

General Economy and Productive Dualisms

Janet Borgerson* and Alf Rehn

Through an investigation of the organizing potential of productive dualisms and ontological hierarchies that move toward epistemic and ontological closures, this essay theorizes the bounded potential of fluidity, and points to the potential for waste, excess and sacrifice within a general economy of gender. We emphasize the apparently paradoxical role that dualisms — especially dualisms understood semiotically — have played in the foundational work to which many theorists look for clues about how to proceed in confounding limits and boundaries. Moreover, closures around the interrelated subordination of femininity and blackness emerge as a crucial reminder of the interlocking projects of gender and race theory. Drawing upon gender and critical race theory, philosophical phenomenology, and the work of Georges Bataille, we suggest that a general economy of gender can be explored by perceiving the closures, and other limits, enacted by dualism in organizational settings.

Keywords: general economy, Bataille, epistemic closure, dualism, gender, race

Introduction

This article interrogates the dualistic positioning of dualism versus fluidity. We do not deny that hierarchical dualisms — often found in thinking that takes dichotomous forms — may create circumstances unfavourable to achieving greater equity in practice. Why, then, do we not follow the alternative to dualism's apparently paralyzing productions that the notion of fluidity presents? We find several flaws in adopting fluidity as a way to think about gendered organizing, gender as organization, and the organization of gender. Firstly, the very articulation of fluidity is still bounded by dualism. Secondly, in contrast to fluidity, dualistic poles provide anchors and descriptions that both defy and mark subordination. We argue that dualisms, crucial

Address for correspondence: *Janet Borgerson, Odengatan 18b 2tr, 114 24, Stockholm, Sweden, e-mail: janet.borgerson@fek.su.se

for critical reflective purposes, are productive in three interconnecting senses. Dualisms produce situations of insightful discursive closure. These closures or limits produce ways of thinking about and challenging this closure and, moreover, initiate waste, excess and sacrifice — each of which can be explored in relation to gender. Drawing upon Georges Bataille's work, we propose a general economy of gender to articulate the possibility of understanding gender as economy and openness.

Philosophical phenomenology employs dualistic poles, often conceptualized semiotically, to recognize conditions of possibility and incompleteness in a system that defies closure. For example, critical race philosopher Lewis Gordon (1995a) argues that a dualistic analysis of the semio-ontological categories, black and white, makes possible a powerful understanding of the form and practice of antiblack racism. Furthermore, within gender theory, the works of Butler, Irigaray, Kristeva and a number of others, have interrogated the apparently polarized manifestation of dualistic gender arising — naturally — from a sexual difference. We take the notion of the production of gender seriously (Butler, 1993), and ask: How do dualisms produce an economy that makes way for an openness of gendered organizing? Here we will turn to Bataille's theory of general economy to explore the potential of excess and incompleteness as an alternative to the flight from dualism.

Within the ambiguous field of critical management studies, poststructuralist theory — taken either as a standpoint or as an inspiration — has been a prime motivator in several influential texts. Examples, such as Robert Chia's work on organizational analysis (1996a, 1996b), Robert Cooper's theories on organizing (1986, 1992) and the edited volume *Postmodernism and Organizations* (Hassard and Parker, 1993) should be well known. The attack on dualisms and stable structures that permeates poststructuralist thinking has found a willing audience in organization/organizing theory. Although the major influences made an impact quite early (see, for example, Cooper and Burrell, 1988), as of late these trends have trickled down from the grander theorizing regarding the ontology and epistemology of organizations to more specific matters. Investigations have resulted in positions such as that taken by Knights (1997), where an uprooting of dualisms is seen as a necessary move to free knowledge-production about organization (cf. Beech and Cairns, 2001; Jones and Surman, 2002). Similarly, Gherardi's (1995) analysis of the symbolic aspects of gender in organizational contexts elegantly shows how dualistic thinking can make us mistake form for substance, and how irony and a fluid sense of roles can (possibly) help.

Not surprisingly, very few areas of organizational investigation — be they entrepreneurship, motivation, gender or the notion of leaders in organizations — can escape being problematized as fundamentally fluid phenomena, flowing uninhibited, continually negotiated and renegotiated. However, to paraphrase Alfred Gell (1992), dualities — bad, fluidity — good, runs the risk

of becoming a handy cheat-sheet for theorizing. Indeed, this move away from dualisms is not entirely unproblematic (see Reed, 1997). For example, Gherardi's promotion of both/and logic still draws on the existence of polarities, allowing for only a preordained amount of 'wobble room'. With reference to this, a call has gone out for a more reflexive stance towards dualisms, one that neither condemns nor glorifies them (Surman, 2002). At the same time, even casual observation results in the finding that people are quite adept at taking on and twisting dualistic gender roles. Directing a sensitive glance toward gender's fluid organization, or the organized fluidity of gender, seems to encourage new insights.

In the following section, we seek to demonstrate the productive importance of dualistic understandings for reflective practices that move beyond the 'displacement' of dominant elements (Knights, 1997) toward recognition of waste, excess, and sacrifice. Our argument is that dualisms should be preserved for critical purposes that are fundamental, even in their absence, in organizing practices. Moreover, we reject turning to fluidity discourses as a way to think about organizing and gender.

Organizing dualisms: lessons from philosophy

The ethical significance of ontological divisions and hierarchies that tend toward limited and biased appraisals of subordinated elements' value raises concerns for the ways both conceptual work and practical experience are conceived of and ordered (Borgerson and Schroeder, 2002). However, whereas Knights argues that 'dualistic theorizing, then, commits the fallacy of misplaced concreteness' (1997, p. 4), we suggest that, philosophically and ethically, there are critical reasons to maintain a fixed gaze upon dualistic poles. Far from the assumption that dualisms provoke unavoidable ontological essentialism, these critical reasons, in fact, include the ability to recognize moments in which normative categories have been naturalized and used in practices of subordination. Knights' argument against dualism simply fails to make the semiotic turn.

In this essay, we emphasize the apparently paradoxical role that dualisms — especially dualisms understood semiotically — have played in the foundational work to which many theorists look for clues about how to proceed in confounding limits and boundaries. In western patriarchal culture, and in other cultures as well, being has traditionally been divided, through dichotomous thinking, — as the word suggests — into two. Plato, after all, marked the distinction between material and immaterial, the representation and the real; and Kant described the superior mode of the 'sublime' in contrast to the 'beautiful'. This binary, and dichotomous, mode has given rise to well-recognized, hierarchically ordered dualisms of meaning and being such as

self/other, white/black, reality/appearance, rational/irrational and — especially relevant here — masculine/feminine, implicated in the 'logic of colonialism' (Plumwood, 1993, pp. 51–5).

Nevertheless, dualisms play a crucial role in calling attention to subordination and oppression, provoking an awareness of hierarchy. For example, Bourdieu has relied upon dualistic analysis to explicate the falsely essentialized dualistic notions of masculine and feminine and their foundational position at the base of social, cultural and cosmological maps of human reality (Bourdieu, 2001). Work in organization theory itself expresses the critical reflective purposes of dualisms in consideration of 'male logics' and 'ideas rooted in the modernist pursuit of transcendent reason' (Calás and Smircich, 1992, p. 241). Calás and Smircich mark the complication regarding the usefulness of postmodern/post-structural theories for feminist practice in organizations 'because on negating privilege to any meta-narrative while accepting the need to adjudicate knowledge claims one may end up privileging some domain of knowledge over others through a hidden criterion' (p. 242). That is, the dualistic meta-narrative explicitly marks privilege and manifests the potential for critical reflection. Knights has suggested that such views are 'subscribed to' in particular by groups that 'seek to displace those in dominant positions in society' (1997, p. 11). That is, in recognizing oneself as subordinate, one can, via reference to dualistic understandings, 'seek to displace' the dominating party. But we argue that attempts to designate, account for, and see the potential in dualist dynamics and closure exceed the seeking of such pragmatic displacement, particularly in terms of gender.

Productive dualisms and ontological hierarchies

Dualistic thinking has been employed by philosophers struggling to understand how hierarchical dualisms in the arenas of race and gender function ontologically when contingent social and psychological constructions define and limit embodied human agents (Butler, 1990, 1993; Butler *et al.*, 2000; Gordon, 1995a, 1995b, 1997, 2000). These explorations have included notions of blackness and whiteness in a racist antiblack world (Gordon, 1995a), and, of course, masculinity and femininity (Butler, 1987, 1990). Further dualism-driven investigations in what might be generally designated existential phenomenology include conceptions of the finite and infinite (Hartmann, 1966), typicality and anonymity (Nathanson, 1986), and the Other and the Self (Levinas, 1985). Judith Butler, who became infamous for supposedly claiming that gender was simply a performance (1990) — and hence could be worn or not worn, rather like a particular concatenation of clothing — remains, regardless of her theory's evocativeness for gender fluidity and drag performances, not primarily a queer theorist, but a phenomenologist (Butler, 1997). She writes:

In a sense, all of my work remains within the orbit of a certain set of Hegelian questions . . . how is it that the constitution of the subject entails a radical and constitutive relation to alterity. (Butler, 1987/1999, p. xiv)

Like others in this tradition, Butler has sought to understand the paradoxes and complexities of poles of meaning and being, the role of ideal instance and the particular experience, and the interrelations between them.

Ontological assumptions function in relation to culturally defined hierarchies and dominant semiotics. Ontology, as the study of being, raises questions about being's genesis, emergence and modes of interaction and agency. Some philosophers have attempted to define the essential features of being, but such essentialism denies what is under consideration here, the contingent social and historical context and construction of being. In rejecting essentialist ontology, Gordon writes that ontology should be understood as the study of 'what is treated as being the case and what is realized as the contradiction of being the case' (Gordon, 1995a, p. 133). This perspective comprehends the role of interpretation and makes a semiotic link between being and culture (see Moxey, 1994), allowing us to interrogate naturalized normative hierarchies and avoid what Gordon calls 'taking our associations too seriously' (Gordon, 1995a, p. 95). Generally speaking, being is active; it is verbal, not simply in the sense of speaking out or voicing a subjectivity, but related to activity in general. To be is to be as an activity, human. However, even if we treat being as constructed and in process, the assumption that it is semio-ontologically possible to move fluidly between dualistic poles, to conceive of ourselves as performing our whiteness or blackness, our masculinity or femininity — to see them as contingent and constructed categories — does not make these particular categories any less likely to affect or determine to varying extents the lives of embodied humans who live, not simply in dualistic worlds, but hierarchical ones as well.

Sexual and ethical dualism

Given their potential for producing powerful theoretical interconnections, hierarchical dualisms clearly offer insights for the organization of gender in organizations. Of course, the legacy of dualism and its accompanying privileging of one element over the other, including the rational over the emotional, reality over appearance and the masculine over the feminine, has far-reaching consequences. Sexual dualism separates human being into opposite sexes with naturally opposing gender traits, prescribing roles and rules. Philosophers have long privileged the so-called masculine, designating as superior the traits and behaviours arising from a specifically masculine way of being. As an example, Kant's sexual dualism identifies men and the masculine with the sublime, and women and the feminine with beauty's

shallow appearances. These associations have profound consequences for women's position in his moral universe. Appearances are variable and depend upon the point of view. They can be misleading, and hence those who judge upon the basis of appearances — that is, women — are not to be included in the same moral realm as those capable of rational, universal and disinterested judgments. Opposed to the sublime's affinity for abstractions, moral reasoning and penetrating depth — male or masculine traits — woman's association with the beautiful marks her as moved by appearances and incapable of 'the motive of mind' that rests upon universal principle (Kant, 1960, p. 63). For Kant, natural femininity allies with appearance, denying women the depth required for a moral rationality. Semio-ontologically speaking, female being fails to attain moral status.

Being is often identified in the context of its dualistic properties, the either/or's that place it within a category or grouping. Further, these groupings are frequently described in a vocabulary of typicality. In a sexist and 'antiblack' world, binary oppositions to the white/male/self function together, creating a meaning that is co-determined and subjugated. Recognizing related semio-ontological alliances, anthropologist Daniel Miller has written on the implications for blackness, conceived of as being's shallow form in western theory's history and functioning as a semiotic pole associated with surface level identity, or appearance — opposing the depth associated with white (and male) rationality (Miller, 1994b, pp. 71–96). Such semiotically constructed lack of identity and depth links blackness with its subordinated counterpart, femininity (see Gordon, 1995a; 1997, pp. 73–88). Thus, the interrelated subordination of femininity and blackness emerges as a crucial reminder of the interlocking projects of gender and race theory. Moral recognition or standing is often denied to those whose human status is contested, particularly in racist and sexist settings — or, to put it another way, characterizations of human agency and ways of being that share positions in ontologically dualistic hierarchies take on semiotic and existential phenomenological relevance (Gordon, 1997).

Ontological othering and epistemic closure

The dualistic relation therefore engages with the potential for epistemic closure (Gordon, 1995a, pp. 130–34, 1997, p. 81). A worldview informed by epistemic closure essentializes being and tends towards the creation of a recognizable 'authentic' identity while knowing next to nothing 'about the typical other beyond her or his typicality' (1997, p. 81). Arguably the most basic dualism, self/not self, paves the way for an understanding of the self that is set against the not-self — the self, in central position, defines the not-self as other. Knowledge of the self develops through a self-versus-other epistemology of difference (Coviello and Borgerson, 1999, p. 1). Historically, this ontological 'othering' has perpetuated and reinforced interconnected

dualistic hierarchical orderings (see Goldberg, 1993). In such a context, those associated with the privileged elements stand in the position of claiming knowledge of all that it is important to know about those associated with the subordinated elements.

Epistemic closure promotes the belief that the other's being is known completely — who they are and what their purpose is. Whereas openness and incompleteness express the potential of the human, epistemic and ontological closure create a limit, denying the other status as human being and erasing the possibility of human relationships (Borgerson, 2001). The confusion at an ontological level between necessary and contingent identities, traits, or actions brings about a closure of possibility, and on an existential level, creates an oppression that blocks the human project (Gordon, 2000, pp. 145–7). Concretizing the contingent categories of meaning and being moves away from possibility, creating an illusion of essence or depth. This depth, formed in the wake of epistemic closure, inevitably reinforces the subjugated status of subordinated ontological categories. However, closure always marks its own presence as closure and, hence, also marks the possibility of a different response. Recognizing dualisms, and their productions, helps us criticize and alter reality and experience. As the work in existential phenomenology discussed above has demonstrated, philosophical discourse is full of dualisms that support, but also undermine, subordination and hierarchy. Marking closure maintains a distinction between the necessary (closed) and the contingent (incomplete), and mobilizes the possibility for change.

On the dualistic boundaries of fluidity

Fluidity — as the space between — resembles what we choose to call a closed or restricted economy. Fluidity frequently bespeaks uninhibited or potential movement within the space between dualistic categories that substantiate opposing poles. An easy flow between masculinity and femininity, perhaps as a recognition of overlapping traits, of potential simultaneous embodiment — these are experiences and concepts often mobilized under the term 'fluidity'. Fluidity, comprehended intersubjectively — as the movement through the medium of social interaction, through conceptual space, or simply as a kind of relation or communication — reflects some of these same insights. For example, philosophers working on notions of 'subjectivity as fluid' describe attempts 'to navigate between two extremes' (Oliver, 1998, p. xii). In organization studies, theorists discuss methods of interpretation arising from 'interaction and interplay between' (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2000). Others underline the potential of flows and play between realms of technology and society or business and art (Guillet de Monthoux, 2000; Latour, 1987; Linstead, 2000).

Problematically enough, the concept of fluidity itself may be gendered. Fluidity's introduction into analyses of gender — and organizations — presumably raises consciousness regarding the ways in which gender works (or doesn't work) in organizing. However, Miller argues that the less socially substantial one's hierarchical positioning, the more there is a turn to fluidity, or non-substantial identities, to avoid further subordination (Miller, 1994b, see also Miller, 1994a). Fluidity functions as a strategy for those with less status. In other words, fluidity, associated with strategies of hierarchically dualized subordinated elements, is *feminized*. This would seem, by default, to allow for upsetting gender dualism, although all attempts at fluidity are likely to be met with attempts at solidity. Alvesson (1998), for example, brings this out in attempting to theorize femininity and masculinity in the workplace. Although we do not focus further upon the implications of femininity's subordinate status and the potential for this status to undermine attempts to positively utilize fluidity's feminine character, we believe such a concern should not be ignored. Still, why do we prefer to rely upon a fundamentally structural notion of a limiting dualism rather than a hypothetically freeing, if feminized, fluidity?

'Fluidity' suggests an easing of borders through which human characteristics and gestures — usually seen as related to specific fixed categories — refer and defer to subjectivities without predetermined lines of attachment. 'Fluidity' within organization theory is, in such a view, already dependent upon the hierarchical dualisms and their limits, including the space allowed between them. This lack of a substantial context for change has been what many of Butler's (arguably confused) critics have concentrated on — that opposition and 'irony' towards dualisms does not negate these, and may even reinforce them (cf. Foucault, 1970/2002, pp. 330–73).

Dualistic categories are often related to specific gestures and traits that define them and produce them as natural or ideal. Further, the dualistic categories are themselves productions and substantiations of — and are constituted by — the performance and iteration of gestures and traits that define them. Here, dualistic categories are simply the manifestation of repeated performances or iterations. For Butler, the hope that emerges in this scenario is that if typical iterative performances are disrupted, altered and shifted, then change in the previously recognized definitive category may be noted as well, opening up possibility for diverse gestures and characteristics (Butler, 1997). Interestingly, and perhaps counter-intuitively, fluidity is not a necessary feature of this scenario, but openness and incompleteness are. The notion that negotiation in itself would allow for unlimited possibility underlies much thinking regarding the benefits of fluidity. Yet, the possibility for alternative iterations arises in the gesture to the unknown, the undefined, the exchange of necessary for contingent — that is, the possibility for change.

Bataille's work on general economy stands against an overemphasis on a model of fluidity, or flow, that takes place between dualistic poles. We have

argued that it is important to maintain dualisms themselves for critical reflective practices, and thus these should not be exchanged for fluidity. However, a model of fluidity — as occupying the negotiating space between masculine and feminine modes — bounded by dualisms might be interestingly surpassed in a movement beyond closed systems. We would like to explore the possibilities of such a gesture, towards the incompleteness and excess we find in Bataille's general economy (Bataille, 1967 [1989], 1976 [1991]; Plotnitsky, 1994).

Acceptable loss: gendered organization and a general economy of gender

That continuing growth is impossible — when individuals, groups, or environments reach their spatial limits — sets the stage for squandering or releasing excess. General economy accepts the uselessness of the inevitable waste and squandering of excess energy. Yet, while we shall see that Bataille's realm of intimacy, grasped in the expenditure of excess, remains outside consideration and unavailable to the order of things, Bataille does believe there are scenarios of acceptable or preferable loss (Bataille, 1967 [1989], p. 31). What we call a general economy of gender can be explored by perceiving the closures and other limits enacted by dualism upon gender in organizational settings. A general economy of gender presents a scenario within which dualisms find their limit, yet at the same time, never close, provoking notions of incompleteness, excess and waste. In response to the forms of apparent closure — epistemic, semio-ontological — in gendered organizational situations, the potential for a general economy of gender emerges.

A relatively recent upsurge of interest in Bataille — in general, and within organization studies more specifically — includes work that focuses heavily on his notions of desire, transgression, the erotic and the sacred (for example, Brewis and Linstead, 2000; La Fountain, 2000; Linstead, 2000; Styhre, 2002); but some also take up general economy (Borgerson, 2002; Nodoushani, 1999; Plotnitsky, 1994). Whereas, arguably, all of Bataille's concepts and assumptions intersect and interact to form a coherent whole, we do not attempt to draw them together here. Our interest rests firmly with general economy and, in this section, after a discussion of general economy, we relate core concepts of waste, excess and sacrifice to gender in organization.

Fundamentally an anthropological insight with regard to formalistic notions of the roots of the economy, general economy presents a perspective that enables the economic to be thought outside reductionist models. Literary theorist Arkady Plotnitsky writes of the contrast:

That which is left in the margins and claimed to be reducible or treated as contamination by classical theories — the unconscious, the meaningless,

the improper, the distasteful, the impure, the wasteful, the perverse — is not only incapable of being marginalized or reduced, but is in fact constitutive of that which is unequivocally opposed to these contaminating forces and is supposed to be purified of them — the conscious, the meaningful, the proper, the tasteful, the pure, the normal. (1994, p. 28)

Such an articulation reflects underlying and related philosophical notions of reliance on the other for self-formation, including the continued existence of the other as different for meaningful intersubjectivity (see, for example, Merleau-Ponty, 1970, pp. 23–4). General economy maintains ‘heterology’ — a reminder of an irreducible remainder and the connection of ‘irreducible loss and incompleteness to the irreducible multiplicity or heterogeneity of a system or nonsystem that may be under consideration’ (Plotnitsky, 1994, p. 29). Bataille insisted upon the integral importance of elements that did not fit into a classical model, mobilizing the crucial role of that which cannot be incorporated; and moreover, as Merleau-Ponty has argued, must not be conceived of as available for incorporation (Merleau-Ponty, 1970, p. 23).

Bataille turns classical economy on its head by suggesting that economy might be about the handling of waste and the creation of excess rather than the prudent management of the perennially scarce. He argues that all systemic phenomena are driven by an ‘accursed share’ — an excess that must be wasted and sacrificed (Bataille, 1967 [1989], 1976 [1991], 1985). In much the same way that Hegel, Simmel, and Levinas posited exchange as the social phenomenon *sui generis* (Levinas, 1985; Miller, 1987), he views economy in a way that encompasses the social totally — an extension of Mauss’s ‘total social fact’ (Mauss, 1967).

Bataille explains that he began to formulate his laws of general economy while reflecting on potlatch practices — one of the most famous cases of a gift economy, intensely theorized within economic anthropology (Leach and Leach, 1983; Mauss, 1967; Rehn, 2001; Strathern, 1988). The potlatch involved a ritual feast, among certain of the ‘Indian nations’ in British Columbia, for example, and was notable as a form of agonistic generosity, where a person could bring honour to himself or herself (the practice was most common among the always-male tribal chiefs) by giving away or even destroying property. A grand potlatch could consist, for example, of a chief giving away most or all of his tribe’s possession to a rival tribe’s chief, thereby shaming the latter and bringing great honour to the former. In Bataille’s analysis, potlatch contained certain ‘irreducible elements’ that could not be ‘unilaterally interpreted’ and seemed to resist efficient incorporation into a classical model of economy and exchange (Bataille, 1967 [1989], p. 193).

Expenditure, rather than production, became the primary object: ‘living matter receives this energy and accumulates it within the limits given by the space that is available to it. It then radiates or squanders it’ (Bataille, 1967 [1989], p. 29). This ‘squandering’ has ontological implications, evoking the

'intimacy' or interiority of being: 'a squandering of energy is always the opposite of a thing, but it enters into consideration only once it has entered into the order of things, once it has been changed into a thing' (p. 193). Bataille defines intimacy, or 'self consciousness', as 'grasping the nothing of pure expenditure' (p. 190). That which is not subjected to objectification manifests in expenditure as a kind of subjectivity-in-squandering, or the non-thing at the core of subjectivity. To 'enter into consideration', however, requires obtaining the status of a 'thing', that is, 'what we know from without, what is given to us in a physical reality' (p. 132). With respect to relations between individuals, or groups, including considerations of inter-subjectivity, sociality and communication, Bataille writes:

the separation of beings is limited to the real order. It is only if I remain attached to the order of things that the separation is real. It is in fact real, but what is real is external. (p. 192)

Thus, self-consciousness, or intimacy — the realm without separation — must remain without comment. The 'real' world of what appears, the world with which phenomenology is concerned, must be the world in which we discuss the general economy of gender.

Bataille writes:

Suppose there is no longer any growth possible, what is to be done with the seething energy that remains? To waste it is obviously not to use it. And yet, what we have is a draining-away, a pure and simple loss, which occurs in any case: From the first, the excess energy, if it cannot be used for growth, is lost. Moreover, in no way can this inevitable loss be accounted useful. It is a matter of acceptable loss, preferable to another that is regarded as unacceptable: a question of acceptability, not utility. (p. 31)

Whereas Bataille indicates the paradox of attempting to utilize the excess that is recognized as wasted and lost — in terms of greater productivity — he suggests that understandings can be reached regarding the acceptability of, or preference for, certain scenarios. This consideration is particularly important for Bataille's argument that excess resources in the realm of global political economy might be acceptably channelled toward raising standards of living, rather than building up military forces (Bataille, 1967 [1989]).

What Bataille calls the growth limits of 'terrestrial space' may not have been reached in relation to gender; however, 'the immediate limitation, for each individual or each group, is given by the other individuals or other groups' (p. 29). This more 'immediate limitation' provides for the possibility of perceiving the closures and other limits enacted by dualism upon gender in organizational settings. Notions of acceptable or preferable waste, excess, and sacrifice will not be emphasized or denied here. In a sense, this is in line with the ironic attitude suggested by philosopher Richard Rorty (1989, 1998),

inasmuch as we present these notions as a way to change the vocabulary regarding dualist versus fluid notions of gender and organizing. By reading gendered organization, or gender as organizing, through the lenses of waste, excess and sacrifice, we wish to play with the concepts, a form of testing philosophy and a way to think about how gender can be thought.

Waste of gender in organizations

Waste shows us the spaces that neither dualism nor fluidity can capture. Within classical economics, waste indicates sub-optimization, irrationality, disutility. For Bataille, waste is the human condition of radical incompleteness and the constituting possibility of death. Bataille's general economy should not lead us to a vision of waste as that which is not enough, but rather waste as overflowing excess. In contrast, gender and organization texts, explicitly or implicitly, suggest that gender can be 'wasted,' in the more traditional sense — hence, a lack or loss of gender, or genderlessness. For example, feminine energy, as a thing to be managed, often eludes the organization, and consequently appears wasted (see, for example, Vinnicombe and Colwill, 1995). Such approaches posit dualist gender as energy in different forms, and thus imagines efficiencies lost if both are not harvested. Similarly, attempts at raising consciousness have suggested that a more gender-diverse managerial presence — for example, more women, understood as bearing traits of an essential femininity, in positions of power — would serve as a panacea for a number of corporate ills, from sloppy accounting to bad human relations practices. Such thinking is well in line with the representation of organizations as closed systems that need to be optimized.

Fluid thinking regarding gender does something similar. Gender, as fluid, only allows for specific movements between dualist poles, presenting more fixed positions at either extreme (a greater or lesser concentration of feminine or masculine traits) as wasted opportunity. Such strategies strive toward optimization — seen in the way the dualist mindset operates even in its critique — and render the fluid merely another form of positioning, or management. If we comprehend waste as a part of general economy, we recognize that what is missing in such theorizing is the possibility for — in fact, the desirability of — radical waste.

Excess of gender in organizing

Butler's (1990) notion of gender as performance has been understood as revealing gender's constantly negotiated status in a fluid sphere between the poles of masculine and feminine. 'Typical' gender roles are but staid versions of the same negotiation. Criticism has suggested that this scenario never truly allows for a radical gender position; one that could do anything besides assume specific ironic poses in the third space between the dualisms

(Bhabha, 1990). Moreover, such thinking seems to allow for irony rather than upheaval, nor does it give, for example, a third sex or fourth sex any real phenomenological value. Thus, Butler's theories seem to point to a position where irony can never be anything else except a staged play, a wink and a nod (cf. Gherardi, 1995).

However, with Bataille's general economy — and the incomplete nature of a system that operates with the notion of excess — as a guideline, an alternative understanding of Butler can be derived. If we take gender as production at face value — gender constituted by performances and iterations according to certain set codes — the possibility of excessive genders, in the sense of failing to draw upon and contribute to an integrated, efficient system, emerges. Arlie Hochschild's (1983) classic analysis of airplane stewardesses suggests that, far from negotiating gender, their feminine typicality becomes necessarily excessive. A number of performances and gestures are added upon the body, not to create the 'woman,' but to create the hyperwoman (cf. Baudrillard, 1993), as stewardess — with every conceivable ruse used to strengthen their femininity, such as specifically cut uniforms, mandated cheeriness and institutionalized subservience. This femininity can then be subverted through a number of means, subtle and overt. The sheer excess enables movement in such a field. Excess points to the supplements required in creating the feminine and the incompleteness of the so-called female. By (economically) adding on codes we witness the impossibility of reaching a final gender state. The possibility of enacting irony towards this construct is not born out of a political move beyond the dualism, but through the overflow of codes, the excess. Excess emerges at dualism's limit, yet points out the impossibility of closure.

Sacrifice of gender among the organized

The genderless being — perhaps evoked through regimented organization's restriction of gender as an always and already active element (Brewis and Linstead, 2000) — can be used to explore Bataille's concept of sacrifice. Connected to Simmel's thinking regarding the social, and further the aspect of sovereignty, sacrifice is both the ultimate social aspect of general economy and the sacred aspect of loss. For Bataille as for Simmel (1978, see also Moscovici, 1993), sacrifice is central for establishing the social order. In a pragmatic sense, sacrifice can be understood as the lessening of the individual in order to strengthen the social (Linstead, 2000) and for Bataille this lessening, even to the level of degradation and death, is not necessarily something to be avoided — as it is vital for the very existence of existence. In a way, sacrifice lies at the very heart of heterology, as the prime irreducible excess.

It would be tempting to draw the conclusion that the sacrifice of gender and the acceptance of gendered loss undergirds organizing completely. In

order to enter the sphere of organizing, losses will be incurred, so that genderlessness could be seen as the spectre that haunts organization, in the sense that the normalizing and standardizing processes of organizing will sacrifice gender and talking about gender in order to establish the organization as a unitary whole. Organization, viewed from a managerialist perspective, deals with the creation of a functioning whole and the creation of genderless discourses (regardless of whether one views this as a patriarchal power-game or simply as enhancing internal efficiency) can be seen as aiding this. Sacrificing gender, in the sense of not allowing it into the discourse of organization, might be an aspect of the foundational tendency of reduction in organizing: in order to establish an organization in the world, some reductions/sacrifices must be made. Losing gender is not the only path for such reduction, as we can think of any number of ways in which the simplification that an organization always is can be created, but in a patriarchal society, it follows logically from the societal order. This is, however, an unnecessarily bleak view. The gendered sacrifices incurred in organizations and among the organized are real enough without referring to abstractions such as the creation of organizing as genderless. Sacrificing gender on the meta-level of organizing meets a far more tangible sacrifice *due to* gender in organizational life. Loss of time, identity, and being forced to choose between family and career — all are easily understandable within a framework of gender-related sacrifice, even though these sacrifices are lived, rather than aspects of understanding organization on a systemic level. Similarly, that organizations sacrifice qualities among the organized, in order to enable organizing, seems commonsensical (cf. Thompson, 1967; Brewis and Linstead, 2000). However, we are then returned to restricted economy's version of loss, that is, sacrifice understood as the acceptance of the alternate costs incurred by choices in a system of optimization.

Bataille instead points out that sacrifice is a process of consecration, a relation to the sacred. Sacrifice, understood as 'destruction, whose essence is to consume profitlessly whatever might remain in the progression of useful works' (Bataille, 1967 [1989], p. 58), is synonymous with society inasmuch as both are processes of negativity, relations and reactions to the phenomenological limit and fact of death. Both society and sacrifice are ways of accessing something beyond the individual, making sacrifice for Bataille the organizing principle *par excellence*. By enabling sacrifice, an individual transcends the limits of individual existence, making the sacred and, concomitantly, freedom possible. But what has this to do with gender?

Moving the argumentation away from dualistic gender may seem a productive move, but might, in light of a view that emphasizes incompleteness beyond closure, actually remove those occurrences of waste, excess and sacrifice that are the basis for social being. The possibility for sacrifice necessitates claiming a position that can then be used in a destructive/productive way, 'destroyed as things, that is, insofar as they have become things'

(Bataille, 1967 [1989], p. 56). Yet, we have suggested that fluidity never escapes the transient negotiations of a restricted economy. Fluidity exists in a system of efficient use, a pre-organized field: there is no excess, no waste, no loss. All zones contain, organize and produce. Gender, understood as fluid negotiation, can never be sacrificed. However, the sacrifices made by, for example, a working mother, are not negotiations in the sense assumed by the notion of fluidity. Instead, it is a lived relation to gender that is established in a system of real losses that are not graspable as taking sides or flowing between fixed positions. Here, the notion of a general economy of losses and waste may be a more productive mode of thinking.

Bataille's general economy emerges at a limit. Dualisms in a general economy of gender remain marked as sites of potential subordination, but are themselves seen as limits situated in an economy of openness. Dualisms are productive and explode into incompleteness. This should not be read as mere abstraction. Rather, thinking about gender as openness and excess could be viewed as a political stand, one where sides are not so much taken as they are produced.

The fluid(s) of organization

In a general economy of gender, we differentiate between that which is open and incomplete and that which is fluid in the following way. 'Fluidity', understood as a property or characteristic of gender, or a possible context through which the modalities of gender might move, mobilizes the expectation of gender as some concatenation of traits to which notions of fluidity can be said to apply. Even then, the most open description of gender must yet consist of something that can be affirmed as fluid. Yet the quality of fluidity does not apply at the level of gender, but at the level of traits said to constitute gender. Gender, as open and incomplete, does not operate at the level of various traits, identifying characteristics, or even constituting context. Rather, gender functions as an openness or agency. As a condition through which, for example, experience, knowledge, and practice are expressed, gender enacts an agency through which other possibilities occur.

Varieties of theorists have attempted to answer the question of what, in fact, expresses itself through gender (Gherardi, 1995). For example, Bourdieu argues in his work on masculinity and femininity that gender expresses and objectifies a basic, and dualistic, mythical understanding of the universe (Bourdieu, 2001). We cannot hope to answer such a question here. What we have attempted, however, is to turn the investigation of gender to productive dualisms — different from a simple application of descriptive dualisms to gender — that marks the contribution of work in phenomenology, including notions around the construction of race and gender in contexts of racism and sexism, and the continuing openness of the human being and human

relationships. Furthermore, within a general economy of gender, notions of sacrifice, excess and waste develop the potential of gender as a limit and an openness capable of affecting and being affected by forms of organization.

Drawing on such notions, the notion of fluidity can be revisited. Recognizing the key role of openness, incompleteness and excess in negotiating the apparent closures of hierarchical dualisms would arguably relegate fluidity to a secondary concern. Simply stated, notions of fluidity are not, and never can be, enough to escape dualistic closures and limits of growth. Furthermore, dualism strengthens the production function it introduces into organizing (understood here in the general sense championed by Cooper [1986]). Nor is fluidity ever an apolitical concept in the discourse of academia. Fluidity, as presented in the academic discussion on gender and organizing, does not emerge simply as an analytical category, but in a thinking that embraces the ideological foundations of the social sciences. Choosing to talk of fluidity is to align oneself with a mode of argumentation that at the same time tries to distance itself from positivist thinking, but nevertheless often presents fluidity as a fundamentally true thing, a fact of (social) life (see, for example, Gherardi, 1995). Even in the process of discovering subordination, the goal (perhaps by necessity) seems to be ontological subordination along an axis of knowledge. In organization theory, fluidity, as a concept, has also to a great extent been affiliated with what could be referred to as 'critical management studies' (see, for example, Willmot and Alvesson, 1992), and comes bundled with a specific striving, a political standpoint of raising consciousness. The politics and the ontology thus become dangerously (but not necessarily undesirably) intertwined. Succinctly put, fluidity as a concept is itself caught in a dualist dilemma through its affiliation with the taking of positions against 'mainstream' organization studies. As a result, we are faced with the issue of ethics. Criticizing dualism simply on epistemological grounds becomes problematic as it ignores the semio-ontological functions of dualist thinking.

Conclusions

Through an investigation of the organizing potential of productive dualisms and ontological hierarchies that move toward epistemic and ontological closures, this essay has articulated the bounded potential of fluidity and opened instead onto a general economy of gender, shedding light on the potential for waste, excess and sacrifice in gendered organizing, gender as organizing and the organization of gender. We have argued that dualisms are not the enemy. Dualisms, conceptualized semiotically, in gender and race theory — especially in philosophical-phenomenological traditions — allow such theory to do what we expect it to do, that is, point out and articulate theoretical understandings of subordination. Dualisms, conceptualized

semiotically, in gender and critical race theory allow such theory to do what we expect it to do, that is, point out and articulate theoretical understandings of subordination and aid us in doing critical work. Moreover, closures around the interrelated subordination of femininity and blackness emerge as a crucial reminder of the interlocking projects of gender and race theory.

It has been suggested that change cannot be measured in an environment directly, but should be measured indirectly through changes in the effect of the environment on the organisms that inhabit it (Lewontin, 2000, p. 127). We wonder whether, in the interplay between gender and organizational environment, one can observe changes in the relevant organisms that are reflections of changes in the environment. Moreover, is gender to be seen as an agent of possibility or a threat? Clearly, with notions already in place of what is good for the organization, certain gendered traits have raised fears that interactions around, for example, feminine traits will change the workplace, or an organization generally, in an undesirable direction. In such situations, gender may be sacrificed, or wasted, in a banal sense. A more interesting sense of sacrifice and waste could be generated in the presence of gender as an agency (Lewontin, 2000, p. 103).

Whereas Bataille insists upon general economy's excess and irretrievable loss, we cannot help but see the innovation beyond the system of restricted, or efficient, economies as an inspiration for work in gender. Criticisms around trying to make excess productive — in gendered organizations and the organization of gender — repeat a typical rhetorical move: we apparently argue for using concepts in a function that they specifically defer. As we have argued, this concern overlooks Bataille's own attempts to identify the acceptable and preferable in excess. Moreover, we shall not disdain the exploration of phenomenological moments in human experience, regardless of some more — absolute — truth that must remain intimate and silent. Drawing upon Derrida's logic in relation to forgiveness (Derrida, 2001, p. 32), what we acknowledge, then, is that if organizing organized only the organizable, the basis of organizing would disappear. Whereas a general economy of gender recognizes the non-closure and useless waste of excess, the notion of organizing must consist in the attempt to organize the unorganizable without which it loses all meaning.

References

- Alvesson, M. (1998) Gender relations and identity at work: a case study of masculinities and femininities in an advertising agency, *Human Relations*, 51,8, 969–1005.
- Alvesson, M. and Sköldbberg, K. (2000) *Reflexive Methodology, New Vistas for Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.
- Bataille, G., trans. and ed. Stoekl, A. (1985) *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

- Bataille, G., trans. Hurley, R. (1967 [1989]) *The Accursed Share, Vol. 1: Consumption*. San Francisco, CA: City Lights.
- Bataille, G., trans. Hurley, R. (1976 [1991]) *The Accursed Share, Vol. 2 and 3* New York: Zone Books.
- Baudrillard, J. (1993) *Symbolic Exchange and Death*. London: Sage.
- Beech, N. and Cairns, G. (2001) Coping with change: the contribution of postdichotomous ontologies, *Human Relations*, 54,10, 1303–24.
- Bhabha, H. (1990) The third space. In Rutherford, J. (ed.) *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, pp. 207–21. London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Borgerson, J. (2001) Feminist ethical ontology: contesting 'the bare givenness of intersubjectivity', *Feminist Theory*, 2,2, 173–87.
- Borgerson, J. (2002) Managing desire: heretical transformation in Pasolini's Medea. *Consumption, Markets, and Culture*, 5,1, 55–62.
- Borgerson, J. and Schroeder, J. (2002) Ethical issues of global marketing: avoiding bad faith in visual representation. *European Journal of Marketing*, 36,5/6, 570–94.
- Bourdieu, P. (2001) *Masculine Domination*. Oxford: Polity Press.
- Brewis, J. and Linstead, S. (2000) *Sex, Work, and Sex Work: Eroticizing Organization*. London: Routledge.
- Butler J. (1987/1999) *Subjects of Desire*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Butler, J. (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion Of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1993) *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*. New York: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1997) The future of gender. Seminar at the Pembroke Center, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, 12 December.
- Butler, J., Laclau, E. and Žižek, S. (2000) *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*. London and New York: Verso.
- Calás, M. and Smircich, L. (1992) Re-writing gender into organizational theorizing: directions from feminist perspectives. In Reed, M. and Hughes, M. (eds) *Rethinking Organization: New Directions in Organization Theory and Analysis*, pp. 227–53. London: Sage.
- Chia, R. (1996a) *Organizational Analysis as Deconstructive Practice*. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter.
- Chia, R. (1996b) The problem of reflexivity in organizational research: towards a post-modern science of organization. *Organization*, 12,4, 31–59.
- Cooper, R. (1986) Organization/disorganization. *Social Science Information*, 25,2, 299–335.
- Cooper, R. (1992) Formal organization as representation: remote control, displacement and abbreviation. In Reed, M. and Hughes, M. (eds) *Rethinking Organization: New Directions in Organization Theory and Analysis*, pp. 254–72. London: Sage.
- Cooper, R. and Burrell, G. (1988) Modernism, postmodernism and organizational analysis: an introduction. *Organization Studies* 9,1, 91–112.
- Coviello, J. and Borgerson, J. (1999) Tracing parallel oppressions: a feminist ontology of women and animals. *feminista!* 3,4, 1. Available online at <<http://www.feminista.com/v3n4/coviello.html>> Last accessed 23 March 2004.
- Derrida, J., trans. Dooley, M. and Highes, M. (2001) *Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*. London: Routledge.
- Foucault, M. (1970/2002) *The Order of Things*. London: Routledge.
- Gell, A. (1992) Inter-tribal commodity barter and reproductive gift-exchange in old Melanesia. In Humphrey, C. and Hugh-Jones, S. (eds), *Barter, Exchange and Value*, pp. 142–68. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gherardi, S. (1995) *Gender, Symbolism and Organizational Culture*, London: Sage.

- Goldberg, D.T. (1993) *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Gordon, L. (1995a) *Bad Faith and Antiracist Racism*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press.
- Gordon, L. (1995b) *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man: An Essay on Philosophy and the Human Sciences*. London: Routledge.
- Gordon, L. (1997) *Her Majesty's Other Children: Sketches of Racism from a Neocolonial Age*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Gordon, L. (2000) *Existential Africana*. New York: Routledge.
- Guillet de Monthoux, P. (2000) The art management of aesthetic organizing. In Linstead, S. and Höpfl, H. (eds) *The Aesthetics of Organization*, pp. 35–60. London: Sage.
- Hartmann, K. (1966) *Sartre's Ontology*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Hassard, J. and Parker, M. (1993) *Postmodernism and Organizations*. London: Sage.
- Hochschild, A. (1983) *The Managed Heart: The Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Jones, C. and Surman, E. (2002) After organization studies. *ephemera*, 2,2, 186–92.
- Kant, I., trans. Goldthwait, J.T. (1761 [1960]) *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Knights, D. (1997) Organization theory in the age of deconstruction: dualism, gender and postmodernism revisited. *Organization Studies*, 18,1, 1–19.
- La Fountain (2000) Bataille's eroticism, now: from transgression to insidious sorcery. In Silverman, H. (ed.) *Philosophy and Desire*, pp. 26–41. New York: Routledge.
- Latour, B. (1987) *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers Through Society*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Leach, E. and Leach, J. (eds) (1983) *The Kula: New Perspectives on Mass Exchange*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Levinas, E. (1985) *Ethics and Infinity*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne.
- Linstead, S. (2000) Ashes and madness: the play of negativity and the poetics of organization. In Linstead, S. and Höpfl, H. (eds) *The Aesthetics of Organization*, pp. 61–92. London: Sage.
- Lewontin, R. (2000) *The Triple Helix: Gene, Organism and Environment*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard.
- Mauss, M. (1967) *The Gift*. New York: Norton Library.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1970) What is phenomenology? In J. Gill (ed.) *Philosophy Today*, 3, pp. 15–36. New York: Macmillan.
- Miller, D. (1987) *Material Culture and Mass Consumption*. Oxford: Berg.
- Miller, D. (1994a) *Modernity, An Ethnographic Approach: Dualism and Mass Consumption in Trinidad*. Oxford and Providence, RI: Berg.
- Miller, D. (1994b) Ontology and style. In Friedman, J. (ed.) *Consumption and Identity*, pp. 71–96. Amsterdam: Harwood.
- Moscovici, S. (1993) *The Invention of Society*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Moxey, K. (1994) *The Practice of Theory*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Nathanson, M. (1986) *Anonymity: A Study in the Philosophy of Alfred Schutz*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Nodoushani, O. (1999) A postmodern theory of general economy: the contribution of Georges Bataille. *Studies in Cultures, Organizations and Societies*, 5,2, 331–45.
- Oliver, K. (1998) *Subjectivity Without Subjects*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Plotnitsky, A. (1994) *Complementarity: Anti-Epistemology after Bohr and Derrida*. London and Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Plumwood, V. (1993) *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. London: Routledge.

- Reed, M. (1997) In praise of duality and dualism: rethinking agency and structure in organizational analysis. *Organization Studies*, 18,1, 21–42.
- Rehn, A. (2001) *Electronic Potlatch: A Study on New Technologies and Primitive Economic Behaviors*. Stockholm: Royal Institute of Technology.
- Rorty, R. (1989) *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Rorty, R. (1998) *Truth and Progress*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Simmel, G. (1978) *The Philosophy of Money*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Strathern, M. (1988) *The Gender of the Gift*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Styhre, A. (2002) Information and communication technology and the excess(es) of information: an introduction to Georges Bataille's general economy. *Ephemera*, 2,1, 28–42.
- Surman, E. (2002) Dialectics of dualism: the symbolic importance of the home/work divide. *Ephemera*, 2,3, 209–23.
- Thompson, J. (1967) *Organizations in Action*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Vinnicombe, S. and Colwill, N. (1995) *The Essence of Women in Management*. New York: Prentice Hall.
- Willmott, H. and Alvesson, M. (eds) (1992) *Critical Management Studies*. London: Sage.