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RE-COGNIZING ONTOLOGY IN MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATIONS The Relevance of the Intellectual Debate for Societality and Fairness in Management

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Abstract

This paper argues that the development of research in the field of management and organisations is dependent on its ability to unravel itself of the bonds of the rational mode of knowing. Thus, re-cognising the ontological dimension of Man and drawing on the fundamental ideas emerging from the post-modern debate. It also points out some of the shortcomings inherent in the present state of knowledge and hence argues for alternative research approaches in this field.

Introduction

Today, irrespective of disciplines, the scholar communities are confronted with the spread of an intellectual stream which comes under the heading - postmodernism, which is more an attitude and/or perspective by which the world is subjected to scrutiny rather than being a set of concepts, theories or dogmas. In many provinces of research and scientific inquiry, work inspired by this intellectual stream are revisiting and sometimes challenging the traditional modes of knowing. Faced with this challenge, an increasing number of attempts aimed at understanding the ideas which emerge from the post-modern mode of thinking and knowing are being made in a wide variety of disciplines. Even though these attempts do not seem to be successful, many authors have tried to evaluate the theoretical and/or practical relevance of post-modern thoughts and hence their implications for the respective disciplines. In the field of management and organization, attempts have been made to comprehend the epistemological basis of post-modern thinking especially with regard to its conception of knowledge and its implications for management and organisations (Cooper and Burrell 1988; and Burrell 1988). Again, using the intellectual lens of the post-modern thinking, attempts have been made to take a closer look at and thus, to reread into specific areas such as the archaeology (Hopwood 1987) and genealogy (Hoskin 1986) of accounting. This sort of rereading, as a possible interpretation, makes apparent the arbitrariness of norm formation and the sustaining of disciplinary power through accounting practices. Yet, very bold and insightful attempts of this nature are viewed with scepticism as to their validity, and above all, as to their contribution to the advancement of management studies. Unable to draw theory-like maxims from their post-modern inspired premises. These re-reading efforts take the form of essays and/or contributions to an on-going debate. From our point of view, it is just perfect that, when dealing with a new kind of ideas, one is not necessarily obliged to violate their fragility by forcing them into familiar schemes nor modelling them into recognizable patterns. Thus, post-modern ideas

are indeed new in our field and may not, at this stage, provide the answers to all that we are trained to expect. If we consider these new ideas as a new paradigm (Kuhn, 1962), then it is needless to say that it takes time before the new paradigm gains some acceptance and even more time before it gains credibility and starts to be productive. Besides, even the notion of something being productive has to be reconsidered if we are to take post-modern thought seriously. Thus, from the post-modern perspective, a productive theory or idea does not have to be linked with efficiency increasing models or with the already existing list of instruments of domination and control. An idea is productive if it allows for a new re-reading of taken-for-granted patterns and boundaries as well as for a problematization of their legitimacy. Post-modern ideas are not meant to facilitate the creation of more rules and norms than we already have. On the contrary, they are meant to question their emergence and conditions of possibility. Thus, postmodernism is hardly an ism (Lyotard, 1979; 1986). It does not constitute a new *Weltanschauung* produced by a specific epistemology or methodology. This is why work inspired by this current, particularly in our field; first of all have to be infused with the major stances of postmodernism before making their own exploration.

In this paper we suggest a twofold of argumentation. On one hand, we will try to present some of the major insights that can be gained from the post-modern thoughts as perceived by us. On the other hand, we will point out some fundamental implications they have for management and organisation research. We argue that, in the light of post-modern thinking, organizational actors can be reconsidered from a wider, ontological point of view. Furthermore, we will argue that this ontological conception makes more apparent and thus accountable for, that which it opposes, i.e. the artificial organizational Man. Aside from the arguments and ideas which are put forward in this paper, we also suggest a conversational mode of knowing and interacting with readers within this field. And even the form and style of this paper should convey this idea. Thus, we wish to see the conversational mode of knowing also as a way of conceptualising the managerial and organisational practices.

Rational Mode of Knowing Under Suspicion

It is not an exaggeration to say that post-modern work encompass the strongest and deepest critical stances of the rational mode of knowing. Drawing from the forgotten and the suppressed philosophies, postmodernists seem to question the very basis of scientific human understanding, i.e. the prevailing mode of knowing. More specifically, they question the epistemological foundations of science which we have been trained to accept and take for granted as sources of truthful, secure and, therefore, practical knowledge. But this questioning does not mean that the scientific knowledge is declared invalid by the postmodernists. The questioning and the criticism must be seen as a way of gelatinising the supremacy of the traditional scientific mode of knowing (i.e. the rational mode of knowing) which incorrectly claims to be the source of human wealth, happiness and freedom. Rather, the post-modern thinkers seem to suggest the opposite. The rational mode of knowing, the world which it produces and hence its implications for our lives has its foundation in the epistemological stances which, as questioned by the postmodernists, succeed only in creating a world of servitude (*La Bo, tie*), indifference and human qualitative desolation. For, because it has its epistemological foundations in discursive reason, this mode of knowing, in order for it to be and to prosper, excludes all that which do not conform to the prescriptions of reason, and a thereby annihilating much of that which is truly human. By excluding and eliminating that which cannot be expressed in ratio-analytical terms, the rational mode of knowing dismisses the world of human uniqueness. It eliminates the uniqueness of individual experience, knowledge, feelings, sentiments, emotions, ethics, aesthetics, sensibility and sensitivity as truth worthy and valid knowledge. Thus, an important aspect of the post-modern textuality, is its insistence upon the irreplaceable value of human bodies and minds and one's contexts as sources of valuable knowledge. Yet, in order to understand the spirit of post-modern thinking one must not look at its propositions but at what it constantly sets to question. Indeed, it is to be understood more as an intellectual attitude rather than as a doctrine.

This constant questioning is addressed to the discursive nature of the rational mode of knowing. More specifically, it is addressed to the claim which this mode of knowing makes of being universal. Its alleged coherence, truth and objectivity (independent from the subject that created it) is thus questioned and accused of being imposed by a tyrannizing reason. Ever since Lyotard (1979) coined the expression tyranny of reason,

the "crusade" against that which is represented by the unacceptable tyranny of reason has become the leitmotiv of the post-modern writings. To them the rational mode of knowing is inscribed within a broader political and ideological framework. It constitutes a rhetoric of domination with the aim of maintaining and enforcing the prevailing structures of power. Consequently, the prescriptive content of this mode of knowing, they argue, cannot be taken as a sine qua non condition of the possibility of human knowledge.

Discursive Unity

One of the epistemological dimensions of the rational mode of knowing, which is often questioned by its critics is the apparent unity of the produced discourses; an impression which, combined with the authority of the latter, produces an effect of coherence and sometimes an unproblematic representation of reality. For, such unity is usually there first, to allow a process of exclusion (Foucault, 1969). Its major function is to eliminate notions that may diversify the alleged stable and/or constant meaning of the discourse and thereby destroy its authority. For, such a stability of meanings does not exist, neither in human practices nor in human understandings. Meanings are artefacts of language and of its logos. They have no other foundation than the arbitrary interpretations and choices of those who produce discourses. Foucault (1966), for instance, considering the formation of the human sciences shows how the simple recurrence of certain themes are sufficient to give them their actual meaning. He also demonstrates that many other themes could have been used to construct other meanings. But the inherent constraints of the logos in producing the unities of discursive practices are also to be found in the grammatological structure of language. Derrida (1967a), for example, exposes the way the grammatological structure of language, before anything is written, orders authoritatively the relations among the terms of a discourse. So also is the case with the objects which are constituted by the discursive production. Baudrillard (1968; 1973), examining the objects of economic discourses shows how, by mirroring each other, they delineate a closed, unified field of meaning. In that light, one can see that the rational necessity of coherence and unity has no justified epistemological ground. There is, therefore, no justification other than a discursive and a rhetorical one for any type of discourse of management to claim a privileged relationship between the meaning it produces and the reality it portrays and addresses.

Truth

Another epistemological dimension of the rational mode of knowing questioned by postmodernists is its production and dissemination of truths which it then claims to be independent of and which it uses as marks par excellence in order to legitimise its own proliferation and prosperity. As Foucault (1966; 1971) points out, this mode, which is so strongly anchored in the contemporary way of knowing, is itself a discursive artefact. The gelatinisation of truth and its contextualisation in relation to the conditions which make it speakable, is an ancient matter. That is, over the past centuries, different eras have practiced different ways of looking at the truth, and continuously shifting perspectives. The Ancient Greek philosophers (600 BC), for instance, had a particular conception of truth and falsity. To them, the truth had little to do with what was said but more to do with who said it and how it was said. The discourses that were regarded as bearers of truth were those which were uttered by people who held a legitimate right to say it. In turn, those people were saying the truth in accordance with the rituals and institutional norms prevailing among those to whom the truth was said. It was only later, that is during the period of transition between Hesiod and Plato, that the truth came to be associated with what the discourse said. In other words, truth was associated with the content of discourse and no longer with the subjects producing it. During this period, truth shifted from being a ritual action (the how or enunciation of a discourse), to being a propositional utterance (the what or content of a discourse). But this change of conception has no foundation other than that of a discursive authority already traceable, for instance, in the utterances of Parmenides (Daudi, 1991). In his reasoning about this shift, Nietzsche (1957; 1963; 1964) re-posing the question of the who, concludes that the will to tell the truth of any discourse is never innocent. To him, like Foucault (1975), the search for truth is only the facade behind which the will to power is hidden. To the postmodernists then, truth and falsity are only discursive categories, and their functioning as epistemological tools of knowledge production has no firm legitimation. In our field, the production of knowledge has, in most cases, been subjected to a similar process. Dominant discourses has

simply imposed themselves as truth uttering instances, with the right to describe, to explain and to represent practices and mental intensities in a way which, by far, transcends any possibility of discursive representation. As Pirandello, the Italian playwright would say, each of us has his/her own truth. This made sense in Pirandello's play, and does so in the plays of the managerial and organisational practices. In these days of polyculturalism and heterogenisation of societies, of individuation of moral positions and bursting values, one is inclined to think of these practices more in terms of their uniqueness and contextuality than in terms of ought to be patterns.

Universality

The questioning of the discursive truth, leads us to another dimension of the rational mode of knowing which comes under postmodernist scrutiny, namely, the will to universality. If the will to know is a search for power, then producing new knowledge is a search for a new power. But in power games nothing is stable. What is true at one time in one place is not necessarily--if ever--true at some other time in some other place. Yet, all discourses legitimating their content with the claim that they are based on universal rationality and in the same token non-temporal and non-situational. Thus, for example, the universe, to a physicist is essentially physical, to the sociologist, it is social and to the economist, economical, independent of time and places. In the human sciences, in particular, this implicit claim to universality is even less attainable. It is, for instance, what Lyotard (1979) tries to show in his criticism of Habermas' theory of communicative action (Habermas, 1971; 1984). What Lyotard does is to challenge Habermas' idea of the very possibility to ground communicative relationships in "universal reason". Lyotard argues that Habermas' ambition to anchor communicative action in a general consensus on propositional rationality is chimerical. This, because its basic assumptions are rooted in the ideas that humans are constantly in search of mutual understanding and that universal rationality may serve this purpose. Consensus on propositional rationality, Lyotard concludes, is utopia. It is utopia mainly because this search and its legitimation, in the last resort, becomes a blinder which diverts our attention from that which the whole project actually cannot encompass nor achieve. That is to say, we may even stop thinking of it as utopia. Thus, propositional rationality will never be able to recognize such extremely human and communicative types of actions such as the search for violence instead of discursive rationality; the search for deconstruction of language instead of its construction; the refusal to accept discursive rules (such as the acceptance of a common vocabulary) instead of accepting them; the search for silence and isolation instead of voicing and communicating. Universality, as an alleged quality of the rational mode of knowing, therefore, has no firmer epistemological basis than the notion of truth. Like the latter, universality ceases to make sense in a world of multiplicity and thus cannot claim to produce greater validity than any other quality of other modes of knowing.

Objectivity

Another epistemological dimension of the rational mode of knowing constantly questioned by postmodernists is its claim to a superior method in producing objective knowledge. On the surface, the suspicion about the idea of superior method may seem to have some air of familiarity with Feyerabend's "anything goes" (Feyerabend, 1975; 1978), or with his saying 'farewell to reason'(Feyerabend 1988). In this respect, it is unlikely that one can produce knowledge outside the "irrational" dimensions embedded in human faculty of judgement (Lyotard, 1983; 1985). The discursive nature of rationality ensures that method is and can only be a rhetorical play (Derrida, 1972; 1979; Foucault, 1971). If the play is spelled out in conformity with the prevailing and dominating norms, then the rhetoric which supports it is acclaimed as valid and the method as objective. To the post-modern thinkers the production of objective knowledge is intimately related to the paradoxical state of human rationality. Since rationality is discursive, there can be no discourse at the origin of which there is not a speaking 'subject'. Thus, when a 'subject' utters itself and claims to do it objectively, her or his utterance is, nevertheless, not situated in an object outside the self. S/he simply talks objectively from her/his subjective point of view, which is a paradoxical situation. From this paradox, it is obvious that humans cannot step out of their condition of 'subjects' and take a look at themselves as 'objects'. It is also clear that in no circumstances, can human 'subjects' come out of their Being, in order to say something about the human world without being immediately self implicated. There are, therefore, no 'human objects' out

there, but rather subjective discourses transforming other 'human subjects' into 'objects' (Baudrillard, 1983). Foucault (1961) has exemplified quite clearly this 'objectification' in the case of 'fools'. He traces the process by which fools were constituted as 'objects' of the discourse of psychiatry. He shows how, in that discourse, 'fools' lost their subjective qualities and how the discourse defined them as 'objects' of study and manipulation. This paradoxical relationship between subject and object, leads the postmodernists to question strongly whether it is possible in the first place to put other human beings under scrutiny and to ask questions about what they are. Instead, it is important to simply attempt to understand other 'subjects' just as they want to speak about themselves. In other words, it is important to perceive what is other in the other and not to consider others as similar 'objects'. Baudrillard (1987), for instance, has explicitly tried to develop a possible approach of the other by advocating a mode of letting 'others' speak for themselves. Thus, Objectivity, cannot be invoked to claim superior knowledge or constitute a secure epistemological tool.

The Discursive Trap

The constant questioning of the epistemological foundations of rational knowledge eventually boils down to facing the problems inherent in the transition between knowing and its expression. As soon as one attempts to express ones knowledge, one inevitably runs into problems connected with the inescapable linguistic nature of human expression. And it is those problems, which at once cannot be avoided, that constitute the trap by which we are perhaps caught in and for which there seem to be little chance for escape.

Constituting rational knowledge by expressing what one knows, as pointed out, results into an exclusion of what cannot be expressed (Foucault, 1971). It is also to comply with the referential world and logos of language (Derrida, 1967a). In that sense, any kind of knowledge, when rationally expressed, becomes a game of language. As such, as Wittgenstein wrote, the first thing to recognized is that we have knowledge of things which we have to be "silent" about since they cannot be said (Wittgenstein, 1958). He also pointed out that our only ground for knowledge may well be nothing more than an "air of familiarity. In that light, a question which arises is: does the expression of knowledge really enrich it? Put differently, is that expression simply a supplement to what we know? For, what we know, while still unexpressed, has a global quality, a fullness, and a plenitude which are broken down by written language. This language then introduces all the constraining rules of the logos. Can this totality, this plenitude, thus, be sustained by its expressed and written elements? Derrida is perhaps the contemporary thinker who has tried to break down this taken-for-granted correspondence between what we know and what we say we know in the most drastic manner. A few of his objections may be worth examining here. Concentrating on the written mode of discourse, Derrida argues that the immediate meaning which we possess is simply inexpressible in written form. First, because writing always means to push what one wants to say, i.e., one's meaning, into the future. The meaning of a text, so to speak, never comes before the end. In that sense, Derrida argues, the meaning of a text is always deferred but also, by the same token, also different from its original form (Derrida, 1967b). Second, because the written text breaks the link between writing and the other modes of expressing meaning. Writing eliminates, for instance, both the 'voice' (Derrida, 1967c) and the 'tone' (Derrida, 1983) involved, say, in spoken meaning construction. The meaning conveyed by a text is in a way present there--that is to say in that text--only on the ground that another meaning is absent from that very text. Viewed from this angle, the rational mode of knowing thus hardly represent a plenitude of, if not a supplement to, immediate human knowledge.

Yet another dimension of the discursive trap put forward by contemporary thinkers is the claim to literality made by rational discourses. For, in order to stand as superior knowledge, rational discourses pretend to represent and explain things as they are in their true essence, that is to say literally. By so doing, the rational mode of knowing implies the rejection of all other discourses which try to talk about things and how they can be perceived in their uniqueness, complexity, opacity and fragility. In other words, the postmodernists urge us to acknowledge the figurative representation of the world as the only possible representation within our reach. The distinction between figural and literal is indeed impossible since our representations use language; and language is essentially figurative. Because of the presence of different meanings--and thus different interpretations (Ricoeur, 1969)--languages are and can only be evocative. Languages can never be firmly anchored in one to one correspondences with the world. Even if a rational discourse may appear to be literal, it is always possible to show that beneath it lies metaphorical figures. The trap, then, consists of the desperate

effort of rational discourses to deny dealing with figural language, as if such a language existed parallel to a literal one. For, one may be tempted to believe that, there may exist a literal language and, on this ground, claim superiority and unchallengeable power. But as we have seen, language can only be figural. Seeing language as being literal is problematic since by implication, it means demarcating the world in terms of normal-true-objective-literal on one side, and on the other pathological-false-subjective-figural. The entire purpose of the deconstructivist gesture unwillingly "institutionalised" by Derrida may be perceived as a pointing out of the trap. For, to deconstruct a discourse is to work through its structural texture, that is its alleged unities and its configurational representations. It is to highlight the figures it has concealed or excluded in order to appear as literal. But deconstruction is also to put to the fore the operations by which the figurative representations are hidden or suppressed by the rational discourse which necessarily is grounded in them but which, for the *raison de la raison*, it conceals and annihilates. For those operations are the means by which the alleged legitimacy and superiority of a rational discourse are sustained. In that respect, it is not the pretended literality or the objectivity of a rational discourse which legitimate it. It is rather the modes by which it is inserted into an institutionalised intertextual web (Barthes, 1973; 1985). This intertextual web is formed by the set of other human linguistic productions through which the rational discourse gains its credibility and recognition as a true and objective discourse. Thus, for instance, in the novel of Pihles (1974), if the 'Imprecator', the famous expert on balance sheets analysis and cash-flow is fiction it is because this text is not tangled into already institutionalised rational discourses. In effect, the novel in question describes very concrete events of the everyday life of a large corporation, with what this means in terms of processes, conflicts, politics and misinterpretations. The novel is a real case study, but, to use Foucault's expression 'the right to tell the truth' (Foucault, 1971) has not been institutionally given to its author. If a balance sheet and a cash-flow report disclosed by any organization is fact, it is so simply because it is embedded into a tight web of concepts and recognized rational discourses (management, accounting) considered as facts. It is also because those who produce these facts are institutionally authorized to do so (organizational actors, accountants, managers, researchers). Another aspect of the trap that we have talked about so far is that when recognized as rational, a discourse becomes at once self-sufficient. For if a discourse is taken for being literal, true, objective; if it is taken for being anchored in reality and facts or being universally valid, it can then live in splendid isolation. Living and thinking people and circumstances situated in space and time would not have any bearing on it. The conversational mode of knowing which we suggest means that instead of relying on and complying with the established truth and universal meanings, researchers--and to some extent practitioners--in our field should engage in a permanent conversation thereby, constructing meanings through intellectual and physical interactions situated in time and place. The conversational mode of knowing is one by which meaning is constructed rather than dictated and adopted; where differences rather than similitude are allowed to be expressed; where those differences are recognized and emphasized, rather than dismissed.

The State of Knowledge in the Contemporary World.

This conversational mode of knowing, we would like to stress, is not a utopian thought. One can perhaps even say that we are getting there sooner or later. If one considers closely enough the state of the rational mode of knowing in the contemporary world, it would then appear that this mode of knowing seems to be laying the ground for its own dissolution. The process which we refer to here could be named auto-deconstruction. As far as we can see, this process seems to be the effect of first, the far too dominating role played by this mode of knowing. Second, of the successive claims implicitly made by this mode of knowing, as we have shown so far. Third, by the discomfort which this mode has created on the human ontological and/or existential level, as an implication of its totalising nature. And, finally, this process of auto-deconstruction is, in a way, the effect of the emergence of different points of resistance disseminated here and there in the body of the scholar community along with other resistance on a broader societal--political and ideological--level. Thus the failure of totalising discourses, be them political, ideological or managerial and organisational, and people's refusal to yield--directly and indirectly--to them is quite obvious in our time. The marks of this process, it seems to us, are expressed in the parallel emergence of societal phenomena along with new practices and their accompanying discourses. These phenomena and practices, which we now try to expose and discuss are: the over explanations of phenomena and the multiplicity of meanings; the rhetoric of

seduction as a force of validation; the simulation in the very process of reality representation and the amplification of reality into a hyper-reality as an effect of the first three dimensions.

Over explanations

The rational mode of knowing is contributing to its auto-deconstruction through the manner in which it has disenchanting the world. By factualizing, materializing or logicalizing every area of human thoughts and endeavours, the rational mode of knowing has dug a hole of spiritual emptiness. Unable to fill that hole with the impression of coherent grand discourse which it wishes to produce, this mode of knowing only succeeds in creating an unleashed quest for yet more and more rational 'explanations'. In other words, the disenchantment of the world has resulted in an infinite demand for explanations and knowledge about every--any--thing. Thus, the rational mode of knowing allows every--any--thing to be an 'object' of knowledge and contribute to the creation and proliferation of such objects. This mode of knowing, in short, has equipped contemporary human beings with a specific 'rational knowledge-seeking mentality'. What is specific about this mentality is that it excludes nothing from the possibility of being rationally known. In effect, the contemporary efforts to 'know' and to explain every--any--thing in a rational way has led to the emergence and the proliferation of an infinite number of 'sciences'. One can, no doubt, take any word in our languages and 'rationally' and make discourses about it, determining its generality, truth and principle of the phenomenon it signifies and of the meaning one wants it to convey in order to create a science. But more important perhaps, is that the rational mode of knowing is no longer able to insure the scarcity and legitimacy of the 'objects' to be known. This is visible in the indefinitely increasing number of fields of inquiry which the dominant mode of knowing can no longer exclude or fight by epistemological or methodological arguments. Illustrations of this argument are visible in the way traditional 'academic disciplines' now have to burst the bounds of their 'field'. Thus the proliferation of 'inter-disciplinary', 'pluri-disciplinary', 'trans-disciplinary' research efforts show well enough that the dominant one-best-way approach can no longer be held as reason legitimising the exclusion of other ways and modes of knowing. In management and organization today, it is very common to read about managerial and organizational actions from psychological, sociological, anthropological, political or 'emotional' perspectives. Consequently, any 'object', natural or human, can be subjected to any kind of rational investigation. This means that no domain of human existence, physical or mental, can, no longer remain secret, veiled or mysterious. For instance, even the spiritual space which, not so long ago, was still occupied by occult understandings such as faith, intuition, mystery, feeling etc. is in a way vanishing in the form of tacit knowledge. This sort of knowledge is now misrepresented with rational discursivities. All the more broadening and annexing one territory after the other. The net result of these discursive activities is an enormous proliferation of objectivated and objectivating pseudo-knowledge (Baudrillard 1978). And it is precisely this proliferation that strike back like a boomerang against the 'objectivity' and 'truth' of the rational mode of knowing. Thus the multiplicity of rational discourses exacerbates the paradox of the relationship between object and subject. The infinite search for rational knowledge creates a situation in which the meaning of any particular phenomenon is bound to be drowned in a flood of explanations, which in Baudrillard's (1981) terms is an over explanation. For whatever object one is seeking a universal meaning to, there exist an infinite number of possible 'perspectives' to it (Baudrillard 1891). This means that any object can be equally explained from different perspectives and by different theories. Thus, such an object as organization is today subjected to the scrutiny of social, economic, psychological and epistemological investigations. It is explained with equal plausibility from the perspectives of these different strands of thoughts. This multiplicity of descriptions, representations and theories about objects constitute its over explanation. No object can any longer represent a source of one universally valid knowledge. In the act of knowing, this multiplicity of explanations forces anyone with a will to know to make a choice of a perspective when making inquiries into an object. This choice, one could say, is to some extent a free choice representing what is true for the person making it. Thus, in making such a choice, one has to appeal to areas of knowledge which does not lean on the universal rationality but rather on one's ontological understanding. This is because such a choice cannot be made by obeying rules embedded in the alleged universal mode of knowing. Choices of this nature, if based on the individual ontology, are necessarily emanating from an unarticulable understanding and can, in a way, be seen as arbitrary choices. For this sort of

arbitrariness, as it were, needs no explanation, justification, and no legitimation. It is constituted in human individuality and is situated beyond reason. Activated by the necessity to make a choice rooted in one's truthful truth, this kind of arbitrariness appeals, in the last resort, to one's ontological and life experience. At this level, truth is no longer a universal rationality. The return to the subject, paradoxically enough, is becoming possible precisely through the project of the rational mode of knowing and its search for objective knowledge.

Rhetoric of Seduction

The auto-deconstruction of the rational mode of knowing is precipitated by the necessity in which discourses leaning on its logos have to compete--and/or induce other discourses to do so--for the appropriation of the exclusive right to explain human behaviours and actions. For, when an objective discourse accounts for, describes and explains managerial and organisational phenomena, it wishes to prevent, in the same movement, other alternative explanations to emerge. Yet, when an explanation emerges and when the discourse producing it establishes its supremacy in relation to other explanations, its universality fills the entire existential space of human life. In our field, the economisation of human relationships, for instance, governs the perspectives given to the study of management and organisations. In this orientation, human action is looked upon as one determined solely by economic factors and thus suggesting that economics was the predominant variable in human life. Man becomes the object of the economic discourse which dictates the true determinants of man's choices. Needless to say that this attitude relegate all explanations except its own into a lower level of significance with hardly any relevance. Yet, any discourse addressing humans as objects of knowledge can, theoretically speaking, claim to have the best explanation. We end up in a situation where discourses are competing for the appropriation of the exclusive right to explain human affairs and for the supremacy of their explanations over that of others. Yet, beyond all else, this competition and what it implies is not only the effect of struggling rational modes of knowing. Indeed, the very act of competing and struggling, as well as the claim for exclusivity and appropriation, not to mention the claiming of being literal, objective and true, is creating a perverse effect which encourages other forms of expressions and modes of knowing to enter the arena.

The over explanations and their relative plausibility together with the competition among alternative interpretations provide a ground for the rhetoric of seduction to draw the lines between winners and losers. The explanation and interpretation per se of a discourse are no longer sufficient. They do not 'speak for themselves' any longer, they must be put to the fore in a convincing manner, not in the traditional sense, but in a way which makes their content seductive. As we can see, this radically changes the order of priorities in the expressions of the truth. What becomes important is no longer what is being said about something but the way in which it is being said. Under these circumstances, what is essential through the rhetoric of seduction, is to be able to mobilize attention and to convince subjects of the plausibility of one's interpretations. In our world, what is taken for the truth and what is not, has become a function of the seductive power of discursive practices (Baudrillard, 1979). Yet, a seductive power cannot lean on normal modes of expression. Such a power lies in what is unusual, astonishing, revolutionary, new and unexpected. In order to be noticed, therefore, expressions of knowledge needs today to be lifted above the crowd in the public place and intensely exposed. In that sense, different expressions of knowledge, the rational mode of knowing inclusive, have to be presented in an exaggerated and ecstatic manner (Baudrillard, 1979; 1981). Thus, appearance takes precedence over the content and becomes the object of emphasis at the expense of what is actually being said.

However, the world of appearances is not that of a logico-rational domain. It simply belongs to the universe of seduction. Seduction per se moves in an aesthetic universe which leans on those dimensions of the human mind which the rational mode of knowing ignores. Here again, discursive rationality is, so to speak, the victim of its success. Forced to return to the universe of appearances, together with the other forms of knowledge which it suppresses but which it engendered, it must now confront the choices of subjects which, it precisely, tends to annihilate. And indeed, choices today are possible. As Baudrillard argues, people in the contemporary world, can accept all explanations at the same time, which amounts to negating them all. People can ignore those kind of explanations or interpretations which do not fit their interests or deep

convictions. They can also ignore discourses that are unable to convince/seduce them. In this respect, the case of the objective knowledge in the context of anthropology may be quite revealing. For, ever since their independence, quite many groups of African people who constituted the objects of study par excellence of the rational mode of knowing of the anthropological discourse, simply refuse to allow anthropologists to visit their countries for any study purpose. In other words, those African people show a strong determination to ignore all that which is said about them in terms of anthropological interpretations and explanations of whom and what they are.

Simulation

The rational mode of knowing in its essence, contributes to the possibility of simulating the world, a process which is not totally in its favour. In effect, rational discourses always offer themselves as sets of principles or laws according to which the world is supposed to function. Consequently, it is believed that the world can always be re-presented according to these principles or laws. Within the mentality of this mode of knowing, great attention has been devoted to the elaboration and improvement of the models used to represent reality without necessarily leading to a more truthful representation of it. On the contrary, one can argue that the models per se come to attract and mobilize all the energy of the researchers to the extent that the reality supposed to be represented become uninteresting and thus simply forgotten. In the representation or even reproduction of the world i.e. the reality, what we end up with, is neither a copy nor a reduction of the same but rather one which is purely and simply a simulated reality.

However, simulated reality is a pseudo-reality that is devoid of the qualities which the 'angle of perception' of the rational mode of knowing excludes when modelling it. It is a pseudo-reality which is superimposed over the real world in order to make the latter appear otherwise and to convey an impression of precision and neutrality. This simulated reality, argues Baudrillard (1981) for instance, always offers itself as more real than the reality it is supposed to depict. It offers itself as more real because it always claims to reveal what reality keeps hidden but at the same time eliminates what it perceives as unnecessary aspects. These aspects might well be crucial anyway, but end up being eliminated because they are difficult to manipulate. For instance, if one follows a model, which in a way is a simulated reality, one ends up conforming to the prescriptions stipulated by such a model and thus acting in accordance with the reality that it becomes perceivable through that model. A pilot in a modern aircraft is required, for example, to consider the symbolic representation of the sky appearing on his screen as more true than that which he may perceive by looking out through the window. In that sense, rational reality always presents itself as a hyper-reality, more real than reality itself (Baudrillard, 1987, p. 37).

Hyper-reality

With the notion of hyper-reality we wish to convey the idea by which the simulated world is, on the first place, a consequence of the rational mode of knowing. Secondly, simulating the world becomes a mode of expression created and re-created by all kind of discourses which emerged in the wake of post modernity and as a reaction against the totalising grand narrative engendered by modernity. The proliferation of this way of grasping the world eventually tend to turn against the rational mode of knowing from which it has emerged. The hyper-real context in our age has also a mediatic character through the advent and increasing use of sophisticated technology. The emergence of sophisticated machines in the universe of knowing has enhanced the belief that knowledge could, in an unproblematic way, be stored and processed elsewhere than in human subjects. Advanced technology used in connection with certain types of machines has enforced the belief that it is possible for rational knowledge to initiate action, through the machines, without the intervention of human bodies. The advent of knowing-acting machines has thus, enhanced the belief that rational knowledge can, without problem, "insert" itself between subjects and their world and, to some extent, replace them. In other words, superficial circumstances imply that the rational mode of knowing could exist and command action outside human contexts. It is believed to live a life of its own, independent of any ontological and existential dimension of human life.

But the hyper-realistic character of rational knowledge also tends to make reality altogether superfluous. For, rational symbolic modelling is, strictly speaking, an operation of re-presentation. In this manipulative

operation, since one is dealing with models of reality and not with reality itself, one can make indefinite reconstructions without taking reality itself into consideration (Baudrillard (1987). On such premises one can perhaps conceive of simulated holiday for tourists as there already exist flight simulators for pilots (Baudrillard, 1987, p. 16).

Relocating the agora

In dismantling the discursive nature of rational knowledge and in exposing the way it is turning against itself, post-modern thinking may seem to enhance a world of appearances only. It may give the wrong impression that, it is urging us to renounce the world of essence and existence. But, on the contrary, it urges us to turn to ourselves and to search for our own fundamental values. It urges us, perhaps, to relocate the agora where questions and answers emerge, from the space situated outside the ontological existence--where it has been relegated by the rational mode of knowing--to another space: that is inner space within ourselves. Thus, the crusade of postmodernism against the tyranny of reason is directed towards the outer provinces where the agora for the search for rational knowledge in human affairs has been located. But, simultaneously, this crusade may seem to imply that the platonist realism must be destroyed and that ideas concerning human beings can no longer be given an ontological status. Seen from this angle, the post-modern project would seem to lead to an existential desert where only appearances and language games would flourish. For, the unwilling mind, it may also appear to be leading to an understanding of the world as a one of simulations void of existential content. If one insists on understanding it in such a manner, as a number of its critics do, this stream of thought could be taken for a nihilist *ras-de-marée*. It could be mistaken for the recurrence of an ancient philosophy which is fruitless, without sense and with deep scepticism (Daudi, 1989).

Yet, from our point of view, the project of post modernity, instead of leading to a dead-end, is opening the possibility to re-think the notion of Man. As Foucault (1966) argues, we are perhaps so blinded by the recent manifestation of man that we can no longer remember a time--not so long ago--when the world, its order, and human beings existed, but man did not. The ideas of the postmodernists, and those of Nietzsche before them, have such disturbing power on us because they introduce the imminent threat of the disintegration of the figure of man. Our modern thought about man, as they have been engendered by the rational mode of knowing, and our humanism are all sleeping serenely over the threatening rumble of man's non-existence (Foucault, 1966). By making evident the unfoundedness of rational epistemology, the ideas advocated here urge and allow us to re-locate the agora where the notion of man can be re-invented and where the ontological existence can be re-experienced. Thus, the exposition of the grounds upon which our notions of knowledge about ourselves rest, does not need to lead to deep scepticism and inaction. On the contrary, it leads to our responsabilization for the realities we are creating and to our presence in doing so. Re-locating the agora is to acknowledge the necessity of individual presence and responsibility in asking the questions and as well as attempting to answer them. Indeed, the post-modern project suggests to consider seriously the fact that the wisdom, which we might gain, may very well emerge from realms of desires and emotions (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972), aesthetics (Lyotard, 1971), and ethics (Eco, 1984).

If we take the post-modern project seriously, it becomes clear that one can hardly let one's existence be governed by rationalized truths issued by discursive authorities whose voice are situated in the outer agora. For, in whatever situation one finds oneself, meaning is always under the process of being made. And since, this making of meaning in our field necessarily has to transcend through a linguistic mode of expression--with its possibilities and shortcomings--introducing the construction of knowledge through a conversational mode is to acknowledge the process of an on-going meaning construction. Thus, conversation is the privileged mode of relating oneself to others and to the world, especially when the meanings, which we construct, become our realities. In that sense, far from leading to an ontological desert, this mode of thinking leads to a world of a multiplicity of realities and of existences. Then, if for some of us, the impression of emptiness left by the post-modern thinking still persists, one might consider to seeing it as a hole made in the wall of the discursive fortifications that allows us to have a glimpse of possible ways of being. As far as knowledge is concerned, it means re-inventing a mode of making sense of and giving meaning to the world which does not eliminate human qualities altogether. This implies to (re)state with strength the plenitude of human existence, i.e., the ontological, inseparable trium of knowing-acting-being. This also implies the constant awareness for

not contributing, as far as it goes, to the establishment and fossilization of the discursive rationality.

Uncertainty in the Field

It is against the disembodiment of knowledge inherent in the construction of rational discourses and the rational mode of knowing that the post-modern stream of thought is primarily directed. But, indirectly, it also addresses itself to the discourse of management and organizations which attempt to provide prescriptive stances based on rationalistic assumptions. What must come under scrutiny is the underlying support from and through which the construction of the discourses of management and organizations holds its legitimating power. One must also question the history of this construction and uncover the discontinuities, which are involved in that process. Thus, the development of our field, from a historical point of view, is not necessarily a continuous succession of improvements cumulating into the body of knowledge, which constitutes it. Historical processes, including that of our field, are fragmented and discontinuous series of events, linked, not by necessities, but by accidents and coincidences (Foucault, 1969). Indeed, as far as the discourse of management and organization are concerned, there is a tendency among scholars to present it precisely as a rationally constructed discourse prescribes. What is emphasized is a successive elaboration of managerial techniques and organizational devices going towards more and more rationalistic perfection and efficiency. The hap hazardous development of the field and its contingency in the face of stochastic social, political and economic forces is left aside. But this state of affairs is not unnoticed. It has already created a feeling of uncertainty and frustration in the field. There is a growing discontent with the inability of social science to achieve 'anything comparable to what was achieved in sixteenth-century physical sciences' (Bernstein, 1976). This discontent is echoed not only in management but also in sociology, anthropology and even in economics (George, 1972; Gadalla and Cooper, 1978; Giddens, 1979;). In all these fields, it seems that researchers are engaged in a chimeric search for a firm ground upon which to stand while, at the same time, realizing that most people in organizations guide their actions on the basis of a wisdom stemming from their ontological experience which goes beyond rationality and predictable behaviour. The danger of such a situation for the field of management and organizations is of course that this chimeric search for the rationale of organizational knowledge and action may just have produced a textuality only relevant for other rational textualities. In other words, the tremendous efforts of rationalization in this field may well have resulted in the production of texts only useful for the production of other texts but with no import upon individual organizational practices. Thus, the question of whether managers and organizational actors have any use in their daily practices for the scientific knowledge, which we, as researchers, provide them with, and whether they come across it, is not considered in this paper.

Conclusion

Against this background, it is easy to understand that the advent of certain themes of reflexion in our field clearly shows that postmodernist ideas have now entered our provinces of thought and are most likely going to remain with us. Such themes as disciplinary power (Daudi, 1986; Knight and Collinson, 1987; Glegg, 1989), archaeology (Hopwood, 1987), deconstruction (Harrington & Francis, 1989), interpreting and accounting for the self (Don Lavoie, 1987; Miller and O'leary 1987) to name but few examples, are undeniably derived from post-modern concerns and are now to be added to the diversity of our field. So also is the case with the concern for such phenomena as seduction (Filby & Willmott, 1988), humour (Collinson, 1988) or emotion (Rafaeli, 1978). These incursions, as we see it, constitute different attempts, which, each in its own way re-locates and takes into account the supposedly non-rational sides of organizational actors and their actions. In a way, these sorts of studies try to reach--and make some sense out of--the depth of the unarticulated dimensions of the existential conditions of organizational actors. The question that can be asked then is: are these sorts of research only occasional reactions against the ever-increasing number of prescriptive rational discourses or are we witnessing a new era? The answer is yes. Management research is entering a new era with both a wider and a deeper scope. The mobilization of human actors, for instance, encouraging them to embrace the organizational goal poses a serious problem. Especially when the actors are not meant to be considered as parts of mechanical orders rationally designed but as responsible beings participating in the making of organizational activities. Yet, the textuality, which has dealt

with this question, has eventually functioned, as Sievers (1986) has pointed out, as a surrogate for the existential dimensions of work in particular and life in general. In other words, the question of the organizational actors' engagement has eventually ended in the discursive trap indicated by postmodernists. Even the most recent textualities which have used the cultural and meaning-making perspective to comprehend the real existential conditions of organizational actors have also fallen into the trap. For, in those approaches, the basic assumption is that efficient and rational conduct can be obtained and monitored if enough knowledge is gained about those who are meant to be controlled. Indeed, even if the cultural and meaning making perspectives, are viewing organisational actors as thinking, feeling, and imagining beings, their assumptions are still reiterations of a rational mode of knowing which they place in the logic of symbols and meanings rather than in that of mathematical models (Mittroff, 1983; Pfeffer, 1981; Gray & al., 1985, to name but a few). In other words, as Sievers also noted, the belief in the possibility to manipulate the mental, symbolic or cultural world of actors does still not constitute a warranty of belonging to the rationalistic enterprise. Thus, while this textuality claims scientificity and seek prescriptive validity, it is engaged in a paradoxical exercise, that of pretending to produce rational knowledge about irrationalities. It is precisely this sort of trap that we have to avoid in our field; the trap of annexing and transforming every gained inch of insight into yet another instrument to be added to the arsenal of control and domination.

The mode of conversation, which we have advocated here, stresses the very act of con-versing between different parties, each one remaining in the integrity of its own self. In that sense, conversation is necessarily coupled to the idea of distance, enabling us to enter into an authentic mode of ontological projection. Rather than trying to bridge gaps between parties (be them individuals, groups or discourses about human affairs) conversation is dedicated to underlining those gaps and even to create them.

In the last resort, rather than pursuing the effort to create 'something similar to the achievement of sixteenth-century physical sciences', management research should emulate the forces, which really give life to organizations. Instead of regarding the living flows of human energies such as feelings, emotions, love and hatred as irrelevant metaphysics; efforts should be dedicated to the most fundamental basis of organizational existence and to actors' ontology. More important perhaps for us, as management researchers, is that in our urge to yield to rational knowledge; we endanger our own subjectivity and ontological project.

The prevailing discourse of management is not necessarily part of our conscious awareness. The meanings we invest it with are pre-scribed in the dominant and thus most available discursive practices. When we 'identify' a certain meaning in management or in the world of organizations, we reproduce the prescriptions of the available discursive practices such as power exercises, the taming and control of human forces, the sole economic nature of relationships and conformity to a sovereign economic reason. Hence, we end up telling various truths about ourselves and producing a world of conformity and mental totalitarianism. Ultimately, the only way for us to avoid this sort of subjugation is by disavowing rational knowledge, by refusing to enter in its pre-scribed confining space and by refusing to be the self that has been scripted by it at the expense of our own. The remedy, however, does not imply an improvement of management instruments, but rather the elaboration of counter discourses, which opposes the terms imposed by the rational mode of knowing. It also implies the disavowing of all the annexed and thematised instrumental notions and the restitution of another mode of knowing; that of conversation where parties recognize each other's uniqueness, individuality and ultimately each other's ontological self. A conversing mode of knowing engaged in the public place making the space available for the plurality of meanings and interpretations, for the distance to be there as part of our world and for the recognition of the other as, precisely, an other. An other, neither to be forced into a prevailing ritual nor to be pre-scribed by the dominant discourse.

The critical attitude encouraged by the deconstructive gesture for coping with the metaphysics of the rational mode of knowing leans on the postulate according to which modernity is synonymous with rationality; given that modernity is the epoch from which post modernity demarcates itself. For, from the post-modern intellectual point of view, a philosophical reflection must constitute itself as radical critique (Hildenbrand, 1979). A similar problematique is posed for management and organisation research: in order to demarcate ourselves from the conception of research in our field as the improvement of rational designs and axiomatic models, we have to allow a radical critique to emerge and to investigate the possibilities of re-thinking our world in ways which we have not tried before (Foucault, 1984).

The criticism levelled against rationality is, in a sense, a translation of our disenchantment with the world, or, in Weber's term, the *Entzauberung*. The discontent in our field most certainly expresses an *Entzauberung* with the actual state of our achievements in terms of theory building. But there are, of course, thinkers in our field and outside it who are not disenchanted. Habermas (1985), for instance, in his contention with modernity, points out that Hegel was the first philosopher who seriously investigated and developed this notion and it is to him (Hegel) that we have to go back to if we wish to understand the intriguing relationship between modernity and rationality. A modernity, which, according to Habermas, continued to be unproblematic from Hegel to Weber until it suddenly, fell in disgrace and became the target of a heavy critique (Hildenbrand, 1979). However, this reflection of the return to Hegel suggested by Habermas is quite problematic since it asks us to return to the Hegelian paradox of the *Aufklärung*. In this paradox we are promised freedom by Hegel under the condition that we submit our individual ontology to the *raison d'état*. Satisfaction will then be distributed to us through institutions created by the state for the good benefit of the subjects. What Hegel regarded as the marks of excellence of modernity--the individualism and the postmodernists see autonomy of conduct, the right to criticize and the liberty of conscience-- as the marks of servitude. Thus, these marks having been conceived within the textuality of the Hegelian *Aufklärung*, were ideologically rather than philosophically rooted and were meant as dogmas rather than as aesthetic visions (Rosset, 1973). Based on these marks, modernity has enhanced its grip on what we today conceive of as management and organisations: the political and economical forms of organisations and institutions engendered by this modernity presuppose the submission of a functional individual who willingly signs the Hegelian contract. Perhaps it is so that the sine qua non for an efficient functioning of the modern form of organisations are individuals who are docile rather than volitional as well as objects informed by norms rather than knowing subjects. A shift and a reorientation must take place and be reflected in our research. The post-modern project underlines the necessity of this shift (Maffesoli, 1988), which, to some extent, has already taken place: from the modern forms of organisations to post-modern ones, where organisations have become more of groups holding together their members on an affective rather than on a contractual basis, with personae having ontologically evolving roles instead of individuals with structurally determined functions.

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