ORGANIZATION THEORY AS POSTMODERN SCIENCE

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'In each period there is a general form of the forms of thought; and, like the air we breath, such a form is so translucent, and so pervading, and so seemingly necessary, that only by extreme effort can we become aware of it'

(Alfred North Whitehead, 1933: 21)

'I must start by underlining just how much I admire the work of M. Einstein….I believe that we are being presented here not only with a new realm of physics, but also, in a certain respect, a new way of thinking'

(H. Bergson, 1922: 102)

'Whereas the mechanistic picture regarded discrete objects as the primary reality…I suggest that the unbroken movements of enfolding and unfolding…is primary while the apparently discrete objects are secondary phenomena….Whereas modern physics has tried to understand the whole reductively by beginning with the most elementary parts, I am proposing a postmodern physics which begins with the whole'

(D. Bohm, 1988: 66)

Overview

This chapter seeks to offer a comprehensive and critical exposition of the postmodern imperative and its implications both for our understanding of organization as a theoretical object and its consequences for Organization Theory (OT) as an academic discipline. The central argument made here is that postmodernism must not be understood as a cynical or nihilistic tendency in contemporary thought but as a subtle and complex attempt at reworking the metaphysical bases of modern knowledge. We begin by examining the roots of Western metaphysics and the manner in which it has shaped modern scientific thought especially in relation to our contemporary privileging of form, being, order, stability, identity and presence over becoming, formlessness, flux, difference, deferral and change. We then identify the key axioms and imperatives associated with the modernist impulse especially the ideas of differentiation, simple-location, classification and representation. Against this modernist tendency we counterpose a postmodern metaphysics in which the Heraclitean primacy accorded to process, movement, interpenetration and incessant

change are emphasised. From this process ontology, order, form and identity, are viewed as humanly-imposed patterns of comprehension and not immutable structures existing independently in an external world. Organization is fundamentally an ongoing aggregative world-making activity not a solid and static thing. Such a view of organization leads us to reconceptualise OT, not as a study of organisational, forms, identities and attributes, or even the internal workings of bounded social systems called 'organizations', but as a sustained analysis of the inextricable relationship between broader civilisational trends and societal forms, and between metaphysical orientations and managerial perceptions, aspirations, and imperatives. Thus, the study of dominant modes of thought, processes of individuation and identity-creation, strategies of objectification and institutionalization, the development of codes of behaviour, social mannerisms, rules of law, and disciplines of knowledge all form a part of this extended field of inquiry. It is this radical reworking of the function and contribution of OT that is implied by the advent of a postmodern science.

The Metaphysical Roots of Modern Western Thought

Contemporary Western modes of thought are circumscribed by two opposing and enduring metaphysical presuppositions. Heraclitus, a native of Ephesus in ancient Greece emphasised the primacy of a fluxing, changeable and emergent world whilst Parmenides his successor insisted upon the permanent and unchangeable nature of reality. One emphasised reality as inclusively processual the other privileged a homeostatic and entitative conception of reality. This seemingly intractable opposition between a Heraclitean ontology of *becoming* and a Parmenidean ontology of *being* provides us with the key for understanding contemporary debates between modernism and postmodernism and their consequences for OT. Although there is clear evidence of a resurgence in interest in Heraclitean-type thinking in recent years, it is the Parmenidean-inspired mind-set which has decisively prevailed in the West over the past five hundred years or so. According to this neo-Parmenidean modernist world-view, ultimate reality is atomistic, stable and relatively unchanging. Atomism presupposes that reality is made up of individual discrete particles with identifiable properties and characteristics that combine together to produce the multifarious life-sized phenomena of our experiences. Wholes are in principle reducible to 'parts' and are, in practice, aggregate outcomes of individual elements.

Furthermore, the belief that individual atoms are stable and thing-like leads to the assumption that each aspect of reality that presents itself to us can be observed, differentiated, recorded, identified and classified in a comprehensive system of representation. Experienced phenomena are deemed to be reducible to aggregate elements possessing distinct boundaries, definable shapes and clear spatial integrity that endure through time. From this metaphysical mind-set, it then becomes possible to postulate the existence of a universal pattern of ordering through which the multitude of phenomena can be predictably related to each other in a hierarchical system of causal relations. Thus, it is believed that through this systematic process of observation, recording, classification, analysis and causal attribution, the goal of ultimate predictability and absolute control is attainable. Moreover, the contemporary neo-Parmenidean world-view does accept the reality of change. However, such changes are importantly assumed to be epi-phenomena of primary stable entities. When changing objects are analysed, it is their attributes that are deemed to have changed, but 'that which underlies the attributes, what the attributes are attributes *of*' (Cobb, 1993: 170) is assumed to remain strictly the same. Thus, any change observed is explained in terms of the *locomotion* of entities; i.e., 'things' moving through space from one location to another. There is no acknowledgement of an internal *becoming* and transformation in these atomistic individuals.

Such a privileging of an entitative conception of reality was much inspired by the introduction of the Phoenician-invented alphabetic system into Grecian thought some three thousand years ago. This is because the phonetic alphabet, as a system of communication, works by breaking up the seamless flow of speech into arbitrary consonants and individual sound syllables. The sound heard and the word seen are distinctly different experiences. In the former, like listening to a continuous melody, the individual sounds melt into one another and there are no clear distinctions separating each note of the music. On the other hand, the phonetically-based alphabet clearly delineates one syllable from another, one word from another, and one sentence from another, and each are treated as distinct entities to be manipulated and dealt with in isolation (McLuhan and McLuhan, 1988). Carothers (1959: 31) maintains that Western thought, because of its overwhelming influence by the alphabet, has developed a dominant mode of perception which is overwhelmingly visual and which elevated the universal, the abstract and the static over the fluxing and concrete particular.

In sum, the alphabet precipitated the analytical breaking-up and objectification of phenomena for the purpose of analysis, and by reducing all our senses into visual and pictorial or enclosed space, inspired the rise of the Euclidean sensibility which has dominated our thought processes for over two thousand years. This privileging of a static and atomistic world-view has paved the way for the dominance of a mechanistic, clock-work view of the universe and the elevation of mathematics as the quintessential tool for investigating and explicating the properties of the physical world (Shapin, 1994). As Shapin writes, the link between a mechanistic world-view and the use of mathematical technique was taken 'as a matter "of course"' (Shapin, 1994: 318) during the period of the Enlightenment. For instance Robert Boyle, like many of his contemporaries 'propagated a mechanical conception of nature' and 'elaborated a matter-theory couched in mathematical concepts' (Shapin, 1994: 333). This is especially evident in an essay he wrote on the *Usefulness of Mathematics for Natural Philosophy* where he urged the application of mathematics in the analysis of nature. It is this clock-work mechanistic view of the universe which has led to the modernist obsession with <u>representing</u> reality since the latter is now believed to be made up of precise, stable and discrete component parts that have been assembled together by universal forces.

Representationalism: The Basic Epistemological Strategy of Modernism
Although the alphabetic system is clearly responsible for the development of an abstractive and visually-based form of knowledge, it took the invention of the printing press over two and a half thousand years later for the modernist mind-set to finally emerge (McLuhan, 1967; Eisenstein, 1980). The invention of the printing press promoted a widespread type-setting mentality through its emphasis on combining and recombining the otherwise discrete and individual characters of the alphabet. Because of the astonishing capacity of this new technology coupled with flexibility of the alphabetic system we are able to produce impressive combinations of syllables, words, sentences and paragraphs to create the seemingly inexhaustible libraries of books and genres we find all around us. The idea that all phenomena can be similarly dealt with by breaking them up into component parts and then reassembling them as needs be, rapidly became the overpowering metaphor for modern analysis (Fisher, 1991; McArthur, 1986). As Fisher shows mining was one of the first systematic attempt to de-constitute and reconstitute the natural world into a series of resources

for our use: 'It is in mining that the world first appears as broken lumps of pure matter' (Fisher, 1991: 223). It is this typographic 'assemblage' metaphor which serves as the organizing template for modern thought. It led Descartes in his *Discourse on Method* to insist upon dividing each of the difficulties that he encountered 'into as many parts as might be possible and necessary in order best to solve it' (Descartes, 1628/1968: 41).

One major consequences of this analytical and typographic mindset was the emergence of an obsession with the creation of taxonomies, tables, hierarchies and classificatory schemas for representing both nature and the social world. Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae*, written in the early eighteenth century provides one of the clearest examples of this taxonomic obsession. In the broader social realm, this same preoccupation was to be found in the work of John Wilkins and Thomas Sprat, both founding members of the Royal Society. For both Sprat and Wilkins modern knowledge is to be based upon pre-established symbols, tables, taxonomies, and hierarchies. Thus, in this scheme of things, 'you do not *call* a thing by its name, which would be arbitrary. No, you *use* the name to designate the thing's location in a taxonomic chart' (Kenner, 1987: 87, emphasis original). Through this system of differentiation, classification and representational ordering, Wilkins and Sprat sought to create an exaggeratedly formal and ordered social world which could thereby be more precisely described, analysed and controlled. It is this taxonomic strategy of representation that provides the leitmotif for the modernist mindset.

This taxonomic impulse, first initiated by Aristotle and rediscovered by the invention of the printing press, precipitated the modern emphasis on what we now call a 'representationalist epistemology': the idea that reality can be adequately captured and symbolically represented through the use of established terms, categories, concepts and explanatory schemas. Such a predisposition, however, is predicated upon an unexamined belief in the stability and fixity of phenomena under investigation. For it is only when portions of reality are assumed to be discrete, identifiable and fixable in space-time, and that they remain relatively unchanging, that words, symbols and concepts can be deemed to adequately represent the world of phenomena and the underlying forces and generative mechanisms associated with it. Such an epistemological strategy entails the *breaking down*, *fixing*, *locating*, and *naming* of all experienced phenomena. Knowing, thus, entails the ability to say what a thing 'is' or what it 'is not'. Knowledge is therefore predicational judgement in that by

identifying what a thing 'is' or what it 'is not', we fix the focus of our attention and assert a general property or condition associated with the object of study. This is deemed to be possible precisely because it is believed that the world has a logical structure and hence lends itself to the grasp of language. All proper knowledge is, therefore, generalisable knowledge and not knowledge of the particular since the particular is always subsumed by the wider predicate term. Thus, '"red" and "wine" are not individual "thises", but universal classifications pointing to the original intuition of the individually observed thing' (Carter, 1990: 26). They refer to commonly identified properties rather than specific experiences.

All this implies that modernist thought places more importance on generalised concepts and categories than on the actual particulars of experience. The latter is inevitably subsumed under the former. As a consequence, visible <u>end-states</u> and <u>outcomes</u> are elevated over processes of change. Only the *fixed* within the *flow* of lived experience and the *universal* in the *particular* are accorded legitimate knowledge status. It is this basic epistemological assumption which provides the inspiration for the scientific obsession with precision, accuracy and parsimony in representing and explaining social phenomena (Sandelands and Drazin, 1989; Pfeffer, 1993). Such an approach to theory-building inevitably privileges *being* over *becoming*; the *already-formed* over the *unformed*; the *visible* over the *invisible*; *presence* over *absence*; *consciousness* over the *unconscious*; *identity* over *relational clusters*; *literal meanings* over *metaphorical allusions*; the *analytical breaking-up* and *decontextualising* of experienced phenomenon over its *wholesome, deeply contextual*, encounter; the use of *rational causal explanation* as the *sine que non* of intellectual analysis over a reliance on the immediate and dynamic *intuition of things*. It is these interlocking sets of philosophical assumptions that continue to shape the modernist approach to organizational analysis.

Key Assumptions of Modern Organisation Theory
Six key metatheoretical assumptions, with varying accentuation, underpin the epistemological project of modern OT. These are *objectivity*, *self-identity*, *individual intentionality*, *local causality*, *homeostatic change* and *linguistic adequacy*. Each of these reflect enduring value-strands woven into the epistemological fabric of modernity.

Objectivity: Firstly, organizations whether socially constructed or otherwise are viewed as concrete social entities with fixed locations, clear identities and describable attributes (Hannan and Freeman, 1977; Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978; Scott, 1992; Aldrich 1992; Donaldson, 1996). Even though it may be readily acknowledged that organizations are 'human products' resulting from 'processes of habitualization' they are nevertheless 'experienced as an objective reality' (Berger and Luckmann, 1966: 77) by the individual. They 'resist his attempts to change or evade them. They have coercive power over him…by the sheer force of their facticity' (ibid). Thus, even from a first-order social constructionist view (Steier, 1991), an organization is deemed to exist relatively independently of the individual actors associated with it and therefore form an appropriate theoretical object of analysis. Solidity, thing-likeness, and identity are attributed to the phenomenon of organization. It has relatively distinct boundaries that can be temporarily and geographically located in space and time. Moreover, organizations are given a certain degree of causal power. They can 'act' and create effects which would not be otherwise possible if they were merely the disaggregate actions of uncoordinated individuals. Alternatively, they may produce 'unintended' effects and consequences that can nevertheless still be attributable to their presence. Whichever the case, both views regard it as axiomatic to attribute causal power to organizations in the way we commonly attribute 'gravity' as the reason for falling objects and 'the weather' as a reason for our choice of clothing.

Self-Identity: Secondly, for many organization theorists, organizations possess identifiable characteristics including especially purposefulness and direction (Donaldson, 1987; Robbins, 1989), stability and configuration (Mintzberg, 1979; Scott, 1992), culture and values (Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Frost et al, 1985; Schein, 1992; Martin, 1992), goals and functions (Perrow, 1967; Blau, 1970; Child, 1984) that are often believed to be visible, comparable and/or measurable. Moreover, the identity and distinctiveness of an organization is not believed to be relationally derived. Instead, it is its own unique configuration that gives it its organizational character. Thus it is possible to talk about an organization's structure, strategy, culture, values and goals and to relate these attributes to perceived organizational actions. Such a macro-orientation is also favoured by those forms of institutionally-based analyses which take economic rationality as the driving force behind organizational configuration and action (Powell and DiMaggio, 1991). Here the organization is

though of as interacting relatively freely with its 'environment' much in the same way we think commonsensically of biological species adapting and interacting with their surroundings in an effort to survive. Each has the capacity to influence and be influenced by the external world. Organizations are widely conceived as open but bounded *systems* (Scott, 1992) interacting with their environments. Systems, whether open or closed, have clearly defined forms and boundaries. They are relatively stable and endure through time so that their identity and attributes can be clearly established. Their 'survival' and 'growth' are linked to internal adaptability, the efficacy of sense-making processes, their capacity for learning, the extent of structural realignments achieved, and their capacity for innovation and renewal. In all these instances, the organization is treated as a concrete and relatively autonomous social entity with humanised capacities.

Individual Intentionality: Thirdly, for an increasingly influential number of organizational theorists who eschew the tendency to reify organizations, the identity and autonomy of individual actors are taken as a given starting point (Weick, 1969; Silverman, 1970; Sandelands and Drazin, 1989): atomicity and the aggregation of individual actions into a collective effort are emphasised. Individual actors are believed to make meaningful and conscious choices so much so that purposefulness, control and causal attribution can be duly assigned even if the eventual outcomes are not always what were intended. Such outcomes are either loosely or 'tightly-coupled' to intended actions on the part of individual actors so much so that the organization as a whole is assigned a secondary 'reified' status. Organizational realities are very much a product of the subjective *enactments* or social constructions of individual actors. They do not exist independently of our perceptions.

In an important discussion of the way language affects our ways of thinking and theorising about organization, Sandelands and Drazin rightly criticise the widespread use of *achievement* verbs such as 'shape', 'determine', 'select' and so on, to loosely refer to concrete organizational processes. When this happens organizational theorists tend to mystify organizational processes 'in a welter of misbegotten abstractions' (Sandelands and Drazin, 1989: 458). For Sandelands and Drazin, words that refer to objects or processes that cannot be observed or verified should be questioned. Organizations on this view are reified abstractions: an emergent property of 'phenomenally given actions of individuals' (ibid). They develop from the

interactions of concrete individuals much in the same way as 'snowflakes or ice-crystals develop from interactions of water molecules, or melodies develop from the interplay of notes' (Sandelands and Drazin, 1989: 473). On this atomistic view the status and identity of individuals as autonomous actors remains unquestioned. Thus deliberate, conscious, and purposeful action on the part of individual actors is emphasised. This means that organizational studies, instead of focussing on the larger organizational unit should instead concentrate on individual meanings and intentions, interpretations and sense-making, to throw fresh light onto the reality of organizational life. Ethnographies, narratives, discourse analysis and story-telling (Van Maanen, 1988; Deetz and Mumby,1990; Czarniawska-Joerges, 1994) therefore provide the rich tapestry of inputs for this type of organizational theorising. However, contrary to popular perceptions of Postmodernism and OT, these interpretive emphases DO NOT reach at the heart of the Postmodern agenda. In so far as these accounts focus on and hence privilege the consciousnesss, intentionality and collective meaning of actors within circumscribed units called 'organizations', they do not, in principle, depart from the modernist mind-set.

Local Causality: Fourthly, organizations are deemed to change primarily through active intervention: either internally by willful actors or externally through agents of change (Miller and Friessen, 1980; Van de Ven, 1987; Tichy, 1988; Kanter, Stein & Jick, 1992). Local, tightly-coupled causality is presupposed. Causality as an explanatory tool for linking otherwise disparate objects and events in space-time is an archetypal modernist concept. What is crucial in the typical use of causal explanation is the need for the observable conjunction of two otherwise separate events. In its minimalist Humean sense, to say that event 'A' is the cause of event 'B' is really to maintain that an event precedent and contiguous to another is 'so united with it in the imagination, that the idea of one determines the mind to form the idea of the other, and the impression of one to form a more lively idea of the other' (Hume, 1740/1992: 172). Thus, observed 'contiguity', 'priority' and 'constancy of relations' constitute the founding basis for the attribution of causality in the classic positivistic sense. Whenever two otherwise unrelated events follow each other in a way such that a consistent pattern of relationship appears to exist, then the antecedent event is deemed to be the efficient cause of the succeeding event.

Aristotle also had much to say about the notion of causality and his ideas remain influential in modern science. His understanding of the causes of change is somewhat more elaborate and qualitatively different from Hume's idea of constant conjunction. For Aristotle, there are four types of causes: the formal, the material, the efficient and the final cause. To take an extremely simple example - the production of a statue from a piece of marble - the *formal cause* is the initial shape given the marble, the *material cause* is the marble itself, the *efficient cause* is the sculptor, and the *final cause* is the purpose for which the statue is produced (Lindberg, 1992: 53). Modern OT, however, following the classical sciences and the positivistic tradition, have tended to emphasise only the efficient cause and either ignored or downplayed the other three Aristotelian causes. This is because the idea of efficient cause accentuates the active interventional role of the agent of change and gives it a closely-coupled relationship with its effect. By overemphasising agency and choice, it exaggerates the sense of mastery and control in our world of affairs.

It is this model of 'tightly-coupled' causality that is assumed in the modernist explanatory schema. This model is widely deployed in the analysis of organizational change and in the prescriptive literature that abounds in OT (Tushman and Romanelli, 1985; Kanter, Stein & Jick, 1992; Van de Ven and Poole, 1995).

Homeostatic Change: Moreover, change, according to the modernist schema, is something exceptional because equilibrium is presumed to be the natural state. It is that which momentarily upsets the balance of an otherwise stable and organized state. Because systems are inherently stable, what is required for change to occur is some kind of intervening force, whether internally applied or externally enforced. Thus environmental pressures or internal agency by way of choices and decisions taken provide the impetus for changes to take place. From this perspective of change, undermining stasis, overcoming inertia and unsettling equilibrium provide the *modus operandi* for successful organizational change and transformation initiatives (Lewin, 1951; Miller and Friessen, 1980; Tushman and Romanelli, 1985; Pettigrew, 1987; Van de Ven and Poole, 1995). The need for active, visible and very often external intervention is presumed. Re-positioning, diversification, re-engineering, culture change, mergers, take-overs, acquisitions, strategic alliances, etc., form a part of the dominant vocabulary that presupposes the need for such overt and purposive intervention. Organisations are deemed to operate within a socio-economic context

which includes markets, an immediate external environment, local national laws and regulations, and international practices and agreements all of which impact upon the survival of the organization itself. Market pressures, mission statements, culture change imperatives, and technological imperatives therefore provide the necessary justificatory bases for initiating change efforts. Change is not regarded as immanent in organizational processes. Rather change must be *initiated* and very often externally enforced.

<u>Linguistic Adequacy</u>: The idea that words are adequate for expressing thought and more importantly that all proper knowing entails conscious thought that can be suitably expressed through language provides the epistemological platform for the legitimisation of modern knowledge. For the modern mind, 'to know a thing is to name it, and to name it is to attach one or usually more universal predicates to it' (Carter, 1990: 26). Knowledge itself, thus, become very much like a product or commodity that can be 'accumulated', 'stored' and 'transferred' in the form of unique word-configurations that we call a theory. The current popular notion of 'knowledge-management' (Drucker, 1993; Nonaka, 1994) is very much tied to this modernist view of knowledge. A theory is, thus, a coherent system of explicit linguistic expressions woven together in an identifiable pattern that purportedly mirrors the going-ons in the real world. If, according to the modernist view, knowledge is predicational judgement precisely because the world is assumed to be logical and lends itself to the grasp of language, then proper knowing becomes a linguistic matter and not a matter of sensation or experience. For modern OT, therefore, symbols, names, concepts, categories, linguistic expressions and theories are the basic raw material needed for theory-building. Accordingly, we need to be especially vigilant about issues of meaning, precision and parsimony in organizational knowledge-creation. It is this emphasis on the adequacy of language in expressing our innermost thoughts and understandings which fuels the project of 'theory-building' and the even-more obsessive practices of data-collection and computerised storage of information. The most controversial of these in modern science being perhaps the current human genome project.

These six metaphysical assumptions shape much of the research agenda of organizational theorists. What remains unchallenged and unquestioned are: a) the notion of 'organizations' as solid entities with clear identities and attributes that

provide the legitimate focus for OT; b) the idea of 'individuals' and their conscious meanings and 'intentions' as the basis for understanding the subjective aspects of organizational life; c) the view of change as an epi-phenomena of basically fixed entities; d) the tightly-coupled and/or localised notion of causality; and e) the unquestioned belief in the adequacy of language, and particularly the written word, in expressing our knowledge of the world and ourselves. These form an interlocking web of values and beliefs that support and justify the project of modern OT.

The idea that organizing could be more productively thought of as a generic existential strategy for subjugating the immanent forces of change: that organization is really a loosely-coordinated but precarious 'world-making' attempt to regularise human exchanges and to develop a predictable pattern of interactions for the purposes of minimizing effort; that language is the quintessential organizing technology that enables us to selectively abstract from the otherwise intractable flux of raw experiences; that management is more about the taming of chance, uncertainty and ambiguity than about choice; and that individuals themselves are always already effects of organizational forces: all these escape the traditional organization theorist. Thus, the broader organizational questions of how social order is achieved; how the flux and flow of our life-worlds are rendered coherent and plausible; how individual identities are established and social entities created; how taxonomies and systems of classification are produced and with what effects; how causal relations are imputed and with what consequences; how systems of signification are used to arbitrarily carve up reality and with what outcomes; these are left unanswered by traditional OT.

Yet it is increasingly clear that such a broader form of societal understanding is unquestionably necessary for today's reflective management practitioners and policy-makers to act effectively and sensitively within the context of a global economy. More and more the world of practical affairs is being rendered inordinately complex and changeable by a panoply of competing ideologies, shifting societal trends, emerging social movements, clashes of global/local cultures, and the advances of telecommunication and the internet that promises to revolutionise our social lives on a scale parallel if not exceeding that of the invention of the alphabetic system and the advent of the printing press. Within such a post-modern context, a deep and abiding philosophic appreciation of the complex flux of the variety and diversity of human societies and an 'unspecialised aptitude for eliciting generalizations from particulars and for seeing the divergent illustration of generalities in diverse

circumstances' (Whitehead, 1933: 120) is what is urgently needed both in the practitioner world of business and in the realm of state governance. The ability to understand the origins and limitations of our own habits of thought; to remain concretely-sensitive to local societal attitudes and aspirations; to detect deeply unconscious cultural idiosyncrasies; to be able to track emergent technological trends and their consequences; to understand shifting political affiliations and public perceptions; to grasp the prevalent social moods, inclinations and capacities: these are all highly prized facets of the effective postmodern business manager and policy-maker. In a reference to this need for a postmodern prescience in successfully negotiating the world of affairs, Alfred North Whitehead, in a lecture given at Harvard Business School during the depths of the Great Depression, maintained that a society can only prosper and retain its greatness if 'its men of business think greatly of their function. Low thoughts mean low behaviour, and after a brief orgy of exploitation, low behaviour means a descending standard of life' (Whitehead, 1933: 120). Space does not permit a more extensive treatment of how a postmodern attitude can directly lead to effective managerial action. Suffice to say that the postmodern as articulated in these pages is not so much a call for the celebration of diversity and plurality, but a call for the return to a re-grounding of theory on the primacy of lived experience. The cultivation of this wider societal vision and understanding of management is what a truly postmodern theory of organization engenders.

Postmodern Philosophy and Science

The term 'postmodern' made its first appearance in the title of a book, *Postmodernism and other essays* written by Bernard Iddings Bell as early as 1926. It was subsequently picked up and used by Arnold Toynbee in 1939 in volume five of his massive tome *A Study of History* where he used the term 'post-modern' to describe the end of the modern era beginning from about the third quarter of the nineteenth century. In the 1950's the poet Charles Olson began using the term to describe an anti-modernist strain in the then contemporary poetry, including especially his own work and that of other so-called Black Mountain poets. From then on the use of the term began to proliferate and multiply although there is little continuity between these early uses and the more recent debates on postmodernism beginning from the early 1960's. Thus, it was not until Lyotard's (1984, but originally published in 1979) publication of a report entitled *The Postmodern Condition* that wider public attention was drawn into

the debate between modernism and postmodernism and their implications for the status of knowledge.

One consequence of the rapid eruption in its usage over the last two decades, is that the term 'postmodern', has been increasingly loosely employed in much of the academic literature in art, science, literary criticism, philosophy, sociology, politics and even in management and organisation studies. Its use has tended to evoke vastly contrasting reactions. On the one hand, postmodernism is frequently dismissed as an extremely simplistic and cynical tendency towards nihilism within contemporary culture and on the other it is regarded as an extremely subtle and complex philosophical attempt at reworking the metaphysical bases of modern knowledge. The word 'postmodern' is therefore, characterised, from its very inception, by an essential ambiguity; a certain '*semantic* instability' (Hassan, 1985: 121) that prevents clear consensus about its meaning and effects.

The postmodern, however, may be most productively invoked as an alternative *style of thought* - a new way of thinking - which attempts to more adequately comprehend <u>and</u> deconstruct the almost-inexorable complexification of science and modern society with all its attendant social and societal ramifications. The possibility of such a new way of thinking was arguably inaugurated during a seminal meeting between Albert Einstein and Henri Bergson hosted by the *Societé de Philosophe* of Paris on 6th April 1922. It is not my purpose here to delve into the details of the exchange that ensured[1]. However, it is important to note that, in this intellectual encounter, which revolved around Einstein's special theory of relativity, Bergson proceeded to examine its wider philosophical implications in terms of the distinction between lived time and clock-time and their consequences for our modes of theorising.

In his special theory of relativity, Einstein had calculated how time, in a particular reference system moving away at a constant velocity, appears to slow down when viewed from another system at rest relative to it. Subsequently, in his general theory of relativity proposed in 1916, he extended the theory and came to the conclusion that 'every reference body has its own particular time' (Einstein, 1916/1952: 26) thereby dismissing the idea of a universal time. The theory of

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[1] For a comprehensive analysis of the debate which ensured between Einstein and Bergson the reader is encouraged to refer to Robin Durie's (1999) *Duration and Simultaneity: Bergson and the Einsteinian*

relativity had the effect of 'figuratively…placing a clock in every gravitational field in the universe' (Kern, 1983: 19). This whole argument ran counter to the then prevailing belief that time was a universal phenomenon.

Bergson was clearly not attempting to refute or downplay Einstein's findings in the realm of theoretical physics. Rather his intention was to critically reflect on the wider philosophical implications of the theory and to point to the need for radically revamping our dominant habits of thought. As Robin Durie (1999) very persuasively argues, this was something that even Einstein failed to fully appreciate in his discussion with Bergson. The result was Einstein's hasty dismissal of Bergson's argument that the special theory of relativity, contrary to Einstein's conclusion, in fact confirmed our deeply held intuition of a universal and irreversible lived time, a *durée*, that cannot be fixed and/or reduced to the supposed plurality of clock-times implied by the special theory of relativity. Bergson states his position clearly in his introduction to *Duration and Simulteneity*:

> 'Our admiration for this physicist (Einstein), our conviction that he was giving us not only a new physics but also certain news way of thinking, our belief that science and philosophy are unlike disciplines but are meant to implement each other, all this imbued us with the desire and even impressed us with the duty of proceeding to a confrontation (with the wider implications of Einsteins' theory of relativity)' (Bergson, in Durie (trans.), 1999: xxvii)

As Murphy (1999: 70) points out, Bergson's philosophical critique of Einstein anticipated Bohm and Hiley's (1993) 'ontological' interpretation of quantum mechanics which, following Bohr's 'Copenhagen Interpretation' of quantum theory and Heisenberg's principle of 'complementary indeterminacy' with regards to position and velocity, gave rise to the central notion of *non-locality* in theoretical physics[2]. Non-locality posits apparently instantaneous communication and real simultaneous determination between objects widely separate in space-time. It confuses location, presence and hence representation by making the absent present and the present absent. In Derridean (Derrida, 1981) terms it is the *différance* that 'consists in deferring by means of delay, delegation, reprieve, referral, detour, postponement, reserving' (Derrida, 1981: 8). Différance instantiates a perpetual 'de-centering' (i.e.,

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Universe. This is an excellent teasing out of the key differences and the subsequent misunderstandings that occurred both on the parts of Einstein and Bergson.
[2] For a more detailed argument of this ontological critique of quantum theory see Murphy (1999) in J. Mullarkey (ed.) *The New Bergson*, pp. 66-81.

non-locatability) movement that resists attempts to locate and represent objects in space-time. Like Whitehead's (1926: 61-63) critique of 'simple location' and Bohm and Hiley's ontological interpretation of quantum theory, Derrida's *différance* can be seen as a parallel attempt to deconstruct the 'metaphysics of presences' which underpins much of Western scientific thought. It is this belief that the theory of relativity and subsequently that of quantum theory offers not just a new physics but a whole new way of thinking that underpins the more contemporary effort to formulate a postmodern science. One that is more in keeping with the leading-edge advances of theoretical physics (see, for instance, David Bohm's (1980) *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* and Ilya Prigogine's (1996) *The End of Certainty*).

The postmodern critique of modernist theories therefore arises from a complex combination of the growing disaffection with the adverse consequences of modernity and the subsequent realization of the limitations of classical science even within the most hallowed domain of theoretical physics. It inspired a relentless search for a more adequate and scientifically-based comprehension of the inherent complexities of both the natural and social worlds we currently inhabit. According to this postmodern view, therefore, modern societal evolution and progress seems to have proceeded 'of its own accord' with an 'autonomous motoricity that is independent of us' (Lyotard, 1992: 66). It is the nature and character of this strange 'autonomous motoricity' that postmodern analyses seek to render more transparent and comprehensible. Understood thus, the postmodern critique attempts to reveal modern rationality as the consequent effect of a reductionistic operation, involving a 'logic of representation', in which the phenomenal flux of lived experience are forcibly carved up, conceptually fixed and systematically subjugated under the widely-sanctioned ordering impulses of division, naming, classification and representation. Through this method of reduction and representation our otherwise intractable and amorphous life-experiences are then made more amenable to instrumental manipulation and control. Modern rationality, and hence representation, is thus a method of thinking, ordering and social construction which creates distinct and legitimate objects of knowledge for a knowing subject. The perceived objectivity, solidity and regularity of our all-too-familiar social world are, therefore, arbitrarily socially constructed rather than the result of inexorable progress, immutable laws and universal principles. Postmodernists argue that it is the structured nature of language that creates the impression that reality itself is stable, pre-organized and law-like in character. It insists that without the social acts

of differentiating, identifying, naming, classifying and the creation of a subject-predicate structure through language, lived reality is but a 'shapeless and indistinct mass' (Saussure 1966: 111). Language, thus, provides one of the first systematic ordering impulses and is intimately linked to the rise of human civilizations throughout the world.

In the process of conventional languaging, however, significant portions of our tacit and embodied forms of knowing are suppressed, marginalised or denied legitimacy in the modernist scheme of things. This is a loss that must not be underestimated. For, we know far more than we can tell (Polanyi, 1966). There is an extensive realm of subliminal comprehension that resists and defies linguistic translation. Such subliminal and oftentimes sub-conscious forms of knowing can only be accessed indirectly and alluded to elliptically. For this reason, much of what is written within this postmodern awareness oftentimes appear unnecessarily obscure to the uninitiated. However, it is this refusal to capitulate to the reductionistic instincts of modernism which defines the postmodern project. *The postmodern, then, is centrally concerned with giving voice and legitimacy to those tacit and often-times unpresentable forms of knowledge that modern epistemologies inevitably depend upon yet conveniently overlooks or glosses over in the process of knowledge-creation.* This is the real purpose and value of the postmodern critique.

Postmodern Axioms and Imperatives

Four intellectual axioms and imperatives are detectable in the postmodern approach to research and analysis. First, in place of the modernist emphasis on the ontological primacy of substance, stability, identity, order, regularity and form, postmodern analyses seek to emphasize the Heraclitean primacy accorded to process, indeterminacy, flux, interpenetration, formlessness and incessant change. This is evident in Jacques Derrida's (1981) *différance*, in Michel Serres's (1982) notion of *homeorrhesis*, in Deleuze's (1988; 1993) notion of the *labryinth*, the *fold*, and the *rhizome*. Notwithstanding their vastly styles and approaches, these writers return again and again to the problem of trying to convey the sense of fluidity, movement, flux and change. Such a processual orientation must not be equated with the commonsensical idea of the process that a system is deemed to undergo in transition. Rather it is a metaphysical orientation that emphasizes an ontological primacy in the *becoming* of things; that sees things as always already momentary outcomes or effects

of historical processes. As Tim Ingold, paraphrasing Ortega y Gasset, puts it well: 'We are not things but dramas; we have no nature, only history; we *are* not, though we *live*' (Ingold, 1986: 117, emphasis original). Such a *becoming* orientation rejects what Rescher (1996) calls the *process reducibility thesis* whereby processes are often assumed to be processes of primary 'things'. Instead, it insists that 'things', social entities, generative mechanisms etc, are no more than 'stability waves in a sea of process' (Rescher 1996: 53). This process ontology promotes a de-centred and dispersive view of reality as a heterogeneous concatenation of atomic event-occurrences that cannot be adequately captured by static symbols and representations. For process ontology the basic unit of reality is not an atom or thing but an 'event-cluster' forming a relatively stable pattern of relations. Correspondingly, postmodern science, which is based upon this processual mode of thought eschews atomistic thinking in favour of a flowing undifferentiated wholeness in which the ultimate unit of reality is not an atom but 'pulses of energy bound together by a thread of "memory"' (Gunter, 1993: 137). What we call an 'atom' is nothing more than a 'certain form in the field of movement' (Bohm, 1988: 62).

Second, from this commitment to a *becoming* ontology, it follows that language, and in particular the activities of *naming* and *symbolic representation*, provide the first ordering impulse for the systematic fixing and structuring of our human lifeworlds. Language, and in particular the alphabetic system, are technologies of organization that help us portion off, fix, locate and represent different aspects of our phenomenal experiences to ourselves. They do not, in any way mirror the going-ons in the world. Postmodernists therefore reject the kind of representationalist epistemology championed by modern science. For postmodernists, theories are viewed more pragmatically as selective and useful instruments or devices that help us to negotiate our way through the world (Rorty, 1991). They are eminently useful even if they do not necessarily tell us how that world really is. In other words, theories may be *workable*, but may not be timelessly *true*. Moreover, because all theories are manifestedly selective and hence incomplete, there will always be parts of reality that are ignored or not accounted for in our dominant scheme of interpretation.

This realisation of the intrinsic inadequacy of language leads postmodernist to a third preoccupation: the attempt to explore and sensitively articulate tacit and oftentimes unconscious forms of knowing in a manner that remains faithful to the

subtle nuances of the gestalt processes of comprehension. Ordinarily, the emphasis in gesthalt psychology, for instance, is on bisecting the visual field into significant 'figure' and insignificant 'ground'. Analysing this overwhelming tendency in *The Hidden Order of Art*, Ehrenzweig (1967) shows that the really accomplished artist cannot afford to attend only to the gestalt figure and ignore the ground. Instead, for the artist, what is needed is a kind of 'undifferentiated attention akin to syncretistic vision which….holds the total structure of the work of art in a single undifferentiated view' (Ehrenzweig, 1967: 23). It is a kind of *unconscious scanning* that produces knowing that is inherently unreacheable through the modern scientific approach with its overwhelming reliance on precise and rigid terms, concepts, and categories. This "full" emptiness of the unconsciousness scanning process occurs in nearly all forms of creative works. Thus:

> 'the artist's vacant unfocused stare pays attention to the smallest detail however far removed from the consciously perceived figure. The uncompromising democracy which refuses to make any distinction between the significance of the elements building the work of art, belongs to the essence of artistic rigour' (Ehrenzweig, 1967: 29).

It is this refusal to hold judgement in abeyance and to prematurely make straightforward distinctions between figure and ground that characterises this form of unconscious scanning. This is the more subtle form of awareness that postmodernists draw our attention to.

Realising the need for extending our powers of comprehension beyond the level of conscious perception, postmodernism attempts to modify the conceptual asymmetry which surreptitiously privileges consciousness and intentionality over the unconscious scanning process. The elevation of rationality, intentionality and choice in the modernist explanatory schema conspire to underplay the role of such unconscious nomadic forces in shaping planned action and outcomes. Postmodern analyses, on the other hand, emphasize the vaguely intuited, heterogeneous, multiple and *alinear* character of real-world happenings. It draws attention to the fact that events in the real world, as we experience it, do not unfold in a conscious, homogeneous, linear and predictable manner (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988). Instead they 'leak in insensibly' (James, 1909/1996: 399). Human action and motives must, therefore, not be simply understood in terms of actors' intentions or even the result of underlying generative mechanisms, but rather in terms of unconscious metaphysics,

embedded contextual experiences, accumulated memories and entrenched cultural traditions that create and define the very possibilities for interpretation and action. This is not to suggest a kind of crude structural determinism whereby agency is entirely explained away in terms of structure. Rather, it is an attempt to show that action is a resultant effect of the ongoing tension and contestation between an immanent tendency towards *repetition* and a centrifugal drive towards novelty and *otherness*. Every existential action, in this postmodern sense is an experimental action reaching out into the not-yet-known. Outcomes are a particular unfolding of innate potentialities yet the manner of their specific manifestations remain essentially indeterminate. Surprise and the unexpected are the real order of things. Against the grand narratives of universal truths, total control and predictability that defines the modernist agenda, postmodernism advocates a more tentative and modest attitude towards the status of our current forms of knowledge.

Finally, instead of thinking in terms of tightly-coupled causal explanations that attempt to deterministically link observed phenomena with underlying tendencies, postmodernism privileges the ideas of reminiscence, resonance, recursion and resemblance as more adequate expressions for describing the 'loosely-coupled' and non-locally defined web of event-clusters that constitutes real-world happenings (Foucault, 1970, 1979). These more elliptical descriptions of a more subliminal form of causality point us more and more towards thinking in terms of the language of complexity science. Thus, recently introduced concepts such as *self-similiarity*, *strange attractors* and the *butterfly effect* are more intellectually productive in that they all allude to a form of non-local and loosely-coupled causality immanent in nature. Consequently, it is argued that thinking in this more allusive and elliptical manner enables us to better appreciate how social phenomena such as 'individuals' and 'organizations', can be viewed as temporarily stabilised event-clusters - microcosms of the civilising process - rather than as concrete, isolatable systems and entities with distinct and definable boundaries. Postmodern analyses, thus, seek to disabuse us of the stubbornly-held idea that reality, including especially our sense of self, is invariably objective, stable, orderly, and 'systemic' and hence predictable in character.

These four theoretical emphases in the postmodern approach provide a fertile alternative basis for redefining the focus of organization studies and for reframing research priorities. It is one that emphasises the role of social organizing forces and

the logic and technology of societal orderings as the more appropriate theoretical foci for OT, and elevates the impact of creativity, chance, novelty and happenstance in our explanatory schemas. As Foucault (1984) puts it very succinctly:

> 'it is to identify the accidents, the minute deviations - or conversely, the complete reversals - the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us; it is to discover that truth or being does not lie at the root of what we know and what we are, but the exteriority of accidents'

If only for this emphasis alone, Foucault must be considered a Postmodern Organization Theorist in the sense elicited in these pages.

Organization Theory as Postmodern Science

According to a postmodern perspective, change is a pervasive phenomena whilst organization and order represents the cumulative productive efforts of human intervention to temporarily stave off the nomadic and immanent forces of change. Contrary to the commonly held view, order and organization do not reflect the law of things but their exception. They are the outcome of an existential 'Will to Order'. Without organization and the stability and regularity it forges, and hence the predictability it earns, human life would be chaotic and eminently unliveable. Yet the seeming stability and solidity of such a socially-constructed world is always precarious and continuously threatened by the restlessness of an inexorable change and the surprise that it brings with it. Beneath the seeming stability of our organized social life lie the restless and nomadic forces of change. This accounts for why even our best made plans often fail. What are called 'organizations', therefore, are nothing more than islands of relatively stabilised relational orders in a sea of ceaseless change. Organization and change are intrinsically opposing, not complementary, forces. Moreover, change does not take place in a linear manner. Instead real change is quintessentially 'rhizomic' in character taking place through variations, restless expansion, opportunistic conquests, sudden captures and offshoots. Real change is anti-genealogical in nature. Unlike the predictable 'tree-like' structure of genealogy with its accompanying binary logic that fixes a linear order, rhizomic expansion and change is subtle, agglomerative, and often subterranean in nature. It spreads like a patch of oil.

On the other hand, organization is a constructive counter-movement aimed at fixing, ordering, routinising and regularising changes through human interactions so that a degree of predictability and productivity in social exchange is attainable. In this sense organization as a 'world-making' activity is pivotal to a civilisational process that 'works from a start of more or less randomness towards increasing coherence, and that moves from amorphousness towards definiteness, from fumbling trails to decision' (Kroeber, 1963: 23). The emergence of modern forms of organized social life and systems of governance follows a trail that leads from 'bands to tribes, tribes to chiefdoms, and chiefdoms to city-states' (Ingold, 1986: 71). Through organization we come to acquire our structure of relations, individual identities, codes of behaviour, habits of thought, social preferences, and our ideals and aspirations.

As generic forms of social ordering through space-time, organization inevitably influences, amongst other things; how the flux and flow of our life-worlds are structured, given identities and made into objects of knowledge; how such objects of knowledge are causally-linked in a coherent system of ordering; how taxonomies and hierarchies help create a system of priorities that influence perceptions and values; how values shape aspirations, choices and decision-making; and how we are socialised to relate to one another in the greater scheme of things that we call 'society'. These are what ultimately inspired the ideologies that gave rise to the peculiarly western form of capitalism analysed and promoted by Adam Smith. It helped define the goals and functions of modern management, shapes managerial orientations, and overwhelmingly influences managerial priorities and practices.

It is this second-order concern with the organization of our forms of social life, our ways of seeing, our modes of understanding, and our methods of knowledge-creation that constitutes the basis for an alternative postmodern OT. One that invariably emphasises the reality-constituting and reality-maintaining character of organization. What is significantly overlooked in much of conventional OT, therefore, is a rigorous and critical reflection of the underlying social, cultural and historical forces shaping the way we see, think and act within the institutionalised and organized structures of the modern world. Against this restricted and restrictive view of OT as an economic-administrative discipline an expanded *Postmodern Theory of Organization* seeks to critically examine the underlying logic of modern rationality and the consequent societal and institutional strategies associated with it. A number of

sub-themes and theoretical preoccupations can be associated with this postmodern science of organization.

Organizing Analysis: From Atomistic Individualism to Enfolded Organicism

The organizational order that modern science has employed with such overwhelming effectiveness is the order of differentiation, fragmentation and representation. The dominance of visually-based forms of knowledge (e.g., 'seeing is believing') brought about by the alphabetization of the Western world has meant that language has been assigned a literal role. One point of the image on our retina corresponds to one set of letters or words in our system of comprehension. In this way, everything observed is deemed to be reducible to pre-established symbols. This habit of analysis has affected us greatly suggesting implicitly that everything is reducible to points and can be reconstituted therefrom. This is the basis for the kind of atomistic thinking underpinning modern science. It provides a powerful and convenient method for effectively dealing with an otherwise amorphous and intractably fluxing reality. Such a method works in contrast to the kind of processual thinking advocated by postmodernism. Atomistic thinking, however, is not simply the opposite of processual thinking. Rather, the crucial difference lies more with the *direction of derivation* (Ingold, 1986:43) in our thought processes than it is about static differences. In an atomistic conception, a phenomenon is deemed to be constituted by the aggregation and interaction of discrete individual elements each of which exists as a stable, independent entity prior to its incorporation. In a processual view, however, the individual elements have no real existence apart from the process of which they are but particular points of emergence. In short: the atomistic individual 'is *constituted* by its parts, not by its position in a wider system of relationship' (Ingold, 1986: 44). Its identity derives from the sum features of its component parts. In a more enfolded and unfolded organismic view of the individual, however, the individual is inextricably linked and relationally defined. Indeed as Bohm (1980: 149) insists, the external order is 'enfolded or *implicate*' in every single element we might abstract from it. Thus, the individual organism is more a vehicle whose singular impetus is to 'receive life and pass it on, to act as a temporary vehicle for the projection of past into future' (Ingold, 1986: 106). The individual is but an ephemeral vector of a creative evolutionary process. Life is like a current passing from germ to germ so much so that 'the living being is above all a thoroughfare, along which the impulsion of life is transmitted.

And as each individual, like a relay runner, takes up this impulse and passes it on, as each generation must lean over and touch the next, so how can we tell exactly where one individual ends and another begins' (Bergson 1911: 45). This is the real empirical facticity of living encounters. As social beings, we do not suddenly appear as already-formed individuals with established identities that then proceed to engage in social intercourse. Instead individual identities are historically-shaped outcomes of the *becoming* processes of individuation, identification and institutionalization. Our personality and character is nothing more than 'the condensation of the history that we have lived from our birth'. Hence, 'It is with our entire past…that we desire, will and act' (Bergson, 1911: 5-7). As such the idea of individual intentionality and purposeful action must be tempered with the recognition that as one deals more and more with social 'persons' and not composite individual entities[3], immanent or 'final cause' rather than the efficient cause becomes increasingly important and hence regularity and predictability increasingly eludes us (Griffin, 1988: 25).

Organizational Complexity and the Unconscious

In keeping with the recognition of an immanent and enfolded notion of reality, postmodern OT finds resonance with the contemporary preoccupations of Complexity Science in their search for more adequate causal explanations that do not overly rely on the kind of localised and tightly-coupled causality proffered by classical science. It is therefore not surprising to see a recent burgeoning infusion of complexity concepts such as 'bifurcation', 'self-similiarity', 'strange attractors', 'butterfly effects' and so on, into organizational theorising both in Europe and the United States. Such an expansive orientation has been precipitated by an increasing acceptance of the central idea of *non-locality* brought about by the advent of a more ontologically-informed interpretation of quantum theory (Bohm and Hiley, 1993). The broader implications of this understanding and its relationship with postmodernism have been productively explored by a number of important thinkers especially David Bohm (1980, 1988), Ilya Prigogine (1984, 1996), J.S. Bell (1993) and Paul Cilliers (1998). Elsewhere, (Chia, 1998), I have attempted to show how such a complexity awareness could be expanded to approach the core concerns of postmodernism.

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[3] For a thorough discussion of this important distinction see Ingold, 1986, pp. 105-108.

Additionally, a heightened awareness of the inherent limitations of language has led to the examination of alternative ways of theorising knowledge and organization. Thus, interest in issues relating to the unconscious such as Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis and the associated question of 'tacit' knowledge (Polanyi, 1958, 1966) form another cluster of interests actively promoted by a postmodern 'turn' in organizational theorising. Postmodernism's revelation of the inherent inadequacies of language points us to a realm of knowing beyond the grasp of representationalist epistemology. This is something that Lyotard, in particular, viewed as the singular most important project of postmodernism. For him, postmodern analysis is that which 'in the modern, invokes the unpresentable in presentation itself….that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable' (Lyotard, 1992: 15). For Lyotard and other postmodern writers, the real purpose of concepts and representations is not so much to discover a better set of representations that will enable us to mirror the going-ons in the world. Rather, it is to point us to an unconscious realm of knowing which lies beyond words but which, nevertheless, has a performative impact upon our lives.

By disabusing us of the seductions of dominant representations postmodern analyses create the necessary conceptual vacuum for us to directly intuit that realm of concrete experiences that constitutes an essential part of our knowing and living. In this way it seeks to cultivate greater sensitivity and awareness of the human condition in general and the complexities and paradoxes of organizational situations in particular. What is advocated in a postmodern organization theory, therefore, is the radical abandonment of 'the organization' as a legitimate object of knowledge and its substitution by organization as a generic process of 'world-making'. In this regard, both complexity science and studies of unconscious desire and knowing must be applied, not so much to circumscribed economic-administrative units called 'organizations', but to all forms of social order such as that proposed in this chapter.

The Logic of Organization

In his thoughtful study of the nature and logic of capitalism, Robert Heilbroner (1985) makes the important point that what drove seminal thinkers such as Adam Smith and Karl Marx to formulate their wide-ranging principles and critiques of the causes and consequences of capitalism was the belief in the presence of enduring but hidden forces underlying the ordinary world of everyday affairs; a kind of 'netherworld' that

impels us towards some destination not of our own making. For Smith it was the notion of the Invisible Hand which guided us towards the Deity whilst for Marx it was the 'internal dialectic' that provided the driving force for transformations in the socio-economic order. Both notions, however, harboured essentialist overtones and underplayed a more historically-informed understanding of the intimate link between civilisation and the socio-economic configuration it produces. This is something that the French historian Fernand Braudel (1981) so persuasively articulated in his book *Capitalism and Civilisation*. Viewed from this latter perspective, our present-day ordering impulses are by no means immutable principles, but are rather derived from a historically-evolved logic of organization that has been transformed over the centuries through the civilising process. As we have tried to show earlier in this paper, the invention of the alphabetic system of representation, as well as the later development of typography has had much to do with the shaping of this dominant logic of organization underpinning everyday social and economic transactions. How this has come to pass becomes a central preoccupation of postmodern organizational analyses. In this regard, Weber's lifelong study of the gradual systematization and disenchantment of modern societies (Gerth and Mills, 1948: 51), Schoenwald's (1973) fascinating depiction of the Victorian order and its effects on our sense of identity and self-perception as well as Foucault's (1979) detailed excavation of the processes of individuation; all these become legitimate domains of analysis in an expanded theory of organization. Postmodern OT then creates an 'open field' of thought that draws liberally from the whole gamut of philosophy, art and the social sciences to illuminate and inform the world of management practice.

Conclusion: Organization as 'World-Making'

Human organizing creates order and predictability out of an otherwise inchoate and amorphous life-world. It consists of an interlocking sequence of ontological acts of differentiating, isolating, fixing and identifying of portions of lived experience. These actions are central to the self's attempt to detach itself from its surroundings in order to attain a measure of autonomy and independence. The object of organization, therefore, is the 'preparation of objects by means of which the system can then distinguish itself from its primary subject and, therefore, be certain of itself' (Cooper, 1987: 408). In other words, organization works to construct legitimate objects of

knowledge for a knowing subject: 'dirt', 'notes of a musical score', 'food', 'pupils', 'the weather', 'culture', 'gravity' and so on. Through this process of organization, objects of knowledge acquire distinctive identities that allow us to treat them as existing independently of our perceptions. In this fundamental sense organization is a world-making activity. It is a ceaseless process of reality-construction and maintenance that enables us to carve out our otherwise amorphous lifeworlds into manageable parts so that we can act purposefully and productively amidst a flood of competing and attention-seeking stimuli. The narrowing of focus, simplification and the consequent economizing of effort in action are thus the ultimate aim of the impulse to organize. Through organization, the various aspects of our lived experiences, including especially our experience of self, acquire a familiar and seemingly unproblematic identity.

Approaching the question of organization from this postmodern perspective opens up radically new ways for rethinking the role and function of OT. Organization theory, according to this expanded postmodern understanding, thus, becomes one of critically examining the oftentimes subterranean societal and institutional strategies that help shape our habits of thought, our sense of self-identity, our perceptions and expectations of social life as well as our values, beliefs and aspirations. In this way postmodern OT draws our attention to the need for practitioner-managers and policy-makers to be made more deeply aware of the underlying societal forces shaping societal moods and capacities as well as managerial mindsets, and hence priorities and practices. This is the real potential contribution of a postmodern science of organization.

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