



# Order under erasure? Disorganisation and the disorganising of ‘unmanaging’

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## abstract

Ahead of discussing the ‘disorganising’ effects of management’s deepening alignment with money, I review how Cooper (1986) reveals the divisions of the disciplines of knowledge as di-visions. Arguing that his ‘cleansing’ of these disciplines conflates the ‘will to order’ with the ‘will to purity’, I adopt the term ‘institution’ as a way of putting ‘organisation’ under erasure. Returning to sociological work ignored by the ‘new institutionalists’ helps infuse a *motility* into the complexity and entanglement of social and moral orderings. In then contrasting Cooper’s silence on management with my ethnographic research on ‘unmanaging’ (Munro, 2001, 2002), I go on to address ‘double-crossing’ as a method of making a ‘clearing’ from the modernist logic that polarises order/disorder and organisation/disorganisation into binary pairings.

## Introduction

We live in an old chaos of the sun.  
– Wallace Stevens, Sunday Morning

The ascendancy of Western ideas of order came under a mounting critique during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Expressly rational and reductive in its approach, orthodoxy was increasingly shown to be highly exclusive in its scope and concerns. Knowledge is ‘ordered’ by drawing together only those matters that are seen to be consistent with each other, what Foucault (1970) calls ‘the

same'. This ordering is then narrowed further, in the view of American pragmatists as well as more prominently in the stream of thought evolving on the European continent, by obviating any disordering elements in favour of an appearance of order. This failure of the prevailing body of knowledge to be more open and inclusive reflects not only a will to order, but stems from a logos of purity that creates an *obligation* to privilege order over disorder within one's perspective (Munro, 1998a: 147).

The question is over how this over-privileging of ideas of order is to be remedied? This is no easy task, particularly in the light of Nietzsche exposing any perspective to be as self-limiting as it is self-serving. Specifically, contemporary critique draws attention to how perspective operates around certain key dyads and dualisms, such as male/female, mind/body, good/bad, light/dark, and so on. Certainly, in bringing back into play whatever is being forgotten, ignored, marginalised, or otherwise discounted, this device of pairing binaries works well to show how the favoured class dominates the exploited and how elites get perpetuated over the downtrodden. For all this, however, does tying together such oppositional pairings into *polarities*, as Cooper (1986) often does, not reduce towards the kind of single perspective caught by Nietzsche's critique?

Attention in the field of critical organisation has likewise focused on how disorder and disorganisation are marginalised as negatives. Where order and organisation are taken for granted as the positive terms, ideas of disorder and disorganisation will of course always be viewed negatively. Instead of being seen as issues needing to be explored further and understood, the rationalist logic of reductionism disposes manifestations of disorder and disorganisation variously as waste, impediments to success, or as limits to the growth of knowledge. Hence, while more scholars in organisation and management are now exploring these critical issues under the rubric of order/disorder and organisation/disorganisation, orthodoxy in its various forms continues to re-create its obligation to treat disorder and disorganisation as matters to be overcome or eliminated in a chase for improvement and advancement.

We exactly do need to know who benefits from any hierarchy in a division. My concern however is over a new orthodoxy over binary relations embalming disorder and disorder within its oppositional status. A case of continuing to

be ruled by the either/or of classical logic? In this essay I avoid conflating the will to order with the will to cleanse and, in what follows, contrast some other possibilities for putting order and organisation under erasure. For example, concepts like alignment, arrangement and disposal suggest themselves as alternative ways in which to explore the theme of organisation and disorganisation. To illustrate the potential of a more indirect approach, I set out some limits and benefits I found in my own work from adopting the term 'institution' in place of 'organisation'.

### **Making a 'clearing' and the limits of deconstruction**

The guiding contribution to the emerging field of organisation/disorganisation, as noted in the call for papers, is Robert Cooper's axiom that order and disorder are inseparable and co-constitutive features of all organizational life. As with other pairings identified in the work of Derrida (1981) among others, the usual aim in making these terms conjoint is to subvert the hierarchy of divisions in which one term is privileged as the positive term and kept dominant over the other. Yet Derrida's debate with Foucault over 'madness' and 'reason' perhaps best exemplifies how inverting such ideas of order may only result in entrapping the new perspective within the alignment of its prior enframing.

There is always a danger in merely inverting any hierarchy of terms in ways that do little to alter conceptions and so leave the general situation unchanged. As Heidegger (1993) presses, in his deconstruction of 'building' as the major metaphor for producing knowledge, we 'dwell' in language. So much so that even this radical inversion from building to dwelling will not escape from the enframing that he takes as preventing 'thinking'. More specifically, seeking to abandon one truth regime may only result in shifting to another truth regime. As Derrida (1981: 135) himself points out: 'the simple practice of language ceaselessly reinstates the new terrain on older ground'.

Cooper's (1986) approach to making a clearing begins by his breaking up the term division into its component parts, thus emphasising a 'di-vision' that pervades the whole production of knowledge. In ways that recall Foucault's (1973) insistence in *The birth of the clinic* on an interchangeability of 'seeing'

and 'saying' as giving rise to the modern institution of medicine, Cooper argues that it is *di-vision* – 'seeing' through the divisions on which a discipline is founded – that allow us to 'say' what there is to know. A neophyte unable to 'see' through these divisions, which create the categories and classification on which knowledge in the discipline grows, thus excludes themselves from entry into the profession.

In addition to the prospect of retreating to 'older ground', inverting hierarchies also retains the either/or framing of 'doubles' that is already inherent in the human sciences. In commenting on one of Cooper's (1997) key inversions 'the labour of division', in which he juxtaposed the work of Foucault and Durkheim, I noted how he overlooked how 'Doubles', in Foucault's analysis, already haunt the human sciences (Munro, 1997a: 28). The trajectory of modern knowledge is not accomplished, according to Foucault (1970: 340) without the 'simultaneous appearance of the double', such as 'the thought and the unthought'. In knowledge seeking to attain purity in its ordering of things – what Foucault calls 'the same' – it is not only 'difference' therefore that is being pushed into the shadows. Inasmuch as the pivot of an oppositional perspective is already embedded as part of the resources of the human sciences, this also makes it hard for an inversion to escape from a truth regime.

### **Thinking with institutions**

Robert Cooper's distaste for using the term organisation became marked mostly in our daily conversation as colleagues in the Centre for Social Theory and Technology. As part of the ESRC doctoral course on poststructuralism I had been giving at Edinburgh University, I had already experimented with putting terms under erasure and was therefore happy to shift away from 'organisation' towards thinking only in terms of 'institution'. As it happens, the term institution proved just as footloose as the term organisation; and, indeed, in either the institutional or organisational literature, they are often used as synonyms. When a concept is used to cover almost everything, as is the fate of each of these contrasting terms, it soon loses purchase and so the scare quotes around each term above is to emphasise how they both stand as placeholders for potentially the same or very different phenomena.

My sense of institution, as an ethnographer, drew on the writings of Goffman and Garfinkel and thus runs deeper than the idea of social order being merely a set of 'rules' to guide everyday conduct. While the centrepiece of sociological theories of institutions is on how custom and convention bring about the good running of corporate or professional bodies, an over-emphasis on rigidity in routines and repetition masks the ways in which employees act as 'contributors' (Bencherki and Snack, 2016) to institutional life. Unfortunately, in the transfer of organisation studies out of sociology departments into business schools, much of the vitality of how everyday institutions work in practice, prominent in Edinburgh under the stewardship of Tom Burns and Sandy Stewart, has been dissipated.

To be sure Goffman's (1959) observations of the specifics of everyday conduct appear outmoded today. Taken as a whole, however, his extensive array of examples form an insistent display of how powerful mimesis is in the transmission of everyday conduct. In the hands of Goffman, this key trope in anthropology – the discipline in which Goffman's study was first published – governs the discreet and selective ways in which we adapt our behaviour to and from each other. Together with its counterpart institution – what he calls 'civil inattention' – Goffman's emphasis is on *performance*. In their attachment to institutions, or apparent detachment from them, persons make a display of identity in their everyday conduct and are thus 'in extension' from moment to moment.<sup>1</sup>

Garfinkel's (1967) insights into social milieu, if intricate and opaque, are different. Rather than observing action within a group like Goffman, Garfinkel's stress is on the circulation of accounts within any grouping, be it in a family, the workplace, or on jury service. Focusing on the *methods* by which people conduct themselves over what he calls 'membership', he shows how one's extension in belonging to one group or another depends on the particular set of accounts to which they are attaching or detaching

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<sup>1</sup> The idea of copying behaviour remains in the literature on role-models, but the power of mimesis in creating and sustaining culture is lost. So, too, senior managers try to seed into the circulation of accounts their favoured phrases. But in seeking to 'manage' discourse, they overlook the resistance of account-giving to top-down control. Any gain in communication is likely lip service to what is popularly known as management bullshit.

themselves. In ways that conform to Strathern's (1991; Munro, 2005) more general view of relations, the quality of one's identity and belonging in any formal institution or corporate body is nonetheless always 'partial and provisional' (Munro, 1996a). It is this undecidability, in particular, that turns account-giving into an endless effort to accomplish inclusion into one grouping and another (Munro, 1996b, 1999a; Bencherki and Snack, 2016: 283).

This matter of extension is far from being the mundane issue it appears on the surface. As I have argued elsewhere, extension is all we are ever 'in' (Munro, 1996a: 270) and it is in this matter of seeing persons in extension that separates out both mimesis and account-giving to be much richer concepts than either mere copying or ventriloquy. Against the common misconception of the social order requiring nothing more than an 'internalisation' of rules, persons actively deploy the institutions of mimesis and account-giving to make their conduct meaningful. This is because the specific institutions they, wittingly or unwittingly, attach to, or detach from, are read by others as a display of their identity or belonging.

### **The motility in mimesis and belonging**

While Meyer and Rowan (1977) do reference the institutional work of Berger and Luckman (1967), they reduce the role of customs and conventions as the great guide to conduct to that of mandatory 'rules' for behaviour. This switch from guide to rules perpetuates a view of individual action as being highly restricted, if not rigid. Specifically, the 'new institution' work of DiMaggio and Powell (1983), which looks back to Meyer and Rowan as the seminal study, sees institutions as creating an 'iron cage' – akin to how Weber projected the growth of the more formal rules of bureaucracy. Consequently, any break with the 'rules' (Scott, 2001) is taken to constitute an infraction, one automatically assumed to contribute to disorder; and would – if not 'corrected' – lead to disorganisation.

In pointing out how account-giving is an endless affair, directed at sustaining one's partial and provisional inclusion (as well as avoiding the all-too present risks of exclusion), my reading of Garfinkel broadens out these

understandings of social order. In being diverted away from more rational concerns into aspects of identity-making, members attach to accounts in ways that can subtly alter the identity they are performing to each other (Munro, 1999b). For example, putative members can feel an over-riding obligation to translate 'what the devil they are up to' (Geertz, 1973) into the concerns of the everyday discourse in circulation by whatever side they feel they supposedly should be on. Hence communication within formal institutions, from business corporations to government agencies, is thus typically much more indirect, and potentially more disorganising, than management theories suppose (see also Vasquez and Kuhn, 2019).

This displacement in account-giving is either missed or treated as merely idiosyncratic. For example, Meyer and Rowan (1977) in pressing their 'decoupling' thesis focus on the way in which myth and ceremony is rationalised to create legitimacy for all kinds of formal institutions, from private to public sector. Their main emphasis is on ritual and rites being used by managers for purposes of putting up a 'front' (as Goffman might say) to regulatory regimes. This has left as invisible the role and importance of everyday institutions in ordering the main activities as if these were all fine by virtue of being conducted 'backstage'. Although there is now more research that recognises the importance of 'internal' institutions, this has done little to rectify Meyer and Rowan's failure to underline how the gain in legitimacy from the 'front' covers up the strategic and exploitative acts conducted by managers.

This limiting the social order to a mechanical imprinting of institutional rules has further led to suppositions of the moral order only being mutable over time; a perspective that underestimates the potential for upsets or change to happen quickly. Whereas Garfinkel notes how an occasional transgression in an account can be handled as 'Just Harry', I have suggested how another might be picked up and circulated in a way that considerably alters conduct.<sup>2</sup> As

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<sup>2</sup> As Egon Bittner (1955) puts the matter, organisation is 'the production of its members'. While membership is a potential source of motility in how 'organisation' is changing all the time, his formulation should not be mistaken for the quite different thesis of modernism, namely that individuals alone manufacture the world.

Derrida says, word gets around. In reassessing what Goffman and Garfinkel offer in terms of extension, discussed in the previous section, a strong case emerges for there being much potential *motility* to events and outcomes (Munro, 2004a). As shown for example in managers' endless attempts to perform themselves as being 'in control' (Munro, 1999a), any shift in the play of attachment and detachment, through these processes of mimesis and belonging, can affect or even alter the social or moral order.

So, too, what Goffman calls an infraction in behaviour might be overlooked by virtue of 'civil inattention'. Or it might be taken up in ways that significantly modify the particulars of that institution. Specifically, where movements like actor-network theory (Callon, 1984; Munro, 2009) have sought to explain stabilities in domination through ideas like that of immutable mobiles, Latimer and Munro (2009) have pressed how small shifts in or alignments over materials bring an instability to alliances and agendas.<sup>3</sup> In sum this notion of motility looks to be key to understanding sudden and unexpected shifts in communal moods, economic modalities, or social movements in which loyalties say turn to hate, or where the dominance within an actor-network quickly alters or even reverses.

### Agency and the sedimentation of institutions

Crucial to the perspective that advances modernism is a long-standing process of *individuation* in society. This kind of individuation, much studied by sociologists, should not be confused with the celebration of the individual as the only source of agency. The first is an on-going process of individuating the social order, which, among other things, now disseminates accountability for corporate failures down to individuals, like charging a nurse for a death occurring in a hospital. The latter, as illustrated earlier in the critique of

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<sup>3</sup> In addressing switching between different cultural materials as 'motility', Latimer (2018) explains 'persons are figured as attaching *and* detaching themselves (or others) to and from materials in ways which have potency. What I have shown in my work is how in everyday life in many different settings there are endless *shifts* in extension that can constitute not just potent moves, but also help balance, stabilise or even disrupt the multiple agendas that make up the ordering of healthcare and which position patients and practitioners alike'.

systems theory (Silverman, 1970), is a philosophical position that attacked the granting of agency to higher order bodies, and which holds that the only source of force is the individual (Munro and Collins, 2011).<sup>4</sup> In seeming to be opposite sides of the same coin, they might well be taken as a key example of di-vision, but unlike Cooper's binary pairings there is little sense of conflict in what they are ordering.

Individuation in the form of pressing accountability for corporate acts onto individuals at the coal face certainly goes hand in hand with modernism's insistence on agency being returned to the individual. Yet the force behind each arises from a separate source. Compatible as they may seem, there is a need to see beyond the presumption that the social order is merely a moral order, which it is often taken for today. Overlap is not identity. For accountability to be individuated and disseminated down the social order, requires the moral order to be reduced to a Kantian ethics (Munro, 1997b) in which persons carry a responsibility to the self rather than to society.

What clouds the entanglement of these twin movements is the taken-for-granted assumption in the literature, discussed above, that any disruptive behaviour of the 'individual' is held in check by being subject to the well-established rules and regulations. Yet insofar as it is the institutional body itself that is being broken up by individuating corporate responsibility, the dissemination of accountabilities brings with it a heightened potential for disorganisation. In sum, it is no longer custom and convention that acts as a guide. Rather the effect of individuating the moral order to the self is one of creating an *obligation* to privilege order over disorder within one's own perspective (Munro, 1998a: 147).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> In terms of institutions being denied agency, recall Mrs Thatcher's often quoted words: 'There is no such thing as society. There are individuals'. In adding 'there is also family', she honoured this institution by securing Middle East monies for her son and gifting him a baronetcy, breaking with the abolition of hereditary principles.

<sup>5</sup> Speculatively, these movements may explain the current division in management responsibilities between line management and 'HR' (human resources), the latter having been transformed out of personnel departments, which ostensibly were about the care of people. As I discussed in CSTT seminars at Keele, in order to push accountability down, it is necessary for managers to avoid giving orders or

The point here is that modernism does not only affect persons, it also individuates corporate entities – as if each also stands alone as an ‘organisation’. Specifically, the dogma of agency coming down solely to the action of individuals overlooks an archaeology of institutions that have gone before and become established as precedent. This brings me to what I take to be one of the most profound ideas in earlier versions of the sociology of organisation. This is the idea of the *sedimentation* of institutions. While the notion of sedimentation is not unfamiliar, what I think is missing today is that the social order is individuated at the same time as the moral order is being reduced to the ethics of an individual. Taken seriously, sedimentation highlights the point that institutions do not come from nowhere. Rather, in practice, they both evolve from – and are thus enframed by – institutions that are already in place.

My argument here is that the space/time into which institutional change can take place is crowded by what has ‘gone before’. In pressing this key anthropological trope, I am however not just making a point about how managers switch between technologies of control in their sheer proliferation (Munro, 1995). I am picking up on the fact that institutions do not only act upon individuals; rather, inasmuch as individuals are activating one institution or another, *institutions have to be also considered as acting upon each other*. It is this interaction and interdependence among institutions of all kinds and levels that contributes to the kind of complexity and entanglement that makes the outcome of any managerial change undecidable and its orders and orderings liable to be disorganising.

## **Disorganisation and ‘cleansing’ the disciplines**

Cooper’s 1986 paper holds up today as one of the most important articles in the field of organisation theory. Looking back, however, I am unclear about whatever clearing Robert (he detested people calling him Bob) thought he was

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direction. As this ‘withholding’ of direct orders and supervision has the potential to be highly disorganising, HR have instead created protocols and procedures that seek to eclipse the earlier reliance on customs and conventions. Of course, these are ‘ever-failing technologies’ a la Foucault and so the end result is for them to contribute to further disorder and disorganisation.

making. The question I have is over the priority he gives to the existence of disorganisation over organisation. Is Cooper using disorganisation as a foil; a rhetorical device to uproot the taken-for-granted, dominant assumptions of order and rationality in organization theory and practice? Or, as evidenced by his making organization 'the appropriation of order out of disorder' (1986: 328), is he addressing more an empirical realm that gets occluded by knowledge, a shadow world on which ideas of order and organisation are always parasitic, even predatory?

As he moves freely across the institutions of organisation theory, philosophy and sociology, Cooper helpfully reveals many of the divisions of these disciplines to be di-visions. It is these that order the field and marshal knowledge in ways that dictate what is to be seen. There is, however, a particular set of di-visions that he keeps in mind while seeking to deconstruct the power of normalisation. Revolving around Heidegger's own division of being and nothingness, these include inclusion/exclusion, presence/absence, visible/invisible and pure/impure. While alerting his readers to how the first three operate to dictate what counts as knowledge, and thus settle what gets appropriated or dismissed, it is this last division around purity that captures Cooper's special attention.

A signal contribution of Cooper (1986) is bringing together the different ways others like Derrida and Marcuse establish how the 'will to cleanse' – the push for purity in knowledge – is itself driven by a 'will to power'. So far so good. However, drawing on Canguilhem's analysis of how normalisation works in this way, Cooper asserts that 'organisation has to be read in a new light' and that its component features – namely 'the division of labour, administrative centralisation, standardisation and rational planning' – are 'innocently understood as the rational expedients of modern administration' (1986: 330). Yet the magisterial force in his rendering of organisation is out of time. Not only would the 'innocence' of these component features be devastatingly exposed in Bauman's (1989) analysis of the holocaust, the purity of each of

these functions was already under attack in both management practice and theory.<sup>6</sup>

In also absenting management from being a key component in his analysis of organisation theory, Cooper (1986) is oddly excluding management from being tasked with its supervisory role: namely that of ensuring ‘purity’ in the good running of its institution. Within the framing of classical organisation theory, the primary function of management is that of ensuring the conformance of operations with policy. In line with Weber’s notion of bureaucracy, the authority of management was directed to their ‘cleansing’ role, one that could maintain, theoretically, the purity of the organisation system. Forgetting he has already identified any such role more generally as *therapeutic* – and thus invested with force – Cooper (1986) is thus strangely silent over management here, either in its organising or disorganising effects.

More potently, Cooper fails to understand how managers were already operating well outside the scope of this classical framing. Marris (1964) for example had long pointed to management’s ‘capitalist’ power growing with the diminishing influence of shareholders. So, too, Meyer and Rowan (1977) had already captured, as I noted above in discussing their decoupling thesis, how management had reduced their legitimating role in institutions to a ‘front’; and so freed managers to run things as they liked ‘backstage’ – out of sight of regulatory supervision. Indeed, under its cloak of legitimation, management as an institution would over the next fifty years come to colonise almost every other form of organisation, dominating the direction and shape of business corporations to universities and from independent charities to government and its quangos.

Drawing on periods of immersion in my ethnographic studies of management, beginning with *Managing by Ambiguity* (1995) and *Belonging on the Move* (1998b), I pointed to how managerial agendas – what I termed *The New*

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<sup>6</sup> For example, rational planning was exposed as a myth by Mintzberg back in 1970 and the command function of administrative centralisation was unpicked from its control task by Sloan in General Motors around 1920. So too specialisation in the division of labour was partially turned on its head through flexibility agendas during the 1980s, while standardisation was cleverly disguised by firms adapting Toyota’s ‘pull’ system of production.

*Commercial Agenda* (1993) – were now regularly turned against their classical function or structure. With emerging voices in the field of critical management identifying managerialism as spreading into the public realm and other writers talking about post-bureaucracy, I was far from being alone in this respect. Specific to my own approach, however, was a close attention to the *disorganising* work of management, in both its deliberate and unwitting forms, often disregarding divisions from specialisation and hierarchy in favour of inventing its own divisions, such as ‘managers who deliver’ versus ‘glorified supervisors’ (Munro, 1995, 2003).

Put simply, the command structure of hierarchy has become increasingly dislocated from the tenets of administration theory. Some of this research is summarised in my papers on ‘Unmanaging’ (Munro, 2001b, 2002), which term I had adopted to make my understanding of the consequence arising from struggles around conflict and power distinct from Cooper’s focus on disorganisation:

...conflict and power has the additional merit of establishing the central problem of order: the *reversibility* of any order. What may begin as a ‘supplement’ to the everyday disorder of living and breathing becomes, in turn, privileged and then is given priority as *the* organization. (Munro, 2001b: 397)

Moreover, I was suggesting that what has turned management into such an omnipotent and all-reaching institution is less a reliance on management knowledge evolving as a discipline and due more to its internalisation of the money system begun by Sloan. Specifically, the exercise of management expertise today works through the granting of budgets – and critically budgets that may be withdrawn at any time. The combination of withholding the delegation of formal authorities and only distributing the discretion to spend on a partial and provisional basis, has resulted in a continuous restitution of the domination powers of top management (Munro, 2018, 1998b, 1999a, 1999b, 2001b).

### **Double-crossing and slipping between truth regimes**

In highlighting his theme as disorganisation, Cooper (1986) sets his sights on deconstructing how the institutions of organisation theory, philosophy and

sociology dictate our ideas of ‘order’ and ‘organisation’. This said, his excavation of divisions in these disciplines treats the ‘will to order’ as if it is entirely integral to the ‘will to cleanse’. Inasmuch as it is the *purity* of these institutions that he is taking to be the enemy, his opposition to ordering seems directed more by his will to reverse any disciplinary cleansing. In attempting to get away from the binding force of these institutions, Cooper is always *un-bounding* the divisions of these disciplines – the di-visions on which knowledge is founded and which as discussed earlier help us ‘see’ the world. So rather than attempting to make a ‘contribution’ to each literature that he enters, Cooper glides across them as if each had no boundaries.

Unlike Cooper, I entered into each of these institutions of knowledge as a putative member, happy to understand the world as it is seen therein and able to work inside by way of making explicit contributions to that field. To be sure each discipline acts on its members as if it is *the* truth regime. And, in line with how Garfinkel identified how members give accounts, sanctions hover over those who fail to uphold the purity of the institution. Inasmuch as the obligation here focuses on the ‘will to cleanse’, my hunch was that the underlying orders and orderings might be glimpsed in the ‘in-between’ of slipping out from one truth regime into another. Rather like that experienced by Cooper between sleeping and waking, this tiny moment would be imperceptible: ‘...in that imperceptible moment between the known and the unknown: lasts but a minute and is quickly gone’ (Cooper, 2001: 169).

It is mainly in respect of this immersion within the disciplines of knowledge that my approach differs from Cooper’s. If there is truth in Foucault’s axiom that one cannot escape from a truth regime, it is also self-evident that we no longer live in a single truth regime but rather in a multiplicity of disciplines. Over time I have therefore immersed myself in several disciplines, boxing my thinking up respectively in the fields of systems, culture, self and language. Picking up on the writings of poststructuralists, I have labelled this technique as ‘double-crossing’.<sup>7</sup> This is first an emphasis on the device of doubling back

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<sup>7</sup> The method of double-crossing I am discussing here relies on a more literal and more sophisticated use than I made in a philosophical paper in which I explicated Heidegger’s (1962) method of making a clearing (Munro 2004b). In interrogating and excavating Heidegger’s (1993/1978) method of crossing back and forth to make his ‘gathering’ of Being, I was taking Hillis Miller to task for his critique of

on any crossing from one regime, say language theory in philosophy to another like the domain of culture in social anthropology. And secondly it acknowledges how – in smuggling ideas back and forth across competing disciplines – one likely borrows in ways that will appear to betray the set of divisions that informs each discipline (Munro, 2016).

As every child knows, one can play with orders and orderings, rather than be crushed by them. Hence if crossing over brings even the slightest loosening from the orderings of one regime, then might not re-immersion into another dislodge the transfer of ideas enough to see them differently? Enough play perhaps to make a ‘gathering’ (Heidegger, 1993), or re-gathering, of what is being excluded in the ordering of each discipline. While any shift might be miniscule, in holding onto that finding one can then cross backwards and forwards into the other truth regimes – again and again – until perhaps one sees each anew? Indeed, by keeping one’s findings ‘partial and provisional’, one can remain open – marginally – and observe how ‘the disposal of the world’ shifts as one crosses backwards and forwards between related ideas borrowed from one discipline or another (Munro, 2016).

In addition to attending to the workings of society in the mood of consumption and the methods of science, my work on management has gone alongside this exploration of the institutions of language and culture. A key theme running through my study of these broader forms of organisation stems from examining their connections and disconnections under the play of *disposal*. In returning the term to its earlier meanings of arrangement and ordering, this frees disposal from its current demotion to mere waste and, further, promotes its ordering powers to come *ahead* of those of production and consumption (Munro, 2016). Although these studies might seem to set up yet another perspective, I see disposal – when linked to thematics like connection/disconnection – as having potential to open up, as well as overlap with, the work of others on organisation/disorganisation.

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Heidegger, in which Miller was all but accusing Heidegger of double-crossing the reader in the more everyday sense of not being straight with them.

## **Concluding comments**

In the wake of Foucault's treatment of theories as institutions, Cooper (1986) helps to expose the obligation within a discipline to 'cleanse' knowledge and keep it pure. This is a signal contribution, one that requires unpacking in future research to appreciate its vast implications. A first concern, nonetheless, is that it is surely a mistake to conflate the 'will to order' with the 'will to cleanse'. To be sure, the institutions of knowledge have a habit of inverting the natural hierarchy of order over purity. Making the purity of the discipline its priority is what is intended to keep knowledge apart from the detritus of disorder and disorganisation – which may well include the ideas of other disciplines. It is also what makes the institutions of knowledge calcify and no longer able to renew their ordering powers.

My second concern is that the world moves on, dragging knowledge behind it as much as its theories affect how things are run. As Argyris and Schön (1974) observed, we should look to see how theories get used in practice. Noticing say how managers adopt one theory one moment and turn to a contradictory one the next, as for example McGrath et al (2021) evidence, involves getting dirty through immersion in the field. Of course, as ethnographers know, relying on the ground of one's observations can open one to accusations of 'going native' and of betraying one's discipline. Just the accusation of switching identity and belonging to those in the field may be sufficient to encourage a member to marginalise their comments; thus keeping the discipline immune from criticism of its core assumptions.

While sceptical in the face of orthodoxy, with its tendency to favour linear and one-dimensional truths, I remain susceptible to a will to ordering – at least the kind of ordering that keeps open the serendipity of beginnings and arrival. At the same time, wherever there are signs of appropriation and exploitation – and there is so much to identify here – I favour research on the relations of disorder and disorganisation. This said, while pressing for ways that unpin them from being mere opposites to order and organisation, it is well to remain doubtful about the kind of relativism that insists on an 'anything goes' abandonment of the disciplines. Given Cooper's own treatment of language as composed of binary terms, à la Saussure, it seems a smaller step just to push

back from the polarity of any division and so defer oneself from becoming entrapped in the opposition of any such difference.

In addition to mentioning my ethnographic studies in terms of my trope of 'unmanaging', I have spent a considerable part of this essay in recalling instead my shift to thinking with 'institution' instead of 'organisation'. Counterpointing the different uses of the term institution within the domains of sociology and organisation studies has been in part my way of putting the term organisation under erasure. Here I discussed how token ideas of social order and culture have become in institutional theory, with the so-called 'new institutionalism' simply overlooking the kind of everyday institutions that were critical to earlier sociological theorising.<sup>8</sup> In making this clearing, what I have found goes well beyond a demise that reflects modernism's endless processes of individuation of the 'social order'. In picking up on how the 'moral order' is also changed and reordered by a celebration of self as the sole agent of change, what I now stress is for future research to look for the quite different forces that are driving accountability and responsibility down the hierarchy.

In investigating management's autopoietic entanglement with money (2018), a major line of my exploration has been to unpick how management uses force silently, particularly by harnessing its use of budgeting for its own ends.<sup>9</sup> In contrast to Cooper's valorisation of disorganisation, my research here has focused on the *disorganising* effects arising from the rise and rise of

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<sup>8</sup> The seminal study of Meyer and Rowan (1977) for the 'new institutional' theory does mention Goffman in passing but draws on his later work *Interaction Rituals*. As ritual is commonly used today in ways that leave it bereft of its anthropological meaning, my hunch is that they adopted the term as a mechanistic trope that evacuates all that Goffman (1959) was doing with 'institutions' in his earlier work.

<sup>9</sup> A starting point was to notice a visible rise in influence of accountants at my workplace in the early seventies, in line with issues of management control moving them away from their historic bookkeeping role. Earlier forms of budgeting, in comparing actual numbers after the fact to those budgeted, did little more than offer a running commentary on the profitability of activities. The priority in this earlier division of the future and the past has been quite reversed. Management not only uses budgeting to plan the world in advance, managers do so in ways that are re-organising time itself: what should come after, the future, now goes before (Munro, 1997c).

management as the only institution able to manage and govern. For example, in my reassessment of the work of Goffman and Garfinkel, I have identified how the ‘motility’ in management – now you feel its force, now it never was there – has allowed managers both to set and shift all kinds of organisation boundaries (Munro, 1999b). Indeed, while researchers continue to spot any conflict in managerial agendas as a source of disorder or disorganisation, such ambiguities are now so commonplace that their very ordinariness has now given them a logic all of its own.

It is in this ability of managers to connect and disconnect – apparently at will – between say the authority of legitimation and the force of domination that my work has differed radically from the new institutionalists and now overlaps with other researchers in critical management. As Ratner and Plotnikof explain:

...building on discussions of power in dis/organization studies (Munro, 2003, 2005; Spoelstra, 2005), we echo their stressing of the always-already disordered aspect of any ordering force. With the concept of partial connections, we found that exploring connectivity as well as cuts, gaps and disconnections produce critical insights into how a dis/organizing technology may differentiate relations and cause normative struggles (e.g. a data-ethical controversy) that are neither controllable nor equally distributed (Munro, 2001; Plotnikof and Pedersen, 2019). (2021: 16)

It is this partial and provisional nature of attachment and detachment that facilitates management in making its ‘cuts, gaps and disconnection’. In so doing, the institution of management has created a world of entanglement and systems-like complexity in which, unfortunately, the only solution nowadays to bad management is more management!

Looking to the organisation literature today, let me conclude by saying it is likely that the actual disciplines I worked under are no longer quite as relevant. It is not only management that has exceeded its classical boundaries, organisation studies has also expanded hugely. As evidenced by the work of the Centre for Social Theory and Technology, this has been accomplished through organisation studies taking into itself much of the knowledge belonging to the human sciences. My impression of the state of play, though, is not one of unification with the field. Rather, a scrutiny of reviewers’ comments suggests heightened competition between sub/disciplines, in

which say versions of institutional theory, sourced by the image of Weber's iron cages, for example, vie with versions of critical theory sourced by the Frankfurt school. Whether these will bring about a story of revolving doors in the way Foucault saw the human sciences – sometimes standing apart and sometimes taking in each other's washing – is hard to say. But we should recognise how this current struggle for dominance between these houses of power – as Weber called such institutions – might yet lead to a kind of disorganisation in organisation studies that leaves it unable to unpick the entanglement and complexity that is already rampant in management practice.

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