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Multiplicity, Virtuality and Organization: The Contribution of Gilles Deleuze

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Abstract

Formal organization is often seen as opposed or resistant to change, in theory as well as in practice. Drawing primarily on the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze we argue that the reverse is true — that organization is itself a dynamic quality and that change and organization are imbricated in each other. We expand several key concepts of this philosophy in relation to organization (the multiplicity of order and the multiplicity of organization, strata and meshworks, virtuality and multitude) all of which draw attention to the unstable but ever-present forces that subvert and disrupt, escape, exceed and change organization. This enables an understanding of organization as creatively autosubversive — not fixed, but in motion, never resting and constantly trembling.

Keywords: Deleuze, change, order, virtual

Introduction

Despite the success of Burrell and Morgan's (1979) popularization of ontology and epistemology as core meta-theoretical concerns in organizational analysis, the field of organization theory more broadly has tended to favour the epistemological at the expense of the ontological, preferring to theorize about organizations rather than conceptualizing organization and interrogating its ontological status.¹ Indeed, such has been the resistance within some branches of organization theory to philosophically grounded conceptual work, that a significant thinker, Robert Cooper, has declined the appellation 'organization theorist'. For Cooper a focus on 'organizations' tends to render difference inferior to being and prevent thinking 'organization' and 'beyond organization' (Cooper 2001; Spoelstra 2005: 113).² While Cooper's work is distinctive for the breadth of its intellectual resources, his understanding of organization and difference in the broader area of social theory bears some significant affinities to Gilles Deleuze's philosophy of difference. Following this path, we argue in this paper that thinking organization with Deleuze can enable and inform further developments on the lines that Cooper in particular has pioneered. Although this sort of conceptual exploration may seem closer to the concerns of social philosophy than those constituting the traditional foci of organization theory, we argue that it is the neglect of the broader dynamics addressed in such social thought that

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has led organization theory to be shackled by two foundation myths. The first is that organization is an abstract system; the second is that such a system is capable of being interrogated as a decontextualized ideal (Tsoukas 2003: 619). This has limited its understanding of change and organization, but Deleuze offers tools and resources for a different, more subtle and responsive approach.

When they have occurred, ontological discussions in organization theory have frequently concerned the rift between realist (particularly critical realist) and postmodern approaches to organization. On the one hand, postmodernism — with its critique of representation and exposure of representational strategies — has been accused of collapsing ontology into epistemology and of a relativism that makes it unable to take a grounded critical stance. On the other hand, critical realism recognizes that representations of reality are socially constructed but has been accused of a residual adherence to a classical, objectivist and naturalist view of reality that can only be advanced through the efforts and methods of natural science. We attempt neither to add to nor to resolve this somewhat starkly posed debate here. As we see in Cooper's work, postmodern or poststructural argumentation does not turn from ontology but rethinks it. Such rethinking may enable fruitful encounters between realism and postmodernism, and we explore these possibilities through the materialist philosophy of Deleuze. Deleuze, we argue, through a creative reinterpretation of Henri Bergson, develops a new set of conceptual tools which offer a basis for reassessing the ontological status of organization in the changing and virtually shaped environment of the twenty-first century and a means of theorizing organization in a way that is better equal to its complexity.

Some previous research on the ontology of organization has argued that organization is the *opposite* of change and that change is pure flow and process. For example, Burrell (1997, 1998) has argued against linear or sequential stage views of change as a *deathly* stoppage of the innate vitality of process, and for the embracement of nonlinear conceptualizations of change, such as Deleuze and Guattari's (1983, 1984, 1988) *rhizome*. The rhizome is a dynamic weed formation which, opposed to the arboreal and hierarchical structure of the tree, involves spontaneous, unpredictable and distant connections between heterogeneous elements (see also Blaug 1999). Building on these contributions we present an expanded and somewhat different reading of Deleuze, agreeing with Bergson that organizing processes can be understood as an active and creative reply to specific experience which remains 'in conversation' with its object and changes along with it (Linstead 2002). Bergson considered that philosophy itself, rather than becoming imprisoned in its own intellectual and rationalistic overcodings and alienated from embodied experience ('the becoming of being'), changes its nature as it engages with the changing nature of lived reality ('the being of becoming'). Deleuze takes this realization further in relation to embodied experience, developing a Bergsonian path between phenomenology and structuralism which is sensitive to both but fully embraces neither — a *partial realism* neither subjective nor objective, realist nor idealist (Bergson 1999: 86; Colebrook 2002: 1–3). We take this understanding into the study of organization, accelerating previous organizational research that has argued that 'change implicates its other... organization' (Chia 1999: 224) and that organization is a

product of change (Tsoukas and Chia 2003). Change and organization can therefore not be opposed in any straightforward way and we elaborate how change and organization are imbricated in each other in a continuously responsive conversation between organization and the 'objects' it tries to organize, i.e. between organization and *non-organization*. This means that *both* change and organization are matters of change — change itself is a result of organization and organization is a product of change that is itself in change. Indeed, the problem is partly one of the language we customarily use — 'results' and 'products' are consequentialist concepts where change and organization are associative and co-emergent phenomena. Rejecting such language, temporarily at least, enables us to make the paradoxical assertion that organization is not opposed to change, but that organization *is* change.

Cooper (1986) similarly thinks of organization as in conversation not just with order but also with disorder and disorganization. Following Marcel Mauss and Roland Barthes, Cooper calls this the 'zero degree of organization'. A zero degree of organization is 'a process of undecidability that pervades all social organization' yet 'is ... an excess to order or meaning' (Cooper 1990: 182; Thanem 2001). In other words, it is not itself organized but contains infinite potentiality for being both organization and not organization. Tsoukas (1998) offers a different view of disorganization more in line with the sciences of chaos and complexity, where disorganization is an unusual or inferior version of organization operating by unusual means in the pursuit of unusual ends. To avoid confusion between these two concepts of disorganization we have chosen to use the term *non-organization* when investigating what Cooper calls disorganization.

To elaborate the continuously responsive conversation between organization and change, organization and non-organization, we selectively focus on the following concepts in Deleuze's philosophy: the *multiplicity of order* and the *multiplicity of organization*, *strata* and *meshworks*, *virtuality* and *multitude*. Whereas organization and order are usually rendered synonymous, Deleuze, with Guattari, rethinks and clarifies their relationship by distinguishing the multiplicity of organization from the multiplicity of order. The *multiplicity of order* is a matter of exteriority, simultaneity, juxtaposition, quantitative differentiation and difference in degree, which is spatial, numerical, discontinuous and actual. In contrast, the *multiplicity of organization* is a matter of interiority, succession, fusion, heterogeneity, qualitative discrimination and difference in kind, which is virtual, continuous and irreducible to numbers because it appears in pure duration (time as experienced rather than measured). The multiplicity of organization disrupts the often assumed, even if relative, stability and unicity of organization. *Strata* are hierarchical tree structures emerging from homogeneous elements while *meshworks* are self-consistent aggregates emerging from the articulation of heterogeneous elements. Whereas strata draw attention to processes of stratification that render organization more or less stable and homogeneous (emphasizing sameness), meshworks actualize processes of destratification that render organization unstable and heterogeneous (emphasizing difference). *Virtuality*, or the undivided and dynamic whole of the virtual, involves all the heterogeneous forces and tendencies that precede, inhabit and exceed organization (the not-quite-organized). *Multitude* is both an actualization

of virtuality and a virtualization of actuality, which resists, challenges and changes organization by working through complex and heterogeneous couplings of power and knowledge, politics, economics and culture. Whereas the concept of virtuality enables us to investigate the ontological conditions of organization, the concept of multitude enables us to examine how these conditions are materialized — yet remain open to change — in social and organizational life. These concepts enable us to expand the insights of Cooper and others and further destabilize and enrich the understanding of organization. More specifically, we argue that organization can be understood as creatively autosubversive — not fixed, but in motion, never resting, but constantly trembling.³

In the first half of this paper we question assumptions of stability and unicity in organization by distinguishing the multiplicity of organization from the multiplicity of order, and by examining processes of stratification in the formation of strata and processes of destratification in the articulation of meshworks. In the second half we further elaborate the changing nature of organization by examining its ontological conditions of virtuality and its actual, material conditions of multitude. In concluding we summarize some of the key implications of Deleuzian philosophy for organization theory and the study of organization.

Organization, Order and Multiplicity

Deleuze's dualistic view of organization is indebted to Bergson, who himself uses the term *organization* in two ways, without explicitly acknowledging it. For Bergson, organization is *life itself* (Linstead and Mullarkey 2003). Wherever we find an *organism* we find it organizing itself and its environment — taking this, leaving that, reproducing, transforming and excreting, evolving, connecting and even socializing. The original sense of the Greek *organon* was not that organs were organic, or *natural*, as we tend to interpret it today, but that they were *instrumental* (Cummings and Thanem 2002). Organization in this sense displays some sort of purpose behind it, willed or instinctual. Whereas life is often associated with movement and organization is typically linked to stasis or control, Bergson argues that organization is an instrumental *sign* of life and ends up using the terms almost interchangeably. The life form that organizes is already organized, but this sense of *vital organization* stems from an intimate engagement and creative evolution with the environment, and is embedded in experienced duration or lived time. The other type of organization is more formal and involves the ordering, measuring, abstracting, differentiating and acting at a distance that is typically associated with scientific clock time, the abstracted experience that by definition is or attempts to be outside duration. It is Bergson's and Deleuze's critique of formalistic organization that has led some commentators (e.g. Burrell 1998) to view organization and change as opposites. But while the dead hand of organization might be a powerful and appropriate metaphor for formalistic and abstracted understandings of organization, our readings of Bergson and Deleuze offer a way of revitalizing the concept.

Deleuze (1988: 38) connects this dualistic view of organization to Bergson's dual concept of multiplicity. On the one hand, there is the *multiplicity of order*, exteriority,

simultaneity, juxtaposition, quantitative differentiation and difference in degree, which is numerical, discontinuous, actual, and represented by space. On the other, there is the internal *multiplicity of organization*, succession, fusion, heterogeneity, qualitative discrimination and difference in kind, which is virtual, continuous and irreducible to numbers because it appears in pure duration (Bergson 1999). Multiplicity of order spatializes thought by setting phenomena out as though on a laboratory table, treating aspects of consciousness like objects of physics and moments of time as separate positions (Linstead 2002). Multiplicity in this regard accepts that things change over time, but treats time as it would treat space. For example, it is quite reasonable to use the same metric for heat and cold, regarding cold as an absence of heat. An object cannot be hot at the same time as it is cold — its capacity to withstand a multiplicity of temperatures can therefore only be demonstrated sequentially. This holds for the human sensation of temperature too: although parts of our body might be hot while others are cold, and the system might fluctuate as molecules accelerate or decelerate at different rates, a singular part is not hot and cold at the same time, though our feet are by the fire and our head in a draught. But is human happiness equally capable of being viewed as an absence of sadness? We all have experiences, which are tinged with, or lie between both, moments when we do not know whether to laugh or cry. Unlike external objects acting upon us with separate influences, they inhabit us. Therefore, happy/sad cannot be collapsed like heat/cold into the simultaneity of the single metric of temperature, a terrain through which we move like mercury moving up and down the thermometer scale. This virtual shifting and becoming of mood is a multiplicity of organization, relational and qualitative, irreducibly experienced and intuited rather than measured and calculated. This contrast between exteriority (dominant in quantitative approaches) and interiority (characteristic of qualitative approaches) still runs through the core of organizational sociology and psychology where the urge to measure such phenomena as culture or emotional intelligence as though they were height and weight and reduce them to the simultaneity of a questionnaire score often triumphs.

When Deleuze turns his attention from multiplicity to social organization he rejects any notion of dialectics as the resolution of opposites because the multiplicity of organization is more than a series of oppositions and differences. Deleuze pursues a non-dialectical politics of multiplicity, advocating a creative pluralism of organization (based on enfoldedness, relational connections and becoming) against a controlling pluralism of order (based on positions, interests and governmentality). So the concept of organization has critical and vital ontological significance — it is not set against change, but is distinguished from the ordering negations of formal organization. It embodies desire (understood as a general motivational force) responsively, while ordering arrangements seek to repress and eradicate desire (Brewis and Linstead 2000; Guattari 1984: 86; Linstead and Pullen 2006: 1293ff.).

Strata and Meshworks

Ideas of order and organization can also be seen at play in Deleuze and Guattari's geological (and geophilosophical) approach to stratification.

Biological, social and economic life are seen to form like geological strata, with the same type of sorting and amalgamating processes and the same type of crossings between strata. This is not purely metaphorical. Rather, for Deleuze and Guattari, a deep isomorphism links geology and society, enabling a mineralization of history that reveals the same set of processes operating behind them, the same 'engineering diagram', 'blueprint' or 'abstract machine' immanent within the structure-generating processes (De Landa 1999, 2000).

Deleuze and Guattari (1988) theorize the emergence of the two types of structures we have already introduced — hierarchical *strata* that emerge from homogeneous elements, and rhizomatic *meshworks* that are self-consistent aggregates that emerge from the articulation of heterogeneous elements. Georges Bataille argued that the social problem of the restricted economy of capitalism was that it wrestled the heterogeneous into the homogeneous and could not accommodate the creative articulations of endogenous desire. Deleuze and Guattari take this further, arguing that the dichotomy can be applied across biology, physical chemistry and human institutions. Processes common in the physical world can be compared to the development of human hierarchical structures such as sorting/sedimenting and coding/consolidating, the latter being facilitated by a third joining substance (such as silica or hematite in rock formation). This is a *double articulation*, which, operating from one scale, transforms matter at another scale (De Landa 1999: 123).

The formation of social strata into social classes exhibits the same 'abstract machine' at work. We speak of such development whenever a society presents a variety of differentiated roles to which not everyone has equal access (hierarchy), and the ruling elite endeavours to preserve for itself access to those roles controlling key natural, material, human, social and cultural resources (hegemony). Hierarchical social role differentiation may be the result of the intensification of energy flows in a society (e.g. a charismatic leader emerging in (pre-modern) society) but the sorting of those roles into ranks on a scale of prestige requires the emergence of specific group dynamics (De Landa 1999: 124). The emergence to hegemony of one group may cede them the power to restrict access to the roles they occupy. Their criteria for sorting the rest of society into less highly ranked sub-groups may begin to crystallize so as to segregate the lifestyles of different strata and regulate mobility between them, determine the steepness of stratificational hierarchies, foster types of stratum consciousness, and influence the degree and intensity of strata conflict. Roles therefore sediment through sorting and ranking processes in most societies, but they are not an autonomous dimension of social organization in *all* societies: the intensity of the in-group dynamics of elites may vary considerably, surpluses may not be allowed to accumulate (as in the potlatch), and kinship or alliance relationships may prevail over social roles. Here is where the second articulation of *coding* is necessary to consolidate the loose accumulation of social roles into a social class. This operation legally or religiously interprets the new criteria and establishes the elites as the bearers of the new culture, the 'legitimizers of change and delineators of the limits of innovation' (De Landa 1999: 124).

Hierarchies of homogeneous elements formed by stratification differ from meshworks of heterogeneous elements, and it is important to know how

meshworks differ from networks and how they are formed. The term network usually refers to a set of connected centres — a social network, for example, may have a number of distributed centres, but these are indeed centres, possibly even formal organizations with their own internal hierarchies. Meshworks, however, have no centres: their 'points' are merely sites of overcrossing, of images or information. For example, in the crossing of several laser beams, from different angles and planes, the point where the beams intersect remains just a point — it has no identity or centre of its own that would exist independently were the beams turned off. It may intensify as more beams pass through it or the beams become stronger — across the network there may be bright spots and darker spots flashing and glowing at different rates, and new beams may emerge to connect different points of passage, but no centre and consequent hierarchy will emerge.

Although this may express the purely virtual nature of a meshwork, social meshworks have other elements working to create their nodes that remain decentred but not without substance. Deleuze and Guattari expand their geological metaphor to identify three types of actions that form meshworks. First, a set of heterogeneous elements must be brought together through an *articulation of superpositions*, i.e. through interconnecting diverse but overlapping elements that are both positions and oppositions. Second, *intercalary elements* effect this interlocking as local connectors (e.g. as catalysts that intensify, densify or reinforce entities and their relations). Finally, these interlocked heterogeneous elements must endogenously generate stable behavioural patterns at regular temporal or spatial *intervals*. The growth of these meshworks is by *drift*, an unplanned result of the cumulation of adjacent interactions. Unlike autocatalytic loops (i.e. dynamic systems that generate their own stable states by rhythmic step-by-step reactions), drift happens when new nodes insert themselves into loops so as to catalyse and be catalysed by the original nodes (by using previously neglected raw materials or waste from the original network) and without jeopardizing the internal consistency of the loop (Maturana and Varela 1992).

Precapitalist markets are one example of a socio-cultural meshwork. With pure barter, complementary demands must be matched, in proximity, by chance. It matters to be in the right place at the right time. When money is introduced, diverse demands can be matched at a distance as money acts as the intercalary element that translates concrete exchange relations of demand into abstract relations of value, in effect buying time and space. It also allows demands to become substitutable among diverse elements, or goods, which have the same value. Of course, this only holds when there is no wholesaler hoarding or dumping stock or no guild controlling price setting. In these conditions markets generate endogenous stable states, especially when commercial centres form trading circuits and cyclic price-waves occur. But neither meshworks nor hierarchies occur in pure forms — even goal-determined bureaucracies exhibit some drift and overlapping functions may form a meshwork of bureaucracies. Even small markets have some hierarchical elements that increase as they grow and develop commodity markets, luxury markets, stock and financial markets and associated niches (De Landa 1999: 128—129). Hence, both meshworks and strata occur in more or less stratified states.

Processes of stratification and destratification are intricately related to desire. Desire here is an immanent force, which is repressed and displaced by the commonly propounded illusion that desire wants something outside of itself rather than being sufficient in its own exuberance (Goodchild 1996: 146). Stratification displaces desire onto an object outside itself by channelling and investing it in representations, or simulacra. Simulacra are signs that can only *conjugate* with desire and not connect with it. To connect, both terms would need to be changed by the coming together, but in conjugation the simulacrum onto which desire is attached (the image of a face, a product, a model body, capital) is not changed. Thus, desire and simulacra form constants by being coupled, repeated and reproduced formulaically until they appear natural, and these constants then form the sediment of social strata. The conjugations of desire hold society together, but this is not productive — only when a desire is connected to another desire could this be so. Power then operates through stratification and conjugation while connection destratifies power relations by keeping desire unlocked and unstabilized. Desire can therefore be a form of resistance.

Social strata — and power relations — are created by subjectification and signification, underlain by organization. In other words, we are signalled to our place in the social by language and signs. Subjectification positions the subject through grammar, constructing relations not through the content or meaning of language, but through the way in which it orders and positions its speakers and sets out their choices for them. They may enter into these forced, conjugated choices or be silent. Simultaneously, chains of signification carry normative interpretations of subjectivity and understanding, which means that the use of a particular expression, for example, evokes a customary or dominant meaning or chain of meanings and a set of rules to be followed. Deleuze and Guattari talk of *order-words*, which, produced by subjugation and signification, both establish positions within a system and give commands and judgements. Order-words constitute a *major* language concerned with extracting constants, homogenizing, centralizing, standardizing and establishing positives and negatives. Indeed, a command to conform is also a warning of the consequences of failure to comply and an invocation to flee. This then opens up an opportunity for a *minor* language, which changes the meaning of statements by creating new connections (of desire to desire), creatively subverting and multiplying meaning and establishing *lines of flight* which are ways of escaping the constraints and controls of order (Jackson and Carter 2004).

Behind subjectification and signification, organization proceeds through two forms of segmentation — the molar and the molecular. *Molar* segmentation, which may be circular or linear, operates through large groupings, the sort that are often statistically manipulated, such as binary sex distinction. Circular segments occur where dispersed groups defer to a centre or State. McDonaldization and economic globalization are circular molarities — in Rugman's (2000) triad theory, the circles revolve around the US, Europe and Japan; in its post-triad replacement BRIC theory, the circles are Brazil, Russia, India and China. Linear segments link units through equivalence and translatability — wage-regimes link monetary markets to production systems which link to consumption segments (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 217). Molar segmentation creates

regularities and institutions as building blocks of society, but it is exterior to the process which generated the segments in the first place. *Molecular* segmentation operates through the interaction and contiguity of adjacent self-organizing systems that catalyse, interact, and act relatively, switching roles from product to catalyst in shifting *assemblages*. Where molar segments are concerned with unity and identity, based on universalized distinctions, categorical boundaries and subjugated to an external authority, molecular segments are subject only in relation to adjacent productive processes whose product influences the process in an *autopoietic* or self-organizing manner (Goodchild 1996: 159–160).⁴

Power, then, creates social strata and operates in society through subjectification and signification, which themselves depend on the *organizational process* of molar and molecular segmentarity. These operations are reciprocal, supple and subtle — those subject to power do not just passively submit to it; nor do they desire repression due to some deep ontological insecurity; nor are they the dupes of ideology. But even though the molar and the molecular are in relation, this is no simple reciprocity. For example, the bigger an organization gets the more it tends to generate self-ordering within its relations, elements and apparatuses. Control at the macrolevel has to contend with the problems of micro-managing petty insecurities — a permanent molecular insecurity of the molar. Molecular movements are not complementary to but athwart the wider organization (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 215–216). At societal levels capitalism engenders privatization, Taylorism, Fordism, performance-related pay and personal key success factors; totalitarianism engenders a different kind of personal and micropolitical insecurity well documented by such writers as Hasek, Kundera and Solzhenitsyn. However, society is not, as in Marxism, defined by its contradictions, but by its quantum and molecular lines of flight that leak between linear or circular molar segments. This is because ‘there is always something that flows or flees, that escapes the binary organizations, the resonance apparatus, and the overcoding machine ... Power centres are defined much more by what escapes them or by their impotence than by their zone of power’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 216–217). Accordingly, organizations are defined not by what they control or attempt to control, and how it is resisted, as some labour-process theory might have it, but by what escapes their attempts to control and accomplishes resistance by means other than opposition. But to understand the openness and dynamics preceding, inhabiting and exceeding organization and the responsive conversation between organization and non-organization it is necessary to introduce Deleuze’s work on virtuality.

Virtuality

Deleuze’s concept of virtuality, or the virtual, requires us to think in relation to the *real*, the *possible* and the *actual*. Conventional philosophies of being to which Bergson and Deleuze provide radical alternatives tend to think in terms of the real and the possible, where the real is what exists here and now, and the possible is what can exist. In this frame of thought the possible is always determined by the real in such a way that what can exist always depends on what

already exists. Possibilities to be realized in the future therefore depend upon what is realized in the present — the real and the possible may be consequentially or even causally connected. Imagine a pendulum which, given time, moves from one end of a continuum to another. By knowing the pendulum's current and previous positions we can predict its next position. By knowing what is real here and now, we can predict what possibilities will be realized in the future. Conventional thinking therefore progresses from the real (a real state of affairs) towards the realization of the possible. But Bergsonian and Deleuzian thinking moves in the opposite direction, from the virtual to the actual and the actualization of the virtual.

Most dictionaries conflate the virtual with the possible and define it as *almost* existing or *almost* real. But the possible is opposed to the real — it is an alternative form of present reality that has not yet been 'realized'. In contrast, the virtual is not even engaged in a necessary relationship with the real as it can exist as pure vision (Deleuze 1994: 211). Deleuze's concept of the virtual is, unlike the possible but similar to Barthes' 'zero-degree', more than the real and 'possesses a full reality by itself' (1994: 211). Crudely speaking, this reality possessed by the virtual is the universe, the one and the all, which means that the virtual *is* everything and that it is *in* everything — a principle of connectedness. The extended and undivided world of the virtual is then related to the actual — the process undergone by the virtual is not one of realization, but of actualization, which divides and positions the virtual in time and space. The virtual should therefore not be confused with popular or mainstream references to virtual organizations and virtual reality; these tend to render the virtual less than the real by confining it to recent simulacral developments in information technology that are held to remove social and organizational experience from face-to-face interaction.

The concept of difference is crucial to Deleuze's understanding of the virtual, the actual and the actualization of the virtual. Drawing on Leibniz, Deleuze argues that the virtual is populated by Ideas. But unlike the Platonist Idea, which gives identity to the thing, the Deleuzian Idea is a matter of difference permeated by the differential (Patton 1994: xii). Here Deleuze makes an important distinction between *differentiation* and *differenciation*. *Differentiation*, which always comes before *differenciation* (Boundas 1996: 91), refers to the mathematical operation of making something progressively determinate (i.e. *a* sets the conditions for *b*), while *differenciation* concerns the more familiar sense of becoming different from something else (i.e. *y* becoming different from *x*). Being virtual, Deleuzian Ideas are differentiated in the sense of becoming progressively determinate. Thus, the virtual is not constituted by different things, but enjoys *internal* difference in the sense of embodying different tendencies that enable it to differ from itself. It is only by being actualized (i.e. *differenciated*) that these tendencies of the virtual are invested with *external* difference so as to be presented as different things differing from one another.

It is the *élan vital* (Bergson 1911; Deleuze 1988) which enables the actualization of the virtual and the production of externally different things. But since these things are actualities (rather than things as such), they are not established with stable boundaries and fixed identities and they do not enjoy the same status as they

would within a philosophy of the real state of affairs. This is because the virtual, with its undivided yet differentiated nature, continues to exist in the actual.

Deleuze does not speak of the actualization of the virtual in terms of the thing, but in terms of the event. The idea of the event is important here because it enables us to extract specific considerations from the Deleuzian philosophy of becoming to understand issues of organization. However, Deleuze's concept of the event is both more open yet more specific than that implied by common dictionary definitions. An event is neither something that simply happens, such as an organized social occasion or a concert, nor something that reveals the essential truth about a general development. Rather, an event is inessential, unexpected, anomalous, seemingly impossible from the current state of affairs, and therefore capable of opening up the future, making a difference, and changing the world (Williams 2003). 9/11 was an event; the 2004 tsunami was an event. As the event is different from what already exists, and as it sticks out from the mundane and the regular, it is a discontinuity in history. But by opening up the future, the event takes its differential nature beyond the moment of its own realization, promising further differentiation (i.e. more will happen because of the event). The event is therefore continuous and discontinuous, a point Deleuze largely inherits from Bergson.

Every actualization of the virtual is an event (because of the difference of the virtual), and the concept of the event (as opposed to the thing) highlights that the actual does not fix and determine what has undergone actualization. Hence, the actualization of the virtual is not a matter of closure but of openness, because the event taking place with the actualization of the virtual never terminates its connection to the extended and indeterminate world of the undivided virtual Whole. Thus far, Deleuze agrees with Bergson. But as well as recognizing movements from the virtual to the actual, Deleuze insists that we must equally recognize movement from the actual to the virtual (Deleuze 1988: 29; Hardt 1993: 19–21; Ansell Pearson 1999: 74–75; Grosz 2000: 228).

Whereas Bergson's notion of virtual memory emphasizes the connections from the virtual past to the actual present, it does not admit connections from the actual present to the virtual future. Deleuze holds that within every actualized event there is a virtual pure event, which maintains the connection between the actual and the extended world of the virtual (Williams 2000: 215). The actual is thus subjected to continuous change and modification and can only enjoy a temporary and momentary existence as a singular event. But instead of approaching entropy, events and achievements can recombine with different virtual tendencies and become something else. Although the pages displaying this text could catch fire, blow away with the wind, disappear into the bottom of some filing cabinet, or rot and dematerialize, they could also be used to support a broken leg on a rickety desk, or be turned into new paper upon which a different text could be printed. In the realm of formal organizations, the machinery of a bankrupt printing company might be taken over by political radicals using it to publish anti-capitalist leaflets. The devolution of organizational decision making might go so far that it slips out of the hands of senior management who find company policy subverted by white-collar workers paying more attention to customers with whom they can empathize than the interests of company

executives and shareholders. In the realm of social organization and body politics, the privatization of public health might go so far that citizens ignore advice from the public health authorities on how to organize one's body, lifestyle, eating habits and sex life in the pursuit of good health, and instead connect to bodily desires that fatten, starve, infect or excessively invigorate the body. This urges that we should study events in organizations and organizational life by drawing attention to the ruptures, instabilities and qualitative differences that make organizations change in unpredictable ways. This can be done by tracing the complex genealogies through which different micropolitical forces and practices are produced and maintained, related, thwarted and changed across time and space, and how small changes at the micro-level can shape genealogies to produce large effects.

Because the actual springs out of the virtual it is never *pre-formed* along these lines. Unlike the mimetic real, which is 'the image and likeness of the possible that it realizes', the actual 'does *not* resemble the virtuality that it embodies' (Deleuze 1988: 97). Actualization is a genuine creation (Deleuze 1988: 106). This is also the challenge for organization and organizations. If we are to follow Deleuze's argument, organizations must create their own terms of actualization. Organizations must become creative. While we might think that organizations are creative, the plethora of managerial self-help books, the abundance of fads and fashions (and literature about them) in management and management consultancy, and the constant exhortations to companies to follow 'best practice' suggests that much of contemporary organization is more cautious and copycat than creative. Indeed, in much of the creativity literature in the management field the term becomes an empty cliché, valorizing the capacities of the individual entrepreneur, inventor or strategist. Not so for Deleuze.

Following Bergson, Deleuze (1988) argues that the creative act takes the form of *creative evolution*, which effectively decentres both the individual and the organization. Deleuze's most important contribution here is to investigate creative evolution in relation to the virtual and to show how the creative evolution of the Bergsonian organism is due to the connection between the actual organism and the virtual whole. Without collapsing the concept of organization into that of the organism, this enables us to see how the creative evolution of an organization is not due to the organization alone, but to the connection between the actual organization and the virtual whole. Again, like Barthes' and Cooper's 'zero-degree', the virtual embodies tendencies of both organization and *non-organization* that may or may not be actualized. Non-organization is not reducible to organization, but refers to what is not organized yet caught up with organization in a complex and intricate relationship. Non-organization exists independently of organization in that it subverts and resists, contradicts and interrupts, escapes, precedes and exceeds organization. It is part of the spontaneous, nonlinear and unpredictable movements of desire, which are both imperceptible and yet make their presence felt. When actualized, non-organization may involve bodily and emotional forces that erode the boundaries between the formal organization and strictly private affairs so as to influence formal organizational tasks such as budgeting, recruitment, strategic decision making and delegation of responsibility (Brewis and Linstead 2000).

Since organizations are always in creative evolution with the virtual, the processes of organization that make organizational entities possible (even as networks or heterarchies) are not the only processes that matter. Indeed, organizations and their members connect to forces of desire that may facilitate and, more importantly, subvert their overarching goals and everyday routines. Hence, it becomes more difficult to identify where an organization (and organization in general) begins and ends, but our understanding of why organizations cannot exist as stable, united, homogenous entities with standardized procedures and clear-cut boundaries is expanded. The future of organization is open. Organizations may change beyond recognition, disappear, and persist but not in the form we tend to know them (see Thanem 2004). Ignoring the virtual and the non-organizational actualizations that may emerge from it risks restricting the change to which organization is subjected and exaggerating the endurance and stability of the organizational processes that make organizations come into being.

The danger with this position is of course that the concept of the virtual might open up so much that everything evaporates and the concrete organizational forces that keep things in their place are underestimated. But the virtual does not imply a blanket rejection of realism. It simply means that such a supple understanding needs to be used with some caution and *not* constructed as a representation of organization that displaces its own formative conditions and components. By viewing organizational arrangements as temporal, molecular *accomplishments*, it can serve an important role in unwresting the reified ontological status that mainstream organizational research often attributes to organizations, adding possibility and connectivity to those approaches that already approach organization with subtlety.⁵ Rather than writing off organization, it can help us view organizations and human organizational activities in a broader context of constant change — a view that itself becomes a matter of change. Bergson's (1911) and Deleuze's (1994) creative evolution is a type of order, but it is a different, non-spatialized, vital order that life produces as it struggles to resist inorganic, unorganized, spatial matter. From this perspective, organization is not deathly: organization is what makes life liveable.

Rethinking Organization: Nonlinearity and Multitude

For organization theorists dealing with Deleuzian philosophy, Bergson's terminology is not unproblematic, not least because Deleuze and Guattari's (1988: 265–272) dissociation of the plane of stratification and organization from the virtual plane of immanence and consistency might reinforce the idea that organization is *opposed* to change. Yet this formless and subjectless plane of movement, rest and affects is vital — so the death of the subject should not be understood as death per se (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 266, 270).

This affirms our Bergsonian view that there are two tendencies of organization — the one we understand as formal organization, and another 'organic' tendency, which engages with other life and, while being in change, affirms partially differentiated and creative life against the extreme alternate deaths of form and formlessness. This reciprocal instability between the plane of organization and

the plane of immanence and consistency renders neither plane anchored but always in motion and always in conversation with the other. Formal organization, creative organization (and organization theory) are subject to this constant trembling.

Proceeding with caution in this light, we can identify two significant features of Deleuzian thought that have been taken up by others and deserve further exploration in organization studies. The first is the issue of nonlinearity. Apart from the arguments against linearity in Burrell's work, Bergson's notion of change may also be conflated with the similar notion of nonlinear order in the sciences of chaos and complexity that recently have received increasing attention in organization studies. Despite claims by Prigogine, one of the main sources for such adaptations, that Deleuze remains a key source of inspiration (Massumi 1992), an explicit appreciation of the virtual is lacking in this work. The emphasis in complexity theory remains on order rather than nonlinearity, although De Landa (2000, 2002) has attempted to come to terms with complexity theory by integrating desire with scientific change.

In a more radical vein, Hardt and Negri (2000, 2004) draw on Deleuze and Guattari to essay a political economy of multiplicity and virtuality, a nonlinear politics of desire. Hardt and Negri's work suggests that the relation between organization and the Deleuzian concept of *multitude* is a key problem for organization theory to address. Although their focus is on the organization and non-organization of political resistance, they argue that culture, economy and polity are now inseparable. Multitude is the virtualization of actual difference in collective lines of flight, which accompany 'Empire' and the globalization of capital through heterogeneous couplings of power and knowledge, politics, economics and culture. Multitude is also the actualization of virtual multiplicity, its materialization in specific, if shifting and open-ended, networks and meshworks that can subvert, resist and escape 'Empire'. Hardt and Negri's analysis reminds us that, from a perspective that is rooted in mainstream organization theory even in attempting to depart from it (when insisting that organization is itself change), it is easy to reduce the concept of change to that of reactive change. In reactive change, which is in accordance with Cooper and Burrell's (1988) (quasi-) Nietzschean view of organization as reactive force, organizations seek to accommodate and reduce the effects of changes incurred by the movements of multitude and multiplicity, by non-organizational actualizations of the virtual and the virtual itself. But there is more to organization than that. Multitude is a becoming. It comes into itself from itself — from its own vibrant possibility, its own lines of flight, its own connections, disconnections and reconnections of possibility and action. It is never sufficiently separable from organization that organization can *react* to it — organization can only react to 'it' by constructing and projecting 'it' as an abstracted Other, a stratified form, not as a living force or flow of desire to which it is always in relation.⁶ It is because of the ways in which the virtual and the non-organizational actualizations of the virtual in multitude make organizations *resonate* and organization *tremble* that organization is change: a non-intentional, creative disintegration and recombination of new forces and matters.

Summary and Conclusion

In this paper we have argued that approaches that oppose organization and change, regardless of their philosophical orientation, have grasped only part of the story. Through the materialist philosophy of Gilles Deleuze we have argued that organization and change are intricately and co-emergently embedded in each other, so much so that organization is change. The Deleuzian insights that enable this movement in organizational thought can be summarized as:

- 1 *Organization has a dual sense*: on the one hand, formal organization as we know it in most mainstream organization theory; on the other, the engagement of life, driven by desire, with other life and its environment.
- 2 Difference involves two types of multiplicity: the first, difference in degree, associated with the first type of organization, is a *multiplicity of order*, which is homogeneous and static; the second, difference in kind, associated with the second type of organization, is a *multiplicity of organization*, which is heterogeneous and changing.
- 3 A geological metaphor illustrates the interplay of the two types in social organization. Social and geological *strata* are formed by processes of sorting/sedimenting and coding/consolidating. *Meshworks* are formed by adjacent interaction, drift and destratification.
- 4 Social strata are reproduced by powerful processes of signification and subjectification underpinned by two kinds of *organizational* tendencies.
- 5 The first signifying tendency of organization actualizes as *molar* segmentation on the macro-level, which creates regularities and institutions as building blocks of society; the second subjectifying tendency of organization operates as *molecular* segmentation across macro- and micro-levels, through the interaction and contiguity of adjacent but diverse self-organizing systems.
- 6 *Molecular lines of flight* leak between and escape molar segments of organization.
- 7 This leakage and escape is further reinforced by *virtuality*, which constitutes the ontological conditions that precede, inhabit and exceed organization and non-organization.
- 8 Virtuality is *actualized* as continuous and discontinuous *events* of organization and non-organization, but actual events are open to further virtualization and change as they connect with diverse tendencies of organization and non-organization.
- 9 Thus, organization and non-organization are inseparable and co-evolve in processes of *creative evolution*. Creative evolution is a differential non-spatialized organization of heterogeneous and dynamic forces and matters, which rests on open-ended accomplishments: organization therefore *trembles*.

10 Organization is *nonlinear* and further resisted, disrupted and subverted, challenged and changed by *multitude*, which operates through intimate couplings of power and knowledge, politics, economics and culture.

Deleuzian thought therefore has a rich potential for developing organization studies in a direction previously opened up by Cooper. There is no need to oppose or dismiss other forms of organization studies as they exist, for there is no need to embrace such an oppositional logic — opposing after all would simply fold Deleuzian thought into whatever established form of organization theory was in view. Deleuze's reworkings of ontology challenge us to think organization differently and in a non-prescriptive way. In so doing he dissolves boundaries and makes connections — between realism and postmodernism, materialism and vitalism, the actual and the virtual, and complexity science, evolutionary thought and creativity. This demonstrates the creative and complexly connective potential of a Deleuzian approach to range *across* the 'Empire' of organization theory and elicit from its sutures its too often suppressed capacity for autosubversive trembling.

Notes

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- 1 Notable exceptions to this include groundbreaking work by Cooper (1986) and Cooper and Burrell (1988); we discuss others elsewhere in this paper.
- 2 Cooper's influence on a generation of organizational thinkers was marked by Chia's (1998a, b) two-volume Festschrift and that on a younger generation by a special issue of *ephemera* (Brigham 2001; Land 2001; Sørensen 2001; Munro 2001; Thanem 2001) including an interview with Böhm and Jones (Cooper 2001). See also Spoelstra (2005) for an assessment.
- 3 Autosubversion is in contrast with Luhmann's concept of autopoiesis. Whereas Luhmann's neglect of autosubversion leads to a one-sided focus on stability, Deleuze's turn to autosubversion highlights the changing nature of organization.
- 4 Again, this should not be confused with Luhmann's concept of autopoiesis, which as we noted underestimates the changing nature of organization.
- 5 While critical realists, following Bhaskar, talk of arrangements being 'relatively enduring', they typically operate with the relative in the background, with what are in effect reifications.
- 6 The same goes for organization as *proactive*, which is the inverse of reaction. The effects of multiplicity can neither be fully apprehended nor fully anticipated, and so can neither be fully determined nor negated by action.

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