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Learning/Becoming/Organizing

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Abstract. *In this paper we rethink and reframe organizational learning in terms of organizational becoming. We see these concepts as two mutually implicating ways of exploring and simultaneously constituting the phenomena of organization. Bearing in mind that the understanding of organization is simultaneously a question of the organization of understanding, we reflect on the complex interrelation between thinking and organizing. In order to connect the processes of learning and becoming, we consider the concept of organization as space in between order and chaos. We propose a perspective that sees learning not as something that is done to organizations, or as something that an organization does; rather, learning and organizing are seen as mutually constitutive and unstable, yet pragmatic, constructs that might enable a dynamic appreciation of organizational life. Further, we argue that the becoming that is in organizing implies a permanent non-rational movement such that organization can never be rationally defined.* **Key words.** *becoming; dis/organization; innovation; learning; power*
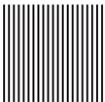
Organization, life and intelligent thought live between order and noise, between disorder and perfect harmony. If there were only order, if we only heard perfect harmonies, our stupidity would soon fall down toward a dreamless sleep: if we were always surrounded by the shivaree, we would lose our breath and our consistency, we would spread out among all the dancing atoms of the universe. *We are; we live; we think on the fringe*, in the probable fed by the unexpected, in the legal nourished with information. There are two ways to die, two ways to sleep, two ways to be stupid— a headfirst dive into chaos or stabilized installation in order and chitin. We
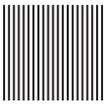
are provided with enough senses and instinct to protect us against the danger of explosion, but we do not have enough when faced with death from order or with falling asleep from rules and harmony. *Our chance is on the crest.* Our living and our inventive path follows the fringed, capricious curve where the simple beach of sand meets the noisy rolling in of the waves. A simple and straight method gives no information; its uselessness and flatness (or platitude) is finally calculable. Intelligence, we knew, remains unexpected, like invention or grace; it does not surpass the surprising to head toward the anything-under-the-sun. Rigor is never in the simple tending toward the identical and would be nothing without uniting and holding together what should not be associated. *There is only something new by the injection of chance in the rule, by the introduction of the law at the heart of disorder.* An organization is born from circumstances, like Aphrodite rising from the sea. (Serres, 1982: 127, italics added)

Since its early and groundbreaking theorizations in the 1970s (e.g. March and Olsen, 1975; Argyris and Schon, 1978), 'organizational learning' has become a central concept in theory and practice related to the management and organization of work. Although the terms 'organizational learning' and the 'learning organization' are broadly accepted, there seems to be some confusion in the way that they are used (Garavan, 1997) and there is little consensus on their precise meaning (Thatchenkary, 1996). Thus, within what has become the 'field' of organizational learning there has been considerable debate over definitions of what such learning 'is'. Informed by disciplinary sources ranging from psychology to sociology, 'management science', economics, anthropology, political science, history (Antal et al., 2001) and education, researchers have argued about definitions of learning. For many, this lack of definition constitutes itself as a 'problem'. Crossan et al. complain that 'little convergence or consensus on what is meant by the term, or its basic nature, has emerged' (1999: 552) and they express a desire for a unified framework to 'provide clarity, promote dialogue, foster convergence and encourage new directions in research' (1999: 535). Popper and Lipshitz propose that the growing interest in organizational learning has a significant 'down side' in that 'the ensuing outpouring of publications is a confusing proliferation of definitions and conceptualisations that fail to converge into a coherent whole' (2000: 181). The result is seen as a 'problem' where 'the definition of learning remains somewhat obscure, in part because the process has been described so differently in the literature' (Miller, 1996: 485). This diversity has resulted in a situation where 'there appears to be little consensus over what a LO [learning organization] looks like or what OL [organizational learning] means. Furthermore there seems little agreement on the relationship between individual learning and collective learning in organizations and how one translates into the other' (Stewart, 2001: 141). This contestation and lack of 'precise' definition has been put down to the youth of the field (Robinson, 2001) such that the 'diversity is a natural part of the maturation process in a

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dynamic intellectual field' (Antal et al., 2001: 931). Nevertheless, in response to such 'problems' of diversity, the commonplace view is the requirement for 'the development of a comprehensive theory of organizational learning' (Easterby-Smith, 1997: 1085).

In our view, such calls for definition, consensus and agreement are misguided in their desire to produce a 'final vocabulary' (Rorty, 1989) for learning—indeed, a vocabulary that would prevent learning itself from learning. Instead we wish to demonstrate a more ironic approach to learning, one where we are like Rorty's ironist who 'has radical and continuing doubts about the final vocabulary she currently uses, because she has been impressed by other vocabularies, vocabularies taken as final by people or books she has encountered . . . she realises that arguments phrased in her present vocabulary can neither underwrite nor dissolve these doubts' (1989: 73). More generally, we suggest that the call for integration and singular definition of different perspectives is itself a thin disguise for a desire for intellectual hegemony on the part of some writers; indeed, the full integration of different perspectives is a state of affairs that nobody but a 'mad totalitarian dictator' would wish for (Czarniawska, 1998). Thus we do not seek putatively final definitions of learning, yet we still respect learning as a concept that can connect with organizations, because it might be a concept that can itself learn.

For some, the concept of organizational learning focuses strategies and mechanisms to develop and utilize the learning capacity of employees at all levels (Senge, 1990; Marsick and Watkins, 1999; Popper and Lipshitz, 2000) such that those organizations will perform in improved ways, usually as a result of requirements to adapt and improve efficiency in times of change (Dodgson, 1995; Denton, 1998). Organizations are said to learn when they facilitate the learning of all individuals within them (Pedler et al., 1991; Popper and Lipshitz, 2000); such learning goes beyond solving specific problems and becomes a means to question and modify organizational norms, policies and objectives (Argyris and Schon, 1978, 1996; Robinson, 2001). In contrast to this focus on learning as strategy and practice, we wish to explore learning as a concept. It is not our intention to define this concept but rather to look at how it might be used. We suggest that learning, in that it might be applied to organizations, has (thankfully) not found the form of primordial signification that many organizational learning theorists yearn for; learning, as a concept, thus exists in its creation and performance rather than in its definition. We believe that those who seek the cold comfort of final definitions and 'agreements' wish to pin down learning as a 'despotic signifier' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 209) that overcodes the potential meanings and uses of the concept. Our discussion attempts to avoid the despotic purpose of integrating and internalizing difference, but rather proposes a learning that allows for creative invention (Deleuze, 1977). In other words, we are trying to evoke a concept of learning that does not belong to a set of

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'utterances of a rational, administrative machinery', spoken by 'bureaucrats of pure reason' (Deleuze, 1977: 149), but rather can, theoretically, connect and produce in a manner that is beyond the control of a central authority that seeks definitions and confines.

To do this we embark on a text that works to connect the concepts of learning and becoming as two mutually implicating ways of exploring and simultaneously constituting the phenomenon of organization. We use learning as a concept, one that might learn and create pragmatically productive possibilities for understanding organizations and organizing. Our intention is that the paper will dialogically engage with (and disturb) ongoing discussions regarding the 'nature' of organizational learning by providing a discussion of the relation (organizationally) between learning and becoming. In this sense, we understand learning and becoming as tentative and ongoing processes through which the entire organization moves, develops and unfolds. Such learning might be thought of in terms of intensity, which pervades the duration of organizations, rather than being a series of events or concepts that are discretely locatable, identifiable or signifiable. Here learning is not something that is done to organizations, nor is it something that an organization does; rather, learning and organizing are seen as mutually constitutive and unstable, yet pragmatic, constructs that might enable a dynamic appreciation of organizational life. Further, we suggest that the becoming that is in organization and in learning implies a permanent non-rational movement such that, despite the best attempts of science, 'organization' can never be known or rationally defined, yet it might learn, become and be connected with.

Our text unfolds in five steps. First, we examine the interrelation between thinking and organizing. We will then put forward the concept of organization as space in between order and chaos. In the following sections, we make problematic concepts of organizational learning as mental work and organizational change as physical processes. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of our analyses for organizational learning.

Thinking and Organizing

Varying a dictum of the English landscape painter John Constable, we take organization theory (and its inbred cousin organizational learning) to be a discipline in which actual organizations are but the experiments. Far from being a mere instrument to realize a pre-given plan, organization is about world-making (Chia, 1998b); it is pragmatic, creative and constructive. Literally, it concerns ushering into existence (and being) in the world in a certain, ordered way. Of course, such existence can occur only on the basis of impermanence where ordering constantly moves between becoming and being: everything, even this text, is a product of a certain kind of organization.

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In more general terms, the 'understanding of organizations is simulta-neously a study of the organization of understanding' (Jeffcutt, 1993: 50), and the 'knowledge of organizing and the organizing of knowledge implicate and explicate each other and are thereby inextricably inter-twined' (Chia, 1998a: 2). Such propositions recall those posed by Michel Foucault when he addressed *orders* of discourse and things (Foucault, 1979) which may be transformed, organizationally, into a concern with how the organizing and ordering of discourses and things is possible. Put simply, what is the *organization* of the discourse and those things it makes possible? Moreover, how is the discourse of organization struc-tured? These questions imply 'reflexivization' (Willmott, 1998) and 'redu*pli*cation' (Serres, 1982),[1] the 'turning back of organization theory upon itself' (Chia, 1996: 7). Thus, organization theory can be considered as supplementary, 'for its texts always present the "organization of organization", that is to say, that as texts *on* organization they are themselves "organized" according to certain normalized criteria' (Cooper, 1990: 196). This organization of organizations is produced in the context of socially legitimized public institutions—organizations are part of 'socially "organized" bodies of knowledge claims and, as such, are always the effects of primary organizing processes' (Chia, 1996: 25). In this sense, a theory of organization is pragmatic rather than mimetic because it constructs rather than discovers the world (Rhodes, 2001). Paying attention to these processes implies that 'instead of generating analyses of organization that assume its objects to exist "out there", waiting to be captured by the tools of the social scientist, analysis is informed by the reflexive understanding that the (methodical) organiza-tion of analysis (for example, within different paradigms) is productive of what we know' (Willmott, 1998: 214).

As Foucault has shown, power and knowledge are mutually dependent on one another and produce each other. Deferring to this idea, we emphasize that organizing and thinking im*pli*cate each other in a similar way: organizing and thinking are mutually parasitic upon each other, they constitute each other and they relate to each other in a process of 'supplementarity' (Derrida, 1976; 1982). This process is one of sub-stitutive signification, 'which could only come forth in a chain of differential references, the "real" supervening, and being added only while taking on meaning from a trace and from an invocation of the "supplement" ' (Derrida, 1976: 7). This supplementarity has a 'subversive quality in which a term is necessarily inhabited by its opposite, and hence possesses the potential for its own corruption . . . [I]t carries the sense of the negation of the term itself being necessary for it to have meaning at all, as well as reflecting the never-satisfied need for something to be "added" to determine its meaning' (Linstead and Grafton-Small, 1992: 341). Hence, the meaning of a concept (e.g. organization) is not separable from the process of passage or from the signifying operation (Derrida, 1996). Instead, using terms such as 'organization' to putatively

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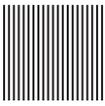
describe a phenomenon is generative; it is a supplement and not just a substitute for a signified or previous signifier (Rhodes and Garrick, 2002). Organizing and thinking implicate and complicate each other: they occur in the space, in the fold, between them where what we refer to as learning and becoming unfold. In this paper we are concerned with the unfolding of the extended nature of learning and becoming and with the effects of adding the concepts of learning and becoming as supplementary to, and creative of, organizations.

We concentrate on the nexus between organization and other concepts in the belief that 'what is *between* is where the real action' is to be found (Cooper and Law, 1995: 245). In so doing we join a growing interest in 'exploring the space between' (Bradbury and Lichtenstein, 2000), and a search for the 'divisions and gaps that constitute the "between" of systems' (Cooper, 1990: 168).[2] The emphasis on divisions, gaps, difference and in-between results from the insight that organizations do not first pre-exist and then create their relationships. Instead they 'occur in existential gaps' (Burrell and Cooper 1988), such that 'what occurs at the relational interstices of nodes and patterns is organizing' (Jeffcutt and Thomas, 1998: 62). This focus on relations and dissatisfaction with ratiocinated and definition-bound notions of organization (and organizational learning) suggests also that organizing is not necessarily logical or linear. Rather than being purely rational, there is an 'inner world of passion, ambivalence and contradiction which may be experienced as repressed, expressed or controlled, diffused or diluted, but never actually obliterated' (Antonacopoulou and Gabriel, 2001: 438). Organizations are thus infused with the non-rational and non-cognitive where emotions and learning 'form their own unpredictable mixture, which can shape, guide and inhibit change . . . mediated through a thick layer of emotion, fantasy and desire' (Antonacopoulou and Gabriel, 2001: 448).

Organization

With regard to conventional analyses, organization is not understood in terms of flux, emotion and unpredictability. Instead, it is seen as a means of ordering, structuring and controlling the chaotic world outside. In a seemingly chaotic world, it appears that human beings 'need to create a sense of order and make arrangements with each other, both to achieve security and to meet material needs' (Watson, 1994: 222). Organization provides means for trying to achieve a stable, predictable and secure world. Such a conception of organization also reflects a 'fascination with the unit' (Serres, 1995a): we want an organization to be singular in its totality—a systematic, integrated and unitary ordering of multiplicity. For such a notion of organization, that which is not rationally unified is considered to be a threat to the very condition of being organized, such that, for example, anything emotional and messy should be institutionalized through regulation and repression of emotionality (Scherer and Tran, 2001). This implies that to be irrational, emotional, unpredictable

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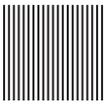
or undefined is a kind of organizational (and theoretical) pathology that must be controlled, organized, brought into line or even eradicated. As the name suggests, the desire organizationally is to be 'organized'—that is, to be controlled, defined and predictable.

Post-structuralist organization theory is instructive here in that it draws attention to how such desires are manifested in practice through 'the workings of primary organizing micro-practices, involving ordering, codifying, framing and classifying, etc., which, in turn, generate stabilized effects such as "truth", "knowledge", "individuals", "organizations" and "society" as well as their attributes' (Chia, 1996: 32). In this context, organization is a 'reality-constituting and reality-maintaining activity' (Chia, 1998b: 366), an 'initial, artificial stabilizing of this incessant and relentless change which, itself, is not entity-like at all' (Chia and King, 1998: 466). Organizing is an 'inscription of order in relation to the otherness (and disorder) of the "unreal" ' (Jeffcutt, 1994: 245). The world is chaotic, in flux and in transformation, and our effort to organize is 'the intrinsically human activity of forging order out of disorder, cosmos out of chaos . . . [O]rganizations are provisionally ordered networks of heterogeneous materials whose resistance to ordering has temporarily been overcome' (Chia, 1996: 51). Organizing involves ordering and reducing complexity such that 'as we embody and perform ordering modes, so, too, we delete. This is what agency is about. It is what ordering is about: ignoring; simplifying; fixing what is complex for a moment in a stable form; reifying' (Law, 1994a: 132).

Our contention is that such a conceptualization of organization is based on a one-dimensional and too narrow-minded point of view. Organization is more than just a 'grammar to reduce ambiguity' (Weick, 1979) through a putatively stable final vocabulary (Rorty, 1989); instead, organization always im*pli*es an 'irreducible otherness' (Lee and Brown, 1994). Organization is not just managing uncertainty, it does not just suppress and repress. Rather, it is a process of increasing complexity *and* reducing it; ordering *and* dis-ordering are interdependent, supplementary and parasitic. These relations are such that, if 'organization is enacted only through the refusal and containment of whatever is thought to represent disorganization and instability, then organization (qua placement) and disorganization (qua displacement) are mutually constitutive and interdependent' (Bloomfield and Vurdubakis, 1999: 626). Indeed, it is forms of non-rational disorganization (for example through irrationality, myths, aesthetics, affectivity and tradition) that are significant in their impact on behaviour in organizations (Strati, 1999).

The recent theoretical fascination with chaos, disorder, noise, paradox and the whole range of concepts such as *différance*, supplement, deconstruction (Derrida, 1976, 1996), differend (Lyotard, 1986) and deterritorialization (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) resides in the growing recognition that 'organization coexists with surprise; that unpredictability does not imply the absence of order; that recurrence does not

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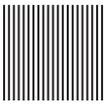
exclude novelty' (Tsoukas, 1998: 292). Organization involves not so much defining and ordering per se, as a desire for order and intelligence in situations where the conventional sense of orderliness reveals only confusion and noise. Organization is not a proper formation of elements but a funky combination of dis/orders. Chaos, disorder and noise are not in opposition to organization but are its very precondition:

> Far from making a system fragile, this [disorder] is what stabilizes it. Every moment of organization that goes beyond the naïve simplicity of a heavy, homogeneous mass (like a sandbag sitting on the ground) has pockets [folds] in which laws, by reversing themselves, far from deconstructing the whole, actually contribute to its consolidation. (Serres, 1995b: 179)

As we mentioned before, organization happens in the interstices, it occurs in the spaces between. In the most general terms, we consider this space in between as the fold between order and chaos. Michel Serres describes this conceptual space perfectly in the quote with which we began this paper: organization, as life and intelligent thought, occurs between order and noise, between disorder and perfect harmony. Our chance is on the crest, following the fringed, capricious curve where the simple beach of sand meets the rolling surf. Creativity and innovation emerge only by the injection of chance in the rule and by the introduction of law at the heart of disorder. And as Serres concludes, '. . . [a]n organization is born from circumstances, like Aphrodite rising from the sea' (Serres, 1982: 127).

But to be in between is unavoidably risky because 'two dangers continually threaten the world: order and disorder' (Valery, quoted in Cooper, 1990: 167). Too much order, rule and harmony, and the system implodes; too much chaos, disorder and noise, and the system explodes. Organizational creativity is in between—metaphorically littoral. New things might emerge when we try to introduce law into the heart of disorder or rules into chaos, and disturb harmony with noise. Organization can thus be understood as an 'intelligent life in between' in that it oscillates between complexification and simplification, de- and re-construction, de- and re-territorialization; it is threatened by the danger of imploding and exploding (Mintzberg, 1991). It becomes an unfolding process of tension between order and disorder that pluralizes and cross-connects artefacts and subjects, human and non-human elements. Organization is not driven by intentions (of management) but is always 'in-tension' (Cooper and Law, 1995). It is a process of linking and connecting that which otherwise would be separated. Organization is the knot, the fold, where order and disorder meet. It is the very process of transgressing the boundaries between the old and the new, the stable and the unstable. This draws attention to the boundary areas—'the margin created by the will and vision of a recurrent and predictable world on the one hand, and on the other the reality of a molten universe that is always on the verge of fusing its elements' (Kallinkos, 1996: 23). Thus, we see organization as occurring in the border zones, in the grey area, where the

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collision of order and chaos, inside and outside, formal and informal, rationality and irrationality, structure and process, occurs. Theoretically, this calls not for an exploration of the hard-edged being of an organization, but rather for the 'building of a syncretic dialogue which recognizes both mutuality and difference, maintaining a heteroglossic in-between that is both diverse and hybrid as well as creative and critical' (Jeffcutt and Thomas, 1988: 67).

Learning

Based on our discussion of organization and organizing, we now wish to connect with the concept of learning. To do so, we follow Foucault's analysis of power/knowledge in order to consider learning in terms of its impact upon power relations in organizations. Let us explain. The knowledge an organization possesses is discursive and therefore always subjected to a certain order (Foucault, 1972). Learning implicates the transformation of this order and, as a consequence, organizational power relations may shift because learning implies the change of established rules and ways of world-making. The organization of the discourse constitutes organizational reality as an effect. Managing the organizational learning becomes the task of providing 'room for multiple voices' (Wenger, 2000; Rhodes, 1997) and creating openings for those without voices. This is not about singular definition but about difference and dialogue. It is deconstructing the organization's own fundament as 'an analytical strategy that permits us to question the limits that may have been imposed upon discourses of knowledge, and opens the possibility of enacting other, different discourses' (Calás and Smircich, 1991: 569). These discourses and their truth-effects enact different worlds, which are not yet inside or outside the organizational reality. Reduced to a formula, one could say that organizational learning can evolve through decentralized power. This is one of the insights we take from Foucault: where there is no power there must be no knowledge, and, we can add, where there is no decentralized power there can be no organizational learning (Gherardi and Nicolini, 2000; Blackler and McDonald 2000; Fox, 2000).

Regarding the dominant image of organization as a process of ordering and the effort of forging order out of chaos, the phenomenon of learning seems to be paradoxical: 'Organizing and learning are essentially antithetical processes, which means the phrase "organizational learning" qualifies as an *oxymoron*. To learn is to disorganize and increase variety. To organize is to forget and reduce variety' (Weick and Westley, 1996: 440). Following from our concept of organization, learning becomes just one element in the process of organizing if it increases variety, complexity and, in this sense, it produces disorder. Such learning occurs in the interstices between different dis/orders where 'the optimal learning point . . . is in circumstances when order and disorder are juxtaposed, or exist simultaneously . . . The optimal juxtaposition between order and

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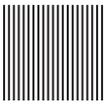
disorder is created not through alternation between the two but through the intimate and continuing connection between the two' (Weick and Westley, 1996: 445). Learning can thus be considered as an oscillation between de- and re-construction, between de- and re-framing (Westenholz, 1993); it can be considered as being interstitial, in between, the search for and exploration of those foldings in which laws, by reversing themselves, far from deconstructing the whole actually contribute to its consolidation. Such learning is the transformation of the images of thought that organize our reality (including the transformation of what we see learning itself to be). It is a process that unfolds through the creation and mutation of concepts—of 'moving concepts' that do not freeze reality but create and develop it (Steyaert and Janssens, 1999: 188).

Concepts organize our thinking and thus our imagined ways of world-making. They allow us to perceive certain things; for example, personnel may be constituted conceptually as 'hands' (Taylor, 1967/1911) or as 'bureaucratic personalities' (Merton, 1940) or as anything—even 'human resources'. It is difficult to change dominating concepts and images of thought, to de-frame and think the unthinkable. Yet one important aspect of radical learning will include the effort to question the taken-for-granted in order to gain yet unknown perspectives and insights. The requirement is to destabilize the finality of the putatively final vocabulary while not seeking to replace it with another false finality. This is a learning that is itself in flux. It is here that organizational rationality can be supplemented with the 'technology of foolishness' (March, 1988), which allows for the playful creation of moving concepts that relax the boundaries of thought and complicate the ways we produce our realities. In order to map unknown terrain, to create new places, to defer our perception, we need fantasy, imagination and *randonnée*—a journey with no fixed route. There can thus be a learning that lies between *randonnée* and method, foolishness and rationality, improvisation and standardized programme; such learning follows an inventive and capricious route. It is this that is the constitutive paradox of learning, which keeps the entire organization in tension as 'creation and imitation, variation and uniformity, distance and interest, novelty and conservatism, unity and segregation, conformity and deviation, change and status quo' (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1995: 192). Learning can be simultaneously repetition and difference (Deleuze, 1994), the moment when the old is no longer as there—just so—as it was and the new is not yet in sight. It is a moment of undecidability and anarchy, a situation that cannot be controlled or planned; rather it is an emerging process. It is improvisation with an unforeseeable ending (Hatch, 1999).

No one can say in advance whether the improvisations that one makes are useful or not. It is conceivable that learning might disturb harmony to such an extent that it proves to be fatal. It is also possible that learning is simply avoided on the basis that it is easier to do what is known than

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what is not. This undecidability suggests not a rational or usability basis for learning, but rather one of non-rational experimentation. Here, learning occurs most readily when what is known in organization theory as 'slack' is encouraged; it can emerge only if there is space for experimentation, foolishness and *randonnée*. Such a space is one where no one calculates every single step but where one can freely chose between different ways of moving in and of exploring the space; a way of travelling without a narrowly predetermined route or destination. Even what might look at first glance as dysfunctional and pathological can, when one looks again, crystallize as consolidation and stabilization of the organization. Such crystallization 'can be observed when, out of the myriads of ideas floating in the trans-local organizational thought-worlds, certain ideas catch on and are subsequently translated into substance in a given organization'. It is about translating between heterogeneous elements, an 'ongoing process of materialization of ideas, whereby ideas are turned into objects and actions and again into other ideas' (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1995: 174). Learning happens at the boundaries through 'collective accomplishments residing in heterogeneous networks of relationships between the social and material world, which do not respect formal organizational boundaries' (Araujo, 1998: 317). Learning can thus be understood as:

> [T]he engineering of the heterogeneous that fashions a network of different materials—people, technologies and text—into a product or effect. Learning is a collective accomplishment which depends on a range of spatially and temporally distributed local practices lying outside the control of any organization and within the network of relationships . . . Learning can be conceived as the heuristic device for the technology of the heterogeneous, which assembles people, technologies and text in the interstices between organization and organizing. (Gherardi, 1999: 111)

Learning implies the transgression of boundaries between inside and outside, and between order and disorder—even between what is and is not considered learning. It occurs in the space between, in the grey area, where the borders are breached, where definitions are unstable.

Becoming

Learning often implies material transformation of practices; the new ways of being or doing signal that something has changed, something has been learnt. If people claim that this or that action springs from the mind, which has command over the body, 'they do not know what they say, and they do nothing but confess with pretentious words that they know nothing about the cause of the action, and see nothing in it to wonder at' (Spinoza, 1883: 108). Management, as conventionally understood, assumes the power to make the corporate body speak or to silence it, to move it and to stop it. If it did not think, the body would be inert. We want to problematize this naive conviction; we want to experience what an organization can do without being determined by a mastermind or a

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master plan. Spinoza says that sleepwalkers do things in their sleep that astonish them when they awake. Yet, many things happen in organizations that management would never have dreamed possible without its direction. In fact, one could say that much of organizing relates to what happens while management is busy making other plans. Our thesis is that the body of an organization and its organs (similar to the sleepwalkers) can and do achieve things that management, captive in its prejudices, has never dreamt of.

Such a de-centring of management from organization leads us toward considering organizations not as fixed entities but rather as being in a constant state of becoming. Further, building on our earlier discussion of organizations being between order and disorder, the notion of becoming enables a discussion of change in relation to organizations. This focus of flux is one where a focus on organization (as an entity) is supplemented by a concern for organizing (Weick, 1979) and where organization is thought of less as a noun and more as a verb that performs itself (Law, 1994b). In this way, a focus on 'becoming' is one where 'organizational phenomena are not treated as entities, as accomplished events, but as enactments—unfolding processes involving actors making choices interactively, in inescapably local conditions, by drawing on broader rules and resources' (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002: 577). Philosophically, perspectives, which see the notion of *organization* as object or organism, may be considered to be the victim of the 'fallacy of misplaced concreteness' (Whitehead, 1938: 66), a 'fallacy' that suggests that organizations 'exist' outside of the ongoing flux of time—'a simple location of instantaneous material configuration' (Whitehead, 1938: 66). Following Whitehead's 'philosophy of the organism', however, organizations can be seen not as 'actual entities'—they are not one of the 'final real things of which the world is made up' (Whitehead, 1957: 27)—but rather as a combination of indivisible processes located (and in flux) through space and time and related to each other. Rather than 'existing', what we think of as an organization is the momentary apprehension of an ongoing process of organizing that never results in an actual entity. The fallacy of considering an organization as a concrete 'thing' thus 'consists of neglecting the degree of abstraction involved when an actual entity is considered merely so far as it exemplifies certain categories of thought' (Whitehead, 1957: 11). Organization is thus an abstraction rather than an entity that is perceivable only at moments in space and time—always becoming and between order and disorder.

Understanding such a notion of 'becoming' is related to what Bergson calls 'intuition'. As Whitehead tells us, it is 'Bergson's charge that the human intellect spatializes the universe; that is to say, that it tends to ignore the fluency, and to analyse the world in terms of static categories' (Whitehead, 1957: 319). Organization is such a category. Usefully, Bergson (1913) draws the distinction between intuition and analysis: whereas analysis renders durations static, intuition is related to the flow of

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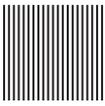
duration. The idea of organizational becoming is intuitive in this way—in Bergson's terms, it is a 'creative emotion'. Such 'creativity' relates to that which is required for a person to adjust dynamically to situations as they are experienced in time rather than a call to eternal realities (Mullarkey, 1999). Deleuze (1988: 31) picks up this point: 'Intuition presupposes duration, it consists of thinking in terms of duration'—intuition is about being in time. So, we can consider an 'organization' not as an entity but rather as an abstraction that is apprehended momentarily in time and space. In this sense, becoming is about the travel and mutation of apprehensions through the flux of time (which is quite different from the notion of organizational change as the movement from one state of order to another). Here organization is reconstituted 'not as a bounded social entity, but as a generic organizing process involved in the creative structuring of social reality' (Chia and King, 1998: 463). This focus on becoming thus sees the idea of an organization's existence not as an ontologically stable object, but rather as something that exists only in its duration; to propose that an organization endures through time (i.e. it existed before, it exists now and it will exist in the future) means that the very idea of organization depends on time. Again following Bergson, an organization does not exist as a distinct entity but rather exists in the 'virtual realm of creative processes and becomings' (Pearson, 1999: 12). Importantly, this focus on duration is not about considering time as a succession of independent points but rather about considering time 'as a flow of experience in which events merge into one another' (Lennie, 1999: 83) such that an organization can only exist in the sense that it is in flux.

Our proposal is that the concept of 'becoming' offers the possibility of re-considering organizational learning. Whereas learning is often thought of as if it is an interplay of de- and re-construction (the difference between then and now), becoming emerges out of a process of mutual de- and re-territorialization (the movement from then to now). These differences (multiplicities) are indeed of two different types. The first is a metric multiplicity that striates difference into numeric, homogeneous and discrete entities; the second is a non-metric multiplicity that is not discretely divisible but rather is qualitative, fusional and continuous (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). In this sense, considering learning in terms of becoming focuses on movement rather than that which is moved. This is not the movement of a self-contained organization; rather, organization momentarily materializes out of the interconnections and interruptions between an organization's flow and other flows with which it intersects. Such multiplicity is not a collection of irreducible units— becoming occurs when two (or more) heterogeneous elements (each already multiple) come together and transform each other. Using Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) terms, becoming is brought about by the de-territorialization (i.e. movement away from a previous moment) of one notion of the organization and the re-territorialization (i.e. the creation of

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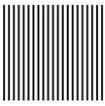
a new and different moment) to another; the two moments interlink and form relays in a circulation of intensities pushing the de-territorialization inevitably ever further. The organization is always in movement and any attempt to make it stop for practical or analytical purposes can be only falsely imposed. There is neither imitation nor resemblance, only an exploding of heterogeneous lines of flight composed by a common rhizome (i.e. a network of de-centred connections) that can no longer be attributed to or subjugated by anything signifying in the absolute sense (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Becoming thus implicates a transgression of the boundaries of a system. It occurs only where there is an assemblage, a combination of heterogeneous materials able to transform each other (Deleuze, 1994). Becoming evolves when heterogeneous elements collide and together build a new system.[3] There is no preformed logical order to becoming and, even worse, during its genesis it might disturb and hinder the entire organism in its existence.

New competencies and new functions emerge after (at best during) the time when the organization is assembled with other elements such that 'there is no preformed logical order to becomings and multiplicities' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 251), there is no pre-given plan. Organizations relate to heterogeneous materials that surround them; as such, there is always a zone of ambivalence where things turn into each other and becoming evolves, where 'becoming is to extract particles between which one establishes the relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness that are *closest* to what one is becoming, and through which one becomes' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 272). In this zone of ambivalence, in the middle, in between, organization and heterogeneous material cross-connect and build a new assemblage. Becoming happens at the boundary, at the margins; it is defined not by a totalizing centre or universal point of reference but by lines of flight and ways out:

> a line of becoming has neither beginning nor end, departure nor arrival, origin nor destination. . . A line of becoming has only a middle . . . [that] is fast motion, it is the absolute speed of movement. A becoming is always in the middle. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 293)

Becoming is the folding and unfolding of lines, the knotting and netting of different materials and organs that mutually de- and re-territorialize each other in order to become something different; and where that 'something' different is always and immediately subject to the process that created it. These connections are those of the rhizome, which always has multiple entryways and exits; it connects any point to any other point. A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, always in between, in motion (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987).

If organization as space in between is rhizomatic, if becoming as constant dis/connecting is an enduring process, what, then, are the 'stable' elements of an organization? What is its 'identity'? The movements of de- and re-territorialization and the processes of de- and re-construction are stable (i.e. ongoing), whereas, paradoxically, the

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seemingly solid elements and structures are characterized by their imma-
nent instability. Organizational change is not the business of unfreezing,
changing and then refreezing an identity. Organizations are not deep-
frozen or ossified; rather, they are in constant transformation, in a
magmatic mode of being (Hasselbladh and Theodoridis, 1998). They
should be read as a generative dance on the edge of a volcano, a 'camping
on seesaws' (Hedberg et al., 1976).

Concluding

> 'Any fool can turn the blind eye, but who knows what the ostrich sees in
> the sand?' (Beckett, 1963: 122)

In concluding, we wish to draw out the implications of our discussion for
the idea of organizational learning. At the outset we set ourselves the task
of relating the concepts of learning and becoming, exploring and simulta-
neously constituting the phenomenon of organization in order to create
pragmatically productive possibilities for understanding organizations
and organizing. On this basis, we have discussed and drawn connections
between three concepts: organization, learning and becoming. This dis-
cussion has worked hard to conduct itself without reference to 'defini-
tions' and stabilities in terms of these concepts; rather we hope for them
to mingle and infect each other in order to enable an appreciation of the
flux of organizations and their organizing concepts. We acknowledge that
any attempt to achieve such tasks is itself immersed in duration and thus
our answers (insofar as you read our discussion as being answers) are the
momentary result of the intersection of a range of concepts that have
briefly been re-territorialized in this text. Our text, as an assemblage, is
similar to the notion of organization that we have concerned ourself with:
it is located in a space in between order and chaos and it is threatened by
each.

As regards organizational learning, instead of seeking concrete and
stable definitions or timeless practices, we suggest that it might usefully
be considered from the perspective of multiplicity. Here, organizational
learning and becoming are brought together to understand learning not as
a discrete and identifiable practice or suite of tools, but rather as a
process through which an organization exists. Learning is thus a form of
dis-organization that connects with and can destabilize the desire for a
unified, timeless and static idea of organization. Such learning is impor-
tant because, on the basis of our cultural legacy, we are provided with
enough senses to protect us from the danger of explosion (after all we
have organization, rationality, unity, linearity and the like). We worry,
however, whether we have sense enough when faced with death from
order. Learning, in this sense, is about overcoming the inability to disrupt
order, which makes it difficult to create a new order. Coupled with a
sensitivity to becoming, learning can be considered as being constituted
in the interplay between order and chaos, and therefore as being the

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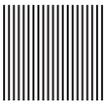
driving force beyond organization. This learning is a way of organizing the complex and supplementary interrelation between implosion and explosion. Learning is a journey on the edge, on the fringe, a way of exploring time and space; it cannot be measured by the old standards, because it is the very process of inventing and establishing them anew. Organizational slack, *randonnée* and a technology of foolishness are the preconditions of learning. Becoming, as an ongoing change of organizational identity, signals a conception of learning that implies a transgression of existing boundaries, a linking of heterogeneous organs, which may lead to the emerging of new yet unknown competencies. Learning/becoming are processes that are neither finally definable nor entirely controlled and manageable, because they imply the deconstruction, deterritorialization and reversing of the existing practices and images that frame an organization's possibilities. Transgressing this frame in order to develop new, even transient, competencies necessarily implies a playfulness that encourages people to experiment with the taken-for-granted order of the organization.

What we have sought to do is to open up space and create concepts that make us move and multiply as well as encouraging us to imagine new possible realities and real possibilities. Taken in its own terms, an organization-as-object implies a dead end—an impossible end of time. Alliteratively, like surfers at the shore, we see our chance as coming to be on the crest—exploring the foldings, the interstices and the space in between. And what else can organization be if not the constant effort to balance these forces through learning and becoming? These are the central movements through which organization explores the foldings, and, in its members' nightly visions, the mysterious precept 'organization, neither order nor chaos' will haunt it like a soul-devouring sphinx.

Notes

1 Etymologically the 'pli' in words such as duplicate, complicate, implicate, applicable, multiply, replicant and pliers comes from the Latin *plicatus* (past participle of *plicare*). *Plicatus* means 'fold' in English, and thus the various 'pli' words refer to the fold or connection of different elements.

2 Following Gephart et al. (1996: 361), therein resides the difference between modern and postmodern organization theory: 'The gap is problematized; that is, it is made a topic of analysis.'

3 See the studies emerging within and around the actor-network theory, especially Cooper (1992) and Law and Hassard (1999).

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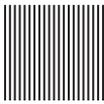
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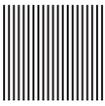
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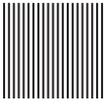
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