

Food Coop (2016) - Tom Boothe

Unplugged - Voices

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Management and organization research can only gain from being inspired by the arts, culture and humanities to rethink practices and enrich its own perspectives. Life in organizations is artificially separate from ordinary life: all mundane objects are thus conducive to astonishment, inspiration and even problematization. The unplugged subsection *Voices* gives academics and non-academics the opportunity to present an interpretation of an object from the cultural or artistic world. While interpreted objects are, or are not, directly related to organizational life and they resonate, or do not resonate, with the moment, they do share some intriguing features. These interpretations suggest a patchwork of variations on the same object.

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INTRODUCTION

This issue of *M@n@gement's Unplugged – Voices* presents four essays on organizations that are not conventional in relation to their governance, their economic model and their consumer relations. Although they are not new to the economic landscape, “alternative organizations” have a growing presence in the academic management literature (e.g., Dorion, 2017; Meyer & Hudon, 2017; Parker, 2017; Parker & Parker, 2017). The recent financial and economic crises and environmental crises such as climate change and loss of biodiversity have helped to make these organizations more visible (Parker, Cheney, Fournier & Land, 2014). In this context, there has been renewed interest in the original model of the Park Slope Food Coop (PSFC) in New York, with numerous projects replicating this participatory supermarket model in Western Europe and North America. The PSFC is an alternative organization in that it is a cooperative and is therefore member-owned, member-controlled and benefiting its members (Mamouni Limnios, Mazzarol, Soutar & Siddique, 2018). It was created in 1973 in the USA, around the time of the counterculture (that is, the peace movement, anti-corporate movement, hippies, etc.) that was happening then (Jochowitz, 2001). Today, the PSFC has around 17,000 members who, in exchange for three hours of voluntary work per month, are allowed to shop there and therefore have access to better quality food at an affordable price.

One of the pioneers of this recent wave of replication is La Louve, which opened its doors in Paris a couple of years ago under the leadership of Tom Boothe. While working with a team to establish the project in Paris, Boothe spent some time in New York studying how the PSFC operated. He directed a documentary on the topic called *Food Coop* (2016), which is the object which the four essays in this *Unplugged* issue reflect upon. This 97-minute long documentary follows different members of the PSFC during their shifts or as shoppers. The absence of voiceover comments lets the members describe and explain in their own words how they experience this alternative organization.

Gauthier and Léglise ground their analysis of the movie in an ethnographic study of the set-up of a cooperative and participatory store that adopted a similar model as the PSFC's. Adopting the approach of Deleuze, they explain the fabulative function of the documentary, looking for critical moments. Following the work of Gibson-Graham, Ouahab considers the movie as providing economic imaginaries that participate in the development of new forms of organizations, which he somewhat provocatively calls “intellectual disturbing organizations.” He further examines the distribution of the documentary as an element that contributes to its performative effect. Lanciano takes a pragmatist point of view on the collective action that results from individual involvement. She questions the alternativeness of the organization by highlighting the tensions between its portrayal as a caring organization and its bureaucratic and ultra-rational context. Such tensions are also emphasized by Dufays in his analysis of the metaphors used by members to describe the PSFC. He argues that the experience of a democratic organization is one of complexity, which explains why several (at first sight unrelated or contradictory) metaphors are used to make sense of different aspects of the organization and its behavior. Taken collectively, these essays provide a mosaic of views on alternative organizations. This mosaic needs to be extended further by complementary approaches. While various paradigms and theoretical frameworks can enlighten the work of alternative

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organizations, theory can also be enriched by studying alternative organizations.

Art, and cinema in particular, whether through fiction or documentaries, has always paid much attention to (alternative) organizing. The essays in this section show how a film, both in its content and as an object, can help us understand an alternative organization model and its diffusion. But, there is still much to explore, including: the perception of the organization and its alternativeness by different audiences, for example in terms of political sensitivity or cultural background; the individual and collective actions triggered by viewing the film, such as enrolling in an alternative organization or adapting an entrepreneurial project to better fit the image of the organization model depicted in the film; or the potentially prescriptive positioning of the film director through the film. We hope that the essays in this section will trigger and inspire future art-based research on alternative organizing.

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WAITING FOR CRITICAL MOMENTS: BEYOND *FOOD COOP* (2016)

It was pitch-dark that evening in April 2018. Only the streetlights illuminated the entrance to the association building where the coordination group had just held their monthly meeting. In the cool spring air, we exchanged a few words and thoughts about what had just been said. Everything had been going more or less smoothly since the launch of the project in a large, provincial French town, just over a year earlier at the beginning of 2017. Our number was growing steadily every day, and we were confident that we were contributing to a worthwhile citizen experience, the crowning moment of which would be the imminent opening of a local cooperative and participatory store (Aufrère, Eynaud, Gauthier & Vercher-Chaptal, 2019).

Yet the clouds had been gathering for a number of weeks, and it was becoming harder to map out the path ahead. The autumn 2016 screening of the film *Food Coop* (2016) – the inspiration for the project – held in one of the city’s small independent cinemas, in no way suggested that such difficulties would lie ahead. The establishment in 1973 of the Park Slope Food Coop, a cooperative, participatory and self-managed supermarket in the Park Slope neighborhood of Brooklyn, which is the subject of the film, seemed like it had been running well for a long time. Based on a relational ethic and a collective ownership model, over the years the New York project had successfully managed to bring together more than 17,000 members who were on hand and ready to volunteer a few hours of their time each month to ensure its smooth running, and who in return had the opportunity to buy high-quality products there at reduced prices.

For us, the recent opening of similar supermarkets throughout France, including La Louve in Paris, for example, which uses the same model as the one in New York¹, made our project seem even more within reach. After all, on the surface, Park Slope Food Coop (PSFC in the text) was a supermarket like any other, with its trolleys, aisles and freezer cabinets. But it was also a place where any given shift might see a teacher or graphic designer paradoxically working in a food aisle (1’ 33), a social worker or psychotherapist becoming a cashier (1’ 58), and where you might see a “manager” hard at work in the basement among a crowd of volunteers (41’). There’s nothing magical about any of this and it is certainly not a leap into the unknown. The world the film depicts is that of our daily lives and our childhood games, but with an added element that reveals another, unexpected America, which is rebellious and paradoxical.

For these reasons, the film seemed to offer wonderful potential and a unifying ambition. What’s more, the French cover of the film presented it as “a user guide for the functioning and principles of these supermarkets, which are more respectful of consumers, producers and also the environment.” Some of us seemed convinced that the film offered a guide for remodeling this system from “the outside,” a system which was rejected by some of the film’s participants who viewed it as a breeding ground for individualism, solitude, misery, violence, filth and decay (31’). From the beginning of our project, everything seemed to be falling into place to enable us to reproduce what the film itself claimed to be: “the most wonderful social experiment in the USA” (French cover of the film).

But in reality, the path ahead ultimately became a challenging and winding one, which forced us to reconsider every step. “To begin with, it

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1. Tom Boothe (2016), who is also the director of the film *Food Coop*, is a co-founder of La Louve, Paris.

was a remake of the film (*Food Coop*). It was easy!” said one of the participants at that evening meeting, before we took a break. This admission, all by itself, marked the end of our certainties.

The choice of tense in his sentence struck us as being highly significant, signaling a turning point away from the ethnographic research which had led one of us to become an active member of the project. There would therefore certainly be a before and an after *Food Coop*. Buoyed by the film, we had undoubtedly underestimated the difficulties involved in any collective entrepreneurial project. They now began appearing to us in successive waves, like many obstacles to be faced all at once. That evening, the film was of course still present in our minds but its magic no longer played out in the same way. With one exception, the new arrivals had not watched it, despite a new screening having been put on immediately beforehand. It seemed that some of us were now living out the references to *Food Coop* vicariously. Naturally, the experience gained in New York, Paris and elsewhere still offered some reference points which could be applied, some routines and arrangements that could be copied, but other models, other systems also asserted themselves over time, inspired by each individual's personal, professional, militant or charitable experience. With every passing day, the references to *Food Coop* became less common. And on that April evening, perhaps we fully realized that we were only just starting to build “our” own store and not a pale imitation of another one.

BEYOND *FOOD COOP*... PATHS BETWEEN IMPOSSIBILITIES

A great deal emerged from *Food Coop*. First of all, of course, there was the film's description of PSFC as an alternative organization, its history and values. Then, there was the depiction of how PSFC had evolved into its current form, the tensions and moments of joy or pain, of disappointment and enthusiasm that *Food Coop* had triggered away from the camera lens. All these points were naturally of great interest. But this brief insight also led us to question the role that cinema can play – which in our opinion includes documentary cinema – in the emergence of new organizations and the underlying entrepreneurial processes. From our point of view, therefore, and given the popularity that it generated, the film *Food Coop* could no longer be seen merely as a detailed description of the workings or the organization of an atypical organization. It seems that there was more to the film's images than met the eye: an undeniably partial, even biased representation of the documentary's images from which researchers will always seek to distance themselves.

Another facet of *Food Coop* which is equally intriguing is the film's ability to inspire its viewers, to encourage their creative spirits, to become “inspiring.” In order to understand the “inspiring” nature of the film should we perhaps expand our gaze to observe critical moments and even explain the aspects that might encourage viewers to become participants? Because *Food Coop* could never be a mere user guide! If that was the case, the film would be nothing more than a provider of information and would even deprive its actors or viewers of their ability to use their initiative and to create (Deleuze, 1985).

To understand the “inspiring” nature of the film, it might even be necessary to accept our removal from reality. As contended by Deleuze, cinema – and in our view documentary cinema too – may not have the sole ambition of representing the world and offering a detailed description of it. The world, in fact, does not require us to provide it with a pale imitation of itself as we experience it every day. If cinema represented the world as it

is, it would simply illustrate its horror or beauty. But then, what would a film like *Food Coop* document if not reality? What should be seen behind the raw images of an organization's daily reality? And... beyond *Food Coop*?

To gain a deeper understanding of the emergence of new organizations, we perhaps have to accept the idea, like Deleuze, that what cinema films or what literature describes is not just the world; it is also the violence that it expresses and the "lines of flight" which it provides us with (Valentin, 2006). As Deleuze commented on literature, writing represents a "perpetually incomplete task of becoming, it is something which is always underway and which overwhelms any issue which can be or has been experienced" (Deleuze, 1993: 11). The same is true for cinema, as according to Deleuze, it is not the world alone which matters and which must be depicted through images; it is, rather, the loss of confidence in the world (Zourabichvili, 2003: 40). According to Deleuze, cinema must therefore film not just what is real, but also a reflection on what is real (Valentin, 2006: 309). This is an important difference and inspires us, as it makes us think beyond the real while not necessarily drifting too far from it, as if we remained tethered to it. What Deleuze means is that recorded images and words can potentially conceal a fable, stripped of its fabulous content, which would then give oxygen to a possibility in the face of the exhaustion of possibilities (Valentin, 2006: 311). And to comprehend this "fable," this "legend," we must look for something which creates newness for those involved, for the actors, and examine the break "not between fiction and reality, but in the new mode of story which affects both of them" (Deleuze, 1985: 195).

To move beyond this loss of confidence in the world, Deleuze tells us that:

"It is thus necessary to go beyond all the pieces of spoken information, to extract from them a pure speech-act, creative fabulation which is as it were the obverse side of the dominant myths, of current words and their supporters, an act capable of creating the myths rather than benefiting from or exploiting them." (Deleuze, 1985: 353)

Fabulation therefore has the creative function of extracting the subject from an unthought world where he would only be informed. According to Deleuze, for example:

"Thus, when [the film's director] Perrault criticizes all fiction, it is in the sense that it forms a model of pre-established truth, which necessarily expresses the dominant ideas or the point of view of the colonizer, even when it is forged by the film's author. Fiction is inseparable from a 'reverence' which presents it as true, in religion, in society, in cinema, in the systems of images. (...) What is opposed to fiction is not the real, it is not the truth which is always that of the masters or colonizers, it is the fabulative function of the poor, in so far as it gives the false the power which makes it a legend, a memory, a monster." (Deleuze, 1985: 196)

We can observe this creative function at critical moments in *Food Coop* when, perhaps involuntarily, each member sets off on a fable, labeling and giving their voice its full power.

In "*What is Philosophy?*" Deleuze and Guatarri remind us that:

"Creative fabulation has nothing to do with a memory, however exaggerated, or with a fantasy. In fact, the artist, including the novelist, goes beyond the perceptual states and affective transitions

of the lived. The artist is a seer, a becomer" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005: 349).

What Deleuze wants us to understand is that fabulation is not the mere evasion of the present, but above all that it allows the individual to imagine the possibility of reconfiguring it (Brito, 2016). Perhaps Deleuze's major idea was precisely to focus not on the present state of a system, nor its reproduction, nor on its downfall, but rather to position oneself between the two, to think of the world as a future, integrating what is in the past and lies ahead within a single present. Cinema, then, would be interesting and "inspiring" not just because it informed us of or invited us to a spectacle, but also because it would be able to offer a space for its actors to envisage something else, an alternative to the present. Filming therefore gives the idea of freeing oneself from what one believes one already knows, especially when filming in "one's own environment" (Brito, 2016: 181), to then trace a "path between impossibilities" (Deleuze, 1990: 182).

In cinema, as in literature, the "fabulative function" can sometimes play the role of reconnecting the broken link between Man and the world, re-strengthening our belief in the world. To fabulate is, then, to call on a people who do not yet exist, "a people who are missing," in the words of Deleuze, and this call "must remain ateleological and must state nothing" (Valentin, 2006: 319). To film is therefore to enable characters to distance themselves from any redundancy. One of the limits, if not one of the dangers, of modern political cinema is therefore for a film's director to be confronted with people who have been colonized twice over, from a cultural point of view "colonized by stories from elsewhere," as well as "(...) by their own myths which have become impersonal entities at the disposal of the colonizer" (Deleuze, 1985: 289). It therefore falls to the film maker or to the author to give the real, non-fictional characters the possibility to fabulate:

"The author takes a step towards his characters, but the characters take a step towards the author: double becoming. Fabulation isn't an impersonal myth, but neither is it a personal fiction: it is a word in act, a speech-act through which the character continually crosses the boundary which would separate his private affairs from politics, and which itself produces collective utterances." (Deleuze, 1985: 289)

WAITING FOR CRITICAL MOMENTS...

The political scope of the fable is therefore immediate in that it goes beyond any current reality in order to become part of a future, of a process of becoming. However, this means that all representations, materials, models and subjectivated myths disappear in one fell swoop. In fact,

"the function of the fable is the expression of an asymmetrical becoming. (...) And this minority becoming affects both the dominant as it does the dominated, the majority and the minority who, as they become interconnected, bring an end to the identifying function which supposes and imposes the majority system." (Krtolica, 2010: 9)

If cinema's aim would be to substitute one rule for another, it would not be art. It is when cinema views itself as a model that it fails, and when a director imposes that, then he/she becomes misguided. By contrast, when it avoids confining the actors to a "redundant" model, it can hope to become freeing (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980: 358). This cinema, as

described by Deleuze, does not aim to force individuals into narrowly defined boxes as the majority template would. As Deleuze reminds us,

“What defines the majority, is the model to which it also has to conform. (...) The minority does not have a model, it is a becoming, a process. (...) Everyone is taken into a minority-becoming leading them along unknown pathways should they decide to follow” (Deleuze, 1990: 235).

Caught in this prism, *Food Coop* is perhaps no longer only what its director wished to create, namely a film that glorifies an organization. Nor is it a user guide which would enable other organizations with which its name was associated to emerge or expand. So, there is arguably another way to watch Tom Boothe’s film, which consists of waiting, waiting and waiting even more, of hanging on every word and sentence, of scrutinizing the gestures and expressions of the participants in order to catch them red-handed as they “fabulate,” as they earn that freedom which was given voluntarily, or not, by the director, and which enables the outline of a near becoming to be sketched and the “lines of flight” to be traced. These critical moments of the film perhaps go beyond *Food Coop*. This is possibly where we find this intention-free cinema whose objective is not to reshape the world’s chaos but instead to allow it to be as it is.

In *Food Coop*, we perhaps experience these critical, political moments through the way in which the members of the cooperative represent their own organization (3’ 30), through everyday life (7’35), in the call made by the man quitting the PSFC (18’), the words and expressions of the lady laying her shopping out on her kitchen table (13’), in the relationship members have with time (51’), and in their relationships with each other (1h 28’) and other people (1’35). If we watch *Food Coop* in this way, we will not only observe the real life of a community and an organization, but perhaps in some critical moments captured on the go, we will observe a call summoning a people, a people who are still missing.

More broadly, the *Food Coop* documentary thread raises three questions related to the researcher’s field work. The first question concerns the performative aspect of a documentary, of image, literature and the arts more generally, over reality and even within films (for example, Duymedjian, Germain, Ferrante & Lavissière, 2019). The existence of a complex performativity opens a new research agenda. Taking this performative dimension into account leads us to investigate how individual and collective subjectification occurs in connection with the emergence of organizations (Hjorth, 2013). Therefore, the way we collect data should reflect this interplay between the film (and the arts, in general), the reality and how participants perceive it. But, according to Deleuze, the researcher has to look for what is missing too and not just for what already exists. As researchers, we have to consider the invention of a new “people,” a “missing people,” and not just address a people that already exists. So, looking at new organizations as the expression of a minority-becoming could be a promising way to understand them, especially to understand how an alternative or collective organization emerges.

The second question for the researcher arises from the difficulty in representing and accounting for what is missing and for people who are not yet there, for spaces which do not yet exist: How can critical moments be shown when fabulation occurs? How can we present data, results and other contributions? In our narration, for instance, the moment we quit the influence of *Food Coop* could perhaps be interpreted as critical, as a sign that a “new people” henceforth exist, and that volunteers have now to create their own “lines of flight,” to build or rethink their own organization.

Identifying these critical moments seems to be crucial to better understanding the paths chosen by emerging or already existing organizations, and not just within the films. While these questions represent challenges that the researcher must overcome, they also open liberating spaces. Berends and Deken (2019) highlight the challenges of writing research articles:

“crafting a paper [...] requires difficult decisions about what comes first. Do we lay out the data first, like *Murder on the Orient Express*, and then move toward conceptual interpretation and theoretical explanation? Or do we start by offering theoretical findings first, like *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, and then illustrate these with data?” (Berends and Decken, 2019: 4)

Deleuze’s writings allow us to go beyond that. Because critical moments and instances of “fabulation” are about minority-becomings; investigating them creates space for problematizing, for new styles of writing and presenting. Surprisingly, we certainly have a lot to learn and write about... beyond *Food Coop*.

These previous considerations lead to a final and important question: How do we grasp these fleeting critical moments? Perhaps a solution is to accept becoming connected with the “others” in our fieldwork and with the New York volunteers filmed in *Food Coop*, to accept living these critical moments ourselves. On that April evening, engaged in an ethnographic experience, we did not feel the solitude which sometimes weighs heavily on the researcher. We experienced a moment of privilege, full of emotion, and we confronted our perceptions and convictions. We allowed ourselves to embark on this journey, thrilled by this moment. But we also had doubts. The struggles of the previous days made our past resurface due to uncertainties, hopes and prejudices. Had we perhaps indulged in “fables” and decided, at a critical moment, to allow ourselves to seek out these unknown pathways described by Deleuze and to transcribe them into a language which would not conceal the multiple becomings which we had started to sketch? It was certainly the case, on that April evening, when, after opening doors, we started to imagine the outline, without boundaries, of an organization in which we would like to live and act. At the time of concluding this text, we have little doubt that the desire to write it was born on that April evening. It is certainly when we are waiting for these few critical moments and when we sometimes abandon ourselves that research finds true beauty.

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DOCUMENTING SUPERMARKETS: CONTEMPORARY EFFORTS TO SUPPORT INTELLECTUALLY DISTURBING ORGANIZATIONS

INTRODUCTION

I am a cooperator of La Louve, a food coop in Paris inspired by the Park Slope Food Coop (PSFC). Four years ago, in 2015, a friend told me about a project in Paris involving a particular type of supermarket that I might be interested in. Intrigued, I joined what at the time was just an association. It was a year before the release of the film *Food Coop* by Tom Boothe. Since then, more than 5,000 people have joined La Louve and have become cooperators like me. Rather than learning about the project through word of mouth, many of them discovered it by watching *Food Coop*: an unusual documentary specifically about the functioning of the PSFC coop. The PSFC was established in 1973 in Brooklyn and is still running today with more than 17,000 members. It is often presented as the icon of the successful food coop, where people work for three hours a month to have access to more affordable food products.

Food cooperatives are not new in France. Michel-Marie Derrion's *Commerce Véridique et Social* in Lyon opened in 1835 and was one of the first consumer cooperatives in history. More broadly, France has a strong cooperative history even though the documentary does not mention it. *Food Coop* presents a model of cooperative *and participative* supermarkets. Although the consumers own the supermarket, they must work regular shifts to have access to its discounted products. It is an exclusive form of a cooperative in which non-members cannot access the supermarket. As it is different to the usual types of consumer cooperatives, the model presented at length in the documentary is new and foreign to a large audience.

My aim is to explore the movie's transformative potential. By making sense of an unfamiliar organizational model, the documentary acts as a tool for developing the Park Slope model across the world. In this short essay, I want to explore how the movie actively participates in the development of new food coops in France. To do so, I draw on the work of Gibson-Graham on the performativity of diverse economies. Using her work, I emphasize the role of economic imaginaries in the development of new forms of organizations and propose the concept of "intellectually disturbing organizations" as a fruitful way to engage with these organizations.

ALTERNATIVE ORGANIZATIONS: EXPLORING OTHER POSSIBILITIES

Food Coop (Boothe, 2016) is constructed as a series of oppositions to our taken-for-granted views of the world. To hook the audience, each scene is constructed to present the routine activities of a supermarket which prove to be counterintuitive. For instance, we start by following members doing very mundane tasks, such as working on the cash register, folding cardboard or stocking potatoes, but we soon learn that these are not the members' main occupations. They are actually psychoanalysts,

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graphic designers or social workers who work with the homeless. This is unsettling to our untrained minds: those individuals should not also be working in a supermarket to make a living. Each scene shows us how the supermarket deviates from our basic assumptions about what it is supposed to be. This echoes the emerging literature on alternative organizations in organization studies (Cheney, 2014; Parker, Cheney, Fournier & Land, 2014; Parker, Fournier & Reedy, 2007). Academics who work on alternative organizations aim to re-politicize organization studies by broadening our way of thinking about organizations, showing that there is no one best way to organize human activities. This research field seeks to show that there is an alternative to neoliberal capitalism.

Opposition to dominant capitalism and its attached imaginary is regularly featured in *Food Coop*. For instance, during the orientation session, the cooperator hosting the session declares: "There is no CEO. There is no board of directors; there are no shareholders to report to. We don't have to finance corporate jets; we don't have to finance bonuses and things like that. WE are the owners and as the owners, we run the place, all 16,000 of us" (Boothe, 2016, *Food Coop*: 59'10). We therefore understand the documentary as a counter-hegemonic discourse, aimed at deconstructing our imaginary of how a supermarket should be organized in our society. This central role of imaginaries in supporting alternative organizations is a key learning from years of research on the subject. To create new organizations, it is necessary to discard our usual imaginaries and develop new ones that draw on past and present experiences or fictional works (Reedy & Learmonth, 2009).

THE ROLE OF IMAGINARIES IN DEVELOPING ALTERNATIVE ORGANIZATIONS

To understand the political role of the imagination, I draw on the work of J.K. Gibson-Graham. Although they write in the first person "I," J.K. Gibson-Graham is the pseudonym of K. Gibson & J. Graham, two geographers with an interest in economic spaces. They are known in organization studies for their concepts of diverse economies and capitalocentrism, which they developed in their seminal book *The End of Capitalism as We Knew it: A Feminist Critique of Political Economy* (Gibson-Graham, 1996). Their key idea is that we do not live in capitalist societies but in capitalocentric societies. We imagine capitalism to be the only way to organize ourselves, while many alternatives exist. This imaginary has self-reinforcing properties for the capitalist social system.

"We argued that the performative effect of these representations was to dampen and discourage non-capitalist initiatives, since power was assumed to be concentrated in capitalism and to be largely absent from other forms of economy. In the vicinity of such representations, those who might be interested in non-capitalist economic projects pulled back from ambitions of widespread success—their dreams seemed unrealizable, at least in our lifetimes. Thus capitalism was strengthened, its dominance performed, as an effect of its representations." (Gibson-Graham, 2008: 616)

Not all forms of economic exchanges are organized through capitalist structures and modes of organizing. Discourses on capitalism are, however, hegemonic, acting as if (and sometimes explicitly stating

that) there is no alternative. Gibson-Graham argues that these hegemonic discourses on capitalism have detrimental performative effects: they impede our imagination and capacity to engage with other forms of organizations and thus reinforce the predominance of capitalism.

Gibson-Graham analyzes this capitalocentrism as a political forfeiture: "Naturalization of the view that we have no (longer a) role in making and managing the economy by which we live has had limiting effects on economic imaginaries. A reluctance to engage in economic experimentation because of its perceived futility, or for fear of repression by the all-powerful economy, has become a form of unfreedom, a discursive enslavement, a refusal to explore economic power as unstable and fluid, as potentially reversible 'strategic games between liberties' that are always available" (Gibson-Graham, 2003: 126).

Contesting the hegemonic discourses of and on capitalism is thus a way of repoliticizing the economy. Permanent debates about the ethical and moral principles that guide our actions re-emerge. Instead of blindly following neoliberal rules, we regain the ability to take decisions. To reshape our imaginaries is to reshape our actions. As advocated by authors such as Castoriadis (1987) and Appadurai (1996), the imaginary is not only a system of social representations, it is also a driving force for our everyday actions.

Alternative organizations already exist in this time and space, but we have to make an effort to acknowledge their presence and engage more fruitfully with these other forms of economic organizations. However, the definition of alternative organizations is vague and relative to what it is not. This is why I prefer, particularly when I am teaching, the idea of "intellectually disturbing organizations". I contend that an organization is disturbing because it challenges the taken-for-granted imaginary through which we understand and act in the world. Talking about disturbing organizations is meant to highlight the difficulty of teaching, researching and engaging with those organizations. Disturbing organizations challenge the status quo and the dominant social order. Intellectually disturbing organizations are not just different, alternative, a different option among others. They represent a problem, a complexity for our minds and imagination. To foster disturbing organizations is thus a political program to denaturalize mainstream practices (Fournier & Grey, 2000) and to propose a radically different way of organizing social life². Intellectually disturbing organizations accentuate the ongoing struggles that take place to shape our imaginaries, which I propose as an organizational perspective for articulating Gibson-Graham's understanding of capitalocentrism.

Tom Boothe's *Food Coop* (2016) can thus be understood as an effort to help viewers make sense of a disturbing organization, the Park Slope Food Coop. It is a political project that contests mainstream supermarkets and supports the development of other cooperative and participative supermarkets. By reshaping our imaginaries, the movie is also a tool for transforming reality; it turns out to be performative. To highlight the performative dimension of the documentary, we need to look at how it has been distributed.

2. Even though, as I will develop later, what is disturbing and what is mainstream is always dependent on the social context.

AN ORIGINAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE MOVIE

The documentary, produced by Lardux films, a small production company, was initially screened in thirty French movie theaters at a time when no similar food coops were in operation. Two years later, the movie was being screened in hundreds of theaters, watched by more than 28,000 people and distributed internationally in Europe (Belgium, Spain, Italy and Portugal) and North America (Canada and the USA). We can understand a lot from looking closely at how the movie was distributed.

Many of the screenings were (and still are) not organized by movie theaters but by local associations and citizen organizations. These screenings are used to attract new cooperators for local food coop projects around the country. In France, about sixty similar projects emerged in the wake of the creation of La Louve, the pioneer organization in Paris. *Food Coop* actively supports the creation of these local supermarkets. Screenings are organized in different cities along with debates attended by Tom Boothe, *Food Coop*'s director, or other cooperators willing to provide information about and publicize this new model. Militant journalists or food activists also participate in such debates and help to anchor the movie in alternative values. Finally, established food coops continue to organize internal sessions to present the movie to would-be cooperators. Thus, from the outset, the distribution of the movie has been oriented toward an active system, coupled with debates, meetings and brainstorming sessions where viewers are expected to engage in creating similar local initiatives rather than passively watch the movie.

This specific type of distribution did not happen by chance. The Park Slope Food Coop model presented by the documentary is particular in its self-sufficiency. The Park Slope has no hegemonic intention or need for expansion. The members only need their supermarket to function well. If other similar supermarkets are to be created, this will happen through replication by local actors without the economic subordination of a subsidiary to its parent company. Because coop members have no direct incentive to expand their model, the diffusion of this disturbing organization must rely on innovative devices. The movie is an example of such devices compensating for the absence of spontaneous diffusion.

In France, the movie became a reference point in the activist scene because of its active role in developing new organizations. As of October 24, 2018, the movie's Facebook page was still active and continued to relay news about the opening of new food coops (in Clermont-Ferrand for instance). In retrospect, *Food Coop*'s producers can write: "*Food Coop*, with its screenings all over France, has changed the world a little by motivating dozens of groups, associations and collectives to create their own cooperatives. Crazy!"³. This role has also been recognized through prizes such as the "Inspiring live Awards" in San Francisco.

THE DOCUMENTARY'S PERFORMATIVE EFFECTS

The documentary is performative in that, as well as describing an organization, it also transforms and supports the development of similar organizations in France and abroad. The concept of performativity is gaining traction in organization studies. There have been recent calls in

3. "Food Coop, avec ses projections partout en France, a changé un peu le monde en motivant des dizaines de groupes, associations, collectifs à créer eux même des coopératives. C'est dingue!"

critical studies for more scholarly engagement to foster new discourses and practices to transform mainstream management (Spicer, Alvesson & Karreman, 2009). For Gibson-Graham, the work on the performativity of capitalism was only a first step. Current research has to counter these performative effects by developing performative research on the diverse economy (Gibson-Graham, 2008): “[Gibson-Graham] embraced a performative orientation to knowledge rather than a realist or reflective one. This acknowledged the activism inherent in knowledge production and installed a new kind of scholarly responsibility” (Gibson-Graham, 2008: 615). According to Gibson-Graham the choice of research topics is not neutral. By focusing on disturbing organizations, we can facilitate their development and increase individuals’ engagement with these organizations. By discussing and describing more anti-capitalist organizations, we can change our economic imaginaries and thus our range of action.

The movie rightly expresses this need to perform diverse economy, the creation of a wider array of organizational forms. During an interview, a Park Slope employee talks about the difficulty of engaging with non-capitalist descriptions of organizations: “I think it is the greatest social experiment in this country. Nobody wants to really write nice things about it because we are a capitalist culture, so to have this egalitarian little nugget really succeed is not good news. It’s not good news in this country” (26’36).

Writing nice things about this social experiment is a way to change the world. *Food Coop* is therefore a way of creating performative positive descriptions of the Park Slope organizational model. It is a key element in understanding the documentary. *Food Coop* does not aim to merely describe the functioning and organizing of a Brooklyn supermarket. Its goal is to support the creation of similar projects across the world. *Food Coop* is a documentary that aims to transform the world rather than describe it. Or more accurately, the documentary transforms the world by describing an example of the diverse economy.

The movie first had an impact on La Louve, whose founder is also *Food Coop*’s director. The documentary was officially released on November 2, 2016 (even though there had been previews since September), and the French version of the Brooklyn supermarket opened two weeks later on November 16. The movie was a recruitment tool. Screenings in Paris were organized with the cooperators being present to provide advice to viewers on how to join the French cooperative which was about to open. The movie therefore ends with the sentence “The Park Slope Food Coop supports the creation in Paris of a supermarket inspired by their model: La Louve.” Beyond recruitment, the movie’s influence is highly visible in discussions among members. It creates a common framework for the shape of the organization in the long run. Cooperators already expect it to have a daycare center, intercoms for talking and asking questions throughout the shop, “walkers” (members who accompany shoppers to the nearby station) and shifts dedicated to processing cheese.

Outside Paris, the documentary is not unfamiliar to the rapid development of similar projects. Describing the organizational model of the Park Slope Food Coop and, more importantly, its economic success and sustainability has reshaped the imaginary of aspiring cooperators and project leaders, as well as investors and public servants. By so doing, it has helped to achieve a critical threshold of cooperators and obtain the large amount of capital needed to start a supermarket and find a commercial lease. The movie’s role in creating and shaping knowledge is thus critical to understanding food coop success in France today. In the

end, the documentary proves to be performative in making cooperative and participative supermarkets less disturbing to its viewers.

CONCLUSION: WHY DISTURBING ORGANIZATIONS MATTER

I would like to emphasize some of the consequences of using the concept of intellectually disturbing organizations, which the movie *Food Coop* illustrates:

1. Engaging with these organizations entails *struggles*. Research into and practice of disturbing organizations is a confrontational program which entails opposition to entrenched interests, established discourses and limited imaginaries. This program is about actively contesting capitalism hegemony and proposing new imaginaries to organize our economic spaces rather than looking at different and alternative organizational models. Discussing alternative organizations tends to obscure political struggles when the aim is to redefine the range of possible futures against a dominant perspective.
2. Engaging with these organizations is *difficult*. We discover through watching *Food Coop* that the Park Slope is an organization that disrupts our taken-for-granted cognitive schemes. It shakes our convictions and creates discomfort. What is being represented in the documentary does not correspond to the usual ways in which we think about supermarkets and organizations. To engage with disturbing organizations thus necessitates an additional effort to, at least, understand and grasp these organizations. Current trends in technology and innovation lead authors to warn us about the pervasive effects of the convenience economy (Wu, 2018). The principle of the least effort directs us towards decisions that go against our fundamental liberties, such as agreeing to give up our personal data easily. Because it promises to make our lives easier, “convenience has the ability to make other options unthinkable” (Wu, 2018). Disturbing organizations painfully go against this trend. This paradox is illustrated most clearly in the documentary when, for some time, we follow a cooperator going home from the Park Slope. A clock on the screen displaying the hour it takes her to go home from the shop praises the slowness of her journey. It seems at odds with an era when pizzas can be delivered by drones⁴.
3. These disturbing organizations have unclear consequences and do not represent *la vie en rose*. The movie explains that a disciplinary committee had to be created at the Park Slope to enforce the rules and sanction members. Eventually, disturbed and dissatisfied members left the coop⁵. In France, the media remains skeptical about the particular model of these food coops where non-members are not allowed to shop. They are concerned that they will become another socially exclusive experiment restricted to the well-off class. Engaging with disturbing organizations calls for long reflection to evaluate their mixed consequences.
4. Our role as scholars is *not neutral*. Our knowledge work actively participates in shaping what is disturbing and what will be less disturbing thanks to our effort to locate and understand those

4. slate.com/technology/2018/05/drone-delivery-is-coming-but-only-these-10-places-will-be-allowed-to-have-it.html.

5. www.nytimes.com/2009/10/25/nyregion/25coop.html

organizations. Our work can become performative by transforming discourse, imaginaries and practices about disturbing organizations (Spicer et al., 2009). Interestingly, Tom Boothe proposes an innovative way of changing our imaginaries not through fictional work but through an organizational documentary. For scholars interested in performing diverse organizations, *Food Coop* appears to be an original tool for transforming our imaginaries and making those organizations less disturbing.

5. Finally, using the idea of disturbing organizations emphasizes the contingent and *situated* nature of their “alternative” dimension. An organization is “disturbing” only to a certain extent, that is, if we are not used to being confronted by it on a regular basis. But through practice, repetition and habit, we can change our views of the world and its organizations. In the United States in the 1970s, such participative and cooperative supermarkets were common and up to half a million Americans were members of a food coop (Co-op Handbook Collective, 1975). To describe an organization as disturbing is thus always a situated statement. We do not all share the same imaginaries. In this regard, I was struck by this powerful scene where a squad leader is asked if he is paid for the additional responsibilities his position represents. He answers “Oh no, no, no, I am not paid,” taking a step back as if he is afraid of the consequences of being paid to be part of this cooperative. The idea of being paid to work in a supermarket is disturbing for this cooperator who is familiar with the Park Slope model. This scene exemplifies the collision of two contrasting imaginaries.

Food Coop is a political documentary. By helping us to make sense of this organizational model, it expands our imagination of the world we can create. As such, the documentary proves to be a performative tool serving the contestation of our society’s capitalocentrism. By supporting the development of many identical supermarkets in Europe and North America, the movie reveals a strong transformative potential and an overt will to change the organizational landscape of our food system.

The concept of disturbing organizations also has this transformative potential. Saying that an organization is disturbing highlights the inevitable difficulties in researching, teaching and engaging with this organization. Disturbing organizations challenge the status quo, a given social order and our taken-for-granted assumptions about the world. These organizations are not simply different, alternative; they are a difficulty, a problem. In this context, organization studies entail an effort towards deconstructing ideologies imposed by mainstream organizations and building better organizations.

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FOOD COOP: OBSERVING AN ALTERNATIVE ORGANISATION IN ACTION AND/OR MANAGERIAL INNOVATION AND RADICAL TRADING?

The film *Food Coop* is an overview of an original, collective experiment with food distribution. It is original in that it is led by consumers who are involved in the project by working several hours per month in the shop. Although the past few years have seen the development in most Western countries of forms of food consumption which are based on local resources and new relationships between consumers and producers, as well as around new sociabilities, the Brooklyn co-operative shop is particularly interesting in that it is a pioneering example of these alternative experiments in the food industry. The shop was actually created in 1973, more than 40 years ago. It does not, therefore, form part of the recent trendy phenomenon of "local food is beautiful." Nor is there any doubt over the sustainability of this model, which currently operates with more than 3,000 consumers.

Food Coop has been broadcast through a remarkable informal network across France and Europe. It is effectively a means of publicizing many innovative experiments and initiatives in the food industry. Those involved in the field of alternative food supply and those involved in economic solidarity are likely to have seen the film several times. Researchers and teaching staff, such as myself, also work on these issues. It has to be said that, beyond its subject matter, the film reveals several important dimensions in terms of its content, its form and use, and the rapid and diversified development of actions and organizations which challenge the market through the market itself (Cheney, Santa Cruz & Peredo, 2014; Dubuisson-Quellier, 2013)

In this short piece, I want to highlight two especially interesting aspects for organizational sciences. Firstly, the film questions the concept of involvement and makes it possible to understand the extent to which it forms part of a collective and organizational approach. As such, the philosophy of pragmatism and theory of inquiry create a highly relevant framework for monitoring and understanding these forms of collective action.

Secondly, the film is a wonderful resource for illustrating and extending academic and scientific discussions about alternative organizations and the tensions they imply. I suggest how to interpret what the director films as an organization characterized by care and attention, which takes place, despite itself, within a highly formal and hierarchized framework.

RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION, FROM ACTION TO ORGANIZATION: DIFFICULTIES IN THE CATEGORIES FOR ANALYZING COMMITMENT

The firm provides a great opportunity, firstly, to demonstrate that new forms of civic engagement and competition in the market, which are embodied in responsible consumption (Dubuisson-Quellier, S., Barrier, J. , 2007; Micheletti, 2002), are not just individual actions, but are actions that take place within a collective and organized context, which can be approached from the particular angle of J. Dewey's pragmatist philosophy.

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RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION: FROM ACTION TO ORGANIZATION

Increasingly analyzed from the perspective of social movements (Fillieule, Mathieu & Péchu, 2009), these approaches raise the question of possible new forms of responsibility, removed from any organization. The concept of “collective, individualized action” has thus been proposed (Micheletti, 2002), adding to the idea of an evolution of protest towards more autonomous forms (Ion, 2012). While models of competition based on collective organization tend to run out of steam, individuals tend to refocus on more individual and intimate commitments, rooted in their basic consumer needs. Thus, the development of fair-trade labels, practices of boycotting or buycotting, and the creation of purchasing groups such as Community Supported Agriculture (CSA or AMAP in France), which equip the responsible consumer by connecting their purchasing power with their protesting power.

In contrast to this idea of an individualization of methods of protest by the market, the film reveals that these new consumer practices take place within a collective and organized context, based on the example of cooperative shops. These new models of responsible consumption are, of course, made possible by organizations carrying out mobilization work in advance and producing information, as well as through companies which organize the supply of products, relationships with producers, etc. (Rodet, 2018). Some social enterprises base their activities and economic models on the exploitation of these new social and trading opportunities (Battilana & Lee, 2014). Consumers are called upon to contribute in a number of ways: by agreeing to sometimes pay higher prices, as in the case of “labels,” by occasionally participating in certain activities (stock-taking, etc.), and by pooling purchases, as in traditional consumer cooperatives, etc.

In the case of Park Slope Food Coop (PSFC), it is the consumers who perform almost all of the tasks necessary for the food distribution outlet to operate, by offering three hours of their time per month. These three hours are an opportunity to meet and talk with other members of the community, but they are largely devoted to essential activities, which are not always very pleasant (such as emptying tanks or processing waste), not very intensive and fairly solitary (such as the walker who brings trolleys back and accompanies customers to the metro stations). These working hours are an opportunity to chat, meet friends and get together (such as the couple who find that their working hours give them a rare opportunity to spend time together!).

THE FOOD COOP, THE INCARNATION OF A PRAGMATIC MODEL OF INQUIRY?

The film shows individuals who are particularly motivated to seek out new experiences, new flavors and quality food, which is in stark contrast to the consumerism that generally prevails in the United States. Their genuine enthusiasm and the connection between some consumers and their Food Coop, shown in numerous excerpts of the film, often makes more skeptical European viewers smile.

These individuals are full-blown consumers: they are seen doing their shopping, paying for it (often in large amounts) and calculating prices. Yet, they are also organized, protesting consumers and workers who are taking control of the organization of their own shopping in an autonomous

way, forming a community. The film thus reveals tensions between categories which we might normally consider to be contradictory: individual versus collective, civic engagement versus consumption, etc. These dialectics (which can be found in many dimensions of the new solidarity and/or collaborative economy) can be viewed through a pragmatist approach to action.

Prominent pragmatist philosophers such as J. Dewey, C.S. Peirce and G.H. Mead have experienced a revival in recent years in the field of organizational sciences (see Farjoun, Ansell & Boin, 2015; Lorino, 2018). They share a common rejection of the dualisms which structure philosophical and social thought. Therefore, although these dualisms do correspond to a reality, it is possible to see another reality, starting directly with the actors themselves. It is thus a vain endeavor to talk in abstract terms about the compatibility between individualism and cooperation, market and democracy, activist and entrepreneur. The pragmatist approaches in the social sciences and organizational sciences are radically empiricist; their precise aim is to observe the creative processes, which are considered as marginal phenomena that are off-set and are particularly destabilizing to fixed scientific categories.

Engagement and citizenship can fully correspond to this type of conceptual categories, a more complex analysis of which is enabled by a pragmatist approach from the angle of Dewey's theory of inquiry in particular (notably in *The Public and its Problems* (1927/1988)). Engagement is usually defined as an alignment of beliefs and practices (Becker, 1960), but it is considered by Dewey in the ordinary activities of social life and may, thus, take the form of hitherto unseen forms and actions (Dewey, 1927, 1930, 1939). It arises directly from individual or collective situations, tested through the experience of daily life. Democratic inquiry therefore consists of individuals dealing with social problems and the activation of a collective process of resolution. The collective formed by the shop constitutes a public, i.e., a group of individuals, tested by similar experiences which, through the ordinary activities of social life – consumption – organize themselves to resolve their common problem. The shop therefore is an incarnation of the inquiry process which collectively performs the activities to resolve individual problems. The film, then, offers the possibility of observing the collective work of inquiry carried out by these individuals-consumers-citizens-workers.

AT THE HEART OF AN ORGANIZATION OF RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION: WHAT IS AN ALTERNATIVE ORGANIZATION?

The documentary film format is particularly apt because it shows organized action being performed and problems being resolved. For almost the entire duration of the film, the director Tom Boothe remains within the shop, which becomes an almost closed space⁶: on many occasions, the shop appears like a hive full of bees, constantly and intensively working (which can be accentuated by fast-forwarding the camera). The film, then, becomes an outstanding way of observing these alternative organizations and questioning these ambiguities. To what extent is this organization alternative? Democratic? Have the cooperative shops which developed on the basis of the example of the PSFC as a result of

6. With the exception of a few outdoor scenes, which I will mention later.

the distribution of the film invented a revived form of self-managing organization?

The organization studies literature is increasingly rich in terms of envisaging alternative organizations to capitalism. “They are organizations that challenge mainstream capitalism by promoting different ways of organizing but also different goals to pursue, following, for instance, the degrowth agenda” (Parker, Cheney, Fournier & Land, 2014). Neo-institutionalist approaches address them from the angle of often contradictory multiple institutional logics, which cut through and mark these organizations. However, as Lallemand-Stempak rightly notes, these approaches remain broadly founded on set ideals (market, state, social organizations), and the social rationale is, ultimately, not clearly understood (Lallemand-Stempak, 2017). Furthermore, particularly in the field of minority or peripheral actors, it appears difficult, and not necessarily productive, to hypothetically position the *ex-ante* existence of an alternative, protest or experimental rationale and an economic rationale, because the actors themselves are involved in the redefinition of these rationales and their limits. By showing them in action, I believe this film enables us to better characterize the specificities of these organizations.

A COLLECTIVE ORGANIZATION OF CARE AND ATTENTION

I initially wanted to focus on the aspect of care and attention to detail, which the director really appears to stress. The focus on care may be, in this regard, a characteristic of alternative organizations. Theories of care look at the way in which some people take care of others and pay attention to their needs, and to the moral aspect of these tasks and the unequal nature of their distribution (Tronto, 1993). The term “care” applies to both concern and care itself; it includes both the concerned attention for the other, which implies an availability, an attitude or a feeling, and the care practices which make “care” an activity and a job (Brugère, 2017).

As I have already mentioned, the commitment of consumer-workers takes the form of performing a “shift” of three hours per month, corresponding to a task. As the shop operates with more than 3,000 members, there are, therefore, 3,000 monthly shifts, which enables the shop to function and address all the problems that arise or may arise.

All the usual issues are addressed with care and attention. For example, the final scene of the film shows Noël, a consumer-worker, removing a piece of chewing gum stuck to the floor after a long day’s supervising. Similarly, another talks about installing stools to enable short customers to more easily reach products on higher shelves. In this way, the scope of the problems to be dealt with never seems to be problematic. The consumer-workers demonstrate a great deal of imagination when it comes to creating new tasks. The task of the “walker” consists of accompanying cooperative member-clients with their shopping and their trolleys to their homes or the closest metro station. This avoids them having to bring back the trolleys, helps them to carry heavy bags of shopping and is an opportunity for a quick chat. Finally, consumers who come to do their shopping are offered the possibility of childcare: this is taken on by other consumers who have undertaken specific training in this task.

The organization of how shifts are distributed is, in itself, characteristic of this attention and care: there are scenes where consumer-workers explain the system of catching up on shifts or the related penalty system, which become comical in their level of complexity.

These marks of attention and care are not just individual initiatives, nor the work of benevolent managers; they are properly planned and

managed by the organization. These characteristics were quickly suggestive to me of the self-managing experiments after the 1960s when childcare was systematically organized to enable women to participate in collective assemblies in activist organization. More specifically, it appears to me that this is in line with the utopian cooperatives in the *Nouveau Monde Industriel et Sociétaire* (Scherer, 2017), where socialist thinker Charles Fourier (1772-1857) tries to scientifically and imaginatively create an organization which takes care of the most basic individual needs through all the members choosing to work (including children and old people, who contribute in their unique way).

Through a pragmatist and radical approach, these elements described in the film continue to analyze the very question of an organization's ability to recognize and individually or collectively deal with all problems, without prioritizing them, in order to characterize alternative or democratic organizations. In this sense, when organizations are not democratic, it is not because they do not have adequate statutes or management frameworks; it is because the individuals who make it up are not free, available or willing to take care of the smallest details of this democratic life.

... IN A FORMAL, BUREAUCRATIC AND ULTRA-RATIONAL CONTEXT

For all that, examining the heart of the day-to-day organization of work also enables us to discern the original characteristics reflected in individual engagement, highlighting the great satisfaction of consumer-workers with a much less desirable, highly formalized and hierarchical organization. Thus, at the same time as being a self-managing paradise, which is something the director undoubtedly wanted to portray and promote, certain sequences in *Food Coop* highlight the voluntary servitude of consumer-workers within a very formal organizational and hierarchical order, which no longer corresponds to the flexibility of the Fourierist utopia. The PSFC experiment breaks down the apparent barriers between consumers and distribution (at least on camera, production is missing from the scope of the model), between paid work and protest work, but social control technologies and a very advanced division of work are alive and kicking, ultimately following fairly traditional lines of the Taylorian organization of work and Weberian bureaucracy.

The operation of the cooperative shop and the commitment and work of consumer-workers requires fine and precise organization. Because the voluntary contribution is around three hours per month, the tasks are defined very strictly and are spread thinly (e.g. cutting cheese, wrapping up cut cheese, washing tanks), and the shop thus operates not by positions, but on a task-based basis. The director does not shy away from showing us the difficulty of certain tasks and the unattractive nature of them for some New Yorkers. The film then shows the way in which tasks are listed and allocated using a fairly complex system of notebooks, files and, now, digital tools. The consumer-workers thus become, in the eyes of the viewer, real workers when they are seen clocking in and out at the start and end of their shifts.

One sequence of the film dwells on a telephone call between two consumer-workers about the non-performance of shifts. First of all, the scene reveals the existence of a social order and the power relations between them. Although they are both consumer-workers, one, who is visible on screen, has the "task" of warning of "deviant" practices, informing the consumer-workers and implementing sanctions (catching up on shifts, non-access to the shop), while the other, off screen, has not completed

their shift. Their conversation highlights the complexity of the rules and their bureaucratic nature to comic effect, particularly through the complexity of the possibilities around combinations and how the shifts could be caught up. Finally, the benevolent control skills of the consumer mediator are clear: she uses the art of circumlocution, nuance and pedagogy, coupled with a perfect understanding of the rules of bureaucracy, further accentuated by her American English. Lastly, the end of the sequence reveals this consumer's profession, which explains her obvious talent for rigid benevolence. The film finishes with a fairly similar sequence, which reveals a symbolic act of violence in the name of the community: as in any shop, shoplifting occurs but in the Food Coop this is committed by peers, members of the community. Rather than being an indication of the failure of the community (why would members steal?), the community organization initiates a pragmatic process, managed by a retired judge, to deal with the misdemeanors. This chilling sequence reveals the discipline in the community which has formed around the shop, which encompasses the norm of good behavior and which takes place without any real sanction (in any case no sanction is evident in the film), other than the judgment and rejection of the benevolent community. Suddenly, this community no longer appears to be a very good place to live ... unless you respect the norms and complex rules.

Finally, the last indicator of the bureaucratic and Taylorian nature of the shop is shown in a long sequence devoted to a plan that two consumer-workers have to replace plastic bags with recyclable paper bags. They get together in a committee to reflect on this project and to come up with a plan which would then need to be approved at the AGM by the consumer-workers present. The sequence presents their reasons why the project would align with the ideological approach of the mission. But the sequence also introduces the general coordinator of the shop, who is not a consumer-worker but an employee with a management role. The organization thus appears to be much less atypical when it is understood that there is, in reality, a legitimacy tension or even a conflict between the legitimacy founded on the engagement of the two consumers, on the one hand, and the management legitimacy of the full-time employee on the other. Clearly, it appears that the coordinator, who has the role of managing all the consumer-workers and who is present on a full-time basis in the shop, has greater legitimacy and is able to influence the consumers' votes at the AGM. Yet again, the organization is far from being as harmonious as the majority of the consumers say. Furthermore, there is a clear hierarchical order regarding legitimacy conflicts between paid managers and consumer-operators.

At the end of the film, the viewer may, therefore, hesitate to define the organization they have observed: is it an alternative and democratic organization which dismantles identities and economic categories, or is it a new manifestation of liberal capitalism where the lines of the organization are drawn by the community and permit the exploitation of free labor and organized servitude of consumers?

The phenomenon highlighted in the film clearly reflects the ambiguity which exists between alternative organizations. I recently viewed the film from the angle in which it is used and viewed by French actors, in two large French towns. The film was seen to be yet another conceptual and organizational management tool to publicize and mobilize consumers. It offers insight into an ideal to be copied by applying the words, the enthusiastic ways of talking, the rules of coordination and the division of labor that I have tried to describe. However, there are other collective shop initiatives which avoid the risks of bureaucratization and servitude of the

consumer. For example, the collective shop in Seine-Saint-Denis, Dionys-coop, proposes a completely different and original model of organization, with no employees, and where the aim of the cooperative is to create farming jobs. Similarly, the individual responsibility of members-consumers is, in this case, central and total, without any particular connection to the organization: if the members disengage, that means that the organization no longer has a reason to exist and it would better to close it. While *Food Coop* reveals the way in which cooperative shops are organized, and broadly lays the groundwork for spreading the concept, there are, nonetheless, many different types of such organizations, as long as they are well articulated, pragmatic, utopian and democratic.

CONCLUSION

Food Coop was clearly designed as a propaganda tool for cooperative shops. However, despite these good intentions, which can sometimes feel cumbersome and pushy, the reality goes further and, as I have tried to show, reveals a much more complex organization which is both attentive and bureaucratic. The attention to micro-practices and action scenes shows the discussions and inherent tensions in democratic and alternative organizations and new forms of engagement. In terms of its observation and close analysis of an organized reality and consumers engaged in an “original” collective action, the film nonetheless presents numerous points of interests for the theory of organization and collective action. The film shows individuals engaged in an economic and collective project and uses cinematography to reveal political engagement as an ordinary and complex act, which falls within the continuity of the daily actions of those involved. As I have tried to show, the film enables a deeper analysis of the characteristic elements of alternative or democratic organizations. These theories of care in this regard are perspectives which are very productive and relatively underdeveloped in the field of organizational theory (André & Pache, 2016). Similarly, the pragmatist position, and Dewey’s theory of inquiry in particular, provide a rich and appropriate framework and epistemology for studying these forms of engagement in action and creative organizations, which strongly destabilizes our categories of analysis and pushes us to renew them.

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FOOD COOP IN METAPHORS: THE UNEASY TASK OF DESCRIBING ALTERNATIVE ENTERPRISES

The documentary movie *Food Coop* was realized by Tom Boothe with the objective to shed light on a specific organizational model for supermarkets. The film aims to explain how the Park Slope Food Coop (PSFC or the Food Coop) works by plainly showing moments of its organizational life and by interviewing members of the cooperative about their experience. In a nutshell, the PSFC is a cooperative whose consumers are its members. As members of a cooperative, they own a share of the organization, they control it democratically, and they benefit from its services (Mamouni Limnios, Mazzarol, Soutar & Siddique, 2018). What is specific to the PSFC's model is that members also work in the supermarket for 2 hours and 45 minutes each month. They perform all kinds of tasks, from cleaning to administrative work, from filling shelves to walking consumers out to the subway. This "free" labor force allows the PSFC to have significantly lower labor costs, enabling the application of lower margins on products and ultimately selling food at a lower price to its members.

The film was shot at the same time as its producer Tom Boothe was founding La Louve in Paris, a participative cooperative supermarket which uses the same model as the PSFC. *Food Coop* was thus used as a communication tool to explain the model both to prospective members of La Louve and to people who were interested in developing such a supermarket elsewhere in France and Belgium, in particular. In turn, they used the documentary as a "propaganda" tool to attract new members (see Ouahab's paper in this *Unplugged* section for a description and analysis of the film's distribution). Beyond the organizational model that is presented, it is therefore interesting to analyze in greater depth the message conveyed by the documentary and how it portrays the PSFC as an alternative to conventional capitalist supermarkets. In this regard, the metaphors used by the members to describe their experience of the PSFC are of particular interest. In this essay, we try to make sense of these metaphors in describing an alternative (democratic) form of enterprise.

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METAPHORS AND ORGANIZATION THEORY

The use of metaphors has had a long tradition in organization studies since Gareth Morgan's seminal book *Images of Organization* (Morgan, 2006/1986). Defined as the "ways of talking and thinking about one domain in terms of another" (Cornelissen & Kafouros, 2008: 957), metaphors are considered to be an important way to frame organizations. Several authors distinguish at least two different streams of literature that match distinct research strategies (Cornelissen, Oswick, Thøger Christensen & Phillips, 2008; Heracleous & Jacobs, 2008).

In the first stream, researchers use metaphors to describe and theorize organizational models. The metaphor helps them to highlight what is similar to (and what differs from) the image they use to describe an organization. It also helps them to create typologies of organizations. For example, Morgan (2006/1986) suggests eight different metaphors that would correspond to eight distinct sets of specific organizational characteristics and behaviors: machine, organism, brain, culture, political system, psychic prison, flux and transformation, and domination. In a

conversation with Oswick and Grant (2016), Morgan stresses that these metaphors are illustrative and correspond to an analysis of the history of organization. Hence, in his view, two additional metaphors should be added to the list to describe more recent organizational models: the global brain – to describe organizations based on big data – and organization as media. Among others, Cornelissen (2005, 2006) has criticized the overly unidirectional character of this approach and its dominant focus on similarities, and therefore suggests taking a domains-interaction approach.

The second stream of literature builds on this critique and adopts a more inductive approach to metaphors (Cornelissen et al., 2008), along with other tropes (Oswick, Keenow & Grant, 2002), as it considers them as cues to understand individuals' sensemaking processes (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Weick, 1995). Instead of defining themselves the metaphors that would best describe an organization, researchers seek to understand a) why individuals use specific images to portray an organization and b) the construction process of a metaphor in generating new meaning (Cornelissen, 2005). For example, Hill and Levenhagen (1995) show how entrepreneurs make extensive use of metaphors to reduce equivocality and to cope with ambiguity by providing helpful interpretive schemes for both sensemaking and sensegiving.

In this piece, we follow this more inductive stream of research as we focus on the metaphors used by the members who are interviewed in the film to make sense of how they experience the PSFC. Such an approach also enables greater contextualization (Cornelissen et al., 2008), enlightening the specific use of certain metaphors.

METAPHORS OF THE FOOD COOP USED BY ITS MEMBERS

Since democracy is a crucially distinctive characteristic of cooperatives and, taking account of the rather flat organizational structure of the PSFC, a researcher following a more deductive approach would probably describe it by using metaphors such as the "community" and expect its members to use similar images. However, the metaphors used by members in the film are surprisingly diverse and sometimes portray organizations that are far from democratic. The "community" metaphor only appears in the film for the first time after more than 15 minutes. In what follows, we leave the community metaphor out of our analysis to focus on three other metaphors that arise several times in the film.

The dominant metaphor we encounter in the film is that of production. It first appears at the very beginning of the documentary when Boothe asks two members of the PFSC, who happen to be filmmakers, how they would explain the coop and its principles in a 30-second movie. One of them spontaneously answers: "if you really want good food [...] you have to work here" (2'33"). The concept film they suggest centers on high food quality at affordable prices, which is made possible by the members' labor. This metaphor of production thus articulates around two metonyms: the member-worker and the high-quality (affordable) food.

Members' labor is portrayed successively as being both positively and negatively rated by the members. "It's fun. I love it," (7'05") says a woman on the early shift who goes home to shower before going to her regular daily job. Then, a man who is shopping explains to another member who is working, that "the best thing to do is to have kids, then you never have to work again. Well, you get a year off" (7'43"). That members

experience the PSFC as an employer-employee relationship is highlighted again later in the movie by a woman who takes phone calls from the members. She explains that some members who call at the beginning of their shift to say they are not coming in “are expecting someone to be angry about them not coming. You know, they don’t work for me. We’re all members. [...] There is very much this sort of transfer and sort of ‘you are the employer whom I’m calling to say I’m not coming in’” (25’07”).

The production’s outcome is the second metonym of this metaphor. High-quality food at an affordable price is highlighted by a woman telling the member working at the cash register how good the sprouts are at the PSFC. At home, this woman compares the price of her groceries at the PSFC and two weeks later at Whole Foods, a regular supermarket, showing how much cheaper it is to shop at the PSFC. In the same vein, a long sequence of the film shows a member who works for the Food Justice Movement comparing the price and quality of lemons between the PSFC and other stores in a poor neighborhood. As well as highlighting that people in deprived neighborhoods often have no choice than to buy their food from “bodegas” (i.e., mini-marts), she shows that the bare items of non-processed food sold there are for the most part of low quality, not fresh and more expensive than in richer areas. By this, she wants to demonstrate that the PSFC equates with both high-quality and affordable food.

The military metaphor is the second that appears in the film and is probably the most surprising for describing a cooperative and its activities. This metaphor traditionally describes such organizational characteristics as hierarchy, limited autonomy of individuals, and discipline (Mutch, 2006), which intuitively seems to go against the representation of a democratic organization such as a cooperative. The scene that directly refers to this metaphor involves a member who coordinates the closing of the PSFC. He describes his work at the cooperative: “I haven’t ever told anyone this, but I look at this as a kind of quasi military exercise, the object of which is to keep everyone doing something” (40’36”). He also insists that the members who belong to the team he coordinates have to sign in, which is “part of [the PSFC’s] culture,” a practice that resembles calling the roll.

The other occurrences of reference to the military metaphor are more indirect. For example, they include the use of words that belong to the vocabulary of the army, such as when a member highlights the difference in culture between “squads.” The practice of giving members instructions via the intercom is also a very powerful image of discipline, which is a distinctive characteristic of the PSFC. When asked to suggest a title for the documentary, a member suggests “Attention Co-op members” because “Intercom is the soul of the Co-op” (16’35”). The members around her laugh but approve this statement. The central position of the intercom is exploited later in the film, as we see a long interview-free sequence taking place on Christmas Eve with all sorts of announcements as background sound.

The third metaphor is that of a cult. This comes through particularly clearly during the penultimate sequence of the film. Some members are packing food and a dialogue starts between a young woman and a man about how difficult it has become for them to shop in other supermarkets:

- “[...] everyone who is a member of the Coop is passionate about it.
- It’s funny.
- It’s almost freaky...

-I always said this place was a cult and now I speak the words like it's...

-I know, it's true. I really can't go back." (1h32'45")

The introductory information session that new members have to attend can also appear as part of the cult imagery. This is made particularly clear by a man who is responsible for the registers, as he speaks of "initiation." He explains how the earlier a member was initiated, which is signaled by a low membership number, the more respect they deserve. The cult metaphor finally appears as a watermark in the discourse of one co-founder when he states "if you ask someone for [...] the most precious thing [in their life], which is a little bit of their time on Earth – time on Earth, that's the most precious thing, not your money in your bank, that's time on Earth, that's all we've got in my opinion. So, we ask for part of that [...]. So if you're gonna give that, you're making a connection" (1h11'15"). This stresses the necessary devotion of the members to the cooperative – giving away part of their life and connecting to the organization.

MAKING SENSE OF METAPHORS OF NON-DEMOCRATIC ORGANIZATIONS FOR A DEMOCRATIC ORGANISATION

Cooperatives are need-driven and member-benefiting organizations. Such characteristics can easily explain the dominant metaphor of production. But how can we make sense of the use for a cooperative, which is democratic by essence, of military and cult metaphors which denote two very undemocratic organizations? In this section, we interpret these metaphors by adopting a comparative approach, despite its limitations (Cornelissen, 2005), and focus on the similarities and resemblances between entities (Oswick et al., 2002). However, we try to embed these comparisons in the specific context in which metaphors are used, to be as close as possible to how individuals experience the organization (Heracleous & Jacobs, 2008).

First, it should be acknowledged that members who use the military and cult metaphors realize their awkwardness with regard to the PSFC and what it stands for. They feel uncomfortable with using such metaphors. Either they say out loud: "This is freaky" or "I've never told anyone this before." Or they laugh at what they just said, suggesting that this should not be taken too seriously.

It should be stressed that these metaphors are mostly used in very specific contexts to highlight one specific characteristic or element of the PSFC, as described above. For example, the military exercise is referred to for its collective dimension involving everyone and assigning each member of the group a distinct task to fulfill the overall objective. This distribution of tasks goes hand in hand with the discipline required to meet the deadline for this given objective. It shows that work in a cooperative such as the PSFC is democratic by episodes. Sometimes, members just have to comply with orders for the collective good.

Another reason that could explain the recourse to the military metaphor can be found in the equality that both types of organization are supposed to thrive on. A member explains that thanks to the shifts at the Food Coop, he regularly meets people he would not meet in his regular life. This remark highlights the equality among members that theoretically applies to the army: one serves regardless of one's origin or social class. This creates cohesion in a context of social diversity. At the PSFC, work is

shared on an equal basis with fellow members and this may lead to a sort of friendship that crosses the boundaries of any individual's original social sphere. The interviewed member speaks of "shift-ship" because he thinks "friendship is like a funny word" to describe this (43'10"). As such, it is the recognition that a specific type of social capital, which is more egalitarian, is created among members by working at the PSFC.

The elements leading to the use of the cult metaphor tend to relate to a certain mindset that members have or need to have with regard to the cooperative – e.g., when speaking of "initiation" – and to the value-driven nature of such an organization. When the co-founder of the PSFC indicates that people have to commit to the cooperative by giving "the most precious thing in life," i.e. time, he is intending to create a sense of devotion to the organization. However, unlike in a cult, this devotion does not benefit just one or a few "chosen" people. Instead, members give a small share of their lifetime for the benefit of the community as well as for their own benefit. Such a mindset creates identification with the cooperative, which the co-founders estimate to be a critical success factor for the project. Insisting on the value of time rather than of money also echoes the anti-capitalist origin of the project and the values of solidarity and equality that lie at the core of the PSFC. Everyone can give time, unlike money, and all members give the cooperative an equal share of their monthly time.

Direct comparison with a cult arises in the discussion between members about their passion for the PSFC (see above). This shows a strong and shared attachment to the organization, which they want to share. "Speaking the word" to communicate one's passion about the cooperative and ultimately to recruit new members is probably what makes the cooperative most similar to a cult. By so doing, the members reaffirm the political behavior of the PSFC. At a local level, it wants to demonstrate that alternatives to capitalism are possible, that organizing the economic activity differently may be efficient and benefit all, rather than a few people. In the same way as a cult, the members of the PSFC stand up for their beliefs, which for some have become a passion, and try to convince others around them.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Overall, the message conveyed by the film *Food Coop*, from the perspective of the metaphors used by the members of the PSFC to describe their experience of the organization, is one of complexity. It brings together elements that do not seem to make sense separately to describe a democratic organization. Because members seem to find no ready-made metaphor to describe such a complex organization as the PSFC, because of the alternative nature of the enterprise, they need to rely on several distinct metaphors to make sense of different aspects of the organization and its behavior. As such, they are in the process of constructing a grand metaphor for the organization, which will build on the smaller ones identified above. In this regard, we follow Cornelissen and Kafouros (2008), who argue that complex metaphors are dynamically made up of smaller primary metaphors that are grounded in the embodied experiences of individuals.

The analysis above also highlights the importance of embedding the metaphor (Cornelissen et al., 2008) to clearly understand what is being portrayed: what element(s) of the described organization are used in the

comparison, what element(s) of the domain are chosen as a metaphor, and whether the comparison is made in terms of similarities or differences. Also, the way people speak about the comparison may provide clues about how to interpret the comparison. In the case of the PSFC, by showing that they use metaphors which they feel are inappropriate to describe the cooperative as a whole, members express their shame or embarrassment through laughter or withholding discourse.

As to the democratic character of the organization, it is striking how few references to democracy members make in the film. This is in contrast to ownership, which is stressed by several members. This is further highlighted by the rare appearance of the community metaphor compared to references to non-democratic organizations such as the army and the cult. A possible explanation is that the democratic dimension of the cooperative is so obvious that members do not even mention it. Another explanation might be the poor experience of democracy that members have at the PSFC. This is corroborated by the low level of participation in general member assemblies, for instance. Also noticeable are the thoughts of the environmental committee members with regard to the debate about the use of plastic bags, when they say how much confidence they have in the general coordinators, i.e. the employees of the cooperative, influencing the vote at the general assembly of the members.

The analysis in this essay is of course limited to what the producer chose to include in the movie. The absence of a voiceover leaves the words to the members of the cooperative. However, the selection of excerpts, and therefore what is said and conveyed to the viewer, is subject to the will and subjectivity of the film director. We may therefore wonder why he chose to keep negatively loaded metaphors, such as the cult or the army, and how these resonated for some of those who were persuaded to join a participative cooperative supermarket like the PSFC after watching the film. Such questions open paths for future research on the political dimension of cooperatives.

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