Exploring the Empty Spaces of Organizing: How Improvisational Jazz Helps Redescribe Organizational Structure

Mary Jo Hatch*

Abstract

This paper uses jazz as a metaphoric vehicle for redescribing (Rorty 1989) the concept of organizational structure in ways that fit within the emerging vocabulary of organization studies. It begins with a description of some basic elements of jazz performance — soloing, comping, trading fours, listening and responding, groove and feel — and builds on these to redescribe organizational structure as ambiguous, emotional and temporal. In reflexive fashion, the paper not only demonstrates the concepts it engages, but presents a jazz-like performance of Rorty's method of redescription via metaphor.

Descriptors: organizational structure, jazz metaphor, improvisation, redescription

Mary Jo Hatch
Cranfield School of Management, Cranfield, UK

Introduction

As businesses become more adaptable and flexible in response to shifting demands and opportunities in their globalizing markets, traditional understandings of organizational structure are breaking down. At first, this breakdown was described in terms of the organization chart; relationships were too multidimensional to be represented by drawing them in a two-dimensional frame, or they changed so frequently that making a chart seemed pointless. When old structural notions collapsed further, this change was communicated with terms such as outsourcing, de-layering, de-differentiation and re-engineering. Now, concepts such as networks and virtual organizations are challenging traditional notions of organization itself. However, like a collapsing star that forms a black hole, the collapsing notion of organizational structure does not disappear. Its absence is felt as an empty space that attracts. For instance, some organization members speak of a frustrating and perpetual lack of communication and coordination and a commensurate loss of control and identity; they may even become nostalgic and personify their emptiness as the 'absent leader'. Others experience empty space as freedom to create something new.

When a concept such as organizational structure no longer suits our descriptive or analytical purposes (e.g., because it is too static to help us understand organizations described by terms such as 'adaptable', 'flexible' and

Organization Studies
1999, 20/1
75–100

0170–8406/99
0020–0004 $3.00

'virtual'), it is generally acceptable to replace it with another, better formulated concept. The trouble is, for the time being anyway, nothing better has come along. In fact, work by Rorty (1989) suggests the wisdom of admitting that the search for a final set of concepts is endless. Instead, Rorty advocates redescription, a constant recycling of old concepts using new (even contradictory) language for the sake of replacing a worn out vocabulary with a new one. In Rorty's (1989) words:

> 'The method is to redescribe lots and lots of things in new ways, until you have created a pattern of linguistic behavior which will tempt the rising generation to adopt it, thereby causing them to look for appropriate new forms of nonlinguistic behaviour, for example, the adoption of new scientific equipment or new social institutions.'

Rorty (1989: 9) further explains that the method does not involve arguing against old vocabularies, but rather trying 'to make the vocabulary that I favor look attractive by showing how it may be used to describe a variety of topics'. Although Rorty focuses on what redescription implies for the emergence of a new kind of human being (the liberal ironist), I will merely borrow his method in order to recycle the concept of organizational structure so as to fit it within the emerging vocabulary indicated in the opening paragraph. To do this, I will use metaphor, which Rorty (following Hesse 1980 and Davidson 1984) offers as a vehicle of redescription.

It is important to acknowledge that I am by no means the first person to attempt to reconceptualize organizational structure (nor am I likely to be the last). The most influential of these attempts to date has been made by Anthony Giddens and his followers who proposed and developed structuration theory (e.g. Giddens 1979, 1984; Ranson et al. 1980; Pettigrew 1987; Reed 1997). However, their work stays firmly rooted in the 'old' vocabulary of modernist sociology and organization theory, while I shall attempt to position organizational structure within an emerging vocabulary sometimes linked to postmodern theory (e.g. Cooper and Burrell 1988; Gergen 1992; Hassard 1996a). While there are points of connection that might be established between structuration theory and the metaphoric approach I adopt, I leave these comparisons for future consideration (which I will touch upon in the conclusion).

Following Rorty, I will use a metaphorical approach. Morgan (1986) suggested that metaphor engages and involves a broader experience base than do other approaches to theorizing, in that metaphor works with the total imagination of the theorist. That is, metaphor does not simply operate within the analytical range of imagination (where Giddens and his followers focus), but calls on emotional and aesthetic capacities as well. Rorty (1989: 17) explains how metaphor contributes to an emerging vocabulary:

> '... we need to see the distinction between the literal and the metaphorical in the way Davidson sees it: not as a distinction between two sorts of meaning, nor as a distinction between two sorts of interpretation, but as a distinction between familiar and unfamiliar uses of noises and marks [i.e., words]. The literal uses of noises and marks are the uses we can handle by our old theories ... Their metaphorical use is the sort which makes us get busy developing a new theory.'

In this essay, I use the case of jazz music, or more explicitly, improvisational jazz performance, as a perhaps unlikely, but nonetheless valuable, metaphor for the purpose of redescribing organizational structure. This metaphor is unlikely in that jazz is more often noted for its lack of structure, but it is precisely this paradox that suggests the jazz metaphor as a valuable tool of redescription. That is, it is the uneasy relationship between structure, jazz, and the musicians who perform it that makes this metaphor both so unfamiliar and so promising in the context of the emerging vocabulary that redescription serves. I say this because contradiction, paradox and suspicion of structures (as totalizing agents) are all part of postmodern organization theory which regularly contributes to the emerging vocabulary of organization studies (e.g. Reed and Hughes 1992; Hassard and Parker 1993; Boje et al. 1996; Burrell 1997).

As my use of metaphor fits Rorty's notion of redescription rather than description, please bear in mind that I am not trying to suggest that jazz and organization are equivalent. My thesis is that orienting ourselves to organizational structure along the lines of the way jazz musicians orient to their structures in performing jazz could help us to generate a redescription of organizational structure that is compatible with the emerging vocabulary of organization studies. Thus my use of the jazz metaphor to redescribe organizational structure is performative; it calls upon engagement, or rather re-engagement, with organizational practices and processes, as will be explained below. Furthermore, because my approach is pragmatic/hermeneutic rather than analytic, it will have to be demonstrated rather than explained. Thus, in this essay, I will invoke my understanding of a jazz-like appreciation of structure and then transfer this appreciation, via metaphoric redescription, to the concept of organizational structure. In doing this, I shall attempt to make the redescription 'look attractive' by showing how it relates to a variety of topics including ambiguity, emotion and time, all of which are part of the emerging vocabulary of organization studies and to each of which, I claim, the jazz metaphor makes an imaginative contribution.

All that Jazz

There are many aspects of jazz. In this section, I will describe only those that have stood out in my mind as being directly related to structure either in jazz theory or in the context of the history of jazz performance. The material on jazz presented below is derived from a combination of three sources. First, I am married to a jazz musician (drummer and songwriter), and much of my understanding of jazz was formulated as I listened to and watched jazz being performed, and talked to jazz musicians before and after my husband's rehearsals and gigs. Second, and as a direct effect of the first, I have had the privilege of tutelage by Danish jazz master Per Goldschmidt whose lifelong exposure to organizational sociology (his father and stepfather were both sociologists) rendered his font of knowledge

about jazz more easily accessible to me. Third, the rich development of the improvisation metaphor in organization studies (e.g. Bastien and Hostager 1988, 1992; Weick 1989, 1993, 1998; Eisenberg 1990; Crossan and Sorrenti 1997; Hatch 1997; Barrett 1998), as well as the extensive jazz literature (especially Berliner 1994), provided support and further inspiration to the points I will make below.

I recognize that many readers will have limited knowledge of jazz, so jazz needs to be described in enough detail to permit redescribing organizational structure using the terms of jazz. Those readers who have performed as jazz musicians may find my descriptions unnecessarily long-winded, and at the same time incomplete. I acknowledge that attempts to describe what is largely tacit knowledge are unsatisfactory when compared with lived experience. Nonetheless, I believe I have gained much insight and understanding from this metaphor without the benefit of actually playing jazz. As most readers will probably be in a similar position, my descriptions are meant to share my understanding and the potential of this metaphor with them. If you do play jazz, you can develop this metaphor on your own; my comments here are merely offered to inspire you to do so.

Structure in Jazz

The structure of jazz provides the material idea upon which jazz musicians improvise. Improvisation, in turn, constitutes the distinguishing feature of jazz. To put this another way, jazz is distinguished from other genres of music (e.g., classical, rock) in the improvisational use it makes of structure. As I will tell it below, jazz musicians use structure in creative ways that enable them to alter the structural foundations of their playing. My development of the jazz metaphor will bring out this paradoxical quality of jazz along with a few other points that I will then relate to the emerging vocabulary of organization studies. In order to accomplish this, we need to begin with some basics.

Heads, Tunes and Improvisation

Jazz performances are structured around the playing of tunes which themselves are loosely structured via partial musical arrangements called heads. The head of a tune defines, at a minimum, a chord sequence, a basic melodic idea, and usually an approximate tempo. Jazz musicians can play a head in any key, using a variety of rhythms and altered harmonies that the musicians introduce during the performance of the tune. Improvisation centres around the head, which is usually played through 'straight' (without much improvisational embellishment) at the beginning of the tune, then improvised upon, and finally returned to and played again as the ending. The head gets a tune started by suggesting a particular rhythm, harmony and melody. The tune is then built from this starting point via improvisation within which different interpretations of the initial idea are offered and new ideas and further interpretations can be explored.

Although the head is normally only played explicitly at the beginning and

end of a tune, the structure contained in the head is implicitly maintained throughout. To understand how this works, hum the melody of the head to yourself over and over throughout a tune and you will instantly recognize its presence as the musicians improvise in its absence. In fact, jazz musicians often keep the head in their heads (i.e., in their audile imagination) as they play, and use it, not only as an improvisational focal point, but to keep track of where they are in the song temporally, harmonically and melodically.

Soloing, Comping and Fours

Soloing provides a mechanism for a given musician to take the lead in introducing new ideas that carry the tune along after the head has been played. This role is passed around among the players (sometimes the order of soloing is agreed upon in advance, sometimes it is worked out as the musicians play). While one musician solos, others may accompany them (a practice known as comping), providing rhythmic or harmonic support to the soloist's improvisation, and occasionally offering (or feeding) the soloist ideas which may or may not be incorporated into the solo.

Soloists encourage the exchange of ideas by leaving space in their playing for other musicians to make suggestions, for instance they may leave gaps between their melodic phrases, or play their chords ambiguously by leaving out certain notes that would distinguish one chord from one or two others. Of course, they do not explicitly think, 'Okay, now I will leave a space for someone else to fill'. Space-making and filling are more spontaneous than this. Jazz musicians listen to the playing of the other musicians and, in listening, spaces are created and filled by a logic that emerges as part of the interaction of the musicians. This simultaneous listening and playing produces the characteristic give and take of live jazz improvisation and also provides the conditions for conflict that can introduce the unexpected that inspires performance excellence, but also risks disaster.

The swapping back and forth of roles between soloists and those comping can perhaps best be seen in a practice known variously as trading, taking, or swapping fours (or as just plain fours), sometimes indicated on stage by one of the musicians holding up four fingers. In fours, jazz musicians take turns playing four bar solos in rapid succession (usually the drummer takes four bars between each of the other musicians) creating an intense exchange of musical ideas and sound.

Listening and Responding

Listening plays a major role in improvisational jazz. It is so important because the openness of jazz structure (e.g. subtlety, implicitness and ambiguity) means that the predictability of others' playing is at a minimum, and the chances for conflict (e.g. undesired disharmonies, rhythmic disagreements) are extremely high. However, rather than constraining or even thwarting good performance, these conflicts can challenge the musicians to make sense out of unexpected sound patterns. Accomplished jazz musicians know that mistakes are defined by their context, so, if someone plays

a 'wrong' note, changing the context can save the situation and, in the best cases, produces a novel idea. Incorporating the unexpected is essential to great jazz improvisation. Of course, as jazz musicians become experienced, their capacity to anticipate the moves of others grows along with their ability to respond to unexpected moves. Thwarting the anticipatory expectations of those they play with becomes an important mechanism for keeping the jazz 'alive'.

Ideally, each musician listens to all the other players all the time they are performing a tune. Nevertheless, many musicians freely admit that they reach this ideal only once in a while, primarily when they achieve peak moments of jazz performance. At other times, the musicians will concentrate on listening to one or two of the other players intensely, often shifting their focus from one player to another as the tune develops. Thus, in any tune, the likelihood is that at least somebody is listening and responding to each player who is contributing. Of course, the best listening and responding involves noticing how others are listening and responding to you. All other factors held constant, the greater the interpenetration of listening and responding, the better the music sounds, and it is this auditory interpenetration that, in part, structures the performance of a tune.

Groove and Feel

If a band is to achieve peak performance on a given tune, the musicians must find the groove. A jazz performance is said to be 'in the groove' when the jazz is played well and thus is very satisfying. Groove helps the musicians play together and know where notes and accents belong — it allows them to feel the structure of the tune inside themselves, which is what is required for them to depart from predictable patterns. For instance, rhythmically, groove involves 'locking in' which means the musicians (especially the drummer and bass player) agree where the beat is. Once the groove is found, the drummer or bass player can play ahead of, or behind, the beat to create tension by either pushing the tune forward or holding it back, ever so slightly. Without a strong sense of the groove, the practice of playing ahead or behind the beat would lead to rushing or dragging, but with groove, this practice heightens the emotional content of the performance and helps give the music a distinctive feel (which, in this case, is due to the relative placement of notes).

Jazz musicians use feel, not only in conjunction with rhythm, but also in relation to the harmonic and melodic structures of jazz. For instance, pitch, timbre, and melody can create tension and release independently or in combination with playing ahead or behind the beat. Furthermore, context (e.g., how the musicians and their audience relate to each other and the situation they are in at the time a tune is performed) contribute to making the feel of a tune different every time it is played. Together, groove and feel contribute mightily to the emotional and aesthetic appeal of the playing and encourage the audience to share in the music by feeling what the musicians feel. When groove and feel are fully embodied (creating music that literally and physically moves the listener), a sense of communion occurs

among those present (present both physically, and in the sense of being aware of what is going on, i.e., listening).

Parallels Between Jazz and the Emerging Vocabulary of Organization Studies

Table 1 summarizes the basic points about jazz introduced thus far and offers some parallels with the emerging vocabulary of organization studies. For instance, developing the capacity to switch between the roles of leading and supporting is a skill associated with successful teamwork and collaboration. The jazz metaphor suggests listening for soloing, comping and trading fours in everyday team interactions, and perhaps assessing the extent to which those roles are adequately fulfilled and to whether switches between them are being smoothly performed (e.g., Are solos interesting? Are those providing the comping contributing to the soloist's ideas or are they interfering with the soloist's ability to express him or herself? Do players know when to take a solo? Do they know when and how to end one?). These issues can be further elaborated by thinking about listening and responding. Are interactions between organizational members openings for new ideas and opportunities for accommodating them? These questions are closely associated with sense-making in organizations (Weick 1995) and might be usefully related to organizational talk (e.g. Boden 1994) and the strategy process (e.g. Mintzberg et al. 1976; Pettigrew and Whipp 1991). Likewise, groove and feel align with organizational culture and identity in their similar emphases on emotional and aesthetic aspects of organizational life (e.g. Alvesson 1990; Gagliardi 1990, 1996; Hatch 1993; Schultz 1992; Hatch and Schultz 1997).

Although simple analogies to current interests in organization studies place the jazz metaphor in a parallel relationship to the emerging vocabulary of organization studies, we want much more insight and involvement from a metaphoric approach than this set of new terms standing alone can offer. To be of value, the jazz metaphor must make an original contribution to

Table 1 Parallels Between Jazz and the Emerging Vocabulary of Organization Studies

Jazz	Descriptions	Emerging Vocabulary
Soloing Comping Trading fours	Taking the lead Supporting others' leads Switching between leading and supporting	Teamwork Collaboration
Listening Responding	Opening space for others' ideas Responding to and accommodating others' ideas	Sense-making Strategy process
Groove and feel	Emotional tension and release Resonance of embodied sound Communion among players and audience members	Organizational culture and identity

our understanding. In Rorty's terms, it must substantially revise our current vocabulary *and* the descriptions they uphold. Can the jazz metaphor accomplish this? I believe it can, or that *we* can, via the use of the jazz metaphor, as I will attempt to show below.

However, before we leave the simple analogy level, notice that the process of redescription has already begun. For instance, look at column 1 of the table and notice the emphasis on sensory and sensual engagement that permeates the jazz metaphor. Listening is obviously connected to hearing, but the musicality of all aspects of the metaphor goes much further, inviting us to *hear and feel* organizing, to listen for and move to its rhythms, harmonies and melodies. This is in contrast to previous approaches to organizational structure that are generally not sensual but rather analytical, orienting our minds to aspects of organizing but generally not engaging our bodies or their sensory capacities. The jazz metaphor encourages us to think about organizational structure with our ears and to engage our bodies and emotions in the process. This sensory and emotional engagement relates to another important feature of jazz — it is *played*.

Jazz happens. It is an activity, not just an abstract category. As an activity, jazz is something to be entered into, participated in, experienced. Via the jazz metaphor, organization can also be imagined as an activity to be entered into, participated in and experienced, and the jazz metaphor encourages us to do so. When engaged in this way, imagining organizational structure extends us well into the arena of activity. Here we find another similarity to organization studies — jazz is focused on performance. However, the jazz metaphor turns traditional organizational interpretations of performance in new directions by suggesting that organizational structure should be redescribed in performative terms (i.e., structure not as a state or outcome, but as a set of performance practices or processes). To develop the performative aspects of the jazz metaphor let us move on to the matter of how musicians use their structures when they play jazz.

How Jazz Musicians Use Their Structures: The Empty Spaces of Jazz

If we wanted to be more jazz-like in our appreciations of organizational structure, where would we begin? I believe the key to metaphoric redescription using jazz as the vehicle lies in appropriating the ways in which jazz musicians orient themselves toward and use their structures. Notice that I have moved beyond the usual question 'what structure should/do we use' and focused instead on the question 'how should/do we use our structure?'. This is an important linguistic move, because it takes structure out of the domain of states of being and repositions it as a part of the process of becoming. This reorientation invites activity and constitutes engagement or, to use more performative terms, it activates and engages.

In the most general terms, instead of trying to find ways to express their structures explicitly, jazz musicians constantly make structure implicit and

discover what they are able to express — it is a structure that supports, but does not specify. For example, as we saw above, finding the groove permits jazz musicians to internalize a tune's rhythmic, harmonic and melodic structure, which frees them from playing it explicitly. Not playing the head, while improvising on it, is another example of the implicitness of structure in jazz.

You should understand that jazz musicians do not need or even want to play their structures explicitly. For example, jazz musicians avoid playing 'one' (especially the first downbeat of the fist measure of a section of music), even though, if they did not know where one was, they would be lost and would find it impossible to play together (this is one common condition for a 'crash' or 'trainwreck' where the musicians so interfere with one another that they cannot go on playing the tune, or, even if they are able to cover up and go on playing, the tune is considered a disaster according to every criterion of acceptable jazz performance).

Likewise, jazz musicians do not accept their structures as given. They believe that the appropriate attitude to structure is one of finding out what you can get away with. Thus, jazz musicians interpret their structures as loosely as possible, maximizing ambiguity and the potential for interpretive multiplicity. Much of the looseness attributed to jazz is imparted by this orientation toward structure. The erroneous impression that jazz is simply 'made up as you go along' is the result of the freedom granted by implicit structures (i.e., structure that is not played explicitly but is nonetheless present in the minds, emotions and bodies of the players). The freedom imparted by not having to play structural features means that the musician can play around them, and this encourages creativity (Eisenberg 1990). That is, *not* playing structures creates space to improvise and this produces the framebreaking attitude that creativity theorists argue provokes the creative imagination (e.g. Adams 1990). It also inspires innovation and change. In jazz terms, however, notice how framebreaking means using the frame to step outside the frame.

To see this more clearly, *we* need to step out of the frame of playing a jazz tune and take a broader perspective on how jazz has changed over the course of its history. As Per Goldschmidt explained it to me, jazz was born along with Ragtime music in the late 1800s, and from there it moved to New Orleans style, Swing and Be-Bop, to Modern and Free jazz. If you study the history of these jazz styles, you will notice a sequence in which the structure of a previous period is repeatedly brought into question, where jazz musicians, in trying to say something new, move away from increasingly familiar structures of past and current styles, until something recognizably different emerges.

Take the case of rhythm. Rhythmically, traditional European music is played on the 1st and 3rd beats of a four count measure, while Ragtime music emphasizes the 2nd and 4th beats of the measure. As the emphasis moves from 1 and 3, to 2 and 4 you get the Ragtime, jazzy feel. As jazz developed further down this path, musicians started playing rhythms in between all four beats, shifting the rhythm from a quarter to an eighth note

(i.e., triplet) feel, and later still to a 16th note feel, first giving us Dixieland and Swing styles, and then Be-Bop and Modern jazz. A similar thing happened harmonically. In each stylistic phase of development, jazz musicians played outside familiar harmonic structures until they moved so far outside that some other structure had to be inferred. Critics and other commentators on the jazz scene interpreted these rhythmic and harmonic shifts as recognizable new styles, which they labelled New Orleans, Swing, Be-Bop and Modern, until, with Free jazz, structure became so subtle as to be practically undetectable to any but the most sophisticated listener, including many traditional jazz musicians. In fact, some see Free jazz as an attempt to play without any structure at all, though even the most free jazz needs a little structure to permit the musicians to orient themselves to each other within the tune.

To put this historical view in processual terms, as each use of structure is challenged by playing outside or between the anticipated notes, harmonies and beats of an existing form, new forms of jazz are created which redefine expectations and thus present new opportunities (new empty spaces) for thwarting them. Thus, the practices of jazz (e.g. soloing, comping, trading fours, listening and responding, finding the groove, playing the head, improvising) fill the empty spaces in the structure of jazz as it is currently constituted, and as this happens, the structure of jazz itself is transformed. Put another way, the improvisational practices of jazz constitute the conditions of its own structural transformation, even as the structures of jazz provide the starting point for improvisation. In this way, playing what is not explicated by one structure permits the creation of another, not unrelated to the first, but rather displaying both continuity and discontinuity with it. In other words, structure used in improvisational ways provokes innovation that radically alters ideas about what structure 'is' in both a material and ontological sense.

Jazz musicians do not simply use structure to organize themselves, they play their structures implicitly by explicitly *not* playing them and in doing so *play with* their structures in the dual senses of interacting with structure and altering it via improvisation. By putting structure on a performative basis (playing along with it interactively), jazz musicians are able to alter their structures radically in the historical sense of creating a discontinuity with the past, but they do this only by building on the continuity of the past that is expressed as the structure they do not play. The continuity in their heads (the structure of the tune) inspires the discontinuity on their lips and in their fingers (improvisation) as they go about transforming jazz as an idiom of musical expression.

To summarize, structure is not sacred to the jazz musician, it serves its own alteration. Thus, it is not static, it is dynamic, and, in this sense, structure has a complex relationship to time: it is simultaneously continuous and discontinuous with the past. Furthermore, as jazz musicians use it, structure is subtle, implicit and largely unheard except in silent accompaniment to what is played out loud; it exists more as an absence than as a presence. In addition, for the jazz musician, structure is interpretively open and often

ambiguous, which means that, on any particular occasion, a tune can be taken in multiple directions; the directions in which it will be taken are only decided in the moment of playing and will be redetermined each time that tune is played. Finally, structure has emotional qualities that allow musicians and their audiences to communicate outside intellectual consciousness, such as via groove and feel. Thus, a jazz-like view is one in which structure has ambiguity, emotionality and temporality, qualities that are as likely to be found in the absences of structure (i.e., its empty places) as in its presence. All of these themes can be identified in the emerging vocabulary of organization studies which has, oddly enough, 'discovered' them through an almost jazz-like process of playing in the empty spaces of organization theory, as will be pointed out below.

The Empty Spaces of Organizing: Redescribing Organizational Structures In Tune with the Jazz Metaphor

What if we were to view organizational structure as ambiguous, emotional and temporal (or temporary)? Recently, explorations in and of organizations have started separately down each of these paths. While there are certainly differences between these lines of research, I will now relate each, via the jazz metaphor, to the concept of organizational structure as I would recommend it be redescribed. I do this to engage the redescription of organizational structure offered by the jazz metaphor with the emerging vocabulary of organization studies and to further demonstrate their mutual resonance. This section of the paper addresses the questions: What might a jazz-like orientation towards organizational structures sound like? How might we engage with our organizational structures as jazz musicians engage with theirs?

The Ambiguity of Structure

As was explained above, the empty places of the structure of a tune produce ambiguity. This openness (or lack of closure) in structure permits any of the musicians to take the tune in a variety of directions, which, if played well, contribute innovation to the history of jazz and create momentary pleasure for both audience members and performers. In this jazz-based view, structuring occurs in what is not specified in the sense that the unspecified is an ambiguity that can be creatively interpreted to produce innovation. In jazz, ambiguity explains nothing, it is a part of the structure of tunes and its function lies in licensing jazz musicians to perform creatively. Although ambiguity in tune structures can be interpreted in ways that bring the musicians into conflict with each other, this conflict is not seen as detrimental to performance, but rather as inviting reinterpretation of the context within which meaning is made.

In organization theory, ambiguity was first conceptualized in relation to organizational decision making and choice. March and Olsen's (1976)

theory of organizational ambiguity specified four forms of ambiguity: the ambiguity of intention (e.g. ill-defined preferences or multiple and conflicting goals), the ambiguity of understanding (e.g. multiple interpretations of intentions and feedback), the ambiguity of history (e.g. difficulty understanding what happened and why), and the ambiguity of organization (e.g. due to frequent reorganizations). Thus, March and Olsen conceptualized ambiguity in relation to the empty spaces left by goal incongruence, disagreement on methods or explanations, and by organizational change. However, whereas March and Olsen theorized ambiguity as part of the explanation for the limits of rationality in organizational choice processes, the jazz metaphor encourages us to reinterpret these empty spaces as opportunities to improvise.

Interestingly, in his discussion of ambiguity and choice in organizations, March (1976: 76–78) described play, not in the musical sense, but rather as a 'strategy for suspending rational imperatives toward consistency' which serve the purpose of helping organizations to discover new goals. For March (1976: 77), 'playfulness allows experimentation'. He went on to explain:

> 'A strict insistence on purpose, consistency, and rationality limits our ability to find new purposes. Play relaxes that insistence to allow us to act 'unintelligently' or 'irrationally', or 'foolishly' to explore alternative ideas of possible purposes and alternative concepts of behavioral consistency.'

When March's ideas about play are linked to the performativity of the jazz metaphor, two ideas are suggested. First, March clarifies at least one contribution the jazz metaphor can make to our redescribed notion of organizational structure — in its playfulness, the jazz-inspired version of structure offers a route to creativity in defining new organizational purposes and goals. The jazz metaphor in turn offers imagination for how to explore alternative purposes along the lines of jazz improvisation, that is, by subjecting ideas to soloing, comping, trading fours, listening and responding. Furthermore, via its emphasis on sensory and bodily engagement, the jazz metaphor suggests how improvisation in organizational decision making can happen other than in a purely intellectual (e.g. rational) way. Good decision making with respect to creatively defining new goals and purposes, like good jazz performance, will require groove and feel.

March's ideas about the links between playfulness and the definition of new goals for organizations introduces the issue of the strategic use of ambiguity. Eisenberg (1984) addressed this issue, describing the benefits of strategic ambiguity in terms of what he called unified diversity. Eisenberg (1984:230) claimed that people in organizations do not always promote correspondence between their intentions and the interpretations given to their messages. At times, they purposefully omit contextual cues to allow for multiple interpretations by others. In his view, organizational structures are at least partly defined in terms of tensions (e.g. between centralization and decentralization) and ambiguity helps construct and maintain these tensions by allowing 'for multiple interpretations while at the same time promoting

a sense of unity'. The task for leaders, in Eisenberg's view, is to find 'a level of abstraction at which agreement can occur', where ambiguity 'foster[s] agreement on abstractions without limiting specific interpretations' (1984: 231). Imai et al. (1988) give several examples of the strategic use of ambiguity in the management of new product development teams in Japanese companies, such as the case of Honda's development of the City car. In this case, Imai et al. (1988: 528) report, top managers only instructed the team of young designers 'to create a radically different concept of what a car should be like', and to develop 'the kind of car that [you], the young, would like to drive'.

Eisenberg's analysis of strategic ambiguity in organizations is similar to the case of jazz musicians who each make their own distinctive contributions based on their interpretations and ideas, while at the same time making enough reference to structure to permit their efforts to form the unity that is a tune. However, my view of ambiguity in structure is not as strategic as is Eisenberg's; it focuses on how ambiguity achieves both unity and diversity by emphasizing the possibilities inherent in an ambiguous structure and the dual role of that structure to: (1) support multiple and diverse contributions and (2) provide enough unity to support the interpretation of the varied contributions of several players as a single tune, or, in the case of organizations, to support the interpretation of the contributions of various organizational members as a single performance. This view is supported by Meyerson's (1991) study of ambiguity in hospital social work.

Meyerson (1991) related ideas about ambiguity to organizational culture in her study of the experiences of hospital social workers who described their normal worklife as highly ambiguous. Meyerson observed that, in her sample, social workers shared a common orientation and overarching purpose, faced similar problems and had comparable experiences, yet this shared culture accommodated different beliefs and incommensurable technologies, implied different solutions to common problems, and supported multiple and sometimes conflicting meanings. She concluded that the effective performance of hospital social work depends upon the acceptance and use of ambiguity, which she claimed could be supported or not by the organizational cultures to which social workers belonged, with support leading to lower levels of psychological burnout.

Feldman (1991) offered case-based illustrations of March and Olsen's (1976) theory of organizational ambiguity. In particular, Feldman's illustrations of the ambiguity of intention and understanding in the U.S. Department of Energy presented the dark side of using ambiguity strategically for the purpose of maintaining unified diversity, as Eisenberg advocates. For instance, in showing how ambiguous goals and multiple interpretations conspired against effective action and undermined organizational self-esteem, Feldman suggested the cultural limits of strategic maneouvering via ambiguous expression, limits that are overlooked by Eisenberg's more prescriptive approach. Thus, along with Meyerson's study, Feldman's work points to the importance of considering cultural context in studies of the ambiguity of organizational structures and practices.

Organizational ambiguity in the broad sense of support for multiple goals and interpretations permits the maintenance of vital organizational tensions such as between centralization and decentralization. Application of the jazz metaphor suggests how the ambiguity of organizational structure accommodates and may even nurture these tensions. Jazz musicians recognize ambiguities as empty spaces into which they can insert their ideas and have influence on the way a tune is being played at any given moment. Ambiguity allows musicians to play the same tunes, but simultaneously to personalize and make new every tune they play, each time they play it. Ambiguity in organizational structures, viewed in this way, works similarly by allowing organizational members to replay organizational values and competencies in personalized ways that offer the opportunity for creativity and innovation within a cultural context that provides coherence. However, remember the caveats offered by Meyerson and especially by Feldman: the interpretation given to the strategic use of ambiguity may be an important consideration; ambiguity read as an opening to improvise (e.g., the Honda City Car case, the supportive social work culture) may be very different relative to ambiguity interpreted as a leader's refusal to take a solo when it comes his or her way (e.g. Feldman's Department of Energy examples). Using ambiguity effectively requires an engaged ability to listen and respond, as the jazz metaphor makes plain.

The Emotionality of Structure

Perhaps the biggest empty space in our prior conceptualizations of organizing has been emotion. Although organizational structures are based in human relationships, managers and other organizational actors have often tried to remove emotion from these relationships, suggesting that emotions are inappropriate to the workplace because they interfere with rational decision making. Hopfl and Linstead (1997: 5) trace the avoidance and devaluation of emotions in organizational discourse to Weber's suggestion that elimination of the irrational and emotional is one of the chief contributions of bureaucracy to capitalism. Although Weber himself merely reported that this aspect of bureaucracy was interpreted as a virtue (he never said by whom), his writings on bureaucracy have been interpreted by rationalist organization theorists and managers as a pillar of support for anti-emotionalism. However, a growing number of organizational scholars and researchers believe that we have been too unsympathetic (*sic*) in our understanding of the emotional aspects of organizational relationships (e.g. Hochschild 1983; Rafaeli and Sutton 1989; Albrow 1992; Fineman 1993; Ashforth and Humphrey 1995). These researchers make many points about the value and role of emotions, for example in learning and change processes, and for purposes of developing organizational citizenship, commitment and involvement.

Few studies of emotion in organizations have examined structural questions, though Hochschild's (1983) highly influential work in this field described emotional labour in terms of 'feeling rules'. The study of jazz undertaken

above, however, suggests a different aspect of structure as emotion. This aspect involves thinking of organizational structure in terms, not of rules, but of communication. If emotion can be communicated, and there is much social–psychological evidence that it can be, then emotion may contribute structurally to organizations by organizing relationships. Put a little differently, the feelings organization members have orient them to one another in particular ways, and these orientations are part of what constitutes an organization's structure as patterns of interaction and relationship.

Positioning structure within the emotional realm recognizes frequently ignored communication channels that offer an important complement to rational means of structuring organizational relationships. For instance, the importance of emotional structuring in organizations becomes clear in the context of de-layering. As influence and persuasion replace authority as avenues for getting things done in de-layered organizations, relationships shift away from their former dependence on rationality towards emotional bases such as liking and interpersonal attraction. However, the importance of the emotional aspects of structure is perhaps even more significant at the level of interactions than at the level of relationships. This would be particularly true for organizations that depend upon the constant reconfiguration of project teams or that indulge in temporary alliances, networks or other highly flexible, new organizational forms.

The jazz metaphor suggests that whenever we interact, communication rests as heavily upon emotional and physical feeling as it does on the intellectual content of the messages involved. I came to view structure in emotional terms when I tried to imagine the organizational equivalent of groove and feel in music. Groove and feel in jazz terms involve making structural aspects of performance (e.g. tempo and rhythm) implicit, which jazz musicians accomplish by rendering them subjects of their emotions and physical bodies (i.e., by literally feeling tempo and rhythm in an emotional and physical sense). Just as jazz musicians assign tempo and rhythm to the emotional realm and communicate on this basis to one another as they improvise (even when they have never played together before), workers may equally depend upon their ability to emotionally communicate as they coordinate their efforts for organizational achievement in the context of temporary teams or fluid networks. In this regard, Eisenberg (1990:145–146) made the important point that emotional communication does not necessarily depend upon self-disclosure, but rather is an intimacy based in shared action. That is, we are as capable of using our emotions to form working relationships as we are of using them to form friendship or familial relationships, and this capacity can extend to those with whom we have no relationship at all apart from the opportunity to act together at a particular moment in time.

The link to action brings us once again to the theme of the performative aspects of jazz. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1990), peak performance in many fields of endeavour, including athletics and music, is accompanied by a subjective state of flow in which performers experience absorption into the moment, lose their sense of self and situation, and achieve effortless performance. Csikszentmihalyi's descriptions of flow remind me of jazz musicians'

discussions of rhythm and harmony, and of groove and feel, not just as material features of jazz music, but as something jazz musicians internalize and embody in the context of performing a tune. Rhythm, harmony, groove and feel have emotional and aesthetic dimensions, and when these aspects of work processes are engaged we may likewise find the experience of flow that Csikszentmihalyi claims constitutes peak performance.

The jazz metaphor further suggests that flow can be communicated between those who are working closely together. As rhythm, harmony, groove and feel create a communion between musicians, audiences and musical experience, so flow permits an emotional form of communication to occur between co-workers (this could be part of what Gersick, 1994, referred to by her concept of 'entrainment', though she did not explicitly discuss entrainment in terms of emotion or flow). In other words, appreciating the groove and feel of work processes may harmonize bodies in a communal rhythm of work that contributes to peak collaborative performance.

If work processes have rhythm, harmony, groove and feel, then the jazz metaphor suggests developing emotional and bodily sensitivity to work. One place to look for evidence of the effectiveness of such a strategy might be the outdoor development programmes in which many organizations have invested considerable time and money (Dainty and Lucas 1992). Such programmes (e.g., the corporate development unit of Outward Bound) claim to make organizational members more aware of the physical and emotional dimensions of the work that they perform in their organizations. The contributions of such programmes can be perhaps better understood using concepts such as rhythm, harmony, groove and feel that are connected by the jazz metaphor to concerns for entrainment and flow. That is, team members who are in touch with their bodies and emotions may be better able to develop rhythm, harmony, groove and feel in their work processes which will enhance communication and the collaborative potential of their teamwork.

The Temporality of Structure

Time is another empty space in our organizational theorizing recently exposed by a small group of organizational researchers and made a part of the emerging vocabulary of organization studies. According to these researchers (e.g. Jacques 1982; Dubinskas 1988; Gherardi and Strati 1988; Hassard 1991, 1996b), the issue of time in organizations is many-sided and can be related to phenomena ranging from scheduling, cyclical events and developmental cycles, to organizational histories, scenarios for contemplating the future, and corporate vision. Most of these researchers describe two aspects of time that I find to be particularly relevant to my rendition of the jazz metaphor for organizational structure: tempo, and the relationship between past, present and future.

Tempo

In his introduction to a compilation of four ethnographies focused on the uses and meanings of time in high technology companies, Dubinskas drew

on Bourdieu (1977) to explain the issue of tempo in relation to the strategic manipulation of time. Dubinskas (1988: 14) wrote:

'... the setting of tempo, the stretching of boundaries, the rushing and relaxing of schedules, and the celebration of passages. This artful manipulation of time is part of the practical and intentional reconstruction of orderliness. The ability or power to exercise this art skillfully, in a recognizably patterned but not rigidly rule-bound way, is a key to the process of building effective social relations.'

Bourdieu (1977: 7) offered several examples of manipulating tempo in strategically organizing action, including:

'... holding back or putting off, maintaining suspense or expectation, or on the other hand, hurrying, hustling, surprising, and stealing a march, not to mention the art of ostentatiously giving time ('devoting one's time to someone') or withholding it ('no time to spare').'

The strategic manipulation of time in the sense of setting and monitoring the pace of work is often claimed as the rightful (if much contested) domain of management (e.g. Taylorism, Fordism). Nevertheless, as Gersick found in her studies of group projects (1988, 1989) and a venture capital backed start-up firm (1994), there is a pattern to the pacing of work in project teams. Gersick reported that the groups she studied worked slowly up to a critical point about mid-way through their 'life', after which, the pace increased in response to a growing sense of urgency to complete by an explicit deadline. Thus, in her study, Gersick made sense of time in relation to targets and deadlines that were externally imposed upon the groups that she observed.

The jazz metaphor provides an alternative interpretation of Gersick's half-life phenomenon. It suggests that different work processes, like different jazz tunes, may have an inherent tempo and, when played at this tempo, they 'feel right'. Instead of the tempo changing at the midpoint of a project, as Gersick claimed, perhaps the intensity of involvement, like the crescendo that builds up towards the end of a well-performed jazz tune, alters the internal perception of time, such that one is left with an impression of a faster pace.

The difference in interpretation is also important because, if tempo is a feature of structure in organizing, as it is in music, then changing tempo can lead to great difficulties of coordination. A strong leader, of course, like an orchestra conductor, can direct a group to alter its tempo to great effect. However, if a group is using tempo to organize itself, like a jazz band does, then respecting the tempo of a work process may be critical to achieving high performance levels because it is used to coordinate activities in the absence of a fixed leadership role. Perhaps it is even because they are tuned-in to tempo that groups such as jazz bands are able to change roles as needed for attaining peak levels of performance. In such cases, rather than a leader-driven performance, the tempo itself carries performance along.

Years of talk about diminishing product lead times have left the impression with many managers that processes can be 'played' at any tempo, and

that faster is better. This reinforces images of project leaders as drivers of performance along the lines of the orchestral model. On the other hand, if what is required is intensity of involvement rather than actual speed, then the image of driving is wrong. Unlike urgency, which comes from external pressures, intensity comes from within, so influence over it will likewise need to be located there. This suggests that, in the improvisation mode at least, team members (including whoever is taking the lead at a particular moment) need to be driven rather than driving. Their fully engaged listening and responding will help to bring the group's performance together, the intrinsic satisfactions of which will give the greatest chance of achieving peak performance levels.

This discussion indicates one of the limits of the jazz metaphor. Although some work processes may be better regarded as requiring interplay and intensity disciplined by a steady beat or tempo, others may fit the orchestral model of a strong leader directing the tempo. To use the jazz metaphor to the full effect requires distinguishing between situations demanding creativity or flexibility and those in which well-accepted work processes simply have to be completed faster. When creativity or flexibility are required, using analogies to jazz performance in respect to building intensity can be a useful way to achieve transition out of the traditional mindset of directive leadership focused on communicating urgency and increasing pace.

In the context of performing a jazz tune, musicians build intensity from the structure of their playing. They generally begin with a round of open solos in which players work out some of their ideas in relation to the head and to what other soloists and those comping have introduced up to that point in the tune. The initial round of solos may be followed by multiple rounds of fours. Here the intensity usually increases due to the rapid succession of solos and to the more intertwined listening and responding called forth from the musicians. As anticipation builds in relation to how well the players are interacting with one another's ideas, the intensity grows until it spills into and forms the final part of the tune — the ending. Endings involve all the musicians playing at once, now hopefully completely engaged in listening and responding, but also drawing on the ideas they laid down at earlier points in the tune. Intensity peaks as all of these ideas are layered together making a final collaborative statement that finds its conclusion by once again playing the head, but this time the head is played with all that has just happened still hanging in immediate memory leaving, in a well-played tune at least, a sense of completion.

Notice two things in this notion of layering to achieve an ending. First, layering is the linguistic equivalent of everyone talking at once, except that, in jazz, this simultaneity is synchronized by the structure developed via improvising around a previous structure. The organizational equivalent would be everyone doing their job at once such that ideas and skills come together in an intense moment of interactivity which has the potential to inform and inspire each participant in a different, albeit synchronized, way. Here space becomes a consideration in that one wonders whether

synchronicity can be achieved when performers are separated by physical distances. In addition to a view of time as a point at which performance can come together (i.e., the ending), a second aspect of time suggests how the present can extend over, reach into, or otherwise connect the past and future. This idea can be seen above in the ambiguous status of the head played as either a beginning or as an ending of a tune. In this regard, notice particularly how endings set up expectations of again playing this (or another) tune by concluding with a beginning.

Past, Present and Future

As described above, the playing of heads in jazz gives both a starting point, and a place to return to, making it possible to create an ending that acknowledges the beginning. Gherardi and Strati (1988: 159) frame a similar aspect of organizational time as 'the activity of the organizational actors themselves, who see key events as being bounded by a beginning and an end'. Those structured points of beginning and ending provide reference to where we have been in the historical past, but also serve as leaping off points that carry us into the future when the present performance will be part of history. Thus, for jazz musicians, the playing of a tune is the connecting point between past, present and future just as a tune's head is the connecting point between its beginning and ending.

In performance, in the strict present of playing jazz, the past has not simply passed. It is re-played, and thus re-established in the present by the musicians and audience members. For example, those tunes that are played most frequently, comprise a collective memory that jazz musicians hold in common, known as jazz standards (e.g. Billie Holiday's 'God Bless the Child', Duke Ellington's 'Take the A Train', Thelonius Monk's 'Round Midnight', A.C. Jobim's 'The Girl From Ipanima', Miles Davis' 'All Blues', Chick Corea's 'Spain'). Playing the head of a jazz standard is likely to evoke memories that link past and present for both musicians and their audiences. Citation, in which jazz musicians play famous solos, phrases or styles associated with other (often more famous) musicians, likewise links the past with the present. Playing heads and citing are practices that allow musicians to incorporate the ideas of those who have had an influence on jazz, but who are not present on stage. These ideas and memories enrich the present moment and imbue it with the emotionally attractive forces of recognition and continuity with the past. Notice, however, how different memories of a particular tune are brought together in the instant of playing it *this time*. The specific memories invoked are shaped by the possibilities presented by these musicians and this audience in the present moment.

As the past is invoked with the playing of a head, so too is anticipation of the improvising to come, thus the future is invited into the present via expectation created by recollection of similar experiences in the past. These expectations and recollections of musicians and audience members fill the venue of performance with a commingling of time past and time future, memory and anticipation. Thus, time past and time future merge in their

influence on time present, which is occasioned by the performance of tunes in a celebration of what Ricoeur (1984: 9, citing Augustine) referred to as the threefold present (i.e., the present of the past, the present of the present, and the present of the future). In this way, associations to a tune are spread out in past time and brought forward in their connection with 'the present of the present', to borrow Ricoeur's phrase. Furthermore, anticipating this can draw future time into the present moment.where it can raise expectations and magnify intensity.

In a temporally sensitive view of organizational structure, the dialectic of past, present and future is similarly compelling. As organizations perform, their memories (institutionalized in the artifacts, norms and customs of organizational culture) are invoked by cultural practices such as storytelling, joking, or other forms of symbol manipulation in much the same way that memories pervade the jazz musician's playing of a tune when past performances are invoked through the playing of heads or the use of citation. Likewise, memories of the organization's past colour present attentions and thereby shape the future via their capacity to stimulate expectations and anticipations that further influence attention, thereby creating a commingling of past and future in the threefold present.

To return again to the theme of performance, if past experience is construed as supporting an expectation of peak performance, the chances of peak performance are enhanced. Invoking past occasions when such achievement was realized reminds us of this potential, and thereby serves a motivational or inspirational role. If expectations are negative, of course, a depressing effect will occur. Either way, emotionally charged memories are likely to set up expectations. Such connections are often interpreted in rather simplistic terms, suggesting to many managers an image of leadership as cheerleading. The jazz metaphor suggests recognizing how the memories and expectations of organizational actors intersect at any given moment to structure the emotional and temporal dimensions of work and organizing in such a way as to influence action. If one wants to have an effect on organizational outcomes, the jazz metaphor suggests that one must enter the process, which means direct engagement in the threefold present of performing. Only through personal engagement can the hermeneutic of memory, attention and expectation be activated, and even then, influence will likely only be in proportion to the degree of emotional/aesthetic involvement of those engaged in the process. Notice how disengaged leadership does not prevent the process from taking place, it only locates the process within a set of actors who are emotionally and aesthetically disconnected from those who hope to influence them.

Summary

To summarize, structure is temporal in the sense that it has tempo and takes place over time, but also in the sense that it constitutes temporal experiences in the commingling of past, present and future in the threefold present. Via recollection, structure evokes emotional connections with the past which, in anticipation, can cast emotional anchors into the future raising

both expectations for and the intensity of the present moment. However, the meanings and experiences invited by the temporality and emotionality of structure are perpetually ambiguous, riddled with the empty spaces that continuously present new opportunities for structural change via engagement in the play of performance. Thus, we find but one of myriad ways to redescribe structure as simultaneously ambiguous, emotional and temporal using the jazz metaphor.

Conclusion

My reason for exploring the jazz metaphor in this essay was to investigate the potential for redescription that Rorty (1989) claimed on behalf of the metaphoric approach. My reason for choosing the jazz metaphor was partly its unfamiliarity within the discourse of structure (which Rorty claimed is essential for redescription), and partly its richness, which I associated with a variety of aspects of organizing appearing within the emerging discourse of organization studies (especially ambiguity, emotionality and temporality). In developing the redescription, I followed Rorty's advice not to try to argue against the old vocabulary, but rather to engage with a new one. However, now it is time to break the silence between redescription and 'the old vocabulary' because some readers will want to know what the benefit of the metaphoric approach is relative to other recent reconceptualizations of organizational structure, especially those provided by Giddens and his followers.

First let me reiterate that the claimed benefit of metaphoric redescription is that it facilitates escaping the clutches of worn out vocabularies. Other approaches to reconceptualizing organizational structure, by remaining entrenched in old metaphors such as those of the machine, the organism and the system, do not offer an equal possibility to construct a new vocabulary in Rorty's terms. By the same token, I mean nothing sacred by the jazz metaphor. It worked to help me reconceptualize organizational structure in terms compatible with the emerging vocabulary of organization studies, and so I offer it to you on that basis. It is the redescription process that matters, however, not the metaphor *per se*. In fact, if the jazz metaphor works well, it too will need replacement, because in time it will become literal rather than metaphoric, as Davidson (1984) explained, and will lose its power to inform and inspire.

Some may want to argue that all that I have said about organizational structure can be said (or even has been said) by those less ambitious of breaking free from old vocabularies. I suspect that those who say this are appropriating what I have offered back into an old vocabulary. To be as precise as I can be, I do not find in earlier reconceptualizations of organization structure the emotional and aesthetic dimensions of structure emphasized by the jazz metaphor. One could say that these dimensions are present in all conceptualizations in a latent form, but my response is that the metaphoric approach taps that latency.

It is my view that there are boundaries of experience that the less figurative language of literal (minded) science cannot easily cross. The metaphoric approach penetrates these boundaries. Thus, my claim for the contribution of this essay is that the metaphoric nature of the method employed contributes something unique. In the specific case of the jazz metaphor, it contributes imagination for the redescribed concept in that it helps us to hear, feel and engage with, rather than simply think about, our organizational structures. I claim that this element of appreciation is lacking in previous attempts to reconceptualize organizational structure and that, therefore, the metaphoric approach contributes distinctive value (though the jazz metaphor does not necessarily contribute greater value than that which other metaphors bring). What I am arguing is that we need to go beyond reconceptualization — or perhaps to go before it — to redescribe organizational structure as a means to connect with a new vocabulary for organizational theorizing that embraces emotional and aesthetic appreciation as well as analytical rigor.

Following jazz practice, let me now return to my starting point and re-state the observation that organizational structure itself has become an absence in our discourse. The move I made in recovering the concept via metaphoric redescription is a continuation of the move that led to its abandonment in the first place, that is, the move of making and filling empty spaces. This paper is not intended to put an end to this process of making and filling empty spaces, but rather to celebrate it for the sake of engaging in the ever emerging discourse of organization studies. Thus, this paper has not been about doing something never done before, but about doing something worth doing again. It is about weaving past and future together to find expressions of identity and being that are not mere repetitions of the past, but which continuously reinvent the present in relation to both past and future. Redescription is an important part of this unending process, and the development of the jazz metaphor in this essay is my contribution to this enterprise.

The jazz metaphor, like any other metaphoric approach, has limitations. In developing and applying a metaphor, it is easy to become so caught up in similarities between vehicle and target that differences are ignored. There are certainly aspects of organizational structure that are ignored by the jazz metaphor. The most obvious of these, pointed out earlier, is that many aspects of organizing are routine and do not require improvising. Here, perhaps another metaphor (e.g., orchestral conducting) would be more useful. The analysis provided in this paper suggests that the jazz metaphor is likely to be most valuable in situations demanding creativity and flexibility, where improvisation is a benefit to performance.

Please be aware that I do not offer the jazz metaphor as a new root metaphor for the field of organization studies. It is, in Rorty's terms, but a 'passing theory', a tool for keeping thought moving in a way that only temporarily suits our purposes and imaginations. I believe it is but one among a variety of metaphoric opportunities. What is important is what we *do* with our metaphors, as Rorty (1989) and Davidson (1984), among others, have

explained. In this case, I used the jazz metaphor to bring out temporal, emotional and ambiguous aspects of organizational structure as a concept to guide both thinking and organizing. Nevertheless, other metaphors in other times and places could have equal or greater value.

In the end, my development of the jazz metaphor is more a demonstration of Rorty's (1989) redescription than an offer of a new metaphor for organization studies, but what is more, the paper engages the practices it describes. In it, there have been solos and there has been comping, a give and take between the ideas I was trying to express and ideas taken from the emerging vocabulary of organization studies. Furthermore, this tune has been played before, and this rendition contains references to the responses of earlier audiences (reviewers' suggestions, and comments by those who have come to talks I have given on the jazz metaphor) in the form of my responses to their responses which are embedded in this text. Successive readings can continue this process to exhaustion. But each time the paper is read, if I achieve my ambition to have you listen and respond, there will be the chance of developing a groove and feel that permits us to communicate beyond the normal intellectual channels by engaging emotional and aesthetic dimensions of our being. This, for me, is where the value of this metaphoric redescription is to be found.

Note

* I would like to thank Peter Case, Silvia Gherardi, David Wilson and the anonymous *Organization Studies* reviewers who offered insight and made valuable contributions to this paper. Special thanks go to Per Goldschmidt and Doug Conner for their patient development of my understanding and appreciation of jazz and for the inspiration I find in their music.

References

Adams, James L.
1990 *Conceptual blockbusting: A guide to better ideas*, 3rd Ed. Reading, MA: Addison Wesley.

Albrow, Martin
1992 *'sine ire et studio'* — or: Do organizations have feelings?'. *Organization Studies* 13/3: 313–330.

Alvesson, Matts
1990 'Organization: From substance to image'. *Organization Studies* 11/3: 373–394.

Ashforth, Blake, and Ronald Humphrey
1995 'Emotion in the workplace: A reappraisal'. *Human Relations* 48/2: 97–126.

Barrett, Frank
'Creativity and improvisation in jazz and organizations: Implications for organizational learning'. *Organization Science* 9/5: 605–622.

Bastien, David T., and Todd J. Hostager
1988 'Jazz as a process of organizational innovation'. *Communication Research* 15: 582–602.

Bastien, David T., and Todd J. Hostager
1992 'Cooperation as communicative accomplishment: A symbolic interaction analysis of an improvised jazz concert'. *Communication Studies* 43 (summer): 92–104.

Berliner, Paul F.
1994 *Thinking in jazz: The infinite art of improvisation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Boden, Deirdre
1994 *The business of talk: Organizations in action*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Boje, David M., Robert P. Gephart, Jr., and Tojo Joseph Thatchenkery, *editors*
1996 *Postmodern management and organization theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Bourdieu, Pierre
1977 *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Burrell, Gibson
1997 *Pandemonium: Towards a retro-organization theory*. London: Sage.

Cooper, Robert, and Gibson Burrell
1988 'Modernism, postmodernism, and organizational analysis: An introduction'. *Organization Studies* 9/1: 91–112.

Crossan, Mary, and Marc Sorrenti
1997 'Making sense of improvisation'. *Advances in Strategic Management* 14:155–180.

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly
1990 *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. New York: Harper and Row.

Dainty, Paul, and Donna Lucas
1992 'Clarifying the confusion: A practical framework for evaluating outdoor development programmes for managers'. *Management Education and Development* 22/2: 106–122.

Davidson, Donald
1984 'What metaphors mean' in *Inquiries into truth and interpretation*. D. Davidson. 245–264. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dubinskas, Frank A., *editor*
1988 *Making time: Ethnographies of high-technology organizations*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Eisenberg, Eric M.
1984 'Ambiguity as strategy in organizational communication'. *Communication Monographs* 51: 237–242.

Eisenberg, Eric M.
1990 'Jamming: Transcendence through organizing'. *Communication Research* 17/2: 139–164.

Feldman, Martha
1991 'The meanings of ambiguity: Learning from stories and metaphors' in *Reframing organizational culture*. P. J. Frost et al. (eds.). 145–156. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Fineman, Stephen, *editor*
1993 *Emotion in organizations*. London: Sage.

Gagliardi, Pasquale
1990 'Artifacts and pathways and remains of organizational life' in *Symbols and artifacts: Views of the corporate landscape*. Pasquale Gagliardi (ed.). 3–38. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

Gagliardi, Pasquale
1996 'Exploring the aesthetic side of organizational life' in *Handbook of organization studies*. S.R. Clegg, C. Hardy and W.R. Nord (eds.). 565–580. London: Sage.

Gergen, Kenneth
1992 'Organisation theory in the postmodern era' in *Rethinking organisations: New directions in organisation theory and analysis*. M. Reed and M. Hughes (eds.). 209–226. London: Sage.

Gersick, Connie
1988 'Time and transition in work teams: Toward a new model of group development'. *Academy of Management Journal* 31: 9–41.

Gersick, Connie
1989 'Marking time: Predictable transitions in task groups'. *Academy of Management Journal* 32: 274–309.

Gersick, Connie
1994 'Pacing strategic change: The case of a new venture'. *Academy of Management Journal* 37: 9–45.

Gherardi, Silvia, and Antonio Strati
1988 'The temporal dimension in organizational studies'. *Organization Studies* 9/2: 149–164.

Giddens, Anthony
1979 *Central problems in social theory: Action, structure and contradictions in social analysis*. London: Macmillan.

Giddens, Anthony
1984 *The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Hassard, John
1991 'Aspects of time in organization'. *Human Relations* 44/2:105–125.

Hassard, John
1996a 'Exploring the terrain of modernism and postmodernism in organization theory' in *Postmodern management and organization theory*. D.M. Boje, R.P. Gephart and T.J. Thatchenkery (eds.), 45–59.Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hassard, John
1996b 'Images of time in work and organization' in *Handbook of organization studies*. S.R. Clegg, C. Hardy and W.R. Nord (eds.). 581–598. London: Sage.

Hassard, John, and Martin Parker
1993 *Postmodernism and organizations*. London: Sage.

Hatch, Mary Jo
1993 'The dynamics of organizational culture'. *Academy of Management Review* 18/4: 657–693.

Hatch, Mary Jo
1997 'Jazzing up the theory of organizational improvisation'. *Advances in Strategic Management* 14: 181–191.

Hatch, Mary Jo, and Majken Schultz
1997 'Relations between orgnizational culture, identity and image'. *European Journal of Marketing* 31: 356–365.

Hesse, Mary
1980 'The explanatory function of metaphor' in *Revolutions and reconstructions in the philosophy of science*. Mary Hesse. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Hochschild, Arlie Russell
1983 *The managed heart*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Hopfl, Heather, and Stephen Linstead
1997 'Learning to feel and feeling to learn: emotion and learning in organizations'. *Management Learning* 28: 5–12.

Imai, Ken-Ichi, Ikujiro Nonaka, and Hirotaka Takeuchi
1988 'Managing the new product development process: How Japanese companies learn and unlearn' in *Readings in the management of innovation*, 2nd Ed. M.L. Tushman and W.L. Moore (eds.), 337–381. Cambridge, MA: Ballinger.

Jacques, Elliott
1982 *The form of time*. New York: Crane Russak.

March, James G.
1976 'The technology of foolishness' in *Ambiguity and choice in organizations*. J.G. March and J.P. Olsen (eds.), 69–81. Bergen, Norway: Universitetsforlaget.

March, James G., and Johan P. Olsen
1976 'Organizational choice under ambiguity' in *Ambiguity and choice in organizations*. J.G. March and J.P. Olsen (eds.), 10–23. Bergen, Norway: Universitetsforlaget.

Meyerson, Debra
1991 'Normal' ambiguity?' in *Reframing organizational culture*. P. J. Frost et al. (eds.), 131–144. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Mintzberg, Henry, Duru Raisinghani, and Andre Theoret
1976 'The structure of unstructured decision processes'. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 21: 246–275.

Morgan, Gareth
1986 *Images of organization*. Newbury Park: Sage.

Pettigrew, Andrew M.
1987 'Context and action in the transformation of the firm'. *Journal of Management Studies* 24: 649–670.

Pettigrew, Andrew M., and Richard Whipp
1991 *Managing change for competitive success*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Rafaeli, Anat, and Robert Sutton
1989 'The expression of emotion in organizational life' in (eds.) *Research in organizational behavior*, Vol. 11. L.L. Cummings and B.M. Staw (eds.), 1–42. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

Ranson, Stewart, Bob Hinings, and Royston Greenwood
1980 'The structuring of organizational structures'. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 25: 1–17.

Reed, Michael I.
1997 'In praise of duality and dualism: Rethinking agency and structure in organizational analysis'. *Organization Studies* 18/1: 21–42.

Reed, Michael I., and Michael Hughes, editors
1992 *Rethinking organisations: New directions in organisation theory and analysis*. London: Sage.

Ricoeur, Paul
1984 *Time and narrative*, Vol. 1. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Rorty, Richard
1989 *Contingency, irony and solidarity*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Schultz, Majken
1992 'Postmodern pictures of organizational culture'. *International Studies of Management and Organization* (Summer): 15–35.

Weick, Karl E.
1989 'Organized improvisation: 20 years of organizing'. *Communication Studies* 40: 241–248.

Weick, Karl E.
1993 'Organizational redesign as improvisation' in *Organizational change and redesign: Ideas and insights for improving performance*. G.P. Huber and W.H. Glick (eds.), 346–379. New York: Oxford University Press.

Weick, Karl E.
1995 *Sensemaking in organizations*. Newbury Park: Sage.

Weick, Karl E.
1998 'Improvisation as a mindset for organizational analysis'. *Organization Science* 9/5: 540–555.