Viewpoint

The sociology of organizations and the organization of sociology: some reflections on the making of a division of labour

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Abstract

This paper speculates on the emerging divide between 'organization studies' – a discipline largely practised in management departments – and the 'sociology of organizations'. Using organizational culture as a case study, I argue that 'forgetting' is a key move in the construction of a discipline. Much organization studies' writing on corporate culture and symbolism is predicated on an amnesia about a wide body of older sociological work on 'atmosphere', 'climate', 'personality' and 'informal structure'. This disciplinary constitution is productive of knowing, yet it also involves drawing boundaries that enable forgetting. Critically reflecting on the current division of labour in this area, as well as on the costs of amnesia, might encourage more historically informed forms of knowing.

Introduction

> In recent years a good deal of the very best sociological work has been devoted to the study of organization. (Egon Bittner 1965: 239)

I want to begin by making some claims about identity. I am an 'ex-sociologist' now working in a 'management' department.[1] I was a 'sociologist of organizations', whilst now I practice 'organization studies' – a sub-discipline of management. This paper is concerned with the identity and the division upon which those statements rely. They suggest that 'management' is an area that is somehow distinct from 'sociology', that is concerned with different matters, or views the same matters in different ways. Or perhaps even that 'sociology' is a scholarly and emancipatory discipline whilst 'management' functions as the ideological apparatus of technocratic capitalism. In what follows I will interrogate some elements of that division and argue that it has some rather undesirable consequences for both sides. To be clear here, I am not

seeking to dissolve 'organization studies' into 'sociology', or vice versa, but I want to examine some of the history that has led to this set-up, and to my own puzzles about disciplinary identity. It seems to me very strange, in an academic climate which is often trumpeted as post-disciplinary, that the emergence of this particular divide is remarked upon so little.

Before I begin though, two *caveats*. First, I am writing as an UK academic and hence am uncertain as to whether some of my assertions in this paper will make sense to an academic working in north America, continental Europe, Australasia or any of the other sites where sociology and organization studies are practiced. Secondly, there are problems of terminology here. This is largely because there are several terms to refer to the study of organizations which have overlapping but rather different connotations. As Clegg and Hardy noted in the preface to their recent survey text (1996: xxiii), 'organizational science', 'organizational theory' and 'organizational studies' all seem to mean slightly different things. To this list could be added 'organizational behaviour' and 'organizational analysis' too. I've chosen the term 'organization studies', because Clegg and Hardy did, and because it seems the most inclusive, but there are certainly national, disciplinary and stylistic differences here that make any definitive naming difficult.

My paper seeks to address the question of how 'organization studies' has been constituted by investigating the addition of one relatively recent concept to its canon – 'organizational culture'. When US management gurus began to write about organizational or corporate culture in the late 1970s and early 1980s it was as if the idea had sprung from nowhere.[2] The story told was one of the dominance of structural models of organization in management education, of functionalism in academic theory and of accountancy in practice. Organizational culture was proposed as an alternative way of thinking about managing. By the mid 1980s management academics were beginning to use the concept routinely as well, and yet the gradual erasure of a wide body of much earlier writings on organization during that decade was quite remarkable. I will suggest that this constitutes a moment when 'organization studies' – as a sub-category of management – begins to construct a canon which is distinct from writing within prior domains such as 'industrial sociology', 'organizational psychology', 'industrial anthropology', the 'sociology of organizations/work', 'industrial relations' and so on. Historicizing the story of organizational culture can point to, first, the ways in which the 'marketing' of the idea itself was constructed through a form of forgetting, and second, how its reception seems to illustrate some rather important points about the emerging divisions between different forms of writing about organizations. To put it another way, I want to say something about the increasing size of the fence between organizational sociology and organization studies and explore the implications of such a division for the social construction of knowledge (Foucault, 1972/ 1989; Douglas, 1987).

Yet this 'forgotten history' is not hard to find. As Jacques suggests 'it lies "hidden" right before our eyes' (1986: ix). From Weber onwards, a central

problem for writings on organization was the tension between the formal and the informal, between structure and culture, or as Gouldner put it forty years ago, between 'rational' and 'natural-system' models of organization (1959/1965). The 'culture' of the 1980s was not really a new concept, but one that had been central in various guises ('climate', 'atmosphere', 'personality' and so on) in the constitution of the study of organizations for at least eighty years previously. My point here is not only that other writers had already been concerned with these matters, but rather that there is something odd going on when so much writing gets effectively forgotten. I will argue that this amnesia is related to the construction and legitimation of organization studies as a particular form of academic labour.

I also want to make a parallel argument that cuts back to sociology itself. It seems to me that in the UK (and perhaps other places too) the 'sociology of organizations', or what used to be called 'industrial sociology' seems to have been increasingly positioned as a more and more marginal sub-discipline within sociology itself. Nowadays, who could really agree with Egon Bittner's assertion of thirty three years ago that I began this paper with? Perhaps instead it could be claimed that the newer and more interesting – work on organizations tends to come from academics who are institutionally located within management.[3] Yet this is also a cautionary tale, not merely an archaeological one. I want to suggest that this reformulation of disciplinary interests is not without its cost, and my story of the trajectory of 'culture' attempts to illustrate that the 'cost' is (in part) a form of amnesia. It allows, in a sense, for wheels to be reinvented in order that further academic labour can take place.

'Discovering' culture

The first references to the term 'organizational culture' I have found are in an article by Becker and Geer (1960) and later in Eldridge and Crombie's *Sociology of Organizations* (1974), but it was not until the late 1970s that the words culture and organization began to be coupled together with any frequency. Two events in 1979 allow us to claim that this was the year that modern organizational culturalism was born. First, a conference was held at the University of Champaign-Urbana that was the first that took this area as its topic (Barley, *et al.*, 1988: 24; Pondy, *et al.*, 1983). Secondly, in the same year Andrew Pettigrew – a British management academic – published an influential article in *Administrative Science Quarterly* (usually the home for highly quantitative and conservative management theory). More popular landmarks soon followed – William Ouchi's *Theory Z* (1981), Peters and Waterman's *In Search of Excellence* (1982) and Deal and Kennedy's *Corporate Cultures* (1982/1988). All three books rapidly became bestsellers and made it almost obligatory in the following decade that 'new' writing on organizations should contain a textual nod in the direction of culture or symbolism.

It is fair to say that the explosion of interest was phenomenal. Academic management journals fell over each other to have a special issue on symbolism or culture – *Journal of Management Studies* (1982, 1986), *Administrative Science Quarterly* (1983), *Organization Studies* (1986) and others. Many academic books also appeared – some of the early ones being Pondy *et al.*, (1983) and Frost *et al.*, (1985) – and a huge number of management guru 'how to' books hit the airport bookstalls. A qualitative illustration of this trend is given by Barley *et al.*, (1988) They did a survey which discovered less than 10 articles on organizational culture published between 1975 and 1978 but nearly 130 published in 1985. The same exercise was repeated by Alvesson and Berg in 1990 which revealed 2550 publications with organizational culture or symbolism as key words. So, 'culturalist' terminology had become a routine part of organization studies about in the space of less than ten years.

But much of this work was premised on the assumption that there was something new happening here, that something had been found that was not there before. Increasingly, it seems to me, the standard citations within works on culture became post 1980s writings from other management academics. Let me take just two examples. Andrew Brown's text *Organizational Culture* (1995) contains about 190 items in the bibliography, of which only 33 were published before 1980. If we discount general citations, we are left with 13 citations from 190 which might link post 1980s writing to earlier ideas. Similarly, Joanne Martin and Peter Frost's *review* of the culture debates (1996) contains about 180 citations. This time 30 were published before 1980. If we again discount general citations we are left with 14 citations relevant to culture. I think it likely that similar exercises could be performed on much work on culture published from within organization studies. It is evident that much earlier work is being written out of the canon, and since the two texts I selected above will themselves be used to reproduce organization studies, this is a trend that is likely to continue. So what happens if we do attempt to look back to earlier writings? What is being forgotten?

'Re-discovering' culture

This part of the paper is structured as a, broadly chronological, narrative beginning with Weber and Taylor and ending in the late 1970s before the rise of modern culturalism. It is also a parade of challenges to structuralist characterisations of bureaucracy and scientific management – Gouldner's 'rational model'. My criteria for inclusion is that the work should be in some way concerned with what Gouldner called the 'natural system' features of organization – variously labelled 'climate', 'atmosphere', 'personality', 'informal structure' and so on. I don't want to be too definitive here about what counts as 'culture', and what doesn't, though I'll say a little more about that in the conclusion. My aim here is not to define, but to point to a wide body of writings with strong family resemblances.

Weber and Taylor

The consensus now seems to be that Weber's formulation of bureaucracy should be properly seen as part of his historical thesis about the development of forms of rationality and legitimation (Gerth and Mills, 1948). As has been well established elsewhere (see for example Albrow, 1970) the model of bureaucracy is an ideal type. If it is treated as a prescription for excellence then Weber can be articulated as being merely a precursor to Taylor, establishing organizational principles which scientific management then distilled and applied to individual workers. In precisely this way many contemporary management texts often make little distinction between Weber and the 'classical' theory of Taylor, Urwick, Gantt, the Gilbreths and so on. All are often framed as evidence which can be used to demonstrate the inadequacies of bureaucratic anti humanism and the amount of 'progress' that has been made in theories of management this century. Yet Watson notes that Weber himself was involved in factory studies in the 1900s which, though unfinished, show an interest in the 'ethical, social and cultural background, the tradition and circumstances of the worker' (Weber in Watson, 1995: 67). Despite this, a very selective reading of Weber as flawed organizational consultant sets much of the backdrop for contemporary organizational behaviour.

It is possible, if a little perverse, to make similar claims about Frederick Taylor (1911/1947). Again, the accepted understanding of Taylor is that he espoused a rigid form of authoritarian behaviourism which relied on the assumption that employees were driven solely by economic reward. The only cultural elements of his work were the perturbations that he sought to eradicate worker's 'systematic soldiering', management's reliance on rules of thumb and so on. As with Weber, this understanding of Taylor's work has provided a baseline for other authors to argue for a story of progress – the gradual humanisation of the brutal face of industrial organization, partly through the heroic efforts of those practising organization studies. Yet, in a very interesting essay, Lucy Taksa argues that these dominant characterisations of Taylor are actually rather flawed (1992, see also Jacques, 1996: 155). She suggests that he *was* centrally concerned with cultural issues – the harmonisation of management and worker interests – and to argue otherwise is to mistake scientific management techniques – such as the *Bedaux* system – for his espoused rationale. Taylor's attempted to replace meorally transmitted counter cultures by a single written organizational culture. Importantly, this was to be achieved through a 'mental revolution' on the part of all employees – managers and workers. Workers were to be encouraged to break with collective opposition and become individual employees sharing unitarist aims. Reading Taylor in this way suggests that his attempt to engineer a sense of organizational harmony – even if it was based on a very narrow conception of interests – anticipates not only the Durkheimian strands of human relations theory but elements of the culture literature too. It again seems that a dominant characterisation of a Taylorist 'other' performs an important function for a

much of the supposedly humanised management of the culturalists. Indeed if, for example, we pay some attention to Henri Fayol's interest in *esprit de corps* or Mary Parker Follett on participation in organizations – both contemporaries of Taylor – then the neat story of progress from ignorance to knowledge, from structure to culture, begins to look rather shaky.

Human relations

The influence of these narrow understandings of Weber and Taylor has been immense, and this shown most clearly by the supposed contrast between scientific management and 'human relations' theory which is now almost canonical within organization studies. As popularised by Elton Mayo, the human relations movement is often said to have brought the social into the study of work through the general proposition that 'informal' patterns of interaction cannot be explained simply by reference to an organization chart or a desire for monetary reward. As Roethlisberger and Dickson put it –

> Many of the actually existing patterns of human interaction have no representation in the formal organization at all, and others are inadequately represented by the formal organization. (...) Too often it is assumed that the organization of a company corresponds to a blueprint plan or organization chart. Actually, it never does. In the formal organization of most companies little explicit recognition is given to many social distinctions residing in the social organization. (in Merton *et al.*, 1952: 255)

These ideas seem to derive from Mayo's introduction to Pareto via his translator L.J. Henderson at Harvard. Both Talcott Parsons and Mayo were members of the 'Pareto circle' dining club at Harvard in the 1930s – as were Merton, Homans, Roethlisberger and Barnard (Burrell, 1996: 642) – and the influence of this group was substantial. Pareto's manifesto for the social engineering of 'sentiments' – the nonlogical rationalisations for action – suggested that elites could manage better if they understood the irrationalities of ordinary human beings. For human relations the concept of group values was almost exclusively restricted to the shop floor and the elitist paternalism which followed essentially defined the 'informal' as being a property of 'them', and not of 'us'.

In terms of an early history of organizational culture it is also interesting to note the influence of an imperial form of anthropology on the human relations movement at Harvard. One of its seminal figures was the Chicago structural anthropologist W. Lloyd Warner, a pupil of the British structural functionalist Radcliffe-Brown. By establishing close ties between the Chicago Anthropology Department and Harvard Business School he attempted to apply his ethnographic studies with Australian aborigines to an industrial setting, and the later phases of the Hawthorne studies were much influenced by this methodology (Wright, 1994). Hence the bank wiring room study is

conceptualised as if it were a functioning society in miniature. The employee attempts to fit in to the value system of this society and the task of the manager is to use science to engineer the social. Mayo's diagnosis of industrial civilisation plays in a key part in popularising this analysis. A disintegration of social ties and plunge into conflict could only be solved by a managerial elite who gave a new meaning to peoples lives. The social conscience of the enlightened manager lay in accepting their responsibility for moral order, but this did not involve damaging their profits. This search for organizational community is a theme which reappears in various guises later in the century. In this sense managerial culturalism is prefigured by the elitist and romantic intentions of the human relations movement.

Neo-human relations

A further celebration of the managerial role was written by another member of the Pareto circle – Chester Barnard (1938/1966). For Barnard management is a question of building common purpose, or an 'organization personality' (Barnard, 1938/1966: 88). Barnard's executive is a manipulator of co-operation and uses non-material means as much as economic incentives. By manipulating the 'hierarchy of positions with gradation of honors and privileges' (Barnard, 1938/1966: 170) the able executive can ensure that the sentiments of organizational participants are favourable to their task at hand. Management is hence 'a matter of art rather than science, more aesthetic than logical'. (Barnard, 1938/1966: 235) In passages that could easily come from a culturalist text he writes of the creativity and personal conviction that build strong organizations. Barnard does not use the term culture, but he effectively formulates managers as culture-heroes.

At roughly the same time Conrad Arensberg and Eliot Chapple, again both at Harvard, founded the 'Society for Applied Anthropology' in 1941. The most well known result of this focus is contained in the work of W.F. Whyte, his classic *Street Corner Society* (1943/1955) being followed by a series of studies of life in organizations (much of it referenced in Whyte 1961). In places he clearly anticipates later culturalism (1961: 34, 386, 433) as well as providing (I think) one of the earliest critiques of this kind of position (*op cit*: 576). Similar work was done within the 'Yankee City' studies supervised by W. Lloyd Warner. *The Social System of the Modern Factory* was a detailed description of a strike in a small community that stressed the fragmentation of consensus brought about by the division of labour (Warner and Low, 1947: 54, 191). These, and other works, helped to begin to make participant observation respectable as a tool for the study of industrial organization.

A work which develops precisely this approach comes from a student of Whyte's – Melville Dalton's *Men Who Manage* (1959). It is an insiders description of four organizations and is predicated on the assumption that 'unofficial' behaviour is an essential aspect of organization. For Dalton the organization chart is a 'point of departure' (Dalton, 1959: 17) and from there

he goes on to investigate the power struggles and cliques that shape life within the organization. The book contains a substantial amount of detail on social life, dress, the use of the cafeteria, Masonic and ethnic ties, and the flexible use of formal and informal rules – such as the reward system (Dalton, 1959, 93, 94, 150, 180, 194). His formulation of the latter is worth quoting since it clearly presages later 'interactionist' work.

> Those who regard this chapter as merely a set of episodes of theft have missed the point. Our study of unofficial rewards is not an attempt to justify internal plunder or to say that theft by membership is inevitable. Both 'theft' and 'reward' derive their meaning from the social context. (Dalton, 1959: 215)

The final development of human relations that is relevant here was more influenced by social psychology than anthropology. It is associated primarily with the work of Kurt Lewin and the key significance of these studies for my purposes was the introduction of the term 'climate' to describe a characteristic of a group. The first mention of 'social climate' seems to be in a paper by Lewin, Lippitt and White from 1939 in which it is used interchangeably with the term 'atmosphere' (in Pugh, 1971: 230). The term climate has since enjoyed a long pedigree in organizational psychology (Tagiuri and Litwin, 1968). Typically, responses to questionnaires are used to categorise members perceptions of autonomy, reward, warmth or whatever. It then becomes possible to relate such measures to dimensions of structure and produce correlation hypotheses about the functional 'group personality' for particular forms of organization. Consider Payne and Pugh's optimistic Comtian conclusion to their review of the area a generation ago.

> The way forward is clear. We can benefit from the ability to design organization structures and climates which are appropriate to particular goals and needs. Furthermore the planning and implementation of social changes will be more feasible with such knowledge. Thus, research which improves our understanding of organizational structure and climate will make an important contribution to our future. (1976: 1169)

Groups and leadership

These connections between culture/climate and management were developed by a series of humanistic social psychologists who broadly built upon Maslow's now classic formulation of a 'hierarchy of needs'. Thus Douglas McGregor (1960) argues that managers can encourage either dependency (theory X) or autonomy (theory Y) depending on how they expect their employees to behave. Rensis Likert (1961) suggests that participation and communication ensure that the social systems of the workplace become tightly knit and productive. Warren Bennis (1966) argues that the 'culture' of 'target systems' (groups to be

changed) must be addressed as part of the 'lab training' or 'T group' change process. Finally, Chris Argyris (1957) proposes that many organizations treat their employees as if they were children, incapable of autonomous responsible action. 'Culture' then becomes a variable to be inserted into the analysis –

> Why is it not possible to hypothesise that the agents of social organization create and then use such status symbols as desks, rugs, chairs, telephones, decorating and size of room to help the formal organization achieve its goals, maintain itself internally, and adapt to its external environment? (...)
>   Why the agents of any particular system (eg: the formal or informal) decide to pick a particular set of symbols to denote status may be related to their personalities, to the culture within which they exist, and to the particular situation being observed. Research into these aspects would lead to insight into how the individual, organization and culture interact and transact to maintain themselves and each other. (1957: 244–5)

Developing in tandem with this psychological humanism was the organizational development work of Elliot Jaques. Whilst his earlier work was located within the Lewinian development of human relations, in *The Changing Culture of a Factory* (1951) he reports on a period of action research when he was consultant at Glacier Metals. In this work Jaques applied his psychoanalytic training to a process of 'working-out' the stresses and tensions produced by the organization of factory life.

> The culture of the factory is its customary and traditional way of thinking and of doing things, which is shared to a greater or lesser extent by all its members, and which new members must learn, and at least partially accept, in order to be accepted into service in the firm. (...) Culture is part of second nature to those who have been with the firm for a long time. Ignorance of culture marks out the newcomers, while maladjusted members are recognised as those who reject or are otherwise unable to use the culture of the firm. (1951: 251)

Though much of this leadership and groups literature adopts a fairly psychologistic definition of the cultural which largely reflects a neo-human relations agenda, a rather more sociological treatment can be found in post-war work which began to deal more explicitly with the work of Max Weber.

The retreat from bureaucracy

One writer who was influential in initiating these debates was George Homans who made a Parsonian distinction between the external and internal aspects of the 'organizational system' (1950). The former refers to specified behavioural requirements that allow the group to survive in its environment, the latter to the expressive social relationships that reflect the sentiments – note the use of

Pareto's term – that individuals have towards one another. Again, remember that Homans was also a member of the Pareto circle, as was Robert Merton, the author of probably the most influential early contribution to this literature with his 'Bureaucratic Structure and Personality' (in Merton *et at*., 1952). Merton suggested that individual bureaucrats may operate in ways that are dysfunctional for the goals of the organization, and hence that formal specifications do not determine actual behaviour. There was much literature elaborating on this point (see for example Merton *et al*., 1952), but I will restrict my commentary to three of the best known writers – Gouldner, Blau and Selznick.

Alvin Gouldner was a student of Merton's, and though he uses functionalist language, his treatment of bureaucracy is one which contains clear indications of his later move to become one of the major critics of the Parsonian orthodoxy. In terms of an anthropological interest it is worth mentioning Gouldner's frequent use of the term myth and his interest in the belief systems, rituals and folklore of the workplace (1954: 79, 117 *passim*). Strip Gouldner's work of its Mertonian gloss and it becomes an excellent piece of industrial ethnography. In policy terms Gouldner offers some kind of liberal solution to bureaucratic dysfunctions in his formulation of 'representative' as opposed to 'punishment-centred' bureaucracy. Individuals in the former understand rules – such as safety guidelines – as collective agreements that are supported by all members. If the same formal rules can have many different informal functions (explicate obligations, allow control at a distance, legitimate punishment and so on, Gouldner, 1954: 237) then they must be understood as locally constructed. Indeed, Gouldner's later work on manifest and latent social roles expands these ideas by suggesting that organizational actors may have value and reference group orientations that shape action yet are not formally prescribed by the organization's explicit rules (1957). To put it more simply, and echoing Dalton, people are not just members of an organization, they also have gendered, ethnic and religious identities (Gouldner, 1954: 285) as well as professional allegiances that crosscut each other.

Peter Blau, again a student of Merton, engaged in participant-observer work in various organizations which convinced him that they did not work as the organization chart suggested, but rather that rules were continually reworked informally. In this light he suggested that the informal was needed to operationalise the formal and, more contentiously, that efficiency is actually often a result of turning a blind eye to official pronouncements. This becomes increasingly important when bureaucrats face tasks that are not easily routinised. In this regard he mentions language (1962: 106), ritual (166) and myth (194) within a framework that is directly influenced by Arensberg's version of structural functionalist anthropology. In policy terms, Blau argued that appropriate recruitment and training procedures would ensure that members of organizations would exercise appropriate autonomy and prevent the need for continual rule re-writing because of the resulting cultural consensus. Select the correct people, give them due responsibility and efficient

administration will result – prescriptions which again would not look out of place in a 1980s piece of organizational culturalism.

Philip Selznick connects these kind of arguments with many observations about the role of elites in shaping the 'character' of organizations. His central problem is the tension between decentralisation and the maintenance of agreement on goals – the difficulty that results in the frustration of both in his Tennessee Valley Authority case study (1949/1966). According to Selznick, when an organization is forced to decentralise there is a tendency for the sub-units to focus on fulfilling their sub-goals at the expense of the major goals of the organization. Echoing Merton, the means become the ends, and echoing Gouldner, this leads to calls for more centralised control, which in turn leads to the need for decentralisation and so on. This difficulty is seen as part of organizational evolution and solving it requires the executive to become an institutional leader, not merely an administrator (1957: 4). Through the idea of 'institutionalisation' Selznick produces observations about the 'character' of an organization which are undoubtedly indebted to Barnard's formulation of organizational personality and which were later influential in the US under the guise of 'institutional theory'. Yet 'character' formation can also be pathological if it is not given purpose or mission by good leadership which is capable of 'transforming a neutral body of men into a committed polity' (Selznick, 1957: 9). His discussion of myth is instructive in this respect.

> To create an institution we rely on many techniques for infusing day-to-day behaviour with long-run meaning and purpose. One of the most important of these techniques is the elaboration of socially integrating myths. These are efforts to state, in the language of uplift and idealism, what is distinctive about the aims and methods of the enterprise. (...) The assignment of a high value to certain activities will itself help to create a myth, especially if buttressed by occasional explicit statements (Selznick, 1957: 151)

So these sociologists were empirically exploring different kinds of organizational rationality, though in a way that was still positioning Weber rather negatively. Albrow's comment that Merton was turning back to a pre-Weberian view which equated bureaucracy with inefficiency can be probably be applied to most of the other authors I have covered (1970: 55). Most importantly though, they were all engaged in an exploration of the 'informal' organization. As Crozier put it –

> Instead of describing bureaucratic dysfunctions merely as the automatic consequence of the ordering of human and technical factors necessary for achieving a superior form of rationality, we have tried to understand them as the elements of a more complex equilibria affecting the patterns of action, the power relationships, and the basic personality traits characteristic of the cultural and the institutional systems of a given society. (1964: 294)

The 'eclipse' of culture?

At this point we reach some writing which is almost always nowadays used to characterise the state of affairs before 'culture' was discovered. In the story now told within organization studies this is the 'other', the anti-humanist and structuralist wasteland that existed prior to the 1980s. Yet it seems to me that, as this paper hopefully illustrates, the hegemony of these ideas can be greatly over-stated. Nonetheless, just as Parsons moved from the quasi-Weberian 'unit act' to develop more and more complex accounts of social systems, so did some work on organization begin to subordinate the 'social system' to other systems. The US work of Walker and Guest (1952), Sayles (1958) and others had foregrounded technology as a cause of change in social systems, but it was the development of the socio-technical or Tavistock approach (Trist *et al.*, 1963, Miller and Rice, 1967) that more firmly placed the social into an inter-locking systems framework. Both Trist and Bamforth had worked on Jaques' Glacier project but in an early paper (1951) had began to move towards a much more elaborate formulation of the possibilities for social engineering in which action was articulated as behaviour and not meaning. This was an approach that treated the socio-cultural parts of the organization as being, at least, causally related to external pressures and, at most, as determined by them. Since these pressures were variable and empirically describable a 'best fit' between social, technological and economic systems could be found for any particular context.

The adoption of a systems metaphor and quasi-scientific methodology placed clear limitations on the nature of what could be operationalised within the research programme. Acceptance or rejection of technical change, for example, was seen as a behaviour pattern which could be managerially modified. Such a formulation left almost no space for considering how meaning could be constructed on an everyday basis. Instead various systemic analogies were adopted to claim a grand view of the extent to which an organization was achieving its 'goals' – defined in a highly abstract sense. The UK Aston studies (Pugh and Hickson, 1976) were probably the clearest example of the flowering of this form of research. The informal organization all but disappeared underneath a deluge of contingently related variables intended to measure the relation between environment, technology, organization, group and individual. As Pugh *et al.* argued, their approach was concerned with –

> ... what is officially expected should be done and what in practice is allowed to be done; it does not include what actually is done, that is what really happens in the sense of behaviour beyond that instituted in formal organizational forms. (cited in Reed, 1992: 137)

The systems and contingency theorists simply ruled certain conceptual artefacts, such as culture, un-testable in favour of the analysis of what were defined as verifiable scientific facts.

The 'return' to social action

It seems to me that it is very easy to overstate the dominance of systems metaphors in writing on organizations. In the USA the work of Everett Hughes (1958) and Donald Roy (1960) form something of a bridge between the early work of Whyte, Warner *et al.*, and the later development of this theme in the interactionism of Becker, Strauss and Goffman. Meanwhile in the UK, as Richard Brown points out, Parsonian notions of consensus never took as strong a hold as they did on the other side of the Atlantic. Brown suggests that this was partly due to the later development of sociology as a recognised discipline and the importance of trade unions in reflecting class and party divides (1992: 12). As a result post-war British industrial sociology had tended to be more oriented to Weberian ideas of interest group conflict (Scott *et al.*, 1956, Dennis *et al.*, 1956, Lockwood, 1958), with 'unitarist' models being treated with considerable scepticism. Even British organizational contingency works like Burns and Stalker (1961) attempted to deal with what they called 'action systems' as part of their account of organizational change.

Nonetheless, it was North American symbolic interactionists who explicitly developed an interpretive stance. Anselm Strauss's concept of 'negotiated order' (1963) gained wide circulation and aspects of organization that were conventionally articulated as 'real' entities were reframed as complex and continually changing practices and local knowledges. In a sense this resulted in the industrial anthropology tradition being taken to its localising limits. For example, Goffman (1961/1968) and Becker *et al.*'s (1961) studies of organizations focused on the way in which understandings of self and other are constituted and contested, as organizational members defend alternative understandings of identity against the organization's attempt to reduce them to one dimensional role players. Indeed, Becker and Geer (1960) were the first to use the term 'organizational culture' in their discussion of manifest and latent cultures which drew on Gouldner's initial suggestions about crosscutting roles. Clothes, spaces, symbols, games, roles and rituals are seen to be deployed and arranged in complex constellations that can only be understand through close observation.

In the UK, David Silverman (1970) was later pivotal in insisting on a theory of organizations that began with action, citing Weber, Schutz, and Berger and Luckmann (1967) as influences. His approach echoed, and was influenced by, many themes in the US Carnegie school of decision making which had began to construct an interpretive social psychology of organization and provided an important bridge between US and UK writing (Clegg, 1994). From rather a different intellectual legacy, ethnomethodology (Bittner, 1965; Garfinkel, 1967; Clegg, 1975; Silverman and Jones, 1976) also provided a rallying point for organizational sociologists who were sceptical about the assumptions of structural models. Bittner, for example, saw 'organization' as a common sense concept carried around in people's heads. Institutions, such as the criminal justice system, are not formal and/or informal but streams of symbolic conduct

which make the formal/informal distinction conceptually irrelevant (Cicourel, 1976; Bittner, 1973).

In the UK, within the emerging 'management' writings on organization, some recognition of the importance of actor definitions even began to drive later contingency theorists to question the degree of cultural consensus within the systems they were attempting to describe. Hickson *et al.*'s (1971) work on 'strategic contingency' suggested that different departments within an organization might have more or less power to impose their views. This was followed by John Child's 1972 essay on 'strategic choice' which drew on both Silverman and the Carnegie school in suggesting that contingencies could mean different things to different actors and also that organizational members had varying capacities to act upon supposed structural pressures. Hence the management faction were a coalition of actors who saw the world in a particular way and had the strategic resources to ensure that their perspective was dominant in the organization. The work of Andrew Pettigrew (1973) is a good example of such a position – a detailed account of an organization is provided to support an analysis of power-brokering and political manoeuvring in the management of meaning.

By the late 1960s and early 1970s a variety of other British writers were also publishing work which could be broadly characterised as industrial, rather than organizational, sociology. As noted above, the approach was neo-Weberian or conflict pluralist with an emphasis on investigating 'shop floor' respondents from the primary or secondary sector, and not the total institutions favoured by US interactionists. Anthropologists and sociologists at Manchester and Liverpool Universities respectively echoed the US community studies in combining elements of sociology with concepts derived from anthropology – focusing particularly on informal structures and traditions (Banks, 1960; Banks, 1963; Lupton, 1963). A little later, the highly influential affluent worker studies (Goldthorpe *et al.*, 1968; 1969) took factory case studies and attempted to relate them to theories of class formation; Ronald Fraser edited collections of biographical accounts of work lives (1968; 1969); and Barry Turner wrote about initiations into 'occupational communities' and invoked the notion of subculture (1971, but see also Crozier, 1964). In addition a number of industrial relations studies analysed organizations from a standpoint in which internal and external influences are assessed for their influence on class perceptions, levels of industrial militancy, attitudes towards technology and so on (Beynon and Blackburn, 1972; Wedderburn and Crompton, 1972; Daniel, 1973). The concept of 'work orientation' is one that is shared across many of these studies – a concept that necessarily suggests that beliefs are not mere epiphenomena of formal structure. At roughly the same time anthropologists were beginning to turn their focus towards the societies they lived and worked in. Abner Cohen's *Two Dimensional Man* (1974) is a good example of the beginnings of an 'anthropology of power and symbolism in complex society' in which the organization of culture is an ordering concept and organizations are the major focus. It is not surprising then that the term 'culture' crops up increasingly in industrial studies from the early 1970s onwards (Beynon and Blackburn,

1972: 156; Lane and Roberts, 1971: 232) and mention is also made of the discipline of 'industrial anthropology' (Mars, 1973: 200).

In 1974, Harry Braverman's highly influential *Labor and Monopoly Capital* coincided with and stimulated a substantial body of work that applied a broadly Marxist analysis to practices in particular organizations. Whilst neo-Weberian and industrial relations studies often focused on class as a major explanatory variable, from the mid 1970s onwards there was an emerging body of work that investigated the strategies and justifications used by dominant groups to maintain their position. Hence Nichols could argue that to understand management practice it is necessary to understand 'business ideology', a term which refers to 'the social values and frames of reference of business men' (1969: 12). The work of Beynon (1974), Nichols and Armstrong (1976), Nichols and Beynon (1977) and Burawoy (1979) provide descriptions of subordination and resistance in everyday work that explicitly rely on assumptions about the importance of actor accounts of organizational life. Later British studies by Pollert (1981), Cavendish (1982), Cockburn (1983) and Westwood (1984) add a focus on gender inequalities to the shop floor ethnography. However, perhaps the most explicit presentation of culture in these studies can be found in the work of Graeme Salaman.

> [*Formal*] knowledge constitutes only a fraction of the ideational and moral world of organizations. Distinctive cultures – both organizational and specialist – occur in all organizations, and play an important part in the distinctive and discrete character of different types of organizations. The difference between a military regiment and an electronics factory, or an university department and an insurance company, is not composed only of differences in structure, activity, technology and control mechanisms. It includes different ways of thinking and evaluating, different moralities and cultures. It is this difference we are referring to when we talk of the 'feel' of an organization, or the 'atmosphere', or 'climate'; the distinctive and habitual ways in which members of the organization (or departments, or sections, or specialities) relate to each other, think, evaluate, know and conceptualise themselves, each other, their work, organization and their objectives. (Salaman 1979: 176–7)

Hence 'official' organizational cultures and ideologies were bodies of practice and belief that members had to be deliberately selected for and then socialised or indoctrinated into. These ideologies were counterposed to the unofficial, lower level, cultures that formed pockets of resistance against dominant assumptions and used sabotage, strikes and cynicism in response. The development of Marxist accounts involved a critique of the rational model that paralleled that of action theorists. Capitalism must *engineer* actors consent, whether through economic coercion or ideological smoke screens, hence an understanding of organization necessarily involves an appreciation of the various informal tactics that attempt to ensure co-operation.

Summary

In general terms then, the 1960s and 70s took alternatives to the rational model in a variety of directions and the foundational assumptions of 'new' culturalism were being clearly rehearsed. So what was really 'new' about organizational culturalism? My short history seems to indicate that we can find all of the constituent elements of organizational culturalism prior to its supposed 'discovery' – liberalising and flattening bureaucracy, quasi-anthropological terminology, an attempt to insert accounts of meaning, the manager as character shaper, the humanisation of work organizations. So the themes raised by the organizational culturalists in the early 1980s were far from novel. A century of writings explicitly or implicitly called upon formulations of culture – manifested variously as climate, personality, institutionalisation, informal organization and so on. That these strands found expression in the culturalism of the 1980s was simply the latest move in a dialectic in which cultural accounts of organization have been framed as an 'other' to structural ones, or as Perrow put it rather neatly in 1973 – 'the forces of light and the forces of darkness' continue to battle with each other (cited in Jacques, 1996: 137). Certainly this 'other' was occasionally subordinated to a Parsonian hegemony, but it was never absent. The claim that culture has been ignored is simply unsupportable. Yet this huge and diverse body of work from sociology and psychology is being gradually forgotten, written out of the archaeology of contemporary organization studies.

Re-membering and re-vising disciplines

> The sign of being at home is the ability to make oneself understood without too much difficulty, and to follow the reasoning of others without any need for long explanations. (...) A disturbance of rhetorical communication marks the crossing of a frontier, which should of course be envisaged as a border zone, a marshland, rather than a clearly drawn line. (Descombes in Augé, 1995: 108)

So why has so much of this literature been increasingly neglected in academic work on culture from the 1980s onwards? I'm not suggesting that this was, or is, a complete absence, that would be far too strong a claim,[4] but I do think there was an increasing ignorance or marginalisation of much of this writing. If it was mentioned, it was used in relatively crude ways to suggest, for example, that Weber was a structuralist where organizations were concerned – a kind of 'false memory syndrome'. Or some pieces might be referenced at the beginning of a paper but do not inform the argument that follows. This is a forgetting that serves to demonstrate intellectual progress, the gradual correction of mistakes and banishment of misconceptions. Now I suppose these might be seen as trivial matters in that I am merely berating some other, largely

nameless, academics for not doing their scholarship properly. Well, yes, but I also want to use this observation to make a point about the constitution of a new form of academic/professional discipline – organization studies. In other words we might want to distinguish between different ways of seeing and reflect on what Cooper has called 'the organization of organization' (1990: 197).

Acts of referencing, the citation of authority, serve to construct and reproduce the proper canon of a discipline, and it seems that the case of culture illustrates their historical contingency. It is precisely by neglecting its pre-history that organization studies can come into being, as a contemporary management discipline which is *not* organizational sociology, or industrial relations and so on. Compare, for example the disciplinary allegiances of Burrell and Morgan (1979) or Clegg and Dunkerley (1980) with Clegg, Hardy and Nord's handbook (1996). Whilst the former were discipline shaping works that drew heavily on sociology, the latter is not obviously indebted to any 'other' discipline but itself. However invisibly, boundaries are being re-drawn, and they are boundaries which rely on forgetting. As Mary Douglas has observed, 'the construction of past time ... has very little to do with the past at all and everything to do with the present' (1987: 69). I've used the term 'culture' to tell this story simply because this is a body of literature with which I am relatively familiar. It seems likely that similar stories could be told about other concepts – 'strategy', 'leadership', 'management', 'innovation' – which have been articulated as part of management more generally, and organization studies specifically. As Jacques (1996) argues, this kind of re-covery (rather than discovery) would be a 'struggle of memory against forgetting', an attempt to show the historical contingency of contemporary (management) thought.

This still probably sounds like I am accusing someone of some kind of sin. But I want to stress that this is also about the active construction of a disciplinary identity – its 'positivity' as Foucault puts it (1972/1989: 125). The condition of possibility of disciplinary knowing involves repulsing 'a whole teratology of learning' in order that 'true and false propositions' can be recognised (1971/1996: 348). An 'unthought' allows for ordering to take place by constructing an outside and hence an inside. It allows for legitimacy to be demonstrated through deciding what sorts of knowing count as proper – a tactic which both constructs and reinforces the discipline of discipline. Becoming someone who practices 'organization studies' involves 'internalising' all sorts of taken for granted assumptions about what kind of work matters, about the history of concepts and the provenance of ideas. The intellectual landscape might have changed but the fences around the 'fields' are still there, re-vising simply inaugurates a new form of vision. This is what provides a 'community of practice' with some sense of continuity and sharedness – a home and language. In this sense it is an enabling strategy, one that allows for disciplinary reproduction to take place. We do not need to be aware of these matters, or to be consciously attempting to bracket off other ideas, in order for this intellectual sclerosis to take place. Indeed, perhaps the process will work better if we do take our boundaries, our citations and our teleologies for

granted and not attempt to question them too much. Normal science can then proceed unhindered by doubts. But what might be lost at the same time – on *both* sides of the sociology/organization studies divide?

In order to address this question, let me turn to contemporary sociology itself, particularly sociology in the UK. I want to say a few words about the sense of identity I have when I look back to my 'home' discipline from my adopted one. It seems evident that, as the epigraph from Bittner suggests, much of classic sociology was built around an interest in organizations and institutions as key to understanding modernity. Marx on capitalism, Durkheim on the division of labour, Weber on bureaucracy. Yet contemporary sociologists rarely show much interest in this area. Indeed, it can be argued that, at the present time, the sociology of organizations is almost moribund within UK sociology departments and only receives attention in sociology journals if it is attached to another area of supposedly legitimate sociological concern. For example, labour market segmentation (as a set of arguments about class, gender and ethnicity), the NHS (as an element in medical sociology) or MNCs (as exemplars of globalisation). In addition, though there is now sustained interest in studying culture, for some reason organizations and organizing are not generally regarded as cultural phenomena. Yet at the same time, so is much organization studies becoming increasingly oriented to commercial organizations – the business school's cash cow – neglecting the state, the health service, education, the law, voluntary organizations and so on. So, just as sociologists forget about organizations, so do those in management departments define them increasingly narrowly.

Let me try to describe this situation in a different way. I have had many conversations with people in management departments who are finding it difficult to get published in UK sociology journals. *Sociology*, *The Sociological Review*, *The British Journal of Sociology*, even *Work, Employment and Society*[5] seem not to publish many papers about organizations. Yet many of us do get published in *Organization*, *Organization Studies* and a wide selection of journals with management in the title. I'm not suggesting that there is a conspiracy at work here (or that this work is not good enough to get into sociology journals)[6] but rather that this is further evidence of a hardening of differences. Curricula, citation networks, the peer groups and knowledge of referees, the divides between professional organizations such as the British Sociological Association and the British Academy of Management, the conference networks built around interest groups such as the 'Standing Conference on Organizational Symbolism' or 'European Group for Organization Studies', all seem to be acting to ensure that organization studies is no longer talking to, or with, sociology. And, as Douglas suggests, 'memory is sustained by institutional structures' (1987: 81).

I think that this divide can also be related to certain occupational movements. In the UK, the lack of career opportunities for sociologists during the 1980s, combined with a massive expansion in business and management teaching resulted in many students with postgraduate training in sociology

being forced to find work outside sociology departments. Perhaps the genesis of what is now sometimes called 'critical management' can be traced back to the consequent importation of Marxism, critical theory, poststructuralism and so on into the B-school. Indeed, the management dominated labour process volumes and conferences could be argued to be one of the few sites where some of the literature that I've mentioned above does get remembered. But even then the memory is selective and there are long running debates around what is, and is not, appropriate to include and exclude from canon (Parker, 1999). Nonetheless, outside this small circle it seems that the professional divides between organization studies and sociology are continuing to widen. Indeed, one sociologist who claims an interest in organizations has recently expressed a severe hostility to 'the debacle of organization theory' (Albrow, 1997: 155). I don't want to suggest that this is a 'crisis', a state of affairs which is somehow threatening any critical work on organizations. Yet all these movements serve to ensure that forgetting becomes easier on both sides of the fence. Just as sociologists become less interested in organizations and institutions, so do those practising organization studies neglect much of the work which is not enshrined within its textbooks. It seems sensible to expect a further institutionalisation of these divides in future as newer books (on culture for example) increasingly rely on work from the 1980s onwards and sociologists see the proper place for a study of organizations as lying within the management disciplines.

So it might well be that the field of organization studies is increasingly defined through a distance from sociology. Psychology and anthropology too, but sociology is my particular concern here. Sociology is partly defined by longstanding debates over methodology, an elaborated conception of theory, a persistent suspicion of modernity and some kind of generalised commitment to emancipation. This is not to say that sociology is a model of disciplinary perfection – I have enough distance from it to recognise this – but I think it can be claimed that organization studies reflects these debates rather poorly. In some cases they are simply ignored, and positivist models of rational economic actors are simply assumed. Here, the ahistoricity enabled by forgetting can also easily translate into an assumed apolicity. In other cases the wheel is reinvented and a great deal of ink is spilt legitimizing positions which have been well established elsewhere. The 'discovery' of qualitative research (on culture for example), endless attacks on a poorly conceptualised version of bureaucracy, or even the attempt to (re)legitimate a 'critical management studies' would seem to be examples of the latter. These are moves that are enabled by forgetting, by constructing a division of labour which is productive of discipline. As sociologists of religion have suggested, when a sect becomes a church it routinises knowing and it is then that certain books get excluded, and certain voices get marginalised or silenced. Disciplining memory has political consequences.

To conclude. This paper may well be no more than the imaginings of a sociologist who is nostalgic for his home discipline, or who needs to find

excuses for his inability to publish in *Work, Employment and Society*. Perhaps this should not be a worry, but is simply a description of how knowing can be constituted. Constructing a 'specialist' area must involve defining limits and banishing an outside – 'a system of control in the production of discourse' – as Foucault suggests (1971/1996). Yet it might also be decided that the failure to historicize, to re-member disciplinary dismemberment, leads to exclusions which can at least be the subject of reflection. And so, this is a paper about my identity – as someone who 'used to be a sociologist' – but it is also a plea for engagement between these two disciplines which seem to be rapidly parting company. I think both have much to learn from each other, even if –

> The revisionary effort is not aimed at producing the perfect optic flat. The mirror, if that is what history is, distorts as much after revision as it did before. The aim of revision is to get the distortions to match the mood of present times. (Douglas, 1987: 69)

Notes

1 Thanks to Peter Case, Bob Cooper, Valerie Fournier, Roland Munro, participants at conferences at UMIST, Leeds and Cambridge, and the Sociological Review referees for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper.
2 See Parker (2000) for an extended discussion of these ideas.
3 Paul du Gay is a notable exception here, but it is also worth noting that his work tends not to refer much to writings from organization studies – a point which reinforces my general argument. See Fournier and Grey 1999.
4 See Czarniawska-Joerges (1992) for example.
5 Indeed, Richard Brown, the founding editor of *WES*, recently described his motivation as publishing a journal which was 'more centrally sociological', and not only about organizations and industrial relations (Brown 1999: 3).
6 This is a possible explanation after all. Since management labour markets have been much more expansionist, they have allowed people in who are not as academically credible as those in sociology departments. As one professor of sociology told me, management is a 'softer' discipline. I'm not sure what to say about this, perhaps because I do partially agree with it, but only partially.

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