

CUBISM AND ORGANIZATIONAL ANALYSIS: REVISITING REPRESENTATION IN THE AGE OF THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY

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Abstract

We suggest that interest in the new times of the knowledge economy may privilege attention to new organizational forms and new approaches to studying them at the expense of those from the past. Arguing that concerns with representation are not necessarily related either to postmodern epistemology or to postmodern epoch, we show how the modernist movement of cubism was an earlier complication of representation that has much to contribute to both the form and content of contemporary organizational studies. We identify some of the main tenets of a cubist approach to organizational analysis and argue that cubism offers an extension to current interest in aesthetics within organizational studies. Cubism, we argue, offers an aesthetic contribution that may supplement contemporary approaches to small-scale organizational studies by slowing them down: by allowing attention to repetition, to the mundane and to the taken for granted.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, and spanning several countries, postmodern thinking has become increasingly important in organizational studies (Alvesson & Deetz, 1996; Calás & Smircich, 1999; Hancock & Tyler, 2001). For example, and starting in the late 1980s, Burrell and Cooper published a series of articles in the journal *Organization Studies* (Burrell, 1988, 1994; Cooper, 1989; Cooper & Burrell, 1988). In turn, parts of this series were summarized, developed, and supplemented (Gergen & Thatchenkery, 1996; Hassard 1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1996, 1999; Parker, 1992; Willmott, 1997) and, as a result of these and many other efforts, it has been suggested that postmodernism has made “a significant and positive contribution to organizational theorizing during the last 10 years or so” (Calás & Smircich, 1999: 650).

Under postmodernism, the separation of researcher and subject is no longer assumed, reality is mediated rather than objective, and language constitutes or “censors” rather than reflects or describes any more essential, central mental processes (Cooper, 1989: 482). Indeed, postmodernism “is directed against a ‘picture theory’ of language in which physical properties of the world are considered fixed while language can be adjusted to meet the needs of their description” (Hassard, 1994: 313; see also Gergen & Thatchenkery, 1996; Chia & King, 2001). Rather than attempting to capture “the impression of a pregivenness in the object of analysis” (Chia, 1995: 589), postmodernism attempts “resuscitation” (Clegg & Hardy, 1996). Further, if the living subject is no longer a concrete object, its representation, capture, and transmission become more difficult, regardless of whether quantitative or qualitative methods are attempted (see also Chia, 1996a: 33-35, p. 67; Stablein, 1996).

As summarized by Calás & Smircich (1999), this *crisis of representation* involves destabilization of the taken-for-granted association between structure and meaning, of the idea that “[m]odern knowledge (or theory) is presumed to represent some form of stable phenomena existing outside their representation” (Calás & Smircich, 1999: 653). Similarly, Kilduff and Mehra (1997: 466) have argued that the problematization of representation implies the undermining of “all claims to methodological purity” that might otherwise imply “an unmediated, objective representation of the facts” and Gergen and Thatchenkery (1996: 366) wrote that “[u]nder postmodernism, methodology loses its status as the chief arbiter of truth”.

Such concerns led to calls for organizational research to adopt new styles. For example, Hassard (1993a) drew on the work of Lyotard to suggest that the method of epistemological postmodernism is serious play rather than empiricism:

In ‘doing science’, we only enter into a number of games with our colleagues. We are in fact involved in a form of ‘serious play’, which sees us intervene in a variety of language-games, make moves in a number of debates or discussions, and seek to oppose the moves and positions of other players while advancing our own positions (Hassard, 1993a: 10).

Similarly, Alvesson and Deetz argued that postmodern research “aims at resistance and indeterminacy where irony and play are preferred to rationality, predictability and order” (1996: 205; see also Chia, 1996a, 1996b; Clegg & Hardy, 1996; Gergen, 1992; Lewis & Grimes, 1999; Schultz & Hatch, 1995). Recently, Kilduff and Mehra (1997) have suggested that postmodern research can be provocative research, and that postmodern researchers “can mix and match various perspectives or research styles in order to contrast with tradition” (1997: 458). Like Hassard and Alvesson and Deetz, Kilduff and Mehra pointed to the importance of irony, arguing for “a postmodernism that is similarly informed by, and yet ambivalent toward, classic statements and techniques of the field in question” (1997: 458). In this postmodernism, “style matters”, researchers “eschewing passive objectivity for an active authorial voice, ... carefully crafting an aesthetically pleasing narrative” (Kilduff & Mehra, 1997: 467), and adopting “a style which privileges action, movement, process and emergence” (Chia, 1995: 597). Taking a somewhat more functionalist approach (Hancock & Tyler, 2001: 73), Gergen and Thatchenkery (1996) suggest that, in place of organizational research serving the grand narrative of progressive science, postmodern research can shift to more local and practical concerns,

can contribute to social action, can give voice to groups which have been silenced, and can generate new realities, practices and perspectives as well as “reinvigorating” those from the past (Gergen & Thatchenkery, 1996: 371).

More recently, Hardy, Phillips and Clegg (2001: 551) have drawn on actor-network theory to argue that “there is an important distinction to be drawn between social subjects produced in their social setting and research subjects produced by researchers and their research community”. While empirical research is not dismissed, these authors recognize that both the research subject and the researcher are embedded in a community of researchers, editors, reviewers, journals and publishers that legitimates the application of particular theoretical, methodological and representational frameworks (cf. Gergen, 1992). Drawing on Hardy et al.’s (2001) call for a reflexivity that takes account of multiple frameworks, we argue for the inclusion within organizational analysis of a means of representation that is both drawn from the past and is outside the usual boundaries of organizational research style, form and reference: that of cubism. Cubism is both modern and disruptive, both visual and textual, and represents an ontological realism that is conceived rather than perceived or observed. Cubism, we argue, offers an aesthetic contribution that may supplement contemporary approaches to small-scale organizational studies by slowing them down; by allowing attention to repetition, to the mundane and to the taken for granted. We argue that cubism may inform the revisiting of questions of representation in empirical organizational analysis, identify several potential approaches to cubist organizational analysis, and suggest that new times should not preclude the revisiting of cubism as a set of ideas that has much to offer.

In the following sections, we suggest that interest in the new times of the knowledge economy may privilege interest in new organizational forms and new approaches to studying them at the expense of those from the past. Arguing that concerns with representation are not necessarily related either to postmodern epistemology or to postmodern epoch, we then show how the modernist movement of cubism was an earlier complication of representation. Finally, we identify some of the main tenets of a cubist approach to organizational analysis and argue that cubism offers an extension to current interest in aesthetics within organizational studies.

PRIVILEGING THE NEW IN THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY

One of the main contributions of research into the knowledge economy has been the differentiation of how that economy differs from those that have preceded it. There is broad consensus amongst strategic management writers that knowledge is recognized as an essential resource for organizational success and competitive advantage (see, for example, Evans & Wurster, 1998; Seely-Brown & Duguid, 2000; Sveiby, 2001). However, as Dodgson (1993) has suggested, a definition of knowledge remains elusive and there is concern that general discussion of the knowledge economy fails to recognize its internal complexity in the form of different sub-sectors and different rates of growth (e.g., Brint, 2001; Thompson, Warhurst & Callaghan, 2001).

Despite such concern, several writers (Kim & Mauborgne, 1999; Quinn, 1992) have discussed the need to shift to a knowledge economy, and Sveiby (1997: 26) differentiates a *knowledge paradigm* typical of that economy from the more tangible *industrial paradigm* of the “old world”. For example, within the organization that is “seen with a knowledge paradigm” (Sveiby, 1997: 27), people are revenue generators, the managers’ power base is dependent on relative level of knowledge, production is based on knowledge workers converting knowledge into intangible structures, and information flows via collegial networks (Sveiby, 2000). In contrast, and from an industrial perspective, people are cost generators or resources, the managers’ power base is dependent on relative level in the organization’s hierarchy, production is based on physical laborers processing physical resources to create tangible products, and information flows via organizational hierarchy.

To some extent, such categorizations echo Clegg’s earlier (1990) contrast between modern and postmodern organizations. Clegg (1990) had argued that by the 1980’s, organizations were responding to the decline of Fordism and to internationalization, de-industrialization and changing center-periphery relations. He suggested that the contemporary Japanese organization had become a beacon of *postmodernity*, in contrast to

the typification of highly differentiated, bureaucratic, modern organizations. Clegg identified seven organizational dimensions that distinguished modernity and postmodernity: Mission goals, strategies, and main functions; Functional alignments; Co-ordination and control; Accountability and role relationships; Planning and communication; Relation of performance and reward; and Leadership (see also Clegg, 1992 cf. Hassan, 1985).

Under this view, postmodernity was construed as “that which comes after modernity” (Clegg, 1990, p. 11), or, in Hassard’s (1993a) terms, as *postmodern epoch* rather than *epistemology* (see also Rouleau, 1992 cf. Burrell, 1994; Willmott, 1995). Hassard (1994, p. 305), has explained this distinction by suggesting that postmodernism as *epoch* is “based on the realist notion that we simply need to find the right way of describing the world ‘out there’”, whereas postmodernism as *epistemology* “suggests that the world is constituted by our shared language and that we can only ‘know the world’ through the particular forms of discourse our language creates” (see also Boje, Fitzgibbons & Steingard, 1996; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Hassard 1993a, b).

In their recent review, Hancock and Tyler (2001), make a similar distinction between *organizational postmodernization* and *postmodern organization theory*. They introduce their discussion of the former with a statement that they argue suggests a spirit typical of commentary not in present times but during the late 1960s:

As we embark upon the second millenium of the Christian calendar, it is perhaps inevitable that we should be on the lookout for signs that western societies are about to undergo some kind of momentous change; that the old order is slipping away fast, to be replaced by a brave, or perhaps not so brave, new world, a world in which the technological revolution of the previous two hundred years will finally bear fruit, alleviating old drudgeries and bringing about new, possibly more emancipated modes of social and economic organization (Hancock & Tyler, 2001: 37).

Although there has been increasing scepticism of such visions, Hancock and Tyler (2001) go on to review the post-industrial thesis (Bell, 1973; Drucker, 1969; Toffler, 1970), flexible specialization (e.g., Piore & Sabel, 1984), post-Fordism (Murray, 1989a, b) and post-bureaucratic management (Heckscher, 1994) as propositions that laid the foundations for the notion that the postmodern organizational form represented a break from the past. Arguably, such efforts concentrate our attention of the possibilities for the new, for whether those possibilities are utopic or dystopic, it is the new form, new technology or new relations that are subject to scrutiny (cf. Cooper, 1989). In summary, such binary oppositions privilege the new, marginalizing the past just as distinctions between postmodern and modern organizations and between post-Fordist and Fordist production systems have before them.

Hancock and Tyler (2001) comment both on the lack of empirical evidence for the shift to a process of postmodernization and on the possibility that the labelling of practices as *post-Fordist* or *postmodernist* “represents merely a semantic technique, an attempt by academics to conjure up new domains of inquiry which [sic] appear novel and worthy of renewed attention” (Hancock & Tyler, 2001: 61). Shifting their attention to *postmodern organization theory*, Hancock and Tyler (2001) concentrate instead on the rejection of representation, the need for reflexivity, and the relationship between power, language and the constitution of subjectivity. They suggest that the foundations for postmodernism’s rejection of positivist and functionalist assumptions were laid with the interpretive works of authors such as Goffman (1959), Garfinkel (1967), Schutz (1967) and Silverman (1970), and note that although there are variants in the postmodern critique of realist ontology, there is a common concern with the constitutive role of language and discourse in representing reality, however constituted (see also Chia & King, 2001).

Rather than turn away from the past or comment on its incorporation within the present, we have chosen, instead, a rather different line of argument. Drawing from the arts rather than science or critiques of science, we return to the past and indeed to modernism, in an effort to illustrate how concerns with representation, reflexivity and disruption are *not only* an indicator of the postmodern turn. We base our argument within a brief introduction to cubism, to which we now turn before considering how cubism can contribute to existing efforts to complicate representational organizational analysis.

REVISITING REPRESENTATION: THE CONTRIBUTION OF CUBISM

Present in the domains of plastic arts, music, dance, sculpture and literature, cubism emerged in Paris and flourished quickly in Europe between 1907 and 1914. The cubist style was first developed by painters and although there are many artists whose works have been called cubist, Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque have been credited with being the creators or pioneers of cubism (Berger, 1965; Cooper and Tinterow, 1983; Rubin, 1989). Juan Gris and Fernand Léger were also considered to have successfully understood and painted in the cubist idiom (Golding, 1959/1988; Kahnweiler, 1915/1968).

Many of the principles of cubism are most easily discussed by reference to visual materials. Although Cooper (1995: 7) identifies diversity amongst the practising cubists he concluded that “the typical Cubist picture lacks perspective and employs geometric forms, restricted colour and a liberal manipulation of visual appearances”. Cubist technique included shifting planes, fractured form, and spatial ambiguity, and included the following features:

- (a) planes that are at once transparent and opaque;
- (b) tones of objects which “bleed” out and become background tones so that the object is part of, and at the same time in front of, the background;
- (c) outlines that coincide with other outlines so that the continuity may be read around either or across both;
- (d) surfaces which recede behind other surfaces and project over them simultaneously;
- (e) shadows, mutually excluded by each others’ light sources, standing side by side;
- (f) parts of objects shifted away from the whole and then changed in tone so that the recognition of the original will be constantly elusive;
- (g) shadows which become substance;
- (h) flat planes which disappear behind themselves;
- (i) shapes created by arbitrary changes of tone competing with the shapes of the recognizable objects within which they are developed;
- (j) forms whose contours pass over other forms while their local tones disappear beneath them;
- (k) interlocking light and dark forms either of which can be seen as the “object” against the other as background (Judkins, 1976: 22).

In essence,

Cubism created an artistic language of intentional ambiguity. In front of a Cubist work of art, the spectator was to realize that no single interpretation of the fluctuating shapes. Textures, spaces, and objects could be complete in itself. And, in expressing this awareness of the paradoxical nature of reality and the need for describing it in multiple and even contradictory ways, Cubism offered a visual equivalent of a fundamental aspect of twentieth-century experience (Rosenblum, 1959/1976: 14).

It has been suggested that cubism was representative of modern art in that it contained reference both to an ideology of optimism and to one of despair (Schwarz, 1997). The responses of modernist artists to this paradox were strained and ambiguous – a desire to create a balance between innovation and tradition, order and chaos, unity and disunity and the known and not known (Crowther, 1993; Schwarz, 1997).

Cubism was also modernist in that it emphasized discontinuity (Everdell, 1997). Tracing the development of thought during the nineteenth century that led to giving up “stubborn old beliefs” [in objectivity, in single perspectives, in “steadily and whole” and so on], Everdell (1997: 347) identifies five major and related ideas that define modernism – subjectivity, reflexivity, relativism and inductive scepticism - and at “[t]he heart of Modernism is the postulate of ontological discontinuity”. Things are not whole and stable. Things can fall apart and fragment. The separateness of the phenomena mean things are difficult to grasp. And things may not be connected (Allen, 1999). Cubism was the quintessential manifestation of modernism (Clark, 1999).

Cubism and the Mundane

While many later styles of twentieth century painting and sculpture can be defined either through their origins in cubism or in opposition to it (Berger, 1965; Chipp, 1968; Cottington, 1998; Hughes, 1989;

Kozloff, 1973; Lemaitre, 1945; Read, 1986; Rosenblum, 1976), cubist painters were contemptuous of any efforts to develop theory or provide theoretical explanations of their work (Chipp, 1968; Hess, 1975; Kahnweiler, 1971; Kozloff, 1973). With some notable exceptions, cubists also tended to avoid grand or controversial subjects, relying so much on traditional, inoffensive still-life and portraits (Crowther, 1993; Klawana, 1994) that their art has been called art without tension (Golding 1994; Hughes, 1989).

There is general agreement the cubists made conscious and deliberate choices about the objects (the reality) they repeatedly chose to represent. Such objects as glasses, tumblers, pipes, newspapers, restaurant menus were close at hand and their significance lay in their lack of significance. Vargish and Mook (1999) suggest the portrayal of such mundane objects not only served as a challenge to what was expected of bourgeois high art but were selected because of their relative unimportance. Indeed, it was because the items were so commonplace that viewers' attention was now on the painting-as-object itself. Citing an example of Picasso's *Portrait of Ambroise Vollard*, Vargish and Mook (1999) make the point that what was significant about the painting was not Ambroise Vollard, the art dealer and subject, but the way in which Picasso represents Vollard. Cubism turned the viewers' attention from what was being represented to how it was being represented.

Some of the similarities between cubist writing and painting that have been noted include the lack of grandeur of the subject and the absence of a focal point of action (Fitz, 1973). Cubist authors and artists also strive to present the fragmentary nature of perception and seek to represent of "the integrity of the individual moment of perception before consolidation by memory into the perceptual whole" (Dubnick, 1984: 4). Finally, important similarities can be identified in the attempts of the literary and artistic cubists to experiment with their respective media in their pursuit of "real" representation (Steiner, 1978).

The Challenges of the Cubist Style

Cubism is an art without sentiment. It is unspectacular. Its subject matter is often commonplace and banal, and much of the inspiration for its subjects was drawn from the artists' daily lives. What has challenged viewers and readers since it first appeared in salons in Paris and later in other European cities has not been its content but the presentation of that content. For cubist art it is the visual that is shocking – the colour (or lack of), the shape, the form, the attempts at representation; for cubist literature it is the structure that is shocking - the repetition, the grammatical complexity, the tortured syntax. For whether a style, a method, an approach, an art-form or an intelligence (Schwartz, 1971), cubism is not always comprehensible or decipherable.

Indeed, the disconnection of cubist style is a constant challenge to accepted visual and linguistic protocols. The challenge to traditional painting was of course, confusing and many audiences were not certain about what was being represented. Cubism demands from its audience the necessity to engage in a relationship with the artistic endeavour – and the reader or viewer is challenged to find their own meaning and understanding from the object observed. There is no one truth of the image and yet there is always a suggestion of a reality of representation. For example, it was Golding's (1994) view that Picasso, in particular, painted objects in cubism that were both themselves and not themselves – women's bodies were like guitars, dots or pegs were as nipples, eyes, navels, and so on. Similarly, Rosenblum (1959/1976) noted that a book could be a table and a violin a hand – referring to this approach as the metamorphosis of the identity of objects.

Cubist technique was considered revolutionary in its creation of a new pictorial vocabulary, for each element of the vocabulary of painting – space, form, colour, light and technique – was worked, re-worked (some say distorted), interpreted and reinterpreted (Golding, 1988). Rules of single-point perspective were discarded, not only in the portrayal of an image on a painting but also in the demands made of the viewer to share the search for a reality promised by multiple perspectives. Herwitz (2000) has even argued that cubism embodies the hallmarks of modernism – discontinuity, reflexivity and multiple perspectives. Everdell (1997: 248-249) provides some clues to assist understand the technique of cubism:

The method was not at all mystical, however disconcerting the results. You took the motif, looked at it from several opposing points of view, divided the results into volumetric planes, and painted those

planes in the place of the subject so that they interfered with each other. The viewer who wished to could reassemble the planes and reconstruct all of the original points of view (preferably not sequentially, but simultaneously).

Braque, Picasso and later their colleagues did not paint objects as seen from a fixed and single-point perspective but combined several different views of the same object within the same picture (see Featherstone, 1988). Indeed, supporting the idea that cubism depicts reality most completely, Gamwell (1980) suggests the multiple views allowed the artists to present all aspects rather than an incomplete aspect of nature. Accordingly, the concept of simultaneity became a major feature of the style (Cottington, 1998; Golding, 1959/1988, 1994), and stressed the role of artistic invention in selecting and synthesising the mix of remembered and seen elements of a subject (Cottington, 1998). Hess (1975: 38) describes simultaneity thus:

... perspective was dissolved, or rather multiplied. The observer was no longer fixed in the one place from which alone the picture under linear perspective looks true. The painter combines in one picture many view-points and illuminates space from many sides, including the positions from within the picture space itself. The spectator thus ceases to be mentally at rest and is taken within the system of the picture where mentally he changes view-points, and is in a form of movement around, through, above and below *the newly created reality* (our emphasis).

Cubism and Realism

It was the cubists who made explicit that our knowledge of the world is carried by our memory into every perception – that what we see is coloured by what we know (Steiner, 1978). Drawing upon memory as well as upon objects that could be seen, cubism has been called the art of conception and not perception (Chipp, 1968; Cottington, 1998; Gamwell, 1980; Kozloff, 1973; Reff, 1992). Although this meant that, under cubism, objects may not be presented as they seem, that is, they may be presented as conceived and not perceived, there is nonetheless a something or a someone or an object that is represented and it is in the representation that a new reality is conceived:

In film and theatre, in music and the written word, Cubism's insistence *on the role of representation in the production of reality* [our emphasis] has been a cardinal point of reference, indeed at times, of principle (Cottington, 1998: 75).

Cubists were aware of the distorting influence of relationship (emotional, temporal or spatial) to any event (Berger, 1965), and it has been argued that they were influenced by the contemporaneous French philosopher, Henri Bergson (see Hess, 1975), by the scientific developments of Einstein (Berger, 1965; Everdell, 1997; Vargish & Mook, 1999), by non-Euclidian geometry (Apollinaire, 1913/1970), and by the developments of Idealism and Symbolism in poetry and art (Barr, 1946/1980; Steegmuller, 1973). What was central to each of these prevailing influences was the challenge to traditional relationships of and within time and space. Previously thought to be immutable, it was now possible for the observer to be detached from a fixed position (Hess, 1975).

While art historians such as Fry (1966) and Rosenblum (1976) have applauded the cubists for their revolutionary challenges to 'western' mimetic traditions, cubism maintains commitment to the representation of a reality. Although many observers may have been aesthetically and visually challenged by the cubist representations of objects, those objects do have a material presence and cubist portraits, still-lives and the few landscapes all contain a logic and coherence consistent with their content. Although cubist paintings did not maintain the traditional visual and spatial logic of perspective, the landscapes included images of trees and houses, the still-lives had an object congruency and the portraits portrayed people, invariably friends and business connections, either seated or standing.

What was perhaps once of the most important contributions of cubists to subsequent thought and art was their emphasis not so much on the presentation of reality but on the observation and representation of that reality (Vargish & Mook, 1999). The reality of artistic representation was no longer a known and unchallenged truth, and the cubists saw that the role of art was to represent and not copy the subject (Schwarz, 1997; Vargish & Mook, 1999). As argued by Rosenblum (1976), even those objects faithfully

presented as “real” are just as false as more abstract images on a canvas. In referring to this paradox, Vargish and Mook (1999) suggest the use of visual deceptions is a cubist game to point out that realism is not about reality.

Indeed, some cubists even questioned the very possibility of ontological realism. In their pamphlet on cubism published in 1912, the artists, poets and critics Gleizes and Metzinger state with force “there is nothing real outside ourselves” and express amazement that critics may suggest that an external image can be represented on canvas. Arguing that reality is both profound and complex, the authors continue, suggesting that, “rationally speaking, we can only experience certitude in respect of the images which they produce in the mind” (1912/1968: 208-214). For Gleizes and Metzinger, reality exists essentially as consciousness – and whatever exists is known as ideas. For these artists, the role of art was to give physical shape and form, which they referred to as “plastic consciousness”, to those ideas. Thus, the art they created was the physical manifestation of the reality they experienced in their minds and not a literal representation of what they may (or may not) observe.

Analytic and Synthetic Styles

Most critics tend to divide the work of cubist painters into two distinct periods – the *analytic* which embraces the years 1909-1912 and the *synthetic*, generally understood to be the period 1912 until the outbreak of the First World War (Barr, 1946/1980; Cottington, 1998; Kozloff, 1973; Read, 1986; Roskill, 1985). Both periods contained essential elements of what are considered major features of cubism – fragmentation, fractured images, multiple perspectives, use of shade and color, and the disavowal of mimetic representation. However, for some, the movement from the processes of representation of an object embraced by analytic cubism to materialist ideas of representativeness enacted in synthetic cubism allowed the development of cubism as an art of conception rather than perception (cf. Cooper, 1971).

It was claimed that the analytic period suggested an intellectual or scientific approach to the work of the cubists, although this was later repudiated by both Picasso and Braque who insisted that their work was intuitive and not intellectual (Read, 1986). In the synthetic period, cubists experimented with the innovation of *papier collé* (pasted paper) and collage in their art, and the paradox apparent in the use of illusions of mimicry in the quest for a true representation of reality is nowhere more apparent than in the use of *collage*, *trompe l'œil* and *papier collé*. False and real; reality and unreality collide and collude in the images of cubist paintings well before the association of postmodernism with pastiche. As stated by Ozenfant (1952: 76-77):

To hope to imitate sunlight with splodgy colours, or translate into actual colour the vibration of the light, was inevitably (at least theoretically) to come to grief. Representation, they said, was never anything but a wretched *ersatz*: light from paint tubes, questionable flesh-tints, nature falsified: and the closer representation was to the object in question, the more flagrant was its deceptiveness, for what could be more false than *trompe-l'œil*: and at bottom, what vainer than the theatre, when it would have us believe in its reality?

The Cubist painter no longer sought to imitate. His [sic] object was to evoke emotions by the exhibition of coloured forms, which, not being comparable with aspects of reality, evaded the falsities inherent in *trompe-l'œil* painting. Representational painting is like music that would claim to give us the illusion of a storm on a gramophone record: all the instrument could do would be to make questionable noises, which, by sufficiently reminding us of the real sounds, would make us realise how false they were.

He concludes his point with the essence of his argument:

To paint true, is to evoke in the observer exact sensations and appropriate feelings, and not fallaciously to imitate.

In this sense, the realism of this cubism is not far removed from that of conceptual art. Under cubism, reality could not be imitated as *trompe l'œil* but was, nonetheless, parodied by the introduction of *trompe l'œil*. Further, the paradox of *papier collé* imposed a reality in imagery abstracted from reality. But this was a

reality that was created - a conception and not always a perception. And yet a reality, nonetheless. Sixty years after his cubist period, Picasso commented, apparently with some exasperation, that:

... everyone talked about how much reality there was in Cubism. But they didn't really understand. It's not a reality you can take in your hand. It's more like a perfume – in front of you, behind you, to the sides. The scent is everywhere but you don't know where it comes from (cited in Kozloff, 1973: 51).

Drawing parallels between the concept of the arbitrariness of the sign formulated by Ferdinand de Saussure in his *Course of General Linguistics* published in 1916¹ and the arbitrariness of the vocabulary of an African mask, Bois (1987) suggested Picasso played with the realization of the value of the minimum sign. Just as a cowry could be an eye and a navel and a mouth, Picasso seized on the awareness that a mere handful of signs, “none referring univocally to a referent” (Bois, 1987: 53) had the potential to provide multiple significations. Thus a shape could be a mouth, or sometimes a nose, or the detail of a guitar. Similarly, and while most cubist painting contained as subject matter only those objects that might plausibly be seen together in one place (Fry, 1966), cubist writer Gertrude Stein stated in *Tender Buttons* (cited in Dubnick, 1984: 94) that: “A shawl is a hat and hurt and a red balloon and an undercoat and a sizer a sizer of talks” which indicates only a very loose association of objects and meanings.

In summary, the cubists believed artistic traditions that revered mono-dimensional perspectives fixed in time and space to be a visual untruth. Their discontent with such untruth inspired them to capture a reality they knew as well as could see and to develop techniques they believed represented a reality and its truths. Surfaces were fractured, planes were fragmented and distorted, colours were stripped. Artefacts of Parisian café life, newspapers, advertisements were adhered to the canvases, ripped, scrawled on and alluded to. Part-bodies and part-objects were distinct and uncertain. Ambiguous shapes could be read. Blank canvases were to be understood. Cubist art was based on a reality that was known, observed and represented and, rather like postmodernism, cubism celebrates attention to the ordinary and to the taken for granted (cf. Cooper & Burrell, 1988). As we now suggest, the cubist impatience with fixed and single perspectives and the representation of the discontinuous and reflexive may also be informative for organizational analysis.

A CUBIST APPROACH TO ORGANIZATIONAL ANALYSIS

As our discussion of cubism has shown, it is important to recognize that concerns with disjuncture, reflexivity and representation are matters not only of interest to postmodernism epoch and epistemology but, at least in relation to art, have been central to discussions of modernism as well. While such discussions have been well rehearsed in postmodern organization studies, we suggest that organizational analysts also draw on cubism as a theoretical and material source that can inform analysis. Regardless of whether readers attempt cubist work themselves, we hope that our cautionary efforts to show how cubism has heralded many of the concerns of postmodern organizational analysis are informative.

First, we suggest that disruptive cubist techniques may contribute to existing efforts to complicate empirical organizational research (cf. Alvesson & Deetz, 1996). For example, rather than contributing to wholeness or some sense of metatriangulation for theory *building* (Lewis & Grimes, 1999; our emphasis), we suggest that multiparadigm inquiry can be thought of as an example of cubist simultaneity, a disjunctive representational strategy that simply provides different, fragmented conceptions of experienced worlds. Under cubist assumptions, paradigm incommensurability (Burrell & Morgan, 1979) is a given rather than a problem, and attention shifts, instead, to the mode and the material through which simultaneity may be represented.

Perhaps organizational scholars can attempt this by considering possibilities for *collage*, ironic *trompe l'œil* and *papier collé*, either in written or pictorial form. While we have concentrated our discussion on the embodiment of such techniques in cubist art, we recognize that such artistic presentations of organizational life remain far from the mainstream and well outside the acceptable means for production of the research subject (cf. Hardy et al., 2001). However, while cubism is not usually a body of work that is relevant to the

¹ There is no suggestion the Cubists in general or Picasso in particular was influenced by de Saussure's work.

representation of organisational studies (see Björkegren, 1993), we do note that there has been increasing attention to the study of the aesthetics of organizations (e.g., Gagliardi, 1996; Linstead & Hopfl, 2000; Strati, 1999). Over recent years the use of aesthetics within organisational studies has attained a much broader view that now embraces the use of organisational stories and the narrative (e.g., Boje, 2001; Gabriel, 1995), literature (e.g., Czarniawska-Joerges & de Monthoux, 1994; Sievers, 1996), drama (e.g., Mangham & Overington, 1987), music (eg. Barrett, 2000; Hatch, 1998) and other artistic styles to analyze organisations (see Carr & Zanetti, 1998, 2000), and the Academy of Management has now a stream which invites the creative presentation of data, including poetry.

In addition, other forms of organizational presentation/representation may also be informed by cubism. For example, the cubist writer Gertrude Stein made the study of how words sound central to much of her writing. Stein was very aware of the socially constructed and arbitrary nature of language. For Stein, language has a social and historical context, and yet language is not fixed or immutable. She did not write according to the generally agreed conventions of syntax and grammar, and the material reality of her times was expressed through her word play and linguistic defiance. Her fractured grammar, discontinuous imagery and complex structures were a celebration of her liberation from the prison of narrative convention and an embracing of the creative potential made possible by the “destruction of everything” (cited in Walker, 1984: 148).

Stein’s work has been called bohemian, idiosyncratic and incomprehensible (Steiner, 1978). She has also been referred to as the most influential and experimental of all modernist writers. Working hard to find a linguistic form to give expression to her understanding of her immediate reality, Stein’s language, syntax, use of repetition (which she preferred to call “insistence”), and grammatical structure were her attempt to subvert linguistic conventions and literary tradition. Stein fought the restrictions of the conventional narrative and in particular, Stein sought to privilege the present dispensing with the narrative conventions of beginning, middle or end (cf. Boje, 2001).

Stein’s commitment to the present is nowhere more apparent than in her word portraits crafted during this cubist period in which Stein painted in the present and each sentence is as important as any other sentence (Steiner, 1978). Here is an example from the first paragraph of her portrait of Picasso:

One whom some were certainly following was one who was completely charming. One whom some were certainly following was one who was charming. One whom some were following was one who was completely charming. One whom some were following was one who was completely charming (Stein, 1912/1946: 293).

The syntax of the sentence is simple and repetitive. But there is movement. The simplicity and the repetition force the reader to note the shifts in the relationships between the simple words. The words appear the same; the movement is imperceptible; the sentence unfolds and the meaning builds and emerges. The image of Picasso is immediately clear but is also opaque. The reader puzzles. Picasso is charming. That is clear. It is apparent Picasso is charismatic. But we must study the language, because of the repetition we are forced to slow down. Note the sentence construction. Be aware of the words. Her use of the present. He is now and he is present. Her language is alive and gives life to her portraits.

This written portraiture is very similar to the painted portraits created by Braque and Picasso during their cubist period, portraits that do not resemble their subjects in their characteristic appearance. Just as the cubist painters introduced concrete materials into their visual images, Stein introduced concrete nouns, sensual adjectives and action verbs (Dubnick, 1984). The form produced by the cubists was there to live its own life, a life communicated by the subject but re-created in the object (Read, 1986: 78). In countering the argument that Stein’s writing is abstract and non-representational, Dubnick (1984) and Steiner (1978) maintain that Stein never abandoned the subject matter. And yet she acknowledged that many of her portraits had little relation to their subjects (Steiner, 1978).

It is clear Stein shared with the cubist artists her efforts to represent pure reality without resorting to the banality of mimicry or the earnestness of a “realistic” narrative. There was in their work a tension between representational art, typified as perception and the known, relational images described as conception (cf. Weick, 1999). For Stein, her portrayal of the material-reality was precise, detailed and exact. Like the visual

artists, Stein was in search of a method to convey her sense of pure reality, but the challenges of her prose and poetry may well go far beyond what is tolerable in contemporary organizational analysis.

For those with a postmodern temperament, the cubists' commitment to reality may blind the potential of cubism to represent the previously ignored, the privileged, the hidden, the exposed, the thought and the observed aspects of organizational life. And yet, a cubist analysis demands a playful and exacting exploration of the slippage of "epistemic trauma" (Vargish & Mook, 1999), of the complexity of the simple and the simplifying of the complex, of the banal, of the significant and the diverse, multiple and simultaneous dimensions of organisations. In the denial of one fixed position, cubism challenges the binary and asserts the many. Within the rubric of cubism, organisational voices, artefacts and illusions can be represented as conception as well as perception; the "truths" of the representation transmitted by rigorous and creative reflexivity.

For those reassured by the cubist acceptance of ontological certainty, the challenge of epistemological relativities may again prove too overwhelming for acceptance. And yet, although the early cubist practitioners such as Picasso and Stein were to move in their later works into greater abstraction (see Dubnick, 1984; Steiner, 1978), cubism is firmly grounded in the representation of reality. The search for all cubist artists was to represent what was a truer and more appropriate reality (Golding, 1988; Vargish & Mook, 1999). For cubists, reality was greater than could be observed (or measured) and included what was referred to by artist Paul Klée as "latent truths" (in Schwarz, 1997: 6). Just as it was for cubists, so too do organisational writers confront the challenge to represent the known and not-known reality of their chosen study – the representational approach differs but yet there is resonance with the commitment to developing a representational style that reflects reality.

In conclusion, we hope that others find such challenges provocative, for we see parallels between the challenges raised by the cubist work and the context of the emerging global knowledge economy. As Mohrman (2001) has argued, the seemingly continuous-discontinuous transition to the knowledge economy has presented great turbulence for the workforce. This turbulence offers significant challenges for representation through organizational analysis, analysis that we suggest may well be informed by cubist style.

In this paper, we have argued that the essence of the cubist temperament, whether expressed in painting or in writing, is the desire to represent a range of knowledges and experiences as a reality while at the same time inviting the audience to contemplate their own repertoire of experiences and knowledges of that same reality. It is apparent there are several critical factors that assert their significance in this representation – the referential object to be represented; the creator's relationship with that object; the creator's choice of medium to represent the reality of the object; the creator's representation; the audience's relationship to the representation (now in turn a referential object) as well as the audience's experience of the represented object.

Working in this way precludes any possibility of certainty or fixed point or single (correct) reading. In order to stimulate the creative dialogue between artist, audience and the piece of work, the writing or painting must be fluid, contingent and relative. The creation and reading of a cubist piece of work is thus inherently complex because of the fluidity of its essence. And yet, because of this essential uncertainty, cubism is an art that invokes not ambiguity but indeed simultaneity. For ambiguity is premised on the assumption of a correct reading that may or may not be apparent. Such a notion of a deterministic and privileged knowledge is however inconsistent with the principles of cubism. In contrast, simultaneity embraces the possibility of holding multiple experiences and knowledges to inform the creation and reading of cubist works. This acknowledgement of limitless experience and readings made possible by simultaneity serves as a defining element of such work. What is also apparent is the absence of privilege in the dynamic between audience and artist (visual or literary) - both artist and audience partners in the creative flux of knowingness (cf. Chia, 1995). The audience must engage with the work without judgement and without the desire to "solve the puzzle (of the text or painting)". This is not only postmodern. It is cubist.

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