

articles

Writing Organizational Analysis into Foucault

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Abstract. *In certain areas of social science and the humanities, Foucault has had an enormous influence in recent years. In particular, history, feminist and gender research, literary studies, philosophy, politics, psychiatry, and sociology have not been able to ignore the radical interventions of Foucault's attempts to think the unthought. Organization theory has not been immune to Foucault's constant challenge to what is taken for granted and his sceptical views of the work of what he named 'universal intellectuals', who claim to speak on behalf of individuals, groups or populations. Foucault's scepticism about historicist and totalizing systems of thought and practice fits the era. His demand is that we question conventional thinking not because it is necessarily wrong but because it is dangerous. Contrasted with the way that much organization theory simply uses Foucault as a convenient resource, this article attempts to push organizational analysis toward Foucault until the pips squeak. **Key words.** epistemology; power/knowledge; resistance; subjectivity; truth/ethics*



'The successes of history belong to those who are capable of seizing the rules, to replace those who had used them, to disguise themselves so as to pervert them, invert their meaning and redirect them against those who had initially imposed them.' (Foucault, 1977: 147)

Introduction

There has been a growing literature that seeks to link organization analysis and Foucault by drawing on his unique insights in the study of



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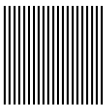
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work and organization (e.g. Hoskin and Macve, 1986; Miller, 1987; Cooper and Burrell, 1988; Knights and Willmott, 1989; Rose, 1989; Knights, 1992; Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992; Townley, 1993; Barker, 1993; Knights, 1997; Covaleski et al., 1998; Ezzamel and Willmott, 1998; McKinlay and Starkey, 1998; Sewell, 1998). This paper began by seeking to build on this tradition and, more particularly, was concerned to consolidate our understanding of the distinctive contribution of Michel Foucault's social analysis and its significance for organization studies. An immediate question raised itself, however, as to whether there was not a problem in wanting to write Foucault into organization theory.

On reflection, it became clear that this could simply result in another perspective in organization theory to add to and compete with an already overcrowded field. Indeed, it may already be too late, as may be seen from the proliferation of Foucauldian approaches to organization analysis. But when discussing the debate on the incommensurability of paradigms in organization studies, Letiche (forthcoming) argues: 'the debate exhausted itself with no one convincing anyone else of much of anything'. Perspectival positions cannot avoid the problem of relativism, where it is impossible to judge one against the other except in terms of presuppositions and prejudices.¹ Following Lyotard, Letiche suggests that 'postmodern' organizational studies demand a radical epistemological break with modernism and not a fudge that seeks to reconcile modernist demands for generality within the context of localized circumstances of concrete organizing.

If we take this view seriously, maybe it is necessary to avoid appropriating bits of Foucault for purposes of re-energizing organization theory and do the reverse—write organization theory into Foucault. While this may be seen as heretical within mainstream organization theory, presumably Foucault would have approved of both it and the moulding of his own work to suit some other purpose. He continually provoked others to bend his work to their interest as he had himself done with Nietzsche² and others. More importantly, however, this project also attempts to follow Foucault's commitment to taking thought beyond itself or thinking what appears to be unthinkable. In writing organizational theory into Foucault, both may be destabilized in the sense that our knowledge of them becomes disrupted and what we have previously taken for granted may be recognized as the (re)source of a particular exercise of power.

Throughout his intellectual career, Foucault was concerned with the epistemological rules of disciplines formation, the disciplining of populations and subjects through power-knowledge relations and the self-formation of the ethical subject. However, it does not constitute too great a violation to perceive his work as having been broadly about how human life *organizes itself* and is *organized*. Similarly, once we reject the notion of perceiving the subject matter of organization theory exclusively as the bounded entity that commonly attracts the label 'organization',³ the two forms of study can be seen as having parallel, if not identical,



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concerns. In this sense, organization analysis⁴ focuses on the principles and processes of *organizing* wherever it occurs. By contrast, Foucault was concerned with the organization of knowledge, power and subjectivity. But no matter what the focus for the activists of organizing, power, knowledge and subjectivity are involved. It makes little difference to these three concepts whether the organizing activity is concerned directly with the idea (i.e. conception/design) or its implementation and, thereby, realization in practice. From the organization of production through distribution to consumption, knowledge is mobilized and modified, subjectivity is secured and sustained, power is exercised in more or less effective ways and ethical discourses formed and reformed. Of course, equally knowledge can be displaced or destroyed, subjectivity ridiculed or resisted, power undermined or undone and moral relations exhausted or emasculated. While these concepts may not be exhaustive of the content of organizing, other aspects can readily be accommodated within their remit. This idea that the central concepts of Foucault—power, knowledge and subjectivity—parallel the principles and processes involved in all forms of organizing social and economic relations provides the basic rationale for writing organization analysis into Foucault.

However, epistemologically there is an even stronger basis for writing organizational analysis into Foucault rather than the other way around. This relates to the distinctiveness of Foucault's epistemological approach to the humanities. In his early work, Foucault (1973) argued that the humanities occupied the space that lies between the representations of the positive human sciences and the subjectivity that makes them possible (see Table 1).

The stimulant for his interest in the rules that '*govern* statements, and the way in which they *govern* each other so as to constitute a set of propositions which are scientifically acceptable' (Foucault, 1980b: 112), was a concern to understand radical and sudden transformations of scientific knowledge. He had seen this radical transformation in the growth of psychiatry and the construction of madness (Foucault, 1977b). While he had already identified as important the circulation of the effects of power among scientific statements, he had not yet fully recognized discursive regimes in terms of power relations or struggles, strategies and tactics (Foucault, 1980b: 114). Growing dissatisfied with some of the

Table 1. The Positive Human Sciences

Representations of:	Through:	Objectifications of:	Truth effects in norms of:
1 Life	biology	the body and its functions	health
2 Language	linguistics	speech and communication	well being
3 Labour	economics	production and exchange	wealth



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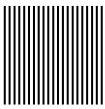
central elements of his archaeology of knowledge where this insight regarding the space that the humanities should occupy was buried, Foucault (1980a; 1984) turned away from an examination of the 'rules of formation' and 'regimes of truth' through which scientific knowledge progresses. Because of this, he abandoned the focus on an archaeology of 'epistemes of truth' in favour of genealogical analyses of power and knowledge that exhibit the conditions making it possible for power to have particular truth effects. In the penultimate section of this paper, I seek to revive this episteme while showing that it is entirely compatible with the genealogical and ethical phases of Foucault's work.

The paper begins by displaying the classificatory results of having trawled through the work of Foucault to indicate how it is principally about power/knowledge, subjectivity, and truth/ethics, after which it is then necessary to show how these conceptions and interests are also the central features of organizational analysis. At the same time, writing organizational analysis into Foucault may mean sacrificing some sacred cows. For example, whereas organization theory tends to reflect and reinforce humanistic values, Foucault has professed an anti-humanist position. This is not so clear-cut however, for while claiming to be anti-humanist, Foucault also argues that human rights are all that we have in our armoury when resisting the powers that subjugate us.

We now turn to our first section, which seeks to summarize Foucault's work in a classificatory schema. While necessarily violating its subject matter, as do all classifications, this is an acceptable heuristic device so long as the temptation of reifying its construction is resisted.

'Pinning Foucault Down'

One way of organizing the diverse, difficult and dramatic character of Foucault's work is to break it up into historically discontinuous periods. The most common of these periodizations is provided by distinguishing between the archaeological and the genealogical phases (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982; Burrell, 1984; Knights, 1992) and, more recently, to add in the final ethical phase (McNay, 1992). While it is difficult to discuss Foucault's writings as a whole without distinguishing these different phases, I do not want simply to repeat what others have already skilfully achieved. Accordingly, the following analysis (see Table 2) takes the periodization a stage further by creating what might be seen as a classification of Foucault's work. It is recognized that classifying is a form of labelling and thereby an exercise of power and, indeed, often an act of violation.⁵ For the sake of the classification, it is necessary to push and prod analyses or discourses into categories that strain to fit them and then are found to be overlapping or inconsistent with other categories in the scheme. This recognition did not stop Foucault from engaging in classification when, for example, he sought to distinguish the point in the 17th



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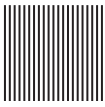
Table 2. The Foucauldian Edifice

Society	Pre-modern	Modern	Postmodern
History		→ Processes of individualization →	
Power Exercised through Knowledge	sovereign spectacles of torture	disciplinary hierarchy/normalization/examination	governmental responsibility
Effects	exclusive fear of punishment	partially distributed divisive	inclusive identification
Self	<i>struggles for honour</i>	<i>struggles for dignity</i>	<i>struggles for autonomy</i>
Identity	subjugated	normalized	aestheticized
Resistance	limited	extensive	occurs in space between multiple identities
Subjectivity	totalized	individualized	subjectivized
Ethics	absolute	publicly regulated	localized
'Truth'	function of God/Nature	effect of power/consent because attached to identity	detached from identity

century at which Classical or pre-modern society became modern. Consequently, the following is a reflection as well as a violation of Foucault.

This analysis is not to be seen as a conventional approach to the examination of history since Foucault does not see these developments in evolutionary terms. They are not, therefore, the equivalent of the historicist stages from feudalism through capitalism to socialism in Marx's historical materialism. In that sense, pre-modern, modern and postmodern characterizations should not be seen as displacing one another in a linear sequence, although clearly each is dependent on its predecessor as the conditions of its own possibility. These characterizations are, of course, an effect of 'problems' of the present, not the past. Here, we can see why Foucault (1977a) described his distinctive form of analysis as a 'history of the present'. It is not 'grand narrative' or totalizing theory, so much as strategic analysis that acknowledges its own 'immersion within an existing, mobile field of knowledge' (Dean, 1994: 23). The analysis cannot then be distinct from, or immune to, the problematic features of the contemporary, fragmentary and conflicting situations that it seeks to study.

However, having said this, Foucault (1980a; 1982) does see modern regimes of power/knowledge as having the increasing effect of transforming individuals into subjects that are turned in on themselves, self-regarding and, thereby, individualized. In large part, this was because the social sciences were providing ever more sophisticated and elaborate understandings of the human subject, and modern regimes sought to utilize this knowledge to promote self-discipline. This represented an 'economy of power', since the resources necessary for its exercise were



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distributed among the population and were of little or no cost to governmental institutions. While recognizing that processes of individualization were 'progressive' from a governmental point of view, Foucault (1982) saw them as far from such with respect to individuals. For this is clearly an exemplification of 'divide and rule', where individuals who are separated from one another are rendered more vulnerable and less resistant to the power exercised over them. Consequently, Foucault continually advocated that we resist the process of individualization by refusing to be what we have become. It is perhaps for this reason that he turned to an ethics and aesthetics of the self in his later work. Caring for the self and making one's life into a work of art (Foucault, 1985; 1986) is simultaneously an acceptance of the individualized resources and a form of resistance to the regime that makes those resources possible by constituting us as individualized subjects. In showing how the subjectivized discourses that we see today as constituting our identities can be traced to the ancient Greek or Roman society, the linear 'progressive' character implicit in the notion of a creeping individualization is countered. For aspects of each power regime can be seen to coexist in a complex *melée* of conflicting and contradictory discourses, both in the present and in the distant past when they had yet to be invented, so to speak.

Although Foucault's method is generally understood to have changed from an archaeological, through a genealogical to an ethical/aesthetical phase, it should not be periodized historically any more than his general analysis. Even though Foucault began to recognize different points of focus as he reflected on his various analyses, each phase is present to some degree at different stages of his work. Having said this, Foucault's later period pays more attention to ethics, subjectivity and the 'truth' of the self than his earlier work. Here, he sought to deploy the legacy of the Enlightenment and humanistic belief in self-development and self-improvement against itself. This counters the way in which, through psychiatry, psychoanalysis, the caring professions, industrial psychology and human resource management, self-development has been utilized as a means of normalizing and/or reintegrating individuals into society, thus rendering them docile. Along the lines that resistance is most effective when it draws on widely accepted knowledge and discourses, Foucault uses the individualized focus on subjectivity to make an aesthetic project of the 'self'. By analogy with the artist in his/her garret, turning the self into a creative work of art would clearly disrupt those effects of individualization that ordinarily render subjects isolated, preoccupied with identity and vulnerable to the disciplinary demands of power. Ethics are adopted that are contingent to the localized circumstances of their application and a transformation of the individualized to a subjectivized subjectivity—that is, one created by, and responsible to, the self. In detaching 'truth' from identity, the unproblematic relationship that power assumes over subjectivity and truth is disrupted. In other words,



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the effects of power/knowledge regimes to produce particular (individualized) subjectivities and 'truths' as part of what it is to secure the self in social relations can no longer be taken for granted.

The relationships between his archaeological, genealogical and ethical phases have tended to be ignored by those drawing on Foucault in the field of organization studies. The greatest neglect here has been the first, and perhaps most difficult, archaeological period and to a lesser extent the third ethics phase. It is perhaps not surprising that organization theorists select Foucault's middle phase for special attention, since it is there that he focused on power and discipline within organizations such as prisons, schools and factories. But this limited use of Foucault simply reinforces and even legitimizes a focus on common sense notions of concrete organizations with definite, clear-cut boundaries. If drawing on Foucault leaves us, and the discipline, untroubled and still capable of taking for granted what we had previously thought, it would seem that his work has had little effect. Neither the literature nor the authors are transformed by the experience of drawing on Foucault. Instead, in the appropriation, it is Foucault who is often transformed to an impoverished deterministic version of his former self.

To understand disciplinary power and surveillance, it is necessary to see how it partly developed out of resistance to the use of torture or more coercive forms of punishment under sovereign regimes. Foucault (1979b: 3–69) describes how spectacles of torture gave rise to protest, riots, attempts to free individuals, attacks upon executioners, acts of vengeance and the elevation of some 'criminals' to hero status. Thus, collective 'solidarity' amongst a population arose out of an act of violence targeted on 'individuals' questioning sovereign power. This process of change delineates a far more uncertain social context, and an unpredictability regarding the outcomes of social interventions, than attention within the management discourse to the 'disciplinary' effects of power has so far allowed (Knights and McCabe, 2000).

It is also important to recognize how institutions characterized by panoptican-like surveillance mechanisms anticipate regimes of governmentality, where individuals are transformed into subjects securing their identities, sense of meaning and reality from the discourses that the regime invokes. For example, in prisons the inmates' belief that they are being watched invokes self-restraint, whether or not such surveillance is actually practised. It is because the knowledge about surveillance is only partially distributed that it works so effectively as a discipline. For clearly, if the knowledge of surveillance were exclusive as under sovereign regimes or inclusive as under governmental regimes, it would not have the effect of disciplining subjects. But the divisiveness of disciplinary knowledge, where subjects are separated from one another as the 'good' from the 'bad', the normal from the abnormal, the criminal from the law abiding or the sick from the healthy (Foucault, 1982) also generates resistance. Subjects struggle for autonomy and a sense of a self



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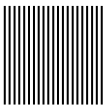
free from the stigmatizing labels that are produced to mark them out or discriminate against them (McWhorter, 1999).

Because of the closer relationship between the middle period interest in discipline and the organization of work, this—and often even more narrowly the one book, *Discipline and Punish*—has been over-represented in organization studies. I feel that this is largely the product of a selective appropriation of Foucault for organization theory, and is partly the reason why I am seeking to reverse the whole exercise so as to write organization theory into Foucault. The different concepts or ideas that Foucault developed were continually revised throughout his life, and their relationship therefore needs to be treated with some care. However, with a limited degree of licence, it can be argued that in relation to notions of the self, contemporary preoccupations have moved from a concern with dignity and autonomy to one of identity. Again, this does not mean that autonomy displaces dignity only to be itself displaced by identity in a kind of historical evolution.⁶ Each of these aspects of self can be coincidental as well as discrete, although the emphasis on one or other aspect has tended to change in the direction suggested. As a consequence, resistance in postmodern organizations will tend to be more focused on issues connected with enhancing or challenging threats to a person's identity than with preserving dignity or autonomy. But dignity and autonomy do not disappear as relevant concerns especially in circumstances of their threatened erosion (Sennett and Cobb, 1977).

Conventionally, resistance is seen as an opposition to, or rejection of, the discursive practices that are seen to be the target of that resistance. Even authors that focus heavily on identity would appear to follow this line of reasoning. For example, Castells (1997: 9–10) argues that there are three forms of identity:

- 1 *Legitimizing identity*, where dominant institutions extend and rationalize their domination through identity (see also Sennett, 1986). This is the basis of civil society.
- 2 *Resistance identity*, where the dominated challenge dominant identities on the basis of different principles (identity politics). This is the basis of communes or communities.
- 3 *Project identity*, where the building of a new identity redefines and seeks to transform dominant institutions. This produces subjects in Touraine's (1995: 11) sense of 'individuals against communities and individuals against markets'.

In order to link these conceptions of identity with Foucault's (1982) work, we could argue that legitimizing identity is similar to the notion of subjection where individuals are tied to themselves and others through a self-disciplined subjectivity. Resistance identity may be seen as a form of rebellion against domination, and project identity appears more akin to revolution against exploitation or institutional domination. But, it may be argued, identity management no longer occurs predominantly along the



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two dimensions of rebellion and revolution; that is, of seeking an alternative community or of a project designed to overthrow the system (Castells, 1997: 9–10). Only when identity management relates largely to resisting any threat to autonomy or ‘dignity in conditions of its continual erosion’ (Sennett and Cobb, 1977), does it tend to be either rebellious or revolutionary. Work and organization has been an important site for such rebellion or revolution, although in recent times resistance has often manifested itself simply in the concern to *escape* from work (Palm, 1970; Knights and Collinson, 1987; Collinson, 1992).

However, when the focus is predominantly about protecting one or a series of identities as a way of making a statement about the world, often it takes the form not of an escape from, so much as an escape into, work (Sturdy, 1992). Such ‘constructive’ forms of resistance occur at all levels of the organization and frequently involve the criticism of management by employees or other managers. Resistance is then encapsulated in a projection onto significant others of a failure to behave competently or to deliver what is promised. Within Castells’ (1997) typology, such resistance lies between what he terms the legitimizing of identity (expectations of conformity), and resistance in the form of the construction of alternative identities or rebellion. While it invariably involves a claim to be closer than others to the organization and its proclaimed objectives, it is clearly a psychological means of elevating the self over others. It is resistance without risk, since not only can it always be legitimized as in support of the values shared by members of a common project, it also helps to reproduce the comforting and protective cloak of the collective activity and the security of identity that it sustains.

An alternative interpretation of project identity would be to see it as having parallels to the existentialist response to contingency, where separation of self from the contingent, overflowing excess of ‘other’ renders individuals anxious, insecure and in danger of falling into a meaningless void. Projects for the self are a way of transforming an amorphous and oppressive indeterminate and meaningless potential into an object of commitment, and a source for a meaningful and secure identity. It is, of course, possible to transcend the meaningless void rather than escape it through project intentionality. But this would require a discarding of the ontology of subject–object separation that reflects and reproduces individualized conceptions of identity. This could then result in a ‘social identity’ that is not simply or primarily based on a preoccupation with a source for security, as is the case with the three forms of identity discussed by Castells (1997). Social identity is not dependent for its construction, sustenance or transformation on any one single institution, discursive practice or social movement, but is polymorphous with respect to its own self-reflexive reproduction. It is probably a necessary condition of the struggle ‘against the submission of subjectivity’ (Foucault, 1982: 213). In terms of postmodern ideas, social identity is multiple, flexible, fragmented and transformational. Having said that, social



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Table 3. History of Management and Organizational Analysis

Theory		Focus or Perspective	
Foucault	power	knowledge/truth	subjectivity/ethics
Managerial	control	productivity	motivation
Technical	Classical (e.g. Fayol)	scientific management (Taylor)	group theory (e.g. Sayles)
Social	Classical (e.g. Barnard)	population ecology (e.g. Hannan & Freeman)	human relations (e.g. Mayo)
Institutional	bureaucracy (Weber)	market competition (e.g. Williamson)	internal market (e.g. Quality Management)
Integrated	global corporatism	knowledge management	job insecurity

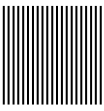
identity cannot be seen to exist anywhere in pure form as if uncontaminated by the anxieties and insecurities that emanate from the difficulties of sustaining the social world as orderly and predictable.

Power and Subjectivity in Organizational Analysis

Table 1 helps us to see the whole of Foucault's work in a much-condensed form; Table 3 is developed to show how organizational analysis can be readily inserted into the Foucauldian edifice without creating too much distortion. For there is little difficulty in understanding the history of management and organization as involving the three issues that have absorbed Foucault throughout his work. In relating these to management and organization, it is clear that control, productivity and motivation are their managerial equivalents and that the major historical perspectives can be examined in relation to them, as follows.

An Integrated Perspective in Organization Theory

There is insufficient space to discuss each of the perspectives outlined in Table 3, and such a discussion would be quite tedious since most of the theories are familiar. The main purpose of the table is to demonstrate the overlap or parallel between the three concepts that have preoccupied Foucault and the management/organization theory concerns. However, the last integrated perspective is less familiar so there is some reason to discuss this as a way of illustrating the intelligibility of the links being drawn. An example of an empirically integrated development, in the form of multi-divisionalization—and in the literature, in the form of transaction costs analysis (Williamson, 1994)—is the transition from bureaucracy to market. For this can be seen as an institutional strategy for integrating control, productivity and motivation. Multi-divisionalization involves a restructuring of the very large (often global or multinational) corporation into a series of smaller business units. A significant, though perhaps not the only, rationale for the internal construction of separate businesses subjected to the vagaries of the market is to prevent them from hiding behind the oligopolistic conditions of their bureaucratic parent.



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Operating as a profit-centre in its own right, each unit is seen to benefit from the discipline of the market even to the extent of acting as a supplier or buyer to its own sister units within the overall corporation. Largely because of the domination of an economics or institutional framework, there is a paucity of empirical research in this field attempting to make the links suggested here. However, it may be argued that the multi-divisional corporation is a precursor of global corporate control, where employees live constantly under the threat that production can always be moved to a low-cost, low-conflict labour market anywhere in the world. It is also the case that such organizations become knowledge-intensive and adept in teamworking as a means of sustaining productivity levels and the motivation necessary to remain part of the corporation, not to be sold off to the highest bidder. Knowledge management in the context of market pressure is an effective way of ensuring control of diversely distributed employees at a distance, while teamworking facilitates self-discipline and employee motivation at the sharp end of the production process.

But Foucault's view that wherever there is power there is also resistance, suggests that the earlier model needs to be superimposed on the analysis of organization and management. To take the last category of the global corporation as a typical development of an integrated approach to management, we can perhaps examine the concept of resistance. Is the multi-divisional organization capable of displacing any potential resistance? Organizational researchers have always found examples of resistance to control, productivity and motivation but, within the literature, this is conventionally theorized in terms of a conflict of material or economic interests between management and the workforce. Without undervaluing such research, the model produced here suggests an additional and complementary analysis, where it is argued that resistance occurs also because of a defence or expression of identity.

While this is speculative, it may be expected that within the global corporation asset specificity (i.e. restrictions in the mobility and flexibility of fixed capital, including specialist skills) would limit the degree to which control could be the principal strategy for managing employees. Nonetheless, employees may work more productively and efficiently than might otherwise be the case if there were not the potential threat⁷ of switching production to low-cost/low-conflict economies. However, even in the absence of such threats in non-global corporations, employees work productively and efficiently partly because their identity is tied up in so doing. As suggested earlier, employees may resist management, not because of an escape from so much as an escape into work and/or the corporation.

From a Marxist perspective, resistance is invariably seen as a reflection of a conflict of material interests where management is simply the symbolic representation of wage exploitation. But employee accusations of management incompetence cannot always be viewed in this manner.



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As was intimated earlier, employees resist often because managers are seen as incompetent in providing the material and symbolic support necessary for production to operate efficiently. For efficient production can be seen as providing both material and symbolic security for employees.

Organizations (especially those of global proportions) are increasingly managing through productivity and motivation rather than control and, therefore, knowledge management and teamworking are pre-eminent. Where teamworking is effective, the collaborative spirit on the shop or office floor provides mutual social support for employees to resist managers who constrain employees from doing their jobs to the best of their abilities. When knowledge management is a key to productivity and employees see their security linked in some way to performance, they become highly critical if managers get it wrong or if their knowledge is inadequate. This occurs quite frequently where there is a failure to draw on the practical knowledge that employees employ routinely, a problem that is difficult for managers to overcome particularly when this knowledge is tacit rather than explicit.

It is for this reason that resistance sometimes takes the form of what postmodernists describe as an ironic and playful distancing from work activities. This may have parallels with the kind of mental distancing described by Palm (1970), and Sennett and Cobb (1977), accounting for subordinates seeking to protect their dignity against its erosion within relations of power and inequality. But it has perhaps more connection with the role distancing described by Goffman (1961), where the display of distance is intended to demonstrate superiority, for example, as when older children ride on a carousel. For in perceiving managers to be struggling and failing in strategies of 'knowledge management', employees can genuinely feel superior. Accordingly, jokes, laughter and ridicule at management's expense can help to sustain their identity (Collinson, 1992). However, where the effects of 'bad' management affect production to the point of threatening job security, employee humour and irony can quickly turn into direct criticism of, and resistance to, managers' practices. Again, we have numerous examples of this in organizations that have not acquired global status but it is speculative as to whether larger and more powerful corporations could contain, deflect or even eradicate such resistance. For the reasons given, I very much doubt this possibility.

An epistemological justification

In this penultimate section, I am concerned to focus on a discussion of epistemology, which organization studies has neglected, with limited exceptions (e.g. Burrell and Morgan, 1979; McIntyre, 1981; Hatch, 1997; Knights, 1997). Foucault, on the other hand, focused very heavily on



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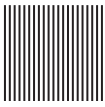
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epistemology in his early work only to marginalize it later in favour of studies of discursive practices and power–knowledge relations. It is a central argument of this paper that, while Foucault was ostensibly dismissive of his early explorations, he remained faithful to the epistemological location of his own work.

Foucault concentrated on epistemological issues in his ‘archaeological period’, where he was concerned with identifying or uncovering common features underlying a wide range of diverse and discontinuous sets of discourses. In his most famous archaeological text, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, Foucault (1973) focused on the historical, social and philosophical rules and regularities (or the ‘unconscious of knowledge’). Foucault argues that these rules underlie the formation of the human sciences but ordinarily elude the conscious awareness of the scientist. In particular, he was concerned with showing how a set of classical disciplines, apparently as distinct and discrete as grammar, political economy and natural history, shared a set of rules and procedures for rendering statements true. Foucault’s emphasis was on the transition to modernism, or ‘when man [sic] constituted himself in Western culture as that which must be conceived of and that which is to be known’ and, thereby, became ‘the object of science’ (1973: 345). This was when the classical disciplines closest to human life were transformed as theorists began to generate representations of a linguistic, economic and biological nature drawn from objectified observations of speaking, producing, and living subjects, respectively. As ‘an event in the order of knowledge’ (1973: 345), this transformation involved human beings becoming the objects, as well as the subjects or agents of knowledge. It is an event that underlies the ‘perpetual controversy between the sciences of man and the sciences proper—the first laying an invincible claim to be the foundation of the second’ (1973: 345), while having some difficulty with regard to their own foundation and justification.

This difficulty is even greater for the management and organizational sciences, which emulate the rules and procedures of positive knowledge (e.g. biology, economics and linguistics). For example, although biology, may have been subjected to political manipulation (e.g. the Lysenko affair), management knowledge is never independent of the power that managers and their corporations exercise. But as Rabinow (1984: 10) made clear, Foucault ‘never intended to isolate discourse from the social practices that surround it’; therefore, those who examine these newer disciplines could benefit by drawing on insights derived from a genealogical analysis.

In his archaeological period, Foucault investigated the rules and procedures permitting writers within a number of discrete and disparate disciplines to make statements claiming the status of truth. In his genealogical investigations, by contrast, analogous discourses and institutions were shown to engage a multiplicity of unconnected strategies



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and tactics in exercising their power over subjects. Foucault (1979a, b, 1980a) explored the various conditions that rendered it possible for these 'technologies of power' (1980a: 148) to emerge historically. Genealogy contrasts sharply with conventional history which, in emulating the methods of the positive sciences, focuses on the historical event as developing sequentially through time and space and is subject to a 'discoverable' set of causal determinants preceding it. The assumption underlying such an analysis is the Enlightenment idea that history unfolds in a unilinear and 'progressive' manner and that its course is strongly influenced by particular individuals (the 'great man' thesis).

Foucault countered these views first, by suggesting that institutions and the discourses surrounding them often emerge out of a series of accidents and arbitrary or superficial localized events. So, for example, Foucault (1979a: 191) traced the 'birth of the sciences of man' not to major philosophical breakthroughs in the great academies, but to such 'lowly' events as the development of files and records constituting 'the individual as a describable, analysable object' (Foucault, 1979a: 190) within institutions of correction, mental asylums, hospitals and schools. Foucault's second counter to conventional history was to remove all trace of the human subject from the centre of his analysis; he argued that social practices and their discursive formations are independent of those who speak for them (Foucault, 1973, 1979b). By this, Foucault did not mean to imply that the intentions of subjects are non-existent but merely that their outcomes in aggregated sets of social practices are wholly independent of what was intended (see Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982).

The discourses of psychiatry, medicine, and the human sciences and institutional practices (e.g. internment, hospitalization, imprisonment) in which they are embedded may be seen as methods for dividing up populations between 'the mad and the sane, the sick and the healthy, the criminals and the "good boys"' (Foucault, 1982: 208). In short, these disciplines and institutions exercise power through the 'normalizing' procedures of exclusion and surveillance whereby 'deviants' (e.g. the sick, paupers, criminals) are physically separated and the 'incompetent' marginalized through hierarchical distinction.

By examining those discourses claiming the status of science, Foucault clearly focused on the conditions of subjectivity that made it possible, for example, to generate representations of a linguistic, economic and biological nature; thus to objectify speaking, producing and living subjects respectively. If, as I have been suggesting, we write organization theory into Foucault, our studies will also occupy the space that lies between the representations of the positive sciences of biology, economics and linguistics and the subjectivity that makes those representations possible. Biology provides increasingly more secure representations, culminating in accounts of the genetic and molecular structure of the body. Economics represents exchange in terms of complex supply–demand market



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structures in which competition and efficiency are seen to be in a relationship of mutual dependency and reinforcement. Linguistics represents the language we speak in terms of semiotic structures in which metaphor and metonymy or semantic and syntactical relations are explored. None of these disciplines ever speak about the subjectivity that is the condition of their possibility—it is simply taken for granted.

Each of these examples of positive knowledge supplies its representations of structures at least at one remove from the subjectivities of the humans that make them possible. Some might want to argue that the remaining social sciences either fill in the gaps left by these positive knowledges, and others may suggest that we can simply study the subjectivities themselves. Psychology tends towards the latter but converts subjectivity into another set of positive representations and refuses to see a precarious space between externalities and the subject, both of which have become elements of a 'pure' representational world—subjects and bodies, language as well as exchange. Filling in the gaps is another common strategy and results in a proliferation of positive discourses seeking an exhaustive inclusion of everything that can be represented. Management and organization studies and a large range of subdisciplines such as human resources, information systems, marketing, operations and strategy, tend to take this form.

Two problems can be seen as arising from this proliferation of positive knowledge that specializes on smaller and smaller parts of 'reality'. First is the problem of representing ever-diminishing divisions of the world and analysing them as if they were discrete independent entities with little or no connection to one another. Understanding would appear to become inversely related to the multiplicity of narrow yet discrete representations. Second is the problem of what to do with these representations once they have been constructed, since it is not clear that a change in the object of enquiry guarantees a distinctive scientific mode of analysis. These subdisciplines readily become inferior offspring of the discipline closest to their focus—economics, mathematics, psychology or sociology. Foucault is distinctive in that, while he perhaps thought he had abandoned his earlier interest in epistemology in his later writings, he adhered to an approach to studying a whole series of events from within the space that lies between positive representations and the subjectivity that makes them possible. This is what makes his work so distinctive and attractive to a vast range of discourses from philosophy to literary criticism, and from politics to organization studies. It is another reason for wanting to write organizational analysis into Foucault and not the other way around. For as I have already intimated, Foucault can be appropriated without his radical way of thinking affecting the appropriator. Appropriating Foucault for organizational analysis is likely to miss the distinctive appeal of his radical departure from dominant epistemological paradigms.

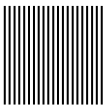


Conclusion

In seeking to reverse the way in which particular theorists are usually appropriated by organization analysis, this paper could be seen as controversial, if not outrageous. In this sense, it reflects Foucault's own method of disrupting the complacency of common sense in taking things for granted. While the paper has been written to provoke debate rather than convince readers to abandon organization theory, it has a serious intent of suggesting that much may be missed when writers simply dip into a major theorist's work to collect a few nuggets for the purposes of adorning their own contribution. Writing organizational analysis into Foucault is designed to demonstrate the wealth of ideas contained, but usually missed, by the attitude of appropriation. In certain areas of social science and the humanities, Foucault has had an enormous influence in recent years. Along with a range of disciplines within the humanities and social sciences, organization theory has begun to be affected by Foucault's radical challenge to conventional wisdom and his sceptical insights into historical and contemporary change. However, there has been a strong tendency to appropriate the glitz and to gloss over the blitz that his work represents for the modern or postmodern intellectual. Accordingly, his epistemology is often ignored (cf. Knights, 1992), his uniquely sceptical approach to history marginalized (cf. Kendall and Wickham, 1999), his analysis of power and resistance constrained by reading into it dualistic conceptions that are wholly inappropriate (Knights, 1997), his ethics seen as self-indulgent (Miller, 1993) rather than a culmination of his life's work and a vivid example of his method of deploying universally-held values precisely to struggle against them.

There has been, therefore, an attempt here to cover as much of Foucault's work as is possible within the confines of an academic paper. Too many organization theorists have focused simply on the most popular of Foucault's output—*Discipline and Punish*. This is partly because its theme of surveillance, through the gaze of institutional procedures that makes of every individual a case for hierarchical observation, examination, and normalization, parallels the ways in which employees are controlled at work. Consequently, the paper has shown how Foucault's epistemology remains pertinent to organization studies since they are much more appropriately identified as located in the space that lies between positive representations of bodies, speech and labour, and the subjectivity that makes them possible. Otherwise they are in danger of simply adding another set of organizational representations to an already overcrowded field but in the process, denying analysis its potential to provide unique insights from this perspective.

However, hopefully we have shown how Foucault's analysis is relevant in more ways than just the epistemological. His focus, albeit at different times on power, knowledge/truth and subjectivity/ethics, is shown to map almost perfectly the central concerns of management and organiza-



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tion regarding control, productivity and motivation. We say almost perfectly, because there are some tensions between Foucault's anti-humanist, anti-positivist and anti-essentialist analytic concerns and the less than total rejection of these by many organization theorists. His demand that we question conventional thinking, not because it is wrong but because it is dangerous, has been the driving force of this paper in its attempt to reverse the tendency for organizational analysis to appropriate, rather than fully engage with, Foucault.

Notes

- 1 This criticism of relativism does not lead me to seek salvation in absolutist or realist epistemologies so much as to challenge both on the grounds that they perceive the world as *some thing* to capture or control (see Lawson, 2000).
- 2 'The only valid tribute to thought such as Nietzsche's is precisely to use it, to deform it, to make it groan and protest' (Foucault, 1980a: 53–4).
- 3 Cooper (1986: 301 quoted in Munro, 2002: 21) 'draws our attention to the role of the boundary as a complex, ambiguous structure', and Cooper and Burrell (1988: 106) argued that we need to be analysing the 'production of organization rather than the organization of production'.
- 4 This switch from theory to analysis is not accidental—it is part of a systematic attempt to move the study of organizations away from the positivistic tendency to see their enterprise as an historically progressive contribution to theory production tested through empirical analysis. The change of nomenclature reflects a move towards the integration of thinking about, observing and representing what we study as a continuous challenge that has no stable and inviolable set of principles or findings upon which to draw for security.
- 5 However, in one sense, I am simply following Foucault's (1980a; 1982) own tendency to redefine at each stage of his development what he had been up to all along.
- 6 This is paralleled in Foucault's (1982: 213) argument that 'nowadays, the struggle against the forms of subjection—against the submission of subjectivity—is becoming more and more important, even though the struggles against forms of domination and exploitation have not disappeared'.
- 7 The analogy with the panopticon discussed earlier can be drawn here, for it is not the exercise of power so much as the threat of its exercise that brings about self-discipline.

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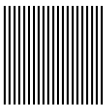
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