ignore this when this suspension is gaining an actuality that is radically new. (Stiegler, 1994: 272)

There are several important points in this passage. Firstly, the simplistic reduction of the human to a civilised animal is problematised because the human is constituted and transformed by an *originary technics*. This does not mean that the human can be understood in terms of a narrow 'technological rationalism' or tool-making capacity as "its should be made plain that many insects, birds and mammals had made far more radical innovations in the fabrications of containers" (Mumford, 1967: 5). As Ansell Pearson (1999: 216) claims, tools – or the non-discursive – only becomes important when it is taken up with "linguistic symbols, aesthetic designs and socially transmitted knowledge the 'aboriginal field' of human inventiveness lies not simply in the making of tools but in the refashioning of bodily organs".¹¹ Secondly, human 'evolution' is radicalised from the chronological transmission of past into the present with slight variation¹² to a process of hominisation that is *constitutively a technicisation*. Evolution as gradual selection based on a chronological past is refigured into a discontinuous transformation constituted by technics. The disjunctures and disruptions of memory in terms of a constitutive technics can be conceived as dissipative assemblages¹³ (see also Clark 1997, Margulis 1993, for example). This is attempted by reworking the *philosophy of life* in Nietzsche and specifically Nietzsche's writing on promises.

According to Nietzsche what marks out the human from other animals is the ability to make a promise.¹⁴ Beardsworth quotes Nietzsche's (*GM*, II 1) statement that:

To breed an animal *which is able to make promises* – is not this the paradoxical task which nature has set herself with regard to humankind? is it not the real problem *of humankind*?

11 Technology from *techne* meaning composition/arts of mind *and* tools/practices.

12 Differences of degree, rather than kind, are crucial for Darwin's theory that the law of heredity is slight variation. Contemporary molecular biology takes up this claim of slight variation with the estimation that human genetic material is only two per cent different from apes. Such claims provide continued credibility for the animality of the human and attempts to reduce the human to physico-chemicals (see Beardsworth, 1996).

13 Assemblage translated from the French *agencement*. It can also be translated as *arrangement* or *organisation*.

14 See Patton (1993: 144-161) for a discussion of power and promises in Hobbes and Nietzsche.

The human is distinguished in that it may make promises, meaning the ability to *defer the discharge of one's force to a future time and place*. For Nietzsche the act of promising is predicated on the *calculability* and *repeatability made possible by technics*. The act of promising is the memory of the delay of force: it is the will's memory that suspends immediacy, says (Beardsworth, 2001). Nietzsche writes:

And precisely this necessarily forgetful animal, in whom forgetting is a strength, representing a form of *robust* health, has bred for himself a counter drive, memory, with the help of which forgetfulness is suspended in certain cases, – namely in those cases where a promise is to be made: consequently, it is by means a passive inability to be rid of an impression once it has made its impact, nor is it just indigestion caused by giving your word on some occasion and finding you cannot cope, instead it is an active *desire* not to let go, a desire to keep on desiring what has been, on some occasion, desired, really it is the *will's memory*: so that a world of strange new things, circumstances and even acts of will may be placed quite safely between the original 'I will', 'I shall do' and the actual discharge of the will, its act, without breaking this long chain of will. But what a lot of preconditions there are for this! In order to have some degree of control over the future, man must first have learned to distinguish between what happens by accident and what by design, to think causally, to view the future as the present and anticipate it, to grasp with certainty what is end and what is means, in all, to be able to calculate, compute – and before he can do this, man himself will really have to become *reliable, regular and automatic* [notwendig], even in his own self-image, so that he, as someone making a promise is, is answerable for his own future!... That is precisely what constitutes the long history of the origins of responsibility. (*GM*, II, 1-2)

This passage is remarkable because it invokes the human as constituted by the practices that make the world *calculable, orderly and necessary*. Contrary to the First Essay's spontaneous and instinctive affirmation of force, here it is the *decentred deferral of force that constitutes the human* – the time between 'I will' and the actual discharge of the will. From the first, then, the suggestion is that the human is based on deferral and this means that the human can never be a purely active force. Moving beyond the notion of a pure active force means that this dichotomising fiction of pure forces is replaced with the *human will as the historical result of the organisation of force that is beyond a priori designation* (Beardsworth, 2001: 50). This means that categories that in *The Will to Power* Nietzsche often wishes to describe as secondary phenomena, as useless fictions in the realm of Judaic resentment, need rather to be located with the *very* formation of the human will in relation to a non-human technico-affective history. Beardsworth, in a crucial section, writes:

Since this formation marks the process of humanisation as such (there is no human organism without the differentiations of memory), categories that emerge within it cannot be either simply 'active' or 'reactive'. Thus, the categories against which Nietzsche sets much of his thinking – causality, finality, purpose, the subjectivity of the will – are the result of a long process that designates the human as such and therefore designates them *as also* active. (2001: 50)

Here subjectivity is denoted 'as also active' because there are no unmediated instinctual forces that reactive culture straightforwardly 'leaves behind' and because subjectivity gives rise to new mixtures of active and reactive. Here it is forces "that are not initially human but which, through historical formation, have entered into relation with the forces that make up the human" (Ansell Pearson, 1999: 221). It is from this argument about the *process of hominisation* that Beardsworth argues that the active and reactive cannot be simply and dualistically pitted against each other. This *process of hominisation is the effect of a series of forces* – human and non-human, discursive and material – that constitute subjectivity and responsibility. This means that human

subjectivity is not a useless fiction rather what is a fiction is that the *human is ahistorical*. The recasting that this invokes is that it is *only* from a series of preconditions that make the human *determinate and determined* that the *indeterminate and creative* emerge in the first instance. To recap this critical point, this means that the human cannot be thought of purely in terms of self-preservation or in terms of the discharge of active forces that prefigure the human because *what is original to human survival is always already non-human*. And, critically, as I have already argued, to say that the human emerges from technics means that there is no essential logic to the process of life and this means that the human is opened up to chance and contingency.

Beardsworth orients these series of preconditions or forces to mnemotechnics. Nietzsche asks how would it be possible to create a human with memory given its “partly flighty mind, attuned only to the passing moment...?”. Nietzsche introduces mnemonics – the arts *and* practices of memory that is a *mnemotechnics* – to answer this question:

To be answerable for oneself, and proudly too, and therefore have the right to say ‘yes’ to oneself – is, as I said, a ripe fruit, but also a late fruit: – how long must this fruit have hung, bitter and sour, on the tree!... ‘How do you give a memory to an animal, man? How do you impress something on this partly dull, partly idiotic, inattentive mind, this personification of forgetfulness, so that it will stick!’... This age-old question was not resolved with gentle solutions and methods, as can be imagined; perhaps there is nothing more terrible and strange in man’s pre-history than his technique of *mnemonics*. ‘A thing must be burnt in so that it stays in the memory’ – that is a proposition from the oldest ... psychology on earth. (*GM*, II, 3)

Here it is deferral made possible by *mnemotechnics* that is the very possibility of human life. This disciplining of the human, taken up, after Foucault (1987), across the human sciences, has made discussion of issues such as freedom or autonomy somewhat unfashionable for the last two decades. Foucault is surely right that the human *is* the historical product of various disciplinary apparatus that provides for the potential for remote control (Cooper 1992), but yet this does not convey the paradoxical quality of discipline that leaves the human open *because* of its original technicity (see also Watson 1998). It is a “widening of the energetic account of concepts in terms of affects into one that includes *technical forces*”, says (Beardsworth, 2001: 52). Here, firstly, the relation between affect and technics changes and cannot be reduced to pure affect without missing the historical. The human is rather the effect of a “vast spiral” that is “enlarging out more widely and through instances of deferral and differentiation like technics, language and social institutions to those organisms whose digestive systems can *promise*” (Beardsworth, 2001: 53). Secondly, to say that the human is organised by technics does not presuppose that a will or the ability to promise will be formed. Rather such a will or ability comes out of the history of mnemotechnics as variously decentred, dissipative and dynamic (Beardsworth, 2001); this means that prior to being active or reactive the human “emerges from this technico-affective history of cruelty and interiorisation”. Thus any attempt to demarcate the history of delayed discharge or interiorisation to reactive forces can be understood as an attempt to *separate* the historical as technics from the psychological and physiological, and to *impoverish* the work of a multiplicity of forces. Beardsworth’s conclusion for how Nietzsche might be received in a contemporary context

is at one and the same time, first, the analysis of everything in terms of force and, second, the analysis of this very force in terms of a historically differentiated, changing and expanding complex of forces, in which no particular force or analysis of force predominates. (2001: 53, emphasis added)

This is an immanent method that is concerned with the genealogical, technical and ethical and with the way in which a transvaluation of values comes from within this expanded multiplicity of forces. Beardsworth suggests that rather than a return to the 'natural' or premodern beneath civilising processes the human subject is the very condition of one who goes *through and beyond* the distinctions of pure force and artificial constraint. Nietzsche does not therefore reject the possibility of calculation, instead what is critical is the function to which calculatory practices are employed.¹⁵ In other words, for Nietzsche, what is crucial is whether an approach to calculation is reached through sovereign or reactive values and what purpose calculation serves, that is to say, whether it is life enhancing or life denying. To the extent that slavish values are dominant and lead to technical-industrial cultures based on utilitarian assumptions, Nietzsche would consider these life denying. For example, a forest might be used for producing wood pulp and through calculatory practices it could be managed so as to maximise output yields (see Cooper, 1998: 108-10). Here actions are valued according to those to whom they are useful – maximum wood output, in this instance – and premised on a reactive metaphysics of permanence and 'atomistic', instrumental need. Alternatively, the forest might be thought of an *assemblage*, with heterogeneous uses – some known, some unknown. Here forest as assemblage is premised on life enhancing activity that transforms the relation between the inside – forest – and the outside – environment.¹⁶ For example, the forest as protection for a village from falling rocks (if it is close to mountains), as part of a sewage dispersal and recycling system, as a recreation area, as a welcoming environment for rare species and even for wood pulp production. Here calculations would still be made, contracts agreed and forest services provided for a variety of uses but 'forest' and its use is premised on an ontology of becoming that is always in tension with a workaday sense of current knowing. Brown *et al* (1998) describe an ontology of becoming as *ontological relativism* that is always

15 Cooper (1976: 1010) writes that the power of an ontology of being – the Platonic system – “was that it was a specific end just as much as it was a specific tool. That end was the *law* or *principle*, the essence beyond change”.

16 Assemblage is “understood as partial, dispersed, fragile, tentative.... It’s the continuous movement of parts in a restless flux in which the separate identities of the parts give way to a mutual coming *and* going, uniting and separating; and in which identities as self-contained units simply *semble*, seem, feign, pretend [and dependent upon] half of a whole that is the *same* as the other half. *Semi* is divided *same*-ness.... Sameness here is clearly not a property of individual parts but more like an originary matrix or source.... It’s the kind of unlimited source that Michel Foucault called *similitude*, by which he meant the directionless, the indefinite... All this is curiously like Whitehead’s mutuality with its *betweenness* that is mute, mutable and motile.... While space and time may be non-distinguishable – ‘invisible and nameless’ in similitude, they curiously, can only be approached by being separated. This is the double function of the *seam*: it separates *and* joins at *the same time*” (Cooper, 1998: 110-11, emphasis in original).

mediated by an *epistemological realism*.¹⁷ Here an ontological relativism presages continual movement or becoming that is “affirmed as within and ultimately carrying off the real. Hence there is an affirmation that things can and will always be different from how they are grasped in their current actuality” (Brown *et al*, 1998: 83). This is what I term the *ontological turn* for the human sciences.

Free Spirits

In this concluding section I want to elaborate on the *ontological turn* introduced above. To do this I return to the character of the *negative capability* described in ‘The Open Field’. For Deleuze and Guattari the ordering of chaos in oneself, the dance of things in tension, is a negative capability that is becoming – a becoming that invokes Cooper’s ‘open field’, Foucault’s ‘similitude’ and Whitehead’s ‘mutuality’. The implication here is that “right management of our world begins with right management of ourselves. Is this learnable?”, posits Cooper (1976: 1014).

The human condition that I have set out above is one that presupposes the organisation of time, memory and promising *and* transforms time, memory and promises overflowing this expanded field of forces. For Beardsworth (2001) and May (1998) this means that periods of history, such as the Enlightenment, should not be considered a mistake to be exorcised but are retained as “a necessary part of the history of life ... and as a necessary part of life, they are a precondition of their own overcoming” (Beardsworth, 2001: 55-56).¹⁸ Henceforth the opposition between becoming and being is not made obsolete but rather returned to a particular history within an expanded energetics that is a condition for life and the transvaluation/overcoming of practical, workaday assumptions of reality. The implication is that life enhancing values come out of a technico-affective history that is willed and recollected as a necessity of a contingent history. This is I think a critical insight but it is also a potential problem as it

17 See also Latour’s (1993) amodern constitution. Taken seriously, Latour’s constitution would inaugurate a new society, a different nature, establish novel facts and reconstruct reality with new assemblages. Here then the human condition changes with society, science and nature. Echoing this, Marcuse (1969: 45, 31) writes “the imagination, sustained by the achievements of science, could turn its productive power to the radical reconstruction of experience and the universe of experience” so that the “rational transformation of the world could then lead to a reality formed by an aesthetic sensibility of man”. Brown *et al* (1998: 82-3) argue that “In advancing a ‘relativist ontology’ we are placing the assemblages of relations at the centre of the analysis, with the implication that the real owes its certain, ordered nature to the unfinished, unstable ‘hybrid’ patterns-in-production of materials and texts which labour within it. It is here that the notion of ‘presencing practices’ deserves emphasis. Unfinished organizings take on the character of stable entities via the mediation of practices which order, stabilize and moreover ensure the repetition of the appearance of certain meaningful patterns.... Presencing practices are a way of making the world ‘visible’ in stable, orderly fashion, thereby providing the conditions of ‘articulability’, for speaking about the world in particular ways”. See Deleuze (1994) for a detailed elaboration of Plato’s logic of original, copy and simulacra.

18 Similarly, analysis of organisations can be retained for present purposes despite the injunction that organisation is act of ‘simple location’ (Chia, 1998).

suggests “that if that history happens to determine, in an individual or a culture (such as ours), precisely the moral values which Nietzsche opposes, then he seems, perversely, to demand that we should ‘will’, rather than repudiate, those very values” (May, 1998: 22). Like the creative solutions to Bateson’s double-binds, the seeming paradox of willing reactive values can be figured into a creative encounter whereby the only way of overcoming is through living *through and beyond* such values so that their life denying effects become overwhelmingly apparent, thus serving as the basis of their own overcoming.

From an expanded multiplicity of technico-affective forces, the relation between the organisation of forces and the re-evaluation of the production of forces is one of *mediation*. This is an important point because it means that active or reactive forces are not forgotten but understood as historical and reflective mediations rather than absolute distinctions. It is, to use Cooper and Burrell’s (1988) terms, concerned with the mediation of the organisation of production *and* the production of organisation (see also Burrell, 2001: 25-26). Once the technico-affective history of the human and the overhuman are understood as inseparable then the organisation of production and the production of organisation cannot be separated either. It is through the mediation of forces understood as through a technico-affective history rather than the breaking down of forces into *a priori* dichotomies such as active or reactive that the forces producing organisation exceed the organisation of production. Similarly, Deleuze and Guattari (1988) describe forces as ‘machinic’ in order that forces are not taken to be an essential essence: here ‘machinic’ denotes the becoming of becoming of forces. This is, I suggest, an empowering sense of the indeterminacy of relations, non-human from the first instance, that emerges from within an expanded field of forces.

Ansell Pearson (1999: 214-24) remarks that what is particular about capitalist society is that capitalism is anti-genealogical and anti-memory as it “no longer needs to write in bare flesh or to create a memory for the human”. But as Ansell Pearson (1999: 220) continues “while capitalism may to a certain extent be the ‘master’ of surplus value and its distribution, it does not dominate the flows from which surplus value derives”. It means, he continues, that “the articulation of machinic subjectivity within the movements of capitalist production is rhizomatic, coming from multiple directions and exceeding the utilitarian and productivist logics of capital in unpredictable and incalculable directions”. It is from this that the “overhuman signals not the death or disappearance of the human and something more than a simple change of concept; in short, it signals the arrival of a new form of life that is neither God nor man – ‘and which, it is hoped, will not prove worse than its previous two forms’” (Deleuze, 1988b: 132, in Ansell Pearson, 1999: 221). An implication of this for those researching organisations is that description and analysis of the human, technologies and organisations can be retained whilst simultaneously maintaining their transvaluation, that is to say, forces producing organisation are shape-shifted by the organisation of production which itself is defined by *and* overcoming its own technico-affective history of forces. Beardsworth (2001: 64) claims that this vital recognition invokes an *immense cultural adventure* that anticipates a future: the irreducible *becoming* of cultural, natural, technical and historical forces of the human. This is, I suggest, Nietzsche’s idea of the *free spirit*:

A free spirit is a person who has an enlarged sense of the self's relation to its *Umwelt* [environment] through recognising the intrinsic relation between the sensuous and the rational. In the experience of this recognition a free spirit becomes less appropriating, more abounding in energy. A 'free spirit' comes, in other words, from knowing where spirit comes from in the first place, how it evolves and what forces are in play behind our conceptual determinations of the world. (Beardsworth, 2001: 43)

Here a free spirit "is no mindless psychotic or eroded subjectivity ... but a massively complex assortment of infinitely adaptable dissipative-structures, provided by a life of richly varied and disciplined structural-couplings with the physical and social environment" (Watson, 1998: 14). Put simply, the untrained encounter with chaos is rarely productive, liberating or creative: Bergson, Nietzsche and Deleuze were great philosophers *because* of their training and what this discipline allowed them to create; this is the conclusion that Deleuze and Guattari (1994) come to in their final collaborative book. Similarly, for Ansell Pearson (1999), since the human is responsible for "even the stars and animal life" – the human is the "eternal custodian of the machines of the universe", say Deleuze and Guattari (1984: 4) – the critical and creative task – which for Deleuze the human continues to enjoy a privileged status as the overhuman – is to "make history" by "unmaking preceding realities and configurations" and produce "unexpected conjunctions" and "improbable continuums". Here the human "doubles history with a sense of continual evolution" (Deleuze, 1988a: 35). The technico-affective assemblages of the human are not the disavowal of history and politics but a creative reconfiguration of them that opens a technico-affective history to a "supple and transversal network of novel alliances that is always perpendicular to the vertical structure of established and official history" (Ansell Pearson, 1999: 223). Here issues relating to the human condition become creative through the critical concepts of assemblage, discourse and technics.

The human cannot be adequately conceived as purely reactive but rather emerges from mediated technico-affective assemblages that are the condition for rethinking the human condition. For Nietzsche choosing depends not on a 'free will' as a primary cause but on a 'strong will' (*BGE*, 21). This 'strong will' should not be taken as evoking total liberation above 'man and mountains', from tradition and all pre-existing sense, on the basis that it is arbitrary. It means instead affirming the technico-affective assemblages of the human as not the antithesis of freedom but a precondition of it in the first instance.¹⁹ To deny this genealogy of the human – "the whole single line of humanity up to himself", Nietzsche says (*TI*, 33) – would not only be bound to failure but would most importantly deny the constitution of the human through temporality and suffering. Thus a 'freedom of the will' that expresses the necessity of the technico-affective history of the human for its own overcoming is the condition for developing a self-discipline of 'promising', *living on and through* with 'great suffering' and becoming self-responsible (*GM*, II, 2). These claims might also be made for the study of

19 "It is never the case that that there is *either* constraint *or* freedom: the logic of otherability and betweenness insists on the *simultaneity*.... Assemblage affirms the complex interdependence *between* the constrained and the unconstrained, *between* the predictable and the unpredictable" (Cooper, 1998: 118).

organisation: neither the forces producing organisation nor the organisation of production precede each other in either direction. Rather “their space of mutual determination is created in the process ... [and these] terms are radically unstable mutually defining instances. *It is this space that is active and pregnant with the future*” (Beardsworth, 2001: 55, emphasis in original). It is a space of invention through and beyond distinctions that retains its particular history as a condition of its eventual overcoming.

The response to the double-bind of the human condition for Cooper, with inspiration from Bergson, Bateson, Deleuze, Nietzsche and others, is to *create*. Here creativity becomes a form of concept producing critique when productive critique does not work within a logic of reversal or binary opposition of *either/or* but affirm relations of *both/and*. This is the *both/and* of the event where relations of becoming and being are inseparable; they ‘inhere and subsist’ as virtual and actual, although they are not identical. For Deleuze and Guattari (1988, 1994) this is critique without deliverance because it does not set out to liberate the human as something that has been held enslaved. It is because of the claims of representationalism, that is to say, that form and order returns to the Same, that Deleuze and Guattari’s pragmatics is so powerful for reanimating critique. If as Nietzsche says we must have chaos in ourselves so as to give birth to dancing stars, then dancing stars will not be repetitions of the Same in a Platonic sense, but a repetition that is a becoming through and beyond a technico-affective history. This becoming is the *negative capability* that Cooper (1976: 1009-10) writes about as “the putting of oneself among uncertainties and staying there.... Out of this swirl of indeterminacy, a creation delivers itself in its own wisdom and needs no pulling”. The ability to make a promise through a constitutive technics might therefore be most usefully thought of as not the resolution of tensions inherent in the human condition but as approaching the double-binds of the human condition: the impossibility of knowing the chaos in oneself and the necessity of making things knowable and ordered. Here technics is anthropomorphic in the sense of *anthropos* meaning of human shape and *morphos* meaning to give shape.

I have argued that the relation between willing, active and reactive forces and life enhancement comes out of the human’s technico-affective history. From this account of the human condition I set out an *ontological turn* and the implications for such a turn for the human sciences and for organisation studies. I have claimed that a dichotomy between active and reactive force culminates in an *either/or* relation: *either* an inability to create new forms through madness *or* the repetition of the Same through acquiescence to common sense representationalism. In both instances the capacity to produce durable ordering effects and the ability to make promises is undermined. Promising becomes impossible for those who have stepped into madness because of a lack of order and regularity. Similarly, those who are obedient only to a logic of representation are unable to fulfil promises because of an inability to respond creatively to the contingencies of any activity. Responding to this predicament is the critical and creative task that characterises Bob Cooper’s intellectual work over the last twenty-five years: writing about concepts that stake out an encounter with the chaos in ourselves and our tendencies to be slavish to conformity. Remaining in paradoxical and unsettling assemblages of *both/and* we must have a little chaos in ourselves, those rhizomatic little ‘dancing stars’, as Nietzsche says, but not abandon sublimated knowledge. Despite

double-binds, the creative movement and mixture of *both/and* is to be fought for with an ontological turn.

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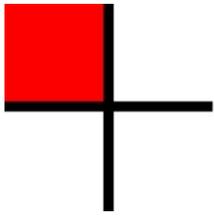
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Unmanaging/Disorganisation

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abstract

This paper intrudes the strategies and agendas of management into the theme of disorganisation. Cooper's (1986) analysis of systems suggests that what is talked about *as* organisation is always the 'organisation of organisation'. Indeed, inasmuch as normal science bootstraps itself from its attention to anomalies, abnormalities and general disorder, his argument is that organisation is the organisation of disorganisation. In contrast, I attend to the sedimentation thesis of 'social' organisation and argue that managers' long-running attempts to dislodge what they brand as 'tradition' has resulted in a kind of disorganised organisation in which there is no centre. Rather, at any moment, different parts of the multiple and diffuse accumulation of managerial technologies are drawn down and performed *as* system.

Introduction

To those versed in deconstruction, it is perhaps of little surprise to find a front-ranking scholar like Cooper investigating the 'priority' of disorganisation over organisation. Perhaps all too easy also to mistake Cooper's (1986) analysis as offering a mere inversion of an existing hierarchy, such as popular misconceptions of deconstruction usually imply. The surprise quickens, however, when managers themselves appear to be deploying the mode of disorganisation. Aren't managers supposed to organise, not disorganise? Why might they systematically disorder and disrupt, even to the extent of setting out to 'unglue' their institution?

In what follows, I develop the theme of disorganisation differently to Cooper. Equally concerned to recover a sense of organisation as *social*, rather than the merely economic, Cooper's emphasis turns on the importance of thinking about boundaries, a concept marginalised by the study of organisation being itself organised into a dichotomy between system and environment (see also Munro, 1986). In contrast I emphasise the institutional thesis of sedimentation, the continuous construction and recreation of all that has gone before. My argument is that disorganisation becomes a viable and potent strategy for managers once the *multiplicity* of orders circulating among institutions is better understood.

Order and Disorder

Two dangers: order and disorder. What are we to make of this injunction, adopted by Robert Cooper as the motif for his seminal paper ‘Organization/Disorganization’? How could order – in Paul Valery’s formulation – *continually* “threaten the world”? Easy to understand how disorder appears always threatening, more difficult to engage readily with the idea of order itself being a danger. To say nothing yet on the difficulties of thinking about *disorganisation*. Is disorganising more than nihilism? If so, how would this be organised? Or could disorganising come to be regarded as an end itself?

Already we feel the muddle of any ‘middle’ here. Problems arise whenever terms are given *equal* weighting; when disorder is insisted on as having its own force and allowed to be a phenomenon in its own right. After all, few would deny a little bit of disarray as healthy; the ability on occasion to wear odd socks, or leave a magazine on the floor by coffee table. And after the Holocaust, the danger of order becoming extreme – when order itself gets ‘out of order’ – is self-evident. So much easier, then, to keep terms as they are! To insist on black being black and white being white, with no grey areas in between.

Disorder appears admissible only when order, so to speak, keeps the upper hand. Yet, according to Cooper (1986), this is to succumb to the formulation of a prior organisation. It is to insist, unwittingly, on the organisation of a “violent hierarchy” (Derrida, 1981: 41), in which one term of a pairing is privileged and the other is denigrated. To keep terms as they are, to forbid inquiry (and so seal them off from examination), is to make immune what Cooper (1986) calls the ‘organisation of organisation’; to proscribe investigation of the ‘organising concepts’ (Foucault, 1970; cf Gutting, 1989) of a discipline is also to leave unquestioned its organising principles.

The Organisation of (Dis)Organisation

Cooper’s (1986) analysis stems from a recognition that organisation, in its most fundamental sense, is the “appropriation of order out of disorder” (p. 328). Inasmuch as the implication here is that order is a *response* to perceptions of disorder, this definition is intuitively plausible. As Cooper emphasises in his analysis of information, “order is extracted *as* form and disorder is *refused* as non-form” (p. 328, emphasis added).

Yet if Cooper’s definition makes disorder prior, this inversion of the traditional ascendancy of organisation over disorganisation would also seem more contentious. Isn’t a sense of disorder set up in turn by expectations of order? However, the corollary of our composing ideas of order out of disorder – the organisation of organisation – is that we then re-impose these ideas upon the world in order to make the world as we find it. In deconstructing organisation, therefore, Cooper points to how *talk* of organisation obviates its own status as the organisation of (dis)organisation and intrudes itself as the very object of discussion. In consequence, disorganisation is simply ‘refused’. Banished as a topic of investigation, it becomes a ‘no-thing’.

To substantiate these claims, Cooper draws on Derrida's argument in which the selection of 'order from disorder' is placed in a context of power. This gives rise to a process of displacement:

...the selection of order from disorder in a context of power in which language (by which we mean systems of communication in general) becomes the very object of the conflict (Cooper, 1986: 328).

Language – the organisation of organisation – becomes the centre of a struggle for power. As Cooper adds:

It is necessary to understand that, viewed in this way, language and speech are not merely the vehicles for the expression of conflict but become the objects to be appropriated (Cooper, 1986: 328)

A stress on conflict and power has the additional merit of establishing the central problem of order: the *reversibility* of any order. What may begin as a 'supplement' to the everyday disorder of living and breathing becomes, in turn, privileged and then is given priority as *the* organisation. So much so that we take as natural and normal those things which are seen to be 'in form', framing anything which threatens our stability as 'in-firm'. But, as we know, not everything that is taken as normal remains so.

Bootstrapping Normal Science from Deviance

According to Cooper, understanding is really a "curative process" (p. 330). By this I take it he means that it is anomalies, like boils or fevers, which manifest or 'present' themselves and, further, that it is the desire to cure such matters which leads to remedies and eventually to a more general understanding of the body and its systems.

In this way, Cooper asserts that the normal became an object of study initially through a concern, both practical and theoretical, with pathology and disease:

Both correct knowledge of systems as well as their correct administration required an understanding of their correct norms and these were to be discovered only through their inversions in the abnormal. (p. 330)

Scientific interest in norms and normalisation, as Cooper suggests, bootstraps itself from its investigations with the abnormal. In a similar way, Kuhn (1970) suggested scientific revolutions are prompted by attention to anomalies. It is disorder – and, more generally, 'error' and the 'incorrect' – that first draws in the attention of science.

Drawing on Canguilhem (1978: 145-88), Cooper correlates the growth in science during the nineteenth century with the problem of administering the large populations that emerged with the rise of industrial societies. In this view, the norm became a formalised tool for dealing with 'aggravated differentiation'. Working forward from the formalisation of rules for the correct usage of the French language by the State's grammarians in the seventeenth century through to the appearance of technological and administrative norms, Canguilhem traced a process in which the norm "functions as the basis of order, not only ordering the system to restore the normal state in cases of

deviation but at the same time providing an order of knowledge for the system to conceptualise itself” (Cooper, 1986: 330).

While Canguilhem directed attention to “an object-language which works on the boundaries of systems”, Cooper suggests his analysis “necessarily includes the human subject in the object-language where it acts through a ‘will-to-cleanse’” (p. 331). This is to say “what is right and acceptable” within a system is based on an inclusion/exclusion principle which maintains the “purity” of the inside by keeping out “impurity” (p. 330).

Ordering Order out of Disorder

The powerfulness of this scientific approach should not be underestimated. Durkheim’s insights on society by comparing suicide rates remains emblematic and, deeply aware of the ‘paradox of consequences’, Weber (and even Parsons) was sceptical of straightforwardly ‘rational’ approaches. Order does not proceed as intended. It was by investigating disorder that order could be excavated and understood.

The kind of norms early sociologists were interested in were not the ‘normative’ of the prescriptive, but stemmed from the result of deep structures in society resulting, say, from the conflict between that of capital and labour. This kind of structure is not to be understood directly, but is to be observed – perversely – through the deviant. As I have argued elsewhere, the presence of a system is recognised not through what it includes, but from what it *excludes* (Munro, 1986). For example, money becomes a system only at the point when it drives out barter. Money can buy goods and goods can buy money, but what becomes increasingly difficult, and deviant, is for goods to buy other goods.

For much of the twentieth century, the sociology of institutions remained caught between a functional attention to the normal at the systems level and this clinical investigation of particular deviant cases. Yet work was emerging, particularly as Cooper notes with the studies of the Chicago school, that could eventually challenge the implicit spatial understandings in which norms were treated as central and deviation remained at the margins. More and more studies of the deviant came to question the very apparatus that installs the appellation of deviance.

More radically for the development of the sociology of institutions, in-depth case studies by symbolic interactionists and ethnomethodologists were also suggesting a process of sedimentation in which practices took on a mimetic or cultural quality which resisted ‘functional’ interpretation. Communities, for example, not only form themselves within institutions, and are so facilitated in their formation by institutions, they also take on a mind of their own. As Bauman (2001: 31) quotes Sennett, “maintaining community becomes an end in itself; the purge of those who don’t really belong becomes the community’s business”.

Organisation as the Construction of its Members

My understanding of how ‘disorganisation’ works proceeds particularly from the insights of this later, ethnographic tradition. In line with Garfinkel’s (1967) analysis of members making themselves ‘visible and accountable’ to each other, Bittner (1965) argued organisation to be ‘the production of its members’. For example, in his study of Skid Row, Bittner (1967) shows how the police operate in ways which keep the peace. This is to say that the police on Skid Row do not uphold the law, as is their official function. Instead they intervene in ways which would seem arbitrary and even lawless. Only in the context of their own understandings of the need to keep the peace do their actions begin to make sense.

While they might not put it so, what managers appear to dislike about their institutions is exactly this propensity for organisation to be the ‘product’ of its members. Such ‘social’ organisation is not only open to accusations of being inward-looking, it resists instructions and prefers the sedimentation of its own practices to the forced introduction of new methods. In a word, such organisation is not only resistant to change, it actually *organises out* change. The ‘will to cleanse’ of the (social) organisation’s members ensures the survival of the ‘purity’ of the sedimented and syncretic organisation by excluding new ideas and new methods as ‘impure’.

The strength and resilience of such exclusion work can be judged by the failure of earlier management regimes to supplant such informal organisation with formal rules (Gouldner, 1954) and the very limited success of recent management in imposing a corporate culture on the more ‘indigenous’ organisational culture. By means of ‘role distance’ (Goffman, 1958) on the one hand and ‘attachment’ to control artefacts on the other, employees seem able to make themselves ‘visible and available’ (Munro, 1999) to the new managerial agendas without necessarily mending their ways.

In such circumstances, it is hardly surprising managers develop an almost pathological urge to disorder; to break up what they regard as stultified and backward and begin to shake other managers out what they take to be their complacency and insularity. As an early example of such ‘disorganisation’, I watched senior managers – in advantageous circumstances of a takeover – ‘rubbish’ precedent and tradition *as* belonging to the past (Munro, 1998). While not unproblematic, particularly in the company having to re-import much of the previously failing accounting technology, this ploy did give senior managers the ability to switch between holding their subordinates within relations of hierarchy one moment and imposing on them relations of the market the next.

At the time of the fieldwork, 1987-8, I saw such attempts to ‘rubbish’ tradition as rather unsophisticated, although I accepted that such ‘disorganising’ discourses became relatively widespread, particularly so for the public sector which is still disparaged for clinging onto tradition (cf Strathern, 1993). In my subsequent ethnography of a highly successful market leader, I began to see how senior managers distanced themselves from everyday organisation, by disparaging subordinate managers as ‘glorified supervisors’ and by declaring work statistics as ‘misleading’ (Munro, 1995). In one sense this might just be accepted as the by now familiar disparagement – a disordering

kind of talk rather than disorganisation per se. However, given the institution's lack of sophistication in management technologies, it seemed to me that more was going on.

In particular, I began to identify *ambiguity* – the withdrawal of instruction – as a potent technique for control. Preserving a silence over local debates between ideas of order and disorder, while talking the talk of more general managerial discourse, allowed managers to reap the benefits of 'social' organisation and yet simultaneously deny its importance. And yet this analysis leaves an uncomfortable question: how is such ambiguity possible? It is to this question of conditions of possibility that I now turn.

The Archaeology of Orders

It is a fair assumption about organisation that virtually any technique of ordering and organising is still going on somewhere today. Indeed, one might go further and wonder if this set of diverse and inchoate material does not, for the most part, also remain imminently available within many institutions. For example, fundamental analysis of share price continues alongside 'chartist' approaches, debates on centralisation and specialisation rumble on interminably and earlier notions, like that of the optimal span of control – a residue of administrative theory – can sometimes be appealed to as if these had current credence.

So, too, strategy is added to planning, planning has been added to procedures, time management sewn onto project management, activity based costing added to standard costing and the balanced scorecard approach added onto a profit focus. Similarly, over quality, an emphasis on continuous improvement is added to a customer focus and each gets added in turn to some version of statistical process control. There is, however, no necessary order of accretion here. For example, where quality circles have long continued, these are charged with absorbing 'new' directions like team-working, or whatever else is thought to be missing or absent.

The point is not that each new addition is revealed to be a 'failing' technology (cf Miller & O'Leary, 1993), in line with the expectations of critique. As Watson's (1994) study of management discourse in GEC illustrates, the potential benefit of some of the techniques is conceded:

DOC was brilliant. It really worked at building the sort of culture a business like this needs. BIP was completely necessary. It is only common sense. TQM seems to me the only way to manage a high-tech operation. Team-briefing's a good idea, problem-solving teams are a good idea.

Although resisting the idea of each of these being 'a magic fad, a new cure-all', what is left is often disappointment that the ideas are not fully integrated into practice. As the same manager continues:

If only we would take these management good ideas to heart and incorporate into some basic hard work. Then we would get there. Instead of that we keep chasing rainbows; going through the motions without thinking out properly what we are doing things for. (Watson: 1994: 158)

It is hard not to hear a plea for order – integration – here. There is a sense of waste that each technology is never incorporated into practice, but merely set aside for the next.

The point is that while each new technology tends to be added to the heap of existing management technologies, few are ever deleted. Seldom are previous ‘orders’ dismantled or taken away. And this asymmetry over ‘addings’ remains broadly true even for ostensibly more radical agendas, such as business process re-engineering which adopt a top-down-approach to rationalisation. The benefits of each technique are surely calculated – and their introduction justified – on the supposition they will replace existing operations and processes. But, in practice, usually they don’t. They end up *adding* to whatever is already being done.

Ambiguity and the de-centring of orderings

As I have argued elsewhere, the kind of organisational culture sought by ‘purists’ (Smircich, 1983) is illusory. Culture is not only imported as and when people enter and leave their institution on a daily basis; so, too, what passes for culture within the institution is shot through and through by the artefacts of control (Munro, 1999).

In this sense, the ‘social’ organisation of members is always syncretic, its rationale and reasons hallowed by time. To be sure one would expect a genealogy in its sedimentation of the kind outlined by Foucault (1979). But inasmuch as new techniques and technologies are ‘kept apart’ – neither being incorporated fully as part of the ‘social’ nor being altogether excluded and rejected – they can be kept on the shelf ready to be ‘activated’ (Simons, 1990) the moment some senior manager asks for information that can be produced in no other way. Such arrangements, I argue, satisfy both ‘the will to cleanse’ and the senior manager’s need to ‘drill’ into performance in ways that are (ludicrously) thought to remain objective.

There is no single organisation to institutions today. Nor, I suspect, was there ever such a fabulous beast as the kind of organisation envisaged by the manager I quoted earlier. Common sense told him that all these ‘good’ ideas needed to be ‘incorporated’ by being fully integrated with each other. But common sense can also be wrong. For to privilege one particular kind of order would be to commit the fallacy of attempting to create a ‘centre’ to organisation. Whereas what the new management, indistinctly and vaguely, appears to be doing is abandoning any authoritative reference to what Derrida (1978: 286) would call an ‘origin’, or ‘an absolute *archia*.’

In discussing this notion of de-centring, Cooper reminds us that Levi-Strauss (1970) realised that he was in danger of privileging the Bororo myth – his own reference myth – over all the other myths. Because myths are cross-referential:

...all are equal and hence collectively refute the idea of one version being paramount for the understanding of all the others. There is no unity or absolute centre of myth. The “differential” structure of myth necessarily precludes it from being pinned down to any one position or point of view. (Cooper, 1986: 319)

Much the same must be said about technologies of managing. There is no single architecture of control which could sustain and carry all the rest. The mistake textbooks make is of talking of management as if all its multiple and diverse parts integrated into a single cohesive system. Whereas the only system that is ever in existence is the one being enacted or imagined on the spot – momentarily and provisionally – out of all the wreckage and bricolage from what has gone before. And insofar as this is always being enacted differently over time and differentially across the institution, we can be pretty sure we never step in the same system twice.

Organisation and Management?

In this short paper, I have tried to make sense of two papers. First I wanted to honour much of the insight in Cooper's 'Organization/Disorganization'. The density of his encyclopaedic knowledge makes it impossible to do full justice to this extraordinarily perceptive paper. Yet I felt I should try, if only to exculpate the failings here of a different and more complex paper on 'Disorganisation' which I am due to deliver to its editors next week.

In this latter paper (see Munro, 2002), I had thought to focus on the extent to which current managerial agendas seem to me to be 'disorganising'. This is a topic on which Cooper's paper is silent. Given the rise and rise of management – so much so that management now presents itself as the solution to its own failings – it seemed to me that a continued silence is now dangerous. Continued attention to the running conflict between management and employees can obscure the radical division emerging between senior and subordinate managers. Increasingly it is this, I argue, which is bringing about a new kind of disorganisation.

And yet writing this new paper has left me wondering if I am not crossing vital boundaries. Should I not speak of 'unmanagement', rather than disorganisation? How might a potential rupture here – between management and organisation – affect our thinking of each? Especially if we can no longer take for granted – as Cooper seems to insist – the idea of management and organisation as belonging to the same discipline?

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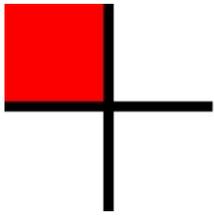
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Exploring the (Expanded) Realm of Organization: Celebrations of a Cooperian Revolution

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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, ISBN: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, ISBN: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

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 decentering 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

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 bureaucratizing 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 chaotic³. 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

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 Sotro'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, Sotro 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, Sotro 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, Sotro 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 irresolvable 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 Sotro 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 oculo-centric 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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