REFLEXIVITY: RECURSION AND RELATIONALITY IN ORGANIZATIONAL RESEARCH PROCESSES

INTRODUCTION

Varieties of reflective and reflexive processes have been discussed in the literature, and often used both instrumentally, as in the academic context of 'professional development' – through research-oriented reflective interviews (Chivers, 2003), mentoring processes (Schlee, 2000) or socialised fellowship (Ballou, Bowers, Boyatzis and Kolb, 1999) and at more challenging levels of introspection. This process of introspection is often argued to be necessarily personal (Doane, 2003), whilst others suggest it may perhaps be extended by working creatively with others (Arvay, 2003) to develop insights as a community.

Within those perspectives and possibilities for reflexivity found in the literature, and which are explored later in this paper, we believe that two inter-related processes are being described. One of these is relatively more commonly used and more explicit – reflection – whilst the other has remained implicit in many of these perspectives. The less fully characterized process is that of recursion. Given the close relationships between these terms we begin by offering our definitions before moving on to the substance of our argument. First, reflection suggests a mirror image which affords the opportunity to engage in an *observation or examination of our ways of doing*. When we experience reflection we become observers of our own practice. Reflexivity however, suggests a complexification of thinking and experience, or thinking about experience. Thus, we regard reflexivity as a process of *exposing or questioning our ways of doing*. As such reflexivity is related to reflection yet is qualitatively different from it. Finally, recursion suggests a return, a process of defining something in terms of itself and thus a *returning to our ways of doing.* Hence, reflexivity is

more than reflection. What is implied is that, through questioning the bases of our interpretations, reflexivity necessarily brings about change in the process of reflection – it is thereby recursive. There is, of course, interaction between these two process dimensions of reflection and recursion; but our argument in this paper is that neither has been characterized effectively in relation to the other, which in turn inhibits and confuses the debate about the nature of the process of reflexivity in research methods.

The aim of the paper is therefore to develop an integrated treatment of these dimensions. Further, this paper seeks to offer a better understanding of the types (or modes) of reflexivity through characterising various patterns of interaction between reflection and recursion, and show first, how these patterns might be experienced in organizational contexts and second how organizational researchers may experience these modes differently.

In developing a characterisation of the nature and processes of reflexivity, however, we also aim to illustrate how it may be regarded as a set of instrumental practices, used in the research process, and as a process which challenges the organizational researcher as well as her research. That is, we aim to show that a fully conceived, reflexivity is a process affecting the whole way of life of reflexive researchers (Cunliffe, 2003; Etherington, 2004; Shotter, 2006) and, indeed, reflexive practitioners more generally (Cunliffe, 2004; Marshall and Reason, 2007; Shotter, 2005). In our characterisation of this process we contend that an instrumental view of reflexivity may, as part of a research process, be a means to ends type of thinking and within conscious activity. A fully conceived view may largely be an unconscious act for some researchers. However, our hope is that the discussion set out in this paper might help bring into consciousness that which has hitherto been unspoken. As authors, we of course face the challenge of engaging in a recursive process about the writing in which

we are involved. To be clear, our stance is not intended to be polemical in that we are not seeking to suggest that a fully conceived view is a more desirable state. Rather, the review process for the paper itself encouraged us to arrive at the suggestion that a fuller set of insights may be more enlightening, especially when recognised as part of the research process.

This paper proceeds as follows. First, the dimension of recursion in reflexivity is explored and characterized. This is followed by a treatment of the second dimension, that of reflection. After these two sections an integrative discussion is developed, leading to the elaboration of four particular steps that collectively describe a meta-process of reflexivity. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications for research practice and possibilities for future research on reflexivity.

RECURSION IN REFLEXIVITY

There are two forms of recursion in reflexivity that are implied, but are rather hidden, in the literature. The first of these implied modes of recursion is regarded as a directed, active process. The identification of this as an active mode of recursion is least evident in some notions of reflexivity that see it as unproblematically 'correcting for bias' (such approaches are extensively reviewed and critiqued in Woolgar, 1988 and Holland, 1999). The recursion is invisible in works that treat reflexivity in this way because being reflexive is described as a process of correcting organizational *research* rather than developing the organizational *researcher* (or more generically, adapting concepts without adapting the process of conceptualization), although to a degree both must go hand-in-hand. As a minimum, there would be some extension of the individual's conceptual framework in acknowledging new questions or problems that were hitherto unexplicated before embarking on an active

reflexive process. In contrast to this relatively well hidden conceptualization of active recursion there are rather more deliberate and clearly described processes of recursive change, such as the reflexive undermining delineated by Cunliffe (2003), Archer's (2007) notion of 'autonomous reflexivity' which incorporates reaction to shock or failure, and Gidden's (1990) characterization of feedback in the development of social practices. In such cases the researcher herself is intentionally disrupted in the process of reflexive research; although this might be regarded as kenotic, as a self-emptying, the process does seem to leave *something* of the researcher behind. That remnant is necessarily different from the researcher who initiated the reflexive process – although they may become locked into the recursive aspect of the process, with the risk of entering a pathological spiral of doubt (Cunliffe 2003).

The second mode of recursion is perhaps less well described in the literature because it is radically different from the 'classic' conceptualization of reflexivity as an active cognitive process. In contradistinction to this popular conceptualization, there are a number of authors that talk of reflexivity as an *unconscious* process by which the process of reflection is itself modified (Beck, 1994; Hoogenboom and Ossewaardwe 2005; Adams, 2003, 2006). This idea of a passively experienced mode of recursion can itself be described in two quite different ways.

On the one hand, there is the possibility of the individual organizational researcher being locked into a theoretical perspective through recursive processes that simply reinforce the current set of understandings that they employ. This can be conceived in two ways. First, the researcher may be seen as dominated by structural influences; this is typified in Bordieu's work, as exemplified in his statement that "I know that I am caught up and comprehended in the world that I take as my object" (Bordieu 2004:115). This means, of course, that the

structurally dominated researcher's notion of reflexivity can only be delusional. Alternatively, conceiving individuals as possessing "inalienable powers of human reflexivity" (Archer, 2007:11) can lead to a sense of denial about the structures we talk in and through, which thus become unquestionable. These two extremes might both lead to the same flaw for different reasons, most commonly a conviction that everything has an explanation that can be described in a way that relates to the precepts of the natural sciences – or else it is anomalous or false. Every encounter with data can be treated in such a way that it reinforces this presumption and structural influences remain undisturbed. As McKenna (2007) has suggested, the requirement to use acceptable 'strategic apparatus' in arriving at research results can be more important to the perceived value of the research than any putative 'truth' claims that can be made of it. Similarly, from the opposite end of an intractable debate, a religious fundamentalist who sees their foundational text as providing the complete description of the world and a pattern for living – anything else being heretical or evil – has a complete system within which all experience can be captured. Of course, both of these caricatures are easily defeated – the former by the strong foundations problem[1] and the latter by the existence of multiple competing texts – but the kind of reinforcing, repetitious recursion which resembles these extreme pictures still seems to be possible.

There are alternative conceptualizations which see the process of reflexivity being driven in conversation with others (Cunliffe, 2003; Driver, 2007). One such example is Cunliffe's practice of social poetics where she notes "I began to videotape my conversations with managers. I then videotaped a second conversation where I, and the manager, watched the first video and commented on what 'struck' us, how we connected and created meaning" (2002b:142). Here change is effected through participation. In such cases the organizational researcher is changed in the process by giving up (at least to a degree) the notion of

independently directing the process of reflexivity and is open to the insights and challenges of others. The challenge here is the degree to which the researcher is *genuinely* open to the other, rather than choosing to filter and challenge concepts that emerge in dialogue against the standard of their existing understanding. Archer (2007) has characterized these alternatives as either meta-reflexivity (in which people become engaged with and transformed by radically different communities) or autonomous reflexivity (where the focus is upon the individual's self reliance and instrumental 'success'). In these conceptualizations autonomous reflexivity is likely to be associated with achievement, but is rather narrow in its breadth of reflection, as in the case of the autonomously reflexive industrial magnate with an "intense focus on business and rendering all aspects of life in the language of business", described by Mutch (2007:1132). In comparison, meta-reflexivity leads to a richer, values-oriented approach. Archer does not suggest, however, that the 'meta-reflexive' has completely surrendered herself to the values of the other; rather her characterizations (see especially Archer 2007:302) suggest that there is a difficult balance, between the hermeneutics of faith and the hermeneutics of doubt (Ricoeur, 1981), involving internal and external reflexive conversations. This perhaps emphasises the inevitable interpenetration of reflective and recursive processes in reflexive research. Accordingly, it is to the dimension of reflection that the discussion now turns.

REFLECTION IN REFLEXIVITY

The reflective element of reflexive processes is relatively well characterised, although in some cases it can be difficult to be sure that the process actually incorporates reflexivity, rather than being a *purely* reflective process. This is perhaps most apparent in the connection with the 'repetitious' aspect of recursion outlined above, where confirmatory thoughts are sought and found through modes of reflection which are deliberately constrained by

established principles. Perhaps surprisingly, some works on reflexivity describe modes of reflection which resemble this; although usually amongst other processes (critiques of a wide range of such positions are provided by Woolgar, 1988 and Holland, 1999). A useful characterisation of the ultimate 'lower limit' of reflection is described by Cunliffe (2004) as 'reflex action' – in which an automatic response to situations is invoked. By definition, this purely draws upon background processes rather than actually foregrounding reflection. Similarly Archer's conceptualization of 'communicative reflexivity' describes the situation of individuals whose reflection on key choices seems to be dominated by prevailing tacit norms in their community (see especially her description of the case of a man who became a miner, like his father and all of his male friends, rather than taking either of the safer and easier alternative positions found for him by female relatives – Archer, 2007:159-160).

A more developed and relatively widespread characterization focuses on the active and deliberate reflection of the individual on a particular process of conceptualization, with a view to developing and supporting validity claims (Bordieu, 2004; Giddens, 1990; Hardy and Clegg, 1997; McKenna, 2007). In the research context such processes are focussed on the elimination of bias and other flaws, but as suggested earlier they may have an effect on the organizational researcher if they are taken seriously. However there is a concern with the possibility of *optimisation* and *robustness* implicit in such approaches; and this comes with a whole set of theoretical assumptions that are unlikely to be unpacked. What is achieved in such a mode is therefore likely to be a reflective *extension* of the current research framework through filling in some discovered gaps and/or adapting it to 'make it work' in the particular situation of interest.

Both of the possibilities for reflection characterised above are reliant upon the organizational researcher controlling and guiding the process. However, there are also possibilities for reflection to be guided by someone (or something) other than the researcher. Two particular characterisations of other-directed reflection can be envisaged. In the first, the process can begin with an accidental disruption to the individual's practice in which they are 'struck' (Cunliffe, 2002) and begin to realise that their patterns of sensemaking are inadequate. Shotter (2005:120) argues that this ability to "notice crucial distinctions" is central to Wittgenstein's work, which is an influential source of thought in this area. This experience of 'being struck', or 'noticing', can trigger a process of opening up reflection to the insights and theories of others, thereby disrupting existing patterns and undermining total reliance on the self (Cunliffe, 2002a; Raelin, 2001). In the second of these possible processes, the researcher becomes absorbed into the patterns of collective thinking offered by the other, or joins with them to develop a new understanding which is mutually developed through the fusion of horizons (Gadamer, 1998).

INTEGRATING THE DIMENSIONS: TOWARDS A REFLEXIVE PROCESS

As the many overlaps in the preceding discussion have perhaps implied, it is possible (and perhaps helpful) to re-integrate the two dimensions of recursion and reflection within reflexive processes. Doing so can yield the conceptualization provided as figure 1.

Take in Figure 1 here

Much of the character of each of the four possibilities outlined in figure 1 has already been alluded to above. For that reason the explication of these elements in this section of the paper will be relatively brief and focussed on the ways in which a meta-process of reflexivity might

be understood to operate across all of them. The discussion of this process connects, to a degree, with Cunliffe's (2004) view of reflexivity as a radically moral project rather than simply the advocacy of techniques by which managers or organizational researchers might be (more) effective. As she points out, a critically reflexive process necessarily involves overlapping existential, praxis-related and relational concerns, as the following discussion will seek to elaborate. Accordingly, although our discussion is primarily concerned with how organizational researchers may experience reflexivity, we do also draw on examples that illustrate the ways in which reflexivity is also important in organizational contexts. The description of the process of reflexivity is addressed in our discussions in four steps, which correlate with the quadrants of figure 1.

In describing each of the four steps, particular aspects and readings of a number of works are incorporated. It must be emphasized that there are other aspects to many of the works discussed in this way. This treatment is not intended to provide a full characterization of any particular author's work, but it merely establishes some common themes that link the different approaches and outputs into a more general framework. The engagement with the framework begins below with the quadrant characterised as *repetition*.

Repetition

This initial step in the meta-process of reflexivity describes a situation in which an individual is reflecting in a relatively closed, self-focussed manner and recursivity operates passively. Woolgar's (1988) classification of varieties of reflexivity elegantly captures this process under the rubric of *benign introspection.* Such a process has the *intent* of reflexivity, but stays within the accepted boundaries of thought for addressing a particular issue or process (as exemplified in Archer's (2007) discussion of 'communicative reflexivity', alluded to earlier).

Such non-challenging processes, sitting at the 'lower end' of the reflexive spectrum, have also been identified in other categorisations such as those provided by Holland (1999) and Cunliffe (2004). in organizational contexts, Cunliffe's (2002a) research provides examples of how this repetitive – rather closed and limited - mode of reflexivity is enacted. For example, one of her interviewees suggested, in relation to performance reviews: "So it's not . . . a category might be problem solving but the dialogue that's there [on the review form], the instructions, the informative words that are put there, encourage you into a real reactive kind of mode. It's like: 'exhibits ability to...'; it's very bounded. It's bounded language, you know? It's saying objectify this like an objective statement: 'This person is a good problem solver—check 'is' or 'isn't.' I think too few managers reflect upon even how to answer that question—it's a very reactive answer." (Cunliffe, 2002:142).

Perhaps more controversially, similar processes of reactivity and repetition can be identified in research processes. In particular, there is a grey area where treatments that describe a *scientific* elimination of bias through accepted and well-characterised (often statistical) techniques might also be considered to be rather closed modes of reflexivity, that also have a passive recursive effect. Bourdieu's work on reflexivity might be characterized in this way (see Bourdieu (2004) for a summation of his thought in this area); indeed, Karakayali's (2004) review of Bourdieu's work on reflexivity seems to imply that it has fallen victim to a form of scientism; the fascination which science can have with its own schemes seems to preclude any radical or critical reflexivity. Such a characterisation may or may not be fair, but it seems reasonable to suggest that there are many situations in which the potential for reflexivity to open up the processes of thought and action to recursive change merely supports a kind of complacent re-inscription and reinforcement.

Extension

Processes begin to look more convincingly like the kind of reflexivity that involves a questioning of self when there is at least some *extension*, some building of new principles or understandings that *connect* with well-known principles but is not *subsumed* within them. The transition to this mode of extension possibly requires some failure or exogenous shock, that induces the feeling of 'being struck' (Cunliffe, 2002a) – the revelatory sensation that existing notions are inadequate, that promotes a more active mode of reflexive engagement. The *extension* mode of reflexivity describes processes where the mode of reflection is still relatively closed and focused on the self, but recursive processes are rather more active – there is a conscious involvement in change. This correlates, to a degree, with Archer's (2007) notion of 'autonomous reflexivity', with its strong link to action and correlation to previous shocks (in the form of failure). For example, she records how an individual who had experienced failure in an arts-related field that he imagined would be satisfying ("I went to do computer-aided design, started to do a diploma at college in basic art and design […] and it just bored me to tears to be honest") later used his existing skills, differently applied, to train and succeed in a more technical profession: "I started this new job, got a little bit hooked by it, and then I could sort of see that I need to do this, go on this course, go on that course and build up" (Archer, 2007:121-125).

In the most general terms, however, the mode of extension seems to be most succinctly characterized in the work of Giddens (1990:38): "The reflexivity of modern social life consists in the fact that social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constantly altering their character". This is very much about the individual modifying their *own* practice through a *personal* critique of social life. It is self-reflexivity – a critique of habitual practices – as described by

Cunliffe and Jun (2005); the individual is concerned about her own role in the construction of social life, but for herself and on her terms. Such a process can perhaps be as ambitious as that described by Hardy and Clegg (1997:S13), who suggest that "Reflexive theoretical positions are those best able to account for their own theorizing, as well as whatever it is they theorize about". Whilst on the one hand this kind of reflexive position seems to be the height of cognitive achievement, on the other hand it might be considered essentially introspective. Hardy and Clegg (1997) and Hardy, Phillips and Clegg (2001) do go further than this – and into the borders of something more open to the other, something more potentially disruptive, in two ways, First, in their presentation of 'pluralistic theoretical communities' – that is, groups of authors in vigorous debate with each other – as means of theoretical challenge and development. Secondly, they highlight the postmodern destabilization of the notion of the research subject as an isolatable target of study. Of course, neither of these positions *necessarily* disrupts the organizational researcher. In the former case, the researcher can be driven into a more trenchant position, using every rhetorical device at their command to 'fight their corner'. In the latter case, the researcher may be left doubting the other – *not* themself. In a similar vein, Alvesson's reflexive pragmatism involves "working with alternate lines of interpretation(s) and vocabularies and reinterpreting the favoured lines of understanding through the systematic involvement of alternative points of departure." (2003:14). Here the intention is to avoid an overly comfortable interpretation of the research process and outcomes but within a closed framing of the researcher themself.

Putatively objective concerns for the social context of theory production, as described above, can be extended into explicit concerns for relationships, power and exploitation in the research context, as described in Mauthner and Doucet's (2003) treatment of reflexivity. These are worthy and noble issues to address, but they still do not open the organizational

researcher's thinking up to radical disruption; there is no sense of unease or instability here that would be expected if radical reflexivity was beginning to develop (Cunliffe, 2003). The question that then arises is how one might more effectively describe or locate the blurred boundary from the process of *extension* (active, but closed and reliant on the self) to the process of *disruption* (active and open to the other). The beginnings of this transition might well be identified in emotion rather than cognition, since Weinstein (1979) has suggested that a developed reflexive position should include attention to emotional responses. Most particularly, the transition to the disruptive mode of reflexivity might be connected to emotional experiences that are *relational by definition*, such as shame, guilt, embarrassment and pride. Garrety et al (2003) have suggested that such emotions are both indicators and outputs of reflexivity. In the generation of such seemingly simple emotions, there is a sense of some kind of 'rightness' or 'wrongness' in relation to the live presence of the other, rather than in relation to cold philosophical principles.

Another 'live' characterization is provided by Parker (2004); although his article is definitely self-reflexive, it presents something of a borderline case as he does explore a number of decisions and actions that he can't quite account for within his own thinking. This suggests that the process of 'becoming manager' that he describes has at least some unconscious, participative recursive aspects. It is also a borderline case for a second reason. That is, it is possible to read his 'interrupted' style of reflexive writing – the deliberately frequent use of footnotes as he re-read and re-wrote the work – as a dialogue with the self as other, displaced and distanciated in time. This connects with the thought of Weinstein (1979), who has highlighted the temporal dimension of the researcher and the effects this can have on research processes. However, there is perhaps a requirement for a synchronic engagement with others to fully open up patterns of thinking and action to disruption, as might be suggested by the

role of the reviewers in Parker's (2004) case. It is to this kind of engaged mode of reflexivity that the discussion now turns.

Disruption

Interestingly, it is possible to locate a more radical, engaged and disruptive mode of reflexivity in relatively early works, such as Gouldner (1970). In this work he suggested that "a reflexive sociology is distinguished by its refusal to segregate the intimate or personal from the public and collective, or the everyday life from the occasional 'political' act" (Gouldner, 1970:504). This perhaps sets the context, or frames the possibilities, for the kind of disruptive reflexivity that this conceptual stage of the process is intended to capture. In this mode of reflexivity, reflection is relatively open and guided by the other, whilst recursive processes remain active.

Woolgar (1988), Weick (1999) and Cunliffe (2003) each highlight the risk of a spiral of doubt for those engaged in such a process, as deeper and deeper foundational notions can be opened to radical critique – and abandoned. This can be a painful process, perhaps linking with the notion of 'fractured reflexivity', in which individuals may find that "internal conversations intensify their distress and disorientation rather than leading to purposeful courses of action" (Archer, 2007:93).

In organizational contexts, Parker (2004) shows how the experience of disruption can lead to disassociation from the organization and one's role within it. After completing his paper, Parker abandoned his management role and status, and found a non-management professorial role in another academic institution. Furthermore, the institution that he joined was at that time a radical group, strongly critical of the kind of managerial action that Parker had found

himself, to his growing discomfort, engaging in. Similarly, in the case of the researcher, it is to be expected that this painful process will be kenotic and leads to an abandonment of particular bases for reason and action, rather than the continuing extension of well-known frameworks. This is a 'clearing out' to make room for the ideas of the other, as perhaps envisaged in Cunliffe's (2002a) reflexive dialogical process. Such a dialogic process highlights the hidden ideologies and tacit assumptions that are enacted in our practices and ways of talking; it is (or should be) an unsettling process as the insidiousness of our many assumptions and interlinked interpretations can be difficult to unravel and disconnect. This mode of reflexivity is therefore necessarily messy. It introduces doubt and contradiction in a way that is clearly distinct from the routine or systematic confirmatory reflexive modes of *repetition* and *extension* discussed earlier. It is the kind of process that merits the title of critical reflexivity (Cunliffe and Jun, 2005), in which our thoughts and experiences are questioned and made more complex through the inputs of others. The role of the other seems to be centrally important in truly radical self-critique (Gadamer, 1977), and Holland (1999) has suggested that the fullest conceptualization of reflexivity includes the transition from an individual to a collective, social level.

The messy process of *disruption* may seem to be potentially endless, but Weick (1999) has suggested that a limitation can be placed upon the consequent undermining spiral of doubt, by choosing to apply 'instrumental reflexivity'. Alvesson, Hardy and Harley (2008) essentially agree with this approach, suggesting that reflexivity should be first applied in deconstructive and then reconstructive manoeuvres, such that the *research* findings are challenged and perhaps changed, although there is no real risk of the organizational *researcher* being changed in such a process. What both of these papers seem to suggest is that one should pull back from the brink by conducting a deliberately shallow review rather

than falling into the depths. But is such 'instrumental reflexivity' simply a commitment to the *appearance* of reflexivity? Indeed, does it not simply serve the needs of academic rhetoric and sidestep, as Conklin (2007) implies, the moral project that reflexivity should be – the openness to questioning *by* and *for* the other? For this reason, this paper seeks to argue that the completion of the reflexive project lies not in paddling in the shallows, but in diving in to the deeps of the other, in becoming engulfed in *participation*.

Participation

The last of the modes of reflexivity described in figure 1, is *participation*; in this mode, reflection is open to the other but the recursive process has become passive. This passiveness is something more than inertness, however. It is the consequence of choosing to trust the other and engage seriously with their view. Arguably, taking another's view seriously in a reflexive sense requires more than a critical appreciation of it. It requires that it be lived as if it was authoritative. If partners in dialogue (rather than a subject-object relation) are both seeking to do this, then a kind of syncretism might be the outcome at the collective level. This kind of syncretist participation is hinted at in Hoogenboom and Ossewaardwe's notion of integrative 'reflexive authority', which they define as "the belief in the ability of institutions and actors to negotiate, reconcile and represent arguments, interests, identities and abilities" (2005:614). Going further, one might argue with Adams, (2003, 2006) that this participative, negotiated, reconciled character is an aspect of all modes of reflexivity, in that all reflexive projects are embedded and socialized culturally, historically and linguistically. Similarly, Marshall and Reason argue that it is necessary "to see evocative evidence of the researcher as both alive and disciplined in the research account, so that we can judge the quality of their doing of research" (2007:376).

However, the important point here is that the mode of participation does not describe the *de facto* embeddedness of the reflexive organizational researcher. Rather, it describes the situation in which one comes to choose to engage with a particular community and be transformed by it. Archer's (2007) 'meta-reflexive' types provide good examples of this kind of participative reflexivity, particularly in cases of involvement with religious and artistic communities; individuals become disinterested in organizational success per se, and there is both an attraction to a 'higher calling' and an engagement with a broader community or deeper tradition. For those engaged in research projects, there is a need to consider what consequences might ensue from such acts of *deliberate participation*, of an intentional, relational 'between-ness' (Cunliffe, 2003; Shotter, 2005, 2006), constructed in conversations in which researchers and the researched (and perhaps reviewers – Driver, 2007) are mutually involved. In considering this, Cunliffe identifies a number of the consequences of radical approaches – and four of these may be argued to be particularly important differentiators of *participation* as a mode of reflexivity. That is, it can be argued to involve: "acknowledging the constitutive nature of our research conversations; constructing 'emerging practical theories' rather than objective truths; exposing the situated nature of accounts through narrative circularity; focusing on life and research as a process of becoming rather than already established truth" (Cunliffe, 2003:991). Such differentiators may help to explain why some remain unconvinced "that 'mainstream' management journals want the full-blooded sense of inquiry that alive and disciplined research might offer." (Marshall and Reason, 2007:376).

In the *participation* mode of reflexivity the organizational researcher, at least partially, gives over the direction and meaning of the research, and herself, to the other(s). It is not argued that this surrender should necessarily ever be complete, and indeed it might be argued that it

is not even possible. This is because the disruptive process, that makes room for the other, must also leave some personal basis on which communication may be based; the notion of complete surrender is therefore implausible. What *is* plausible, however, is the move towards some kind of fusion of horizons (Gadamer, 1998) in which we might feel that the framed and reframed questions and answers constituting our conversations come to have common *boundaries,* even if the particular *contents* are necessarily different. In research relationships, researchers and the researched are changing both together and apart, which suggests that this notion of fusion may be an idealized notion in empirical research contexts. What may be more likely is that the disrupted, confused and self-emptied researcher seeks participation with a more static 'partner'. That is, participation is most likely to be completed when the researcher engages in conversation with a classic (or in some way charismatic) *text* rather than a person. Indeed both of Archer's (2007) most persuasive examples of this kind of participation relate to the 'meta-reflexive' individual's engagement with classic texts: in one case English literature, in the other (rather more abstractly), scripture mediated by the Christian church. In such cases, it can be seen that the disturbed and ardent seeker finds that which 'speaks to her condition' and is then able to complete the reflexive cycle by relaxing back into the mode of repetition – but perhaps only for a time. If they are seriously disposed to radical reflexivity, they may well progress through the cycle again and again, abandoning old answers and seeking new questions. Is not this how a radically reflexive researcher might be characterized?

THE META-PROCESS OF REFLEXIVITY

A possible sequential process and movement between the modes

We have arrived, then, at a final conceptualization of reflexivity as a movement amongst and between all four of the modes outlined above. This is suggested by the revised diagram given as figure 2.

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Four interruptions or reversals to the process indicated in figure 2 can be suggested, however. First, the transition from repetition to extension may be abandoned by the organizational researcher simply choosing to exclude data which do not fit with her current set of assumptions – what may be more or less legitimately classified as the 'exclusion of outliers'. Secondly, the transition from extension to disruption may be reversed if the researcher feels that the process is too uncomfortable, and/or that a more instrumental and less challenging approach would be more pragmatic (Weick, 1999). Thirdly, the transition from disruption to participation may never obtain, if the researcher becomes locked into a pattern of radical doubt which rejects the reality (however constructed) of everything.[2] The final reversal might come from participation which reaches towards a 'fusion of horizons' but then collapses into rejection and a confusing withdrawal into a process of disruption.

Implications for research practice

An important contribution of this paper is to make visible the relationships between what are traditionally regarded as immutable positions, governed by our theoretical perspectives, with regard to reflexivity. This has implications for academic and practitioner activities, in that

these positions are not a once and for all state; we move moment to moment, issue to issue at times. We may be entrenched in some views but open to exploration with and by others on different occasions. More importantly this paper argues for consideration of reflexivity as change in the organizational researcher as well as in the research activities. The paper also provides a framework around which to begin a discussion about our legitimizing practices for conducting and writing up our research. That is, by considering how reflexivity is apparent in thinking and subsequent doing (in academic and practitioner lives) the acts of researching and producing research artefacts should come under close scrutiny. Furthermore, with an increasing volume of research written in a reflexive mode (variously conceptualized), in this paper we contribute to promoting a nuanced understanding of the changing process of engaging with research material over time.

The temporal dimension of the organizational researcher's practice is rarely discussed in accounts of the research process. It is possible that the processes of repetition, extension, disruption and participation may take place in a particular research project, rather than and in addition to them being attributed to a researcher in a mutually exclusive manner. It is also possible to consider the cumulative process of reflexive practices applied across a sequence of research experiences lasting many years, each of which might be argued to subsume all previous iterations of the researchers' practice. This may offer some explanation of the longer gestation periods associated with reflexive forms of research, in that individual researchers and research teams must simultaneously grapple with the specific instance of research and their past collection of research experiences. Furthermore, it is important to consider that organizational researchers also work *in* organizations. The relationship between reflexivity and 'ordinary' organizational life (particularly the transformative career changes that can be associated with the participation mode), alluded to earlier in our discussion, suggests that

radical reflexivity may result in researchers abandoning a conventional research career altogether.

It is acknowledged, however, that the utilisation of a 2x2 matrix as a means of describing the complex processes of reflexivity (as in figure 2) is an oversimplification and might even be characterised as reductionist. In mitigation, we have already alluded to the potential for reversals and interruptions in the process, and a third dimension – a temporal one – is thus also implicit in our earlier treatment. Building on these earlier observations and critiques, we also consider that it is important that the divisions and demarcations in any such graphical representation be conceptualised as semi-permeable boundaries where leakage, transfer and slippage may occur. Above all, the characterization we have developed here should not be seen as a taxonomy, but rather as a way of understanding the possible inter-relationships between the two process dimensions we have identified, in individual and relational contexts. As we have argued in the introduction to the paper, we believe that there is much potential for confusion about the meaning of reflexivity, with many definitions which are based on assumptions about the theoretical perspective of the isolated organizational researcher. Here we have sought to lay out some of these distinctions, albeit in the rudimentary form of a model. We have also approached reflexivity from an alternative position in that we look at relationality and change and thereby are able to describe what the adoption of a reflexive stance may mean to the individual (researcher or practitioner) who is unavoidably engaged in social relations, rather than being an isolated monad choosing to adopt a particular position. Our approach, in challenging the boundaries between researchers and those that they research, has enabled us to provide an account of reflexivity that may be useful to practitioners as well as researchers.

Research agenda

In order to explore the framework presented here, the next step in our journey could be to identify and review previously published empirical works which claim to have been conducted in a reflexive mode, to consider how the authors' claims to reflexivity are represented in the texts of their written research. By engaging with such material we might ascertain how such representations of reflexivity correspond to the descriptions of the processes represented in this paper, thereby exploring the relevance of our conceptualization to understanding and supporting reflexive research at the level of a particular research project. However, we recognize that the 'offstage' conversations with reviewers and the other relationships that constitute the formation of a research 'product' are also intrinsic to the nature of reflexive processes, and their representation, in a particular research project. For that reason the project-level investigations alluded to above might be more fruitfully developed by conducting new research with the authors of reflexive empirical works, to investigate the nature of reflexivity as *experienced* by the authors of such works. In this way we might begin to further develop the temporal dimension of our conceptualization, by exploring the (perhaps multiple, overlapping and messy) relationships between the progress of particular research projects and the reflexive journey of the organizational researcher.
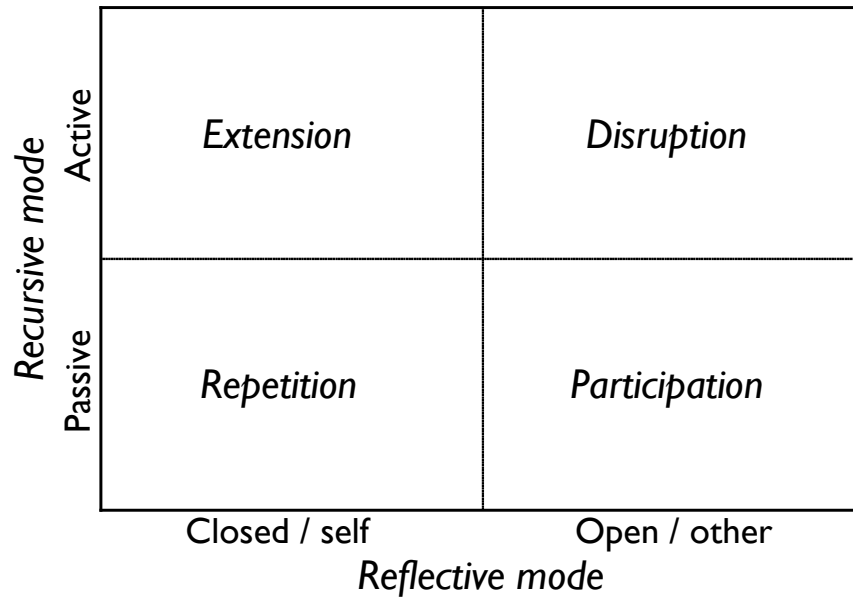
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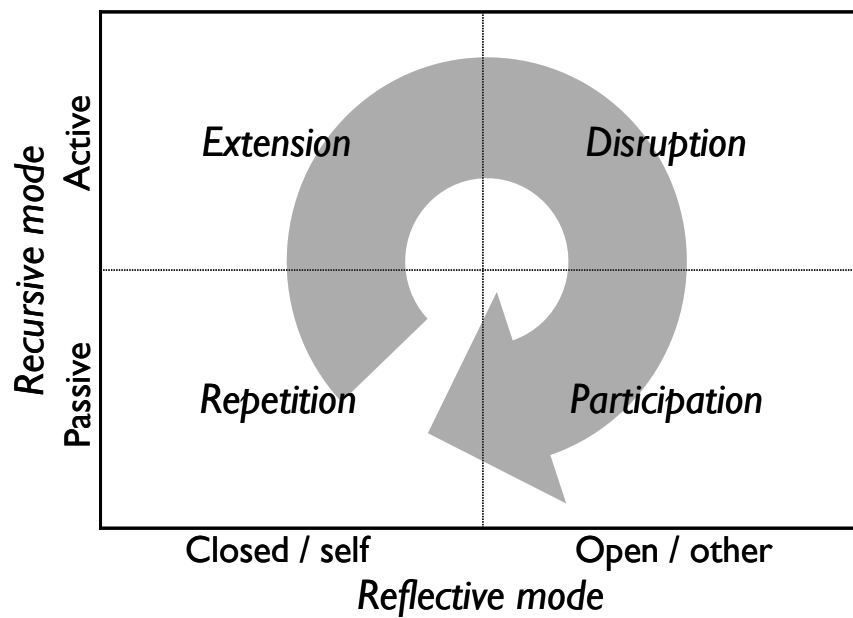
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FIGURES

	Closed / self	Open / other
Active	Extension	Disruption
Passive	Repetition	Participation

Figure 1: The dimensions of reflexivity

	Closed / self	Open / other
Active	Extension	Disruption
Passive	Repetition	Participation

Figure 2: The meta-process of reflexivity

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[1] A strong foundations perspective argues that any proposition should only be accepted if it is
     directly demonstrable in repeatable experimental evidence or clearly derived, through logical

argument, from such evidence. The problem is that the strong foundations proposition *itself* cannot be derived in that way.

[2] The kind of position offered in the radically negative postmodernism of Baudrillard, for example.