

Another time, another place: Space and time in organization studies

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Abstract

In July 2005, the *4th International Critical Management Studies Conference* was held at Cambridge University and it contained a stream on space and time in organizations. In the call for papers, the stream convenors -- the editors of this special issue -- made it clear, that outstanding papers would be considered for publication in this journal and the *Journal of Organizational Change Management* (see Carr & Hancock, 2006). The papers in this volume represent what the editors' and reviewers' believe were outstanding papers that raised significant issues for organization studies beyond a tight focus on the management of change.

In our introduction to the special issue of the *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, we found ourselves drawn to a citation from the work of Lefebvre (1991) and to providing what we were to call conceptual "fragments". These reflections are worthy of repeating here, in this special issue. The citation from Lefebvre (1991) was that: "Time per se is an absurdity, likewise space per se. The relative and the absolute are reflections of one another: each always refers back to the other, and the same is true of space and time" (p. 181). It seems increasingly difficult to discuss space and time as though they are discrete entities that are mutually exclusive. Rather, discussion about one of these 'entities' implies the other. This seems to be the case regardless of whether we perceive space and time as some kind of absolutes than can be independent of the observer or whether we embrace forms of relativity in which space and time are considered social constructions that are therefore, open to forms of social control and change. We find that the papers in this special issue implicitly and in some cases explicitly, are drawn to consider the binding of space and time in organization dynamics.

In also being drawn to reflect upon space and

time in terms of "fragments" rather than providing a 'chronology' of ideas, it was our view that much of our engagement with disciplinary discourses, as with life itself, deals with the processing of fragmented experiences. The variety of disciplinary discourses on space and time present us with voices, themes and motifs that have complex, contested and/or problematic histories. TAMARA has always been a journal that invites critical reflection and particularly welcomes interdisciplinary/cross-disciplinary insights and the papers in this issue do provide glimpses of such critical reflection.

About the papers in this special issue

Sammy Toyoki, André Spicer and Richard Elliott in their paper, entitled *Beyond old horizons: Theorising the rhythms of social reproduction*, question what they regard as the current scientific approaches to studying space and time and in particular, Giddens' (1976, 1979, 1981, 1984) well-known and increasingly 'popular' theory of structuration. The authors take exception to a number of assumptions made by Giddens particularly in his conception of space and time.

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It might be recalled that Giddens attempted to provide a framework through which one might better understand how social life is recursively reproduced. Embedded in this framework was, in part, his motivating plea for social theory to incorporate a view of human behaviour as *action*. Essentially his argument was about the interplay of practice (agency) and structure. The theory of "structuration", as he called it, called attention to the duality of structure, i.e.:

The essential recursiveness of social life, as constituted in social practices: structure is both medium and outcome of the reproduction of practices. Structure enters simultaneously into the constitution of the agent and social practices, and 'exists' in the generating moments of this constitution. (Giddens, 1979, p. 5)

Of course, in trying to comprehend the manner in which organizations become 'produced' and 'reproduced', it seems helpful to focus upon the dialectic interplay of human agents and the structural conditions that can be active resources; and at the same time, barriers and constraints to action. The structural conditions themselves, are part of the production of social practice. In a similar, but somewhat larger argument, Bourdieu (1977) noted:

Objective structures are themselves products of historical practices and are constantly reproduced and transformed by historical practices whose productive principle is itself the product of structures which it consequently tends to reproduce. (p. 83; see also Watkins, 1985, p. 22)

The 'duality' and dialectic of structure and agency, in Giddens' structuration theory, also involves another dialectic, this being time and space. Indeed, Giddens (1979) described the relationship as follows:

the duality of structure connects the *production* of social interaction, as

always and everywhere a contingent accomplishment of knowledgeable social actors, to the *reproduction* of social systems across time-space. (p. 27)

Social practices are thus connected to a spatial context and historically sedimented. The paper by Toyoki et. al. take issue with this formulation as the authors make the cogent case that, in addition to structure and agency, one needs to take into account the factor of what they call "projected outcomes". For these authors, the time and space aspect in both production and reproduction of social interaction involves the past, present and *future* - a trialectic relationship. The argument is that social reproduction occurs in three different modes: the practiced; the planned; and, the imagined. The imagined requires us to appreciate that expectations of the future may influence present social action and behaviour. Moreover, the agential orientation to the future provides a powerful case for understanding social and organization change.

Then, to take this trialectic understanding a little further, the authors draw upon the work of Lefebvre (2004) on "rhythmanalysis". The idea of "rhythm", in the context of time and space, is one in which social interaction or action itself reproduces the space and time conjunction. The authors argue that it is in such a formulation that Lefebvre's theory allows us to "move beyond ahistorical explanations of everyday life and view praxis as it occurs through a constant process of becoming". The manner in which the present engages the past and future is a theme that also arises in the next paper of this special issue.

In his paper entitled *Judgment as un-linear as time: Description and ascription in venture capital assessments*, José Bertil González Guve provides a case study of an organization in Stockholm to illustrate how the process of judgment takes place in a time progression that is not linear; but one that occurs in a kind of backward loop. Guve

draws upon a psychoanalytic view of time -- the sense of which is carried in the French expression *après-coup* -- broadly translated as *after-the-event*. The argument advanced is that whilst the past may influence the present, the past is itself, over-determined by the present. The meaning of the past gets re-inscribed by the manner in which the present seeks to draw selectively upon the past.

Guve notes that in the presentation of the gathered information (i.e., facts) upon which a decision and a judgment is to be made, the presentation really amounts to a *re-presentation* in which some facts get valued to the degree that they over-determine the actual meaning of the facts. As Guve puts it: "In other words the way in which our values and meaning are ascribed to a case will over-determine the very description of it". This argument is certainly a challenge to what might be our 'normal' sensibility of the relationship between facts and judgment. For Guve, in situations where a judgment is to be made, *description* and *ascription* go hand in hand.

Ming Lim resumes the discussion of the work of Lefebvre in her paper entitled *The (re)production of organizational time: Reading the feminine through Henri Lefebvre*. In the context of the blurring of boundaries between professional and domestic work, Lim poses the question: "How do we intend to re-produce time for ourselves as social, not merely -- or even -- economic beings within an organizational context"?

In order for us to consider our 'options', Lim suggests we first need to understand the manner in which time is manipulated, and in some cases rendered invisible, as a result of our acceptance of what Lefebvre (1979) referred to as "economic space"; and from which was distinguished "social space". Economic space is seductive and swallows up much of time in its focus upon material reward and personal benefit. Social space, which includes time with family and to undertake self-fulfilling pursuits, is crowded out by economic space and in so doing, Lim

argues, serves to "negate" social or domestic (procreative) life. It is in this context that Ming suggests economic space negates or suppresses *feminine* time -- the time it takes to procreate and nurture and care for domestic circumstances. Work organizations are seen as complicit in this process in as much as the focus is upon economic space.

In a challenge to the field of organization studies, Lim argues that time needs to be "*spatially reconfigured* to become visible" to those who 'suffer' from the present space-time constructs. It is argued further that, thus far, work organizations have failed to develop appropriate responses to the economic-social space split that is played out in the structuring of work.

In Charlie Chaplin's film "Modern Times", an organisational contraption -- a work structure -- was created to improve workplace efficiency that was a "feeding machine as a time-saving device, so that the workers could continue working during the lunch time. The factory sequence resolved itself in the tramp having a nervous breakdown" (Chaplin, 1964, p. 415; see also Chaplin, 1936/2003). For the factory, the feeding machine was seen as 'all good' and for the tramp, the worker, it turned out to be 'all bad'. Cheryl Lapp and Adrian Carr, in their paper entitled 'We have to watch our selves: The psychodynamics of critical distance', do not see space and time as merely resources that are configured as a technology in organising the workplace. They view space and time as issues of social construction and that relate to modes of thinking that are transferred to the workplace. One of these psychodynamic modes is 'critical distance'. For Lapp and Carr, critical distance is comprised of space and time required to see that one subject and or object cannot be described or explained in terms of one binary trait set or an other but that one is mutually constituted by binaries. If only one trait set is perceived, it is that set that is allowed to overcome and 'megalise' or engulf the other side until it seems the other has disappeared. Critical distance is the space that allows one to see at least two sides to

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every story: "If one of the binaries is imagined, self-space compression exists from the erosion of critical distance" (Lapp & Carr). On the other hand, an excess of critical distance isolates the binaries, which again, creates the perception that only one side exists. Further, it is their contention that generally speaking, it is the perceived 'good' of a subject or object that is welcomed at the expense of also experiencing *but not taking the time to think about* the bad.

The 'good' of the Chaplin story should be that similar constructions, copies of or their simulacrum (Baudrillard, 1976/2002) should be reflected upon before enacted. However, it is through an analysis of an organisation that Lapp and Carr show that by and large, people are still blinded by the ways and means 'big business' is allowed to invade self-space; and as if it were some 'Tayloristic' "tradition" (Alford, 1991, pp. 14-15). Lapp and Carr's view is that space and time are first reflected to adults through embodied experiences that are constructed in infancy. Specifically, they see the psychodynamics of splitting (Klein, 1944, 1975a, 1975b, 1975c, 1975d, 1986) and mirroring (Freud, 1933/1988; Lacan, 1949/2004; Kohut, 1971, Sarup, 1992, 1996; Winnicott, 1971; see also Carr, 2002) to be the root causes of extreme critical distance deficiencies. By applying their work on binaries to critical distance, it appears 'big business' is also 'good business' that also effects a space and time power hierarchy over the less powerful other (Cixous, 1986).

To illustrate their points, their paper uses a case study of Wal-Mart to show that this organisation and others like it are not as 'all good' as the store professes its self to be (Pollitt, 2004). While Wal-Mart provides goods at economical prices, the organisation also does this at the expense of its employees and customers in global space that has been allowed to occur over more than a decade (McCune, 1994; Pressley, 2006). By exploring Wal-Mart space over time, Lapp and Carr speak directly to those who 'suffer' from space-time compression in the form of

experiencing lack of and excesses of critical distance embodied by Wal-Mart's underpaid workers and homogenized consumer base. As viewed through the lens of psychodynamics, we gain an appreciation of space and time being less abstract and even epistemological than they are "embodied experiences". Thus while, we still 'hear' from Frederick Taylor through the work of Chaplin (1936, 1964), space and time cannot be seen as only 'traditional' resources or organising elements for efficiency such as when they are applied to others as 'external' constraints. Space and time are at the same time, externalities that are internalised to affect intrapersonal reflexivity that affects and effects interpersonal relationships. Lapp and Carr's vision and voice on space-time is that as employees, consumers, and community members "we have to watch our selves" because of the internalised and transferred affects of space and time such as those experienced through psychodynamics of critical distance.

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