



Organizações & Sociedade

ISSN: 1413-585X

revistaoes@ufba.br

Universidade Federal da Bahia
Brasil

Lacerda, Daniel S.

Overcoming dichotomies through space: the contribution of dialectical materialism to organization studies

Organizações & Sociedade, vol. 22, núm. 73, abril-junio, 2015, pp. 223-235

Universidade Federal da Bahia
Salvador, Brasil

Available in: <http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=400638363003>

- How to cite
- Complete issue
- More information about this article
- Journal's homepage in redalyc.org

redalyc.org

Scientific Information System

Network of Scientific Journals from Latin America, the Caribbean, Spain and Portugal

Non-profit academic project, developed under the open access initiative

OVERCOMING DICHOTOMIES THROUGH SPACE: THE CONTRIBUTION OF DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM TO ORGANIZATION STUDIES

SUPERANDO DICOTOMIAS ATRAVÉS DO ESPAÇO: A CONTRIBUIÇÃO DO MATERIALISMO DIALÉTICO AOS ESTUDOS ORGANIZACIONAIS

Daniel S. Lacerda*

Abstract

One of the most debated choices in every social research design is the adoption of either a realist (objective) or an idealist (subjective) worldview of sociological problems. As argued in this paper, this dichotomy can be bridged by the dialectical approach of historical space production according to Marxist traditions in human geography. Therefore, this paper explores the philosophical grounds of this debate and previous attempts to conciliate the dichotomy and finally proposes a rejection of this dichotomy by adopting the categories of 'space' and 'time' as central in organizational analysis. Space is a historical production of social relations, and the same relations are defined in terms of their surrounding space. Thus, organization studies can benefit from a spatial view of organizations to overcome epistemological constraints by interpreting organizations as historically produced and producers of their spatial context.

Keywords: space, production, epistemology, Marxism, dichotomy.

Resumo

Uma das escolhas mais debatidas na escolha da abordagem para pesquisas em ciências sociais é a adoção de um paradigma de pesquisa realista (objetivo) ou idealista (subjetivo) com o qual afrontar problemas sociológicos. Como defendido nesse artigo, essa dicotomia pode ser resolvida através da dialética da produção histórica do espaço, segundo a tradição Marxista da Geografia Humanista. Para demonstrar isso, esse artigo explora as bases filosóficas desse debate, as tentativas de conciliação dessa dicotomia, e finalmente propõe a sua rejeição através da adoção das categorias 'espaço' e 'tempo' como centrais na análise organizacional. O espaço se produz historicamente a partir de relações sociais, e as mesmas relações se definem a partir do espaço que as contém. Nesse sentido, os estudos organizacionais podem se beneficiar de uma leitura espacial de organizações para vencer barreiras epistemológicas, através da interpretação de organizações como historicamente produzidas e partes de um contexto espacial mais amplo.

Palavras-chave: espaço, produção, epistemologia, Marxismo, dicotomias.

* PhD Candidate, Lancaster University, UK.
E-mail: d.lacerda@lancaster.ac.uk

Introduction

When producing scientific knowledge, researchers are required to be philosophically positioned to provide sense to their objective and justify their selected method. In the struggle for legitimacy, many scholars may be compelled to accept either a realist (objective) or an idealist (subjective) worldview of sociological problems. However, justifying the epistemological positions of a research is never an easy task, for every dichotomy also describes a continuum. Johnson and Duberley (2000) understand such disputes as part of the epistemological conventionalisms that frame the recognition of "valid" scientific knowledge and its communities of practice. Going beyond this framing in terms of paradigmatic engagement, it remains unclear how research can be positioned when both objective constraints and subjective constructions are accepted for describing a phenomenon.

Peci (2004) explains that the "object vs. subject" debate is an old controversy that has been an adjunct to main sociological issues for a long time. She addresses this question by identifying three possible responses to the objectivity-subjectivity debate: 1) unilateral adoption of one or other view; 2) attempted synthesis of the objectivity-subjectivity dichotomy; and 3) rejection of the objectivity-subjectivity dichotomy. Exploring these three possibilities and their theoretical bases, this paper aims to focus on the dichotomy rejection, proposing the Marxist perspective of space production over time as an appropriate form of representing and dealing with organizations.

Regardless of strong ideological resistance from contemporary intellectual movements, Marxism still has plenty to offer, and the contributions that Marxism can make to organization studies remain underexplored. The explanatory power it has within a capitalist society and the inspiration of its critical vein has not been systematically considered for many issues. Despite this struggle, Marxist sociology has much in common with most organizational studies such as the acceptance of the class structure stemming from the relations of production as the major element of social differentiation and the conflictual nature of capitalist work as opposed to the functional and neutral relations of designed organizations (ADLER, 2009). What I intend to discuss here is a more concealed and specific feature of Marxist sociology, which has been absorbed in critical geography: the concept of space as relational and produced over time. I argue that the *spatiotemporal* approach to organizations is a way to articulate both the objective comprehension of the material world and a subjective approach to providing meaning for this same world, while rejecting their opposition.

Most investigations in management studies do not consider the spatial conditions of organizations. The lack of spatial analyses could blind us from the important meanings and material constraints that are dialectically conditioning. Therefore, we are often presented with managerial accounts that focus either on aprioristic worldviews or narrowed material empiricisms. As I explain in this paper, the alienation of space, through which an abstract space for organizations is constructed, can be explained by Marxist sociology and its unfolding theories. What I will present is a close consideration of Marxist contributions to sociospatial analysis and the benefits of applying the epistemological perspective of space and time to organizational analysis for overcoming an old controversy in social sciences strongly present in management: the 'object vs. subject' dichotomy.

In the next three sections, I will explore the three possible solutions proposed by Peci (2004) for the discussed dualism. For the first one – the unilateral solution – I will present prevailing controversies regarding similar dichotomies that are frequently tackled in Organization Theory: object vs. subject, realism vs. idealism, and empiricism vs. rationalism. Such dichotomies are to be explained in the light of their respective philosophical traditions and illustrated by sociological debates. In the second topic – the alternative of reconciliation – which is widely discussed in sociology, will be explored. These two topics are important to completely understand the nature of the epistemological debate. However, I will continue by rejecting the existence of the dichotomy and present the main proposition of this paper through the use of the categories of space and time on the light of the key Marxist geographers that have

discussed them. As explored in the following section, although these concepts are yet undertheorized in the field of Management and Organization Studies (hereafter MOS) – and empirical applications are particularly rare – some contributions have already acknowledged their importance in the field (COSTA; GOULART, 2011; DALE, 2005). In the last section, some theoretical implications for MOS will be drawn, summarizing the key aspects of having space and time as key analytical categories.

Taking the Unilateral Position

Although they are related, and many times coincident, the following dichotomies differ from one another, and should not be confused: 'objectivism vs. subjectivism', 'idealism vs. realism' and 'rationalism vs. empiricism'. Hessen (2000) explains them on the basis of the classical relation of the philosophy of knowledge between the *knower* subject (the individual intent on the apprehension of a new knowledge) and the *known* object (the content of knowledge to be apprehended by the subject). This relation can be understood as a search for the truth. Questions surrounding this aim include whether and how it is possible to know the truth. In this context the aforementioned dichotomies acquire sense.

The first dichotomy refers to the ontological essence of knowledge, wherein the truth would be found in the effectiveness of knowledge. The premetaphysical solution for this relation is represented by the following distinction: in objectivism the object determines the subject, and the subject incorporates the determinism of the object; whereas in subjectivism, the human knowledge is centered on a transcendent subject (HESSEN, 2000, p. 51). The epistemological possibility of achieving this knowledge brings about a metaphysical solution for the question of essence: for *realism*, the concrete world exists despite our consciousness, and all the attributes of the object are extracted from their own content; whilst for *idealism* there is no object disassociated from our consciousness, and the only possible objects remain as either abstract ideas or products of human perception (HESSEN, 2000, p. 53). In the social sciences, idealism is usually instantiated through *nominalism* (words/names instantiate our consciousness and establish truth). Although the previous explanations concern absolute concepts, several variations of these traditions attenuate their extreme positions.

The third mentioned dichotomy regards the sources for generating/observing knowledge. From the one side, according to *rationalism* a judgment will only be valid and logically true if derived from reason; and on the other extreme, according to *empiricism* the knower consciousness can only extract content from experience (HESSEN, 2000, p. 40). This third dichotomy is related to a contemporary categorization of knowledge as tacit (only acquired in in action) vs. explicit (can be represented in pieces of information).

Thus, the dichotomy motivating the present discussion (subjective-objective) is associated with its very metaphysical solution (realism-idealism) in the sense that the latter contains an epistemological substance for the former. The adoption of realistic or idealistic commitments by science is also a function of historical context. Roughly, as explained by Morente (1980), philosophy appears for the first time along with the belief that we live in a "real" world; therefore, our natural attitude toward the world is objectivity, which provides the grounds for *realism*. However, confronted by historical happenings (such as the dissolution of religious unity and discovery of the spherical earth and its place in the solar system), the Western Aristotelian philosophy of realism falls into crisis and gives place to *idealism*, which considers things as derived from the consciousness of the subject (MORENTE, 1980, section 69). Arguably, this shift has repeatedly occurred, illustrating the dialectical development of social knowledge¹.

¹ An analogous behavior of waiving traditions is illustrated in the field of management by Barley and Kunda (1992). They argue that contrary to what management tradition communicates, managerial discourse did not evolve linearly toward rational and, ultimately, normative forms of control. Instead, management rhetorics, assumed by the authors also as ideologies, defined social praxis in five "swinging waves" of normative and rational control, according to historical context.

According to Morente (1980, section 70), the main characteristic of modern thought is in effect its conditioning by its historical context, which carries the past that preceded it. The anxieties that opened the space for idealism also favored the emergence of the theory of knowledge, i.e., questions of epistemology, and the problem of the knowledge process. The metaphysical questions of being now inform various perspectives of knowledge, representing different natures of social sciences, of ways of achieving new knowledge (epistemologies). The opposing positions of naturalism vs. constructivism, for example, place in opposition the view that a concrete truth can only be achieved by proper methods used in complete disassociation with the world (naturalism); against the actuality of constructed truths through language and manipulation of meaning, wherein the individual cannot be considered as disassociated from the world (constructivism).

One of the key contemporary questions of sociology (and hence, of management) is whether the subject holds the *agency* to produce its social (organizational) reality or is determined by the social (organizational) *structure*. This dichotomy holds the very grounding of the 'idealism vs. realism' problem, transposing it to the social production. The agency vs. structure debate is still controversial in the social sciences (KING, 1999; ARCHER, 2000). While *agency* refers to the capacity of an individual to act, in traditional streams of structuralism the *structure* determines the agent in a static and time-independent way. This implies that whenever structure is opposed to agency, the duality is dialectically reoriented to the possibility of an *idealistic* determining agent confronting a *realistic* determinant structure. Bourdieu (1998) and Giddens (1980) are among those who sponsored the most propagated attempts of reconciliation between agency and structure, creating theories for which structure and agency are coexistent in human consciousness (Bourdieu's *habitus*) or in the action (Giddens's *structuration*), as explained in the next section.

In management, an intuitive answer to the separation between realism and idealism/nominalism might unfold from the identification of the level of analysis. That is to say, when discussing organizations, or the organizational field, we refer to something that does not concretely exist. As constructed concepts, organization and field could be approached as reified entities, since it is admitted to be possible to grasp the entire lot of what is born from the limited basis of human ingenuity (such a reification process is well observed in Systems Rationalism, for example by Boulding, 1956). However, when it comes to members of organizations, we are dealing with natural human beings, an extremely complex entity to conceptually understand. Since human beings are undefined, they would acquire a theoretical existence only when looked at through hermeneutic lenses, whatever they may be. Thus, the analysis of individuals would be more easily subordinated to the ontological assumption of subjectivity of the acquired knowledge (as depicted by ethnographic perspectives on organizations, for example Van Maanen, 1979).

However, this argument also holds a viable antithesis: one could say that reifying organizations in a realist approach is impossible, since organizations do not exist concretely, and thus should be treated as theoretical constructs. Similarly, driving conclusions regarding individuals would lead to logical fallacies if they were not directly supported by concrete experience. The problem with this contradiction is that it overlooks the underlying question. In other words, to tackle the question of knowledge source we cannot rely only on responses to the metaphysics of knowledge essence (as defined by Hessen, 2000). Paço-Cunha (2012) reminds us that the appropriation of categories needs to be part of a systematic effort of rearticulation of abstractions with the concrete, which means that any articulation of the categories of production should refer to the fundamental antagonism of society – the contradiction of itself. Over the past few decades, there have been many attempts to apply in the social sciences theories that similarly articulate the epistemological positions of realism and idealism, as will be illustrated in the next section.

Attempted Synthesis

In the social sciences, the debate on dichotomies is more commonly found in the various paradigms that are built from the combinations of different dichotomies/continuums, as explained in the classical work by Burrell and Morgan (1979). It was only from the 1990s that possibilities of a multiparadigmatic knowledge incited MOS scholars to propose pathways to this journey (HASSARD, 1991; LEWIS; GREMES, 1999), although they have also motivated more doubting scholars to emphasize the incommensurability of such paradigms (JACKSON; CARTER, 1991; COOKE, 1997) or reaffirm the conviction of anchored positions on single paradigms (REED, 1997; FLEETWOOD, 2005). Although this paper is not about paradigms, and focuses on a single aspect of it, it is linked to this very debate, which has been influenced by different philosophical traditions and disciplines that have attempted to bridge the ontological gap between the objective (realism) and subjective (nominalism) nature of science.

On philosophical grounds, Hessen (2000, p. 61) places *phenomenalism* as the most important attempt to reconcile realism and idealism. It agrees with realism in its assumption of the existence of real objects but it is also aligned to idealism insofar as it limits knowledge to the consciousness of our minds. Phenomenalism, as constructed by Immanuel Kant, states that albeit "things-in-themselves" are "found" in reality, they are "processed" by an *a priori* intuition, which constrains the conceptual properties of such objects. Hence, it does not acknowledge the possibility of knowing the primary attributes of real objects – such as form, extension, and movement – since space and time are a function of our consciousness. Although phenomenism contributes to the understanding of the constraints discussed so far, the limit of its application to MOS resides in its grounding in the sole relation 'knower subject-known object'. Such philosophical rapport is conceptually changed by the complex nature of social objects, wherein multiple subjects interfere in each other's judgment.

Besides the proposition of the *a priori* contents of the mind, the Kantian contribution introduces the *critique* of such an assumption, by denying any pre-existing metaphysical hypothesis on the structure of reality. Kant was an idealist in the sense of the essence of knowledge, but this challenging and critical spirit can be also applied from the realist perspective: assuming that the real world has a given order (to some extent independent from our consciousness) but challenging its absoluteness. Accordingly, critical thinking applied to realism constitutes *critical realism*, wherein the objective properties of things are assumed to be formed not only by human perceptions but also by the reasoning of our consciousness. This position is becoming increasingly accepted by social sciences as it allows the determinism of objective constraints but still admits the role of social concepts in its critique. However, its precise ontological groundings are still disputed by different traditions (AL-AMOUDI; WILLMOTT, 2011).

The dispute on the objective vs. subjective nature of the knowledge of the world goes much further than its apprehension. It also (and perhaps especially) concerns the possibilities of acting on the same world. Particularly in the social sciences, famous reconciliations were constructed on the grounds of the 'agency vs. structure' dichotomy, and among those, two important sociological theories that emerged in the 1970s should be noted: the Theory of Social Action by Pierre Bourdieu and Structuration Theory by Anthony Giddens (Sewell, 1992; Peci, 2003). In brief, Bourdieu (1998) contends that power plays a key role in sustaining common belief. According to him, different agents who hold different levels of capital compose the social structure. The importance of the capital is determined by the leading agents, and the structure is created by the actions of single individuals who position themselves according to the level and type of capital they hold for this field, which determines how powerful they are. However, this very structure is internalized within each player, promoting a determining force that compels them to act according to the rules that govern this game, and thus maintaining the *status quo*. These internalized practices compose what Bourdieu calls *habitus*, and results in the reinforcing relation between internal (*habitus*) and external structures.

Giddens (1980) shares the same hermeneutic perspective of Bourdieu's social game as well as the attributed relevance to power relations. However, Giddens's

structure exists within human action, focusing more on the determining individual. Its central concept, *structuration*, stands for the effect that social structure has for the human action and the way this action defines social structure. For Giddens, although the set of social practices are enacted by space-time dispositions, the dialectical relation is not temporal, but virtually dependent on the other practices. The structure is a reflective product of human activities and the activities a recursive continuity of structured actions.

Both Bourdieu and Giddens are informed by Marx, especially by the notion of reification (see below), which followed the historical production of Marxist thought around the categories of 'ideal vs. real'. Marx's stance in this debate is seemingly realist, since he borrowed the dialectical method² from Hegel to apply it to material social reality. The contradictions are thus materially determined and acquire predominance over the clash of ideas (thus his method "historical materialism"), as illustrated in *The German Ideology*:

The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life. Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men, appear at this stage as the direct efflux of their material behavior. (MARX; ENGELS, 1968, p. 6)

Although ideas appear here as conditioned by material practice, Marx and Engels acknowledge the necessity of ideas to intervene in the world, for they are "directly interwoven with the material." In subsequent productions of Marxian philosophy (moving forward from orthodox Marxism), Marxist dialectics was used to approach questions of knowledge, and Lukács (1967, 1971) gave one of the most prominent contributions of this categorization.

Lukács approached the objectivity-subjectivity dichotomy by examining the Kantian tradition that presupposed an external reality (universal, objective, and concrete) wherein no metaphysical essence would exist, and the representation of concrete ("singularity") wherein a particular instance is classified. Traditional scientific discourse would thus generalize each classified instance: "since every category – every form – is a product of transcendental creative subjectivity, Kant consequently needs to deny its content" (LUKÁCS, 1971, p. 21, my translation). Lukács criticizes this scientific tradition (subject/object) and finds in artistic form the possibility of linking objectivity and subjectivity through the category of the "particular": "because art depicts concrete men in concrete situations [...] it must attain the meaning of the typical of men and circumstances, providing a synthesis whose object would be the pure typical" (LUKÁCS, 1971, p. 230–231, my translation).

In a later development, Lukács (1967) put in Marxist dialectics the possibility of examining the contradictory content of reality as inseparable from the essence of the reality that generated it. Examining commodity fetishism as the central structural problem of capitalist societies, he argues that when commodity becomes the universal structuring principle of a society, it replaces commodity as "particular," founded in its use value. When commodity thus becomes a universal category, its exchange relations produce reification, i.e., transformation of an abstraction into a concrete object, subjugating human consciousness to the forms in which this reification finds expression. The way in which economy is later rationalized and systematized in formal laws – empowered by the division of labor – estranges men from the inherent contradiction existent within these relations, "thus, the subject of the exchange is just as abstract, formal and reified as its object" (LUKÁCS, 1967, p. 26). Lefebvre associates this tendency to the abstraction of space, as explained next in the presentation of the main argument of this paper: the appreciation of organizational truth through the analysis of the production of space over time.

² The recurrent method of confronting a thesis to its contrary, which leads to a contradiction that will generate the synthesis to be used as a new thesis.

Rejecting the Dichotomy

Based on Nietzsche's critique of pure reason and building on the tradition of U.S. pragmatism, Peci (2004) proposes the rejection of the dichotomy 'ideal vs. real', which can be understood as shifting between the possible ways to reach the truth. This paper will offer a further option to reject this two-sided ontological possibility, which is based on a sociomaterial approach to the problem. It is based on Marxist thinking and argues that the separation of ideal and real can be overcome when space is observed over time. This proposal, as in the previously mentioned case of pragmatism, does not reject the ontological existence of these categories of subject *per se*; it just shifts away from the necessity of conciliation or negotiation between them in order to reach the truth. To pursue this track, it is first necessary to define *space* not in its physical and Cartesian sense (i.e., concrete form) but as a wider category that incorporates human relations and unanimated objects (which can be then operationalized by different constructs such as scale, network, territory, or place), as will be explained below. Accordingly, *time* is not disassociated from space; it is referred to through the historical analysis of spatial structures and their development.

According to Marx, the sphere of production is primary and determinant over the other spheres of social life. This production takes place in space, which is socially constructed over time by the power relations existent in society. Spatial features (both physical and social) enact possibilities and restrictions, affecting every dimension of everyday life. Moreover, no matter how precisely reality is depicted by objective descriptions, it is also determined by precedent social processes and associated discourses, inasmuch as for Marx individuals are constrained and enabled by the historical unfolding of the forces of production. The social context can thus rearrange power relations through the production of a new space. This dialectical relation is developed by some of the authors who have greatly influenced the field of human geography (LEFEBVRE, 1991; HARVEY, 1973; SANTOS, 2009), and who share the perspective of dialectical materialism, which informs this paper.

The ontological conception of space on which Lefebvre draws is based in an understanding of 'total space', which cannot be separated or fragmented by disciplines or elements. From the very beginning, Lefebvre (1991) clarifies his rejection to the dichotomist separation "ideal" vs. "real":

What term should be used to describe the division which keeps the various types of space away from each other, so that physical space, mental space and social space do not overlap? Distortion? Disjunction? Schism? Break? As a matter of fact the term used is far less important than the distance that separates 'ideal' space, which has to do with mental (logic-mathematical) categories, from 'real' space, which is the space of social practice. In actuality each of these two kinds of space involves, underpins and presupposes the other. (LEFEBVRE, 1991, p.14)

When examining the issue of urban space and social justice, David Harvey remarks that social relations are always spatial. In his methodological essays, Harvey (1973, p. 287) highlights the importance of human practice for the Marxian framework as the only way to resolve the dualisms of Western thought (subject and object, fact and value, mind and body, etc.). Harvey (1973) particularly highlights how intertwined the concepts of space, social justice, and urbanism are recognizing the power of Marx's analysis to reconcile disparate topics – by the collapse of dualisms that cannot be bridged – without losing control over the analysis.

The underlying reason for this viewpoint comes from the dialectical epistemology of the Marxist method, i.e., there is no prevailing side in the epistemological dichotomy subject – object. The human individual is the only animal capable of altering itself by changing its surrounding structure: human practice produces history at the same time as historical structure constrains human action. Concepts and ideas can then become the material force of production, as they are translated into human practice (HARVEY, 1973). Concepts are produced, hence, under certain conditions, and "the restructuring

of knowledge through this transformation process mirrors the transformation process as it operates in society as a whole" (HARVEY, 1973, p. 299).

Harvey claims that the key methodological question should be thus focused on understanding how this transformation occurs, which means to reveal how space is constantly produced. The world was naturally composed of a set of inanimate "things" before the beginning of human interventions in it. From the moment human beings start to appropriate inhabited space, we should understand space as including also social relations as constitutive elements. Lefebvre is one of the key authors who have shown how the comprehension of "space" is crucial to social relations. He analyzed the reproduction of social relations in the design, production, and representation of space over time. *The Production of Space* (LEFEBVRE, 1991) represented, and further developed, the concept of space in a way which is not neutral and concrete, but encompassing both the producing processes and the material products.

The production of space is a historical process that constantly evolves from the previous instant. The understanding of space is also determined by how human beings shape it. Milton Santos later leveraged Lefebvre's theories by advancing the critical perspective of geography to the development of global capitalism. His definition of space is oriented to the development of economic production; moreover, he referred to the organization of such space as "an indivisible, integral and also contradictory set of 'systems of objects' and 'systems of actions', not taken in isolation but as a unique scenario in which history unfolds" (SANTOS, 2009, p. 63). For Santos, the technique mediates the production of space. It is not only a conceptual operation but also a concrete realization. More than analyzing the product of labor or the worker, different techniques distinguish different spaces and bridge the "producer – product" gap. This proposition could be illustrated by the different management cycles that enact different 'fashionable' ways of managing, resulting in diverse realizations of managers and organizations over time.

The constant negotiation of ideal and real in the work of Lefebvre can be seen through the "spatial triad" that for him constitutes space: *spatial practice* – defining the space of production and reproduction, it ensures continuity and some degree of cohesion; *representations of space* – where space is designed and conceptualized, e.g., titles, organograms, or protocols; and *representational space* – space lived and associated in its symbolic apprehension. This is the experienced space, for which representation is subjective. These three aspects cannot be considered to be detached, in the same way as embodied experiences are not separate from the environment of enactment, but rather as mutually determining each other.

According to a spatiotemporal epistemology, ideal concepts are thus historically created concepts. They do not emerge from emptiness or exist in an autonomous fashion alienated from reality. Concepts are, instead, continuously being shaped along with experience. Ideas emerge as historical truths as a consequence of spatial practice, whereas any reality in space can be explained in terms of its genesis in time (SANTOS, 2009, p. 54; LEFEBVRE, 1991, p. 115). In other words, any space is a historical production grounded on the previous existence and what existed before is not reality anymore but a representation depicted from a particular viewpoint. Accordingly, Santos (2009, p. 36) explains that "every object and action have modified their absolute signification and acquire a relative signification, provisionally truth, different from the precedent moment and impossible in another place."

As unfolding from Marxian tradition (although none of them were orthodox Marxists), the influences so far mentioned are committed to the tradition of historical materialism. Lefebvre (1991) summarizes the essence of historical materialism in geography:

Any "social existence" aspiring or claiming to be "real," but failing to produce its own space, would be a strange entity, a very peculiar kind of abstraction unable to escape from the ideological or even the "cultural" realm. (p. 53)

However, historical materialism does not necessarily imply the realist ontology of space, because it necessarily requires human mediation to convey a meaningful effect (materiality). Lefebvre (1991, p. 27) himself exemplifies that space is at the same time

as concrete and abstract as money, which is grounded on a social convention but holds the material capacity of generating transformations. Moreover, the main commitment of such authors was to include social relation in the analysis of a material world. The resultant category (whatever it is named) can help MOS in the opposite sense: to include in social relations the material sense of the world where organizations engage.

Implications for Organizations Studies

To understand the need for a spatiotemporal epistemology, it is useful to consider how time and space are objectified and rendered manageable within contemporary organizations. In effect, modern forms of organization often enact an instrumental reduction of time and space to strategic concerns. Clark (2002, p. 25) explains: "Time was given a linear format (the time line). Knowledge was given a linear format (e.g., the organization life cycle). Similar time-space trajectories can then be applied, with caveats and modification to social activities." The need for efficiency of modern organizations under instrumental concerns led the mainstream of MOS to the suppression of categories that would not contribute to this one-dimensional aim. However, it is not only true that efficiency gain is not the main requirement of all types of organizations, but being subjected to reductionist interpretations of reality can also mislead the understanding of such organizations.

Approaching organizations through the categories of space (territory, place, etc.) and time could assist in overcoming epistemological constraints. It would overcome idealistic entrapment, which reads phenomena from preconceived models of management, ignoring techniques, relations, or resources that can be understood only from the perspective of local occupants of that space. Likewise, the realistic centrality of material space as being sufficient to define the organization would be adjusted by the understanding that material objects and flows are signified on the basis of previous and ongoing territorial experiences, and such experiences entail constructed concepts: there is no science without presuppositions (NIETZSCHE, 1974, §344).

A compelling example of the use of spatiotemporal alternatives to MOS is the epistemological approach of contemporary historiographies, which appear as an emerging area of interest in the field and apply similar spatiotemporal assumptions to reconstruct 'truth' (notwithstanding discernible ontological differences from Marxian philosophy). Although the classical method of history when applied to MOS is grounded in historical realism, this practice is not absolute. Historical realism enacts history as an exercise of empirical objectivism – claiming to extract from the archives the simple reproduction of the past. However, contemporary historiographies also show how it consists of a narrative construction – from natural, material, and social entities – to disclose the past according to its traces (WEATHERBEE, 2012). Although MOS are dominated by methodological realism, Weatherbee contends that what history does is to give meaning to the actual past, as he does referring to his own historiography: "it is neither wholly realist nor wholly relativist in account" (WEATHERBEE, 2012, p. 213).

In an application of this approach, Srinivas (2012) discusses the theorizing of the past in organization studies. Albeit acknowledging how management history is more commonly constructed using archives as simple sources of facts, it suggests the application of Walter Benjamin's theses on the ways in which we recall the past: giving it a counterfactual possibility and broadening archives to include those who had no voices to appear in them. Srinivas goes beyond narrative, and his proposition could be understood as a quest for "social-material truth," which is not reachable by empirical pathways, neither can it be revealed only by human created tales but is approached by facts valid only under a given established spatiotemporal reality (the past). The truth is, thus, highly related to what happens in a given territory, but it should not be reduced to its written accounts.

The previous section demonstrated how Marxist authors' theories help to converge into two emancipative ontological assumptions of using space: it is composed by entwined objects and flows that make space socially produced by power relations,

and it is dependent on lived experience. Such assumptions are adopted in Lefebvre's (1991) triad, wherein spatial practice (production of particular sets), representation of space (planned or represented space), and representational space (symbolisms and creative representation) acknowledges associated views of a same space. Although they may seem distinct in nature, they determine each other as part of a total produced space (any symbol or representation is always associated to a space of practice).

Lefebvre's triad has been widely used by contemporary investigations of organizational space. In a seminal application of his theory, Dale (2005) incorporates the concept of social materiality in the analysis of mutual enactment of the social and material in the organizational control of a private company. The author describes how the design of a workspace combined with proper cultural and textual interventions produces a material space for individual control. Such material and spatial conditions triggers, in the workers, processes of resistance and accommodation in a constant negotiation between the individual and space.

In another stream of application of the production of space, Costa and Goulart (2011) adopt Santos's (2009) analytical categories to link events in social settings with the intended development of the territory. In the presented case, events involving social actors interacting with each other established different flows of resources with territory insiders and outsiders. The creation of networks with outsider actors disempowered the organization with internal actors, and showed the dialectical social relation between spatial links and development, as capable of changing the territory: "the relations between actors [...] producing and being produced by territorialities can, effectively, generate events in the territory" (COSTA; GOULART, 2011, p. 1013).

What these two examples have in common in terms of the discussion here is the mutual enactment of objective conditions and subjective actions in the organization of *spaces*. Discussing the mutual presence of objective and subjective elements, Dale (2005, p. 654) proposes the metaphor of the relationship between the river and the riverbanks to understand reciprocal influence between social structure and agency. The river is formed by the design of landscape from its very beginning and will continue to change if the landscape is externally altered, whereas the landscape is also shaped and changed by the erosion caused by the water of the river.

On the one hand, engaging with space is thus to realize that the social world is conditioned by objective constraints, such as environmental and gender inequality, present in the features of the lived space. Such constraints continuously affect the spatial praxis. On the other hand, carrying the produced history means that we could not approach any social phenomenon with a mind completely free from previous concepts, notwithstanding cultural conditioning seeming to be naturalized into invisibility. This explains to a great extent why radical dualisms have possibly vanished from most contemporary scientific theories.

Conclusion

The use of a spatiotemporal epistemology in MOS should be aligned with emancipative ontological assumptions of space. As showed by the Marxist tradition of human geography (LEFEBVRE, 1991; SANTOS, 2009; HARVEY, 1973), space should not be considered only from the static physical viewpoint but through a scenario where social flows and material objects are entwined and interrelated. Any configuration of space is also embedded in the previous configurations from which it developed, i.e. the social relations that determined the production of a particular set of systems. Space is, consequently, a production of social relations, although the same relations are defined by means of surrounding space. As argued here, the adoption of this perspective can bridge the gap between realist-idealist worldviews.

This paper is not a defense of paradigmatic commensurability. In effect, hereupon two reservations will be made. The first one is that working with space is not necessarily a multiparadigmatic attempt, as it is based on its own theories and assumptions. What advocates of absolute commensurability often disregard is that different worldviews

(paradigms) characterize different problems, and not only different solutions to the same problem. The second point is that denying a given dichotomy is not a rebuff to all ontological dichotomies. In effect, we live in a world of continuums, and positioning science in each continuum is at the very least an exercise of good will.

The limitation of the proposed epistemology resides in the definition of space as derived from the Marxian perspective, for it is unsurprisingly focused on productive relations. This may be limiting to organizations not motivated by production, but by other types of social relations. Although 'production' could have a wide meaning out of orthodox Marxism, it is hardly fit, for example, on organizations emerged from "symmetric" and "collective" aims of human actions according to Arendt (1998). For Hannah Arendt, any relation to productive labor/work would be actually a reduction of the very human condition, which is intended to exert political actions. From the Marxist perspective, such a manifestation, disconnected (alienated) from the capitalist social order, is arguably impossible, but some degree of alienation exists in every analysis.

Finally, it should be noted that the approach presented here is not methodologically described. The epistemological ideas presented do not outline the implications for specific applications, which can be done over operational approaches that use spatiotemporal concepts in analytical constructs. A methodological sketch is likely to reduce at some level the absolute sense of space/time categories—this reduction is, after all, a known cost in any operationalization effort—but should not undermine the sociological basis of space as total and historically produced by dialectical forces.

References

- ADLER, P. S. Marx and organization studies today. In: _____. *The Oxford handbook of sociology and organization studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. p. 63-91.
- AL-AMOUDI, I.; WILLMOTT, H. C. Where constructionism and critical realism converge: interrogating the domain of epistemological relativism. *Organization Studies*, v. 32, p. 27-46, Jan. 2011.
- ARCHER, M. For structure: Its reality, properties and powers: a reply to Anthony King. *Sociological Review*, v. 48, n. 3, p. 464-72, June 2000.
- ARENDT, H. *The human condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- BARLEY, S.; KUNDA, G. Design and devotion: surges of rational and normative ideologies in management discourse. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, v. 37, n. 3, p. 363-99, Sep. 1992.
- BOULDING, K. General systems theory: the skeleton of science. *Management Science*, v. 2, n. 3, p. 197-208, Apr. 1956.
- BOURDIEU, P. *Practical reason: on the theory of action*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.
- BURRELL, G.; MORGAN, G. *Sociological paradigms and organizational analysis*. London: Heinemann, 1979.
- CLEGG, S. R.; KORNBERGER, M. *Space, organizations and management theory*. Slovenia: CBS, 2006.
- CLARK, P. A. *Organisations in action : competition between contexts*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2002.
- COOKE, B. The deceptive illusion of multi-paradigm development practice. *Public Administration and Development*, v. 17, n. 5, p. 479-86, 1997.
- COSTA, C. F.; GOULART, S. O jogo social e a produção de acontecimentos no território: o caso da Rede Arrozearias do Sul. *Cadernos EBAPE.BR*, v. 9, n. 4, p. 998-1014, dez. 2011.

- DALE, K. Building a social materiality: spatial and embodied politics in organizational control. *Organization*, v. 12, n. 5, p. 649-78, Sept. 2005.
- DALE, K.; BURRELL, G. *The spaces of organisation and the organisation of space: power, identity and materiality at work*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.
- DEETZ, S. Disciplinary power, conflict suppression and human resources management. In ALVESSON, M.; WILMOTT, H. (Eds.). *Studying management critically*. London: Sage, 2003. p. 23-45.
- FLEETWOOD, S. Ontology in organization and management studies: a critical realist perspective. *Organization*, v. 12, n. 2, p. 197-222, Mar. 2005.
- FOUCAULT, M. *Ordem do discurso*. São Paulo: Loyola, 1996.
- GIDDENS, A. *The constitution of society*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980.
- HARVEY, D. *Social justice and the city*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973.
- HASSARD, J. Multiple paradigms and organizational analysis: a case study. *Organization Studies*, v. 12, n. 2, p. 275-99, Apr. 1991.
- HESSEN, J. *Teoria do conhecimento*. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2000.
- JACKSON, N.; CARTER, P. In defense of paradigm incommensurability. *Organization Studies*, v. 12, n. 1, p. 109-27, 1991.
- JOHNSON, P.; DUBERLEY, J. *Understanding management research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2000.
- KING, A. Against structure: a critique of morphogenetic social theory. *Sociological Review*, v. 47, n. 2, p. 199-227, May 1999.
- LEFEBVRE, H. *The production of space*. London: Blackwell, 1991.
- LEWIS, M. W.; GRIMES, A. J. Metatriangulation: building theory from multiple paradigms. *Academy of Management Review*, v. 24, n. 4, p. 672-90, Oct. 1999.
- LUKÁCS, G. *Prolegomeni a un'estetica marxista*. Roma: Riuniti, 1971.
- LUKÁCS, G. Reification and the consciousness of the proletariat. In: KARAGEORGIS, S. N. (Ed.). *History & class consciousness*. Pontypool: Merlin, 1967. p. 1-35.
- MARREWIJK, A.; YANOW, D. *Organizational spaces: rematerializing the workaday world*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2010.
- MARX, K.; ENGELS, F. *The german ideology*. [1968?]. Available from: <<http://cwanderson.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/The-German-Ideology.pdf>>. Accessed: 2014 Jan 15.
- MORENTE, M. G. *Fundamentos de filosofia*. São Paulo: Mestre Jou, 1980.
- NIETZSCHE, F. *The gay science*. New York: Vintage, 1974.
- PAÇO-CUNHA, E. Rearticulação categorial ao pensamento marxiano: produção em geral, trabalho abstrato e burocracia. *CSONline (UFJF)*, v. 1, n. 14, p. 175-201, 2012.
- PECI, A. Estrutura e ação nas organizações: algumas perspectivas sociológicas. *Revista de Administração de Empresas*, v. 43, n. 1, jan./mar. p. 24-35, 2003.
- PECI, A. Além da dicotomia objetividade-subjetividade: a nova teoria institucional em estudos organizacionais: uma abordagem crítica. In: VIEIRA, M. M. F.; ZOUAIN, D. M. *Pesquisa qualitativa em administração*. Rio de Janeiro: FGV, 2004. p. 71-96.
- REED, M. I. In praise of duality and dualism: rethinking agency and structure in organizational analysis. *Organization Studies*, v. 18, n. 1, p. 21-42, Jan. 1997.
- SANTOS, M. *A natureza do espaço: técnica e tempo, razão e emoção*. 4. ed. São Paulo: Universidade de São Paulo, 2009.

SEWELL, W. A theory of structure: duality, agency, and transformation. *American Journal of Sociology*, v. 98, n. 1, p. 1-29, July 1992.

SRINIVAS, N. The possibility of the past: two routes to a past and what they tell us about professional power. *Management & Organizational History*, v. 7, n. 3, p. 237-49, 2012.

VAN MAANEN, J. The fact of fiction in organizational ethnography. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, v. 24, n. 4, p. 539-50, Dec. 1979.

WEATHERBEE, T. G. Caution! This historiography makes wide turns: historic turns and breaks in management and organization studies. *Management & Organizational History*, v. 7, n. 3, p. 203-18, Ago. 2012.

Submissão: 13/10/2013

Aprovação: 10/12/2014

