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Abstract

‘Craft’ is a trope widely used to characterize diverse practices of scientific knowledge production and communication, including within the field of Management and Organization Studies (MOS). On examination, ‘craft’ is found to have a deep etymological connectedness to science, ethics and politics. Attending to this etymology provides a basis for disclosing how the dominant, neopositivist normative order of knowledge generation and dissemination in MOS articulates and dissembles an ethics of dissociation and an exclusionary politics. Critique is commended as the means of identifying the tacit, constitutive role of ethics and politics in scientific knowledge generation and dissemination. The thesis is illustrated by reference to ‘Gioia Methodology’ (GM) and abduction to which exponents of GM subscribe.

Introduction

Over forty years ago, the late Ian Mitroff, celebrated organization theorist, avowed that ‘observations are neither theory nor value free. *One's values and one's theories influence what one sees and how one interprets it*’ (Mitroff, 1980, p. 514, emphasis added).

Mitroff’s claim questions ‘the idea that organization science is... *free of normative commitments*’ (Howard-Grenville, 2021, p. 10). His proposition challenges the assumption that ‘the normative structure of science’ comprises a single set of value-neutral¹ epistemic criteria (e.g., disinterestedness, communism) against which the knowledge claims are

authoritatively assessed (Merton, 1942/1973). Following Mitroff, a challenge for exponents of management and organization studies (MOS) is to acknowledge, identify and interrogate the ‘normative commitments’ that, for example, condition ‘*what one sees and how one interprets it*’ (Mitroff, 1980, p. 514, emphasis).

There were once signs of MOS researchers being ‘willing to discuss their values’ (Connell & Nord, 1996, p. 425). Contraction of the ‘space for such conversation’ (Connell & Nord, 1996, p. 425) has coincided with the rise of varieties of neopositivism in which value neutrality is ostensibly assured by adopting ostensibly ‘rigorous’ methods, such as Gioia Methodology (GM), that are dedicated to ‘establish[ing] a context-free truth about reality “out there”’ (Alvesson, 2003, p. 15). Application of such methods is held to eliminate, or at least minimize, the intrusion of extra-scientific value contamination (Bell & Willmott, 2019; Schaefer & Alvesson, 2020). This accounts for why, in MOS journal methodology sections, acknowledgement of the constitutive role of values in generating empirical material and presenting findings is exceptional and unwelcome. To do otherwise is to unsettle the value neutral, neopositivist conception of MOS.

It has been wryly observed that, in contexts where value-neutrality is assumed, ‘contesting the standard value neutral view would likely be inimical with career advancement’ (Davis, 2016, p. 15; see also Köhler, Smith & Bhakoo, 2022). Incentives promote the replacement of researchers’ ‘own reasoning with a procedural application of a template’ (Harley & Cornelissen, 2022, p. 240; see also Delbridge & Fiss, 2013) is devised to curtail the intrusion of values. In this world, possessors of the methodological ‘bigger stick[s]’, such as the architects and champions of neopositivist templates, notably GM, have ‘the *better chance* of imposing their definitions of reality’ (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 127, emphasis added).

Exclusion of discussion of the constitutive role of ethics and politics in scientific knowledge production is highly consequential as it results in ‘*a possible world [then]... becom[ing] treated as *the* world*’ (Deetz, 1995, p. 53). Knowledge purporting to be value-neutral is taken to provide *the* credible and reliable way of knowing, and enacting, the social world. ‘Positive’ knowledge resulting from propositional and configurational reasoning, for example, appears to ‘stand on [its] own grounds’ (Cornelissen, Höllerer & Seidl, 2021, p. 8), and so requires no moral justification (MacIntyre, 1981). Knowledge that does not provide methodological assurances of its neutrality is devalued as pre-scientific or non-scientific (Cornelissen, Höllerer & Seidl, 2021, p. 12, 14).

Scholars who are unpersuaded by the ‘positive’ aspirations and claims of value-neutral science (e.g. Adler & Jermier, 2005) have commended greater heed of how scientific knowledge is conditioned politically by ‘structures of domination...inscribed into our current beliefs’ (Cornelissen, Höllerer & Seidl, 2021, p. 12). Different kinds or paradigms of organizational analysis (Burrell & Morgan, 1979) are then read as articulations of distinctive normative orders that implicitly ‘ground theory and method debate in a moral debate’ as they provide ‘alternative conceptions of the social good and preferred ways of living’ (Deetz, 1996, p. 204; see also Lounsbury & Gehman, 2024).

Revival of an appreciation of the constitutive role of values, articulated as politics and ethics, in scientific practices is timely as the ‘grand challenges’ – of geo-political instability, climate breakdown, recurrent financial crises, growing social inequality, technological transformation, disillusionment with liberal democracy, declining trust, etc. – defy technocratic diagnoses and solutions. Contriving to escape politics and ethics, technocratic

reasoning side-lines critique's denaturalization of the status quo and value-commitment to transforming oppressive conditions. Critique is consistent with the call to '*foreground* ethical and moral concerns as central to the purpose and the quality of research' (Amis & Silk, 2008, p. 457) - a 'foregrounding' that threatens to disrupt the framing MOS as a disinterested, unified, 'positive' body of scientific knowledge distinguished by an ethics of dissociation and an exclusionary politics. The prospect of 'foreground[ing]' ethical and moral concerns' may be slim. Yet t because there is only a 'better *chance*' (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 127, emphasis added), not a certainty, of alternative knowledge claims being suppressed or discredited, the 'standard neutral view' (Davis, 2016, p. 15) is inherently vulnerable to challenge and potential replacement.

The paper is organized in three sections. The first begins by recalling the deep etymological connectedness of craft to ethics, politics and science as a basis for challenging the dominance of neopositivism in MOS. It recalls the normativity of methodology and signals the relevance of critique. The second section takes Gioia Methodology (GM) as an example of neopositivism. It compares the formulation and pathological consequences of GM protocols with those developed at Ford prior to the Pinto fires. As GM explicitly subscribes to abduction, in the third section critique is more explicitly engaged to show how abduction in MOS relies technocratic reason. Each section of the paper applies critique to disclose shortcomings and contradictions in the dominant framing of methodology and thereby enable its emancipatory transformation.

Craft, Ethics, Politics, Science and Neopositivism

This section addresses the etymological connection of the metaphor of craft to ethics, politics and science before addressing the limitations, notably the *faux* value-neutrality, of neopositivism. In MOS, the craft metaphor is commonly invoked to signal imaginative and haptic practice in research processes that include theory building (e.g., Fulmer, 2012; Hibbert, Sillince & Diefenbach, 2014), academic writing (Patriotta, 2017; Ragins, 2012), peer review (Ballinger & Johnson, 2015) and evaluative research (e.g., Gregory & Martin, 1994). Although the trope is frequently deployed, attention has not been paid to how its etymology associates craft with ethics and politics, and so connects it to critique.

Historically, with regard to (small ‘p’) *politics*, ‘craft’ denoted ‘might, power’, as evident in the concept of ‘statecraft’ as well as witchcraft². Concerning *ethics*, the etymological connection with craft is through ‘*kraptyr*’ (Old Norse) that meant, in addition to ‘strength’, ‘virtue’ (although the connection is not directly to its Aristotelian formulation that is articulated in ‘virtue ethics’ (MacIntyre, 1981; 2006; see also Bezuidenhout, 2017). To reduce misunderstanding and confusion, Table 1 below provides a glossary of key terms used in the present analysis.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Expanding the Craft Metaphor

It has been noted how, in MOS, use of the craft metaphor is largely confined to an acknowledgement of the imaginative and haptic aspects of research practice. A partial

exception to this rule is an editorial in *Academy of Management Journal* (AMJ) where Baer & Shaw's (2017, p. 1214) declare that: '[t]here is more to being a master craftsman than skill acquisition'; that the responsibility of MOS scholars is 'not only to the craft but to the wider community that the craft is serving'; and that 'one's responsibility... only comes when we are "in love" with what we are doing' (Baer & Shaw, 2017, p. 1214). This editorial challenges the reduction of craft to skill or technique; it situates craft within community; and it incorporates a recognition of how, enabled by passionate engagement, craft engenders responsibility for our activities.

The AMJ editorial registers and the received wisdom that 'craft' is present primarily, or even exclusively, in what Cunliffe (2011, p. 667) terms 'more exploratory expressions of embedded and aesthetic forms of knowledge typical of subjectivist and intersubjectivist problematics'. Baer and Shaw (2017) contest the framing of research as *either* science (objectivist) *or* craft (intersubjectivist) (Cunliffe, 2011, Figure 1, p. 654-5). Their reflections are particularly relevant for opening up awareness of the heavy investment of neopositivist MOS in an *ethics of dissociation* associated with the ideal of epistemological mastery (Code, 2006) whose mission is to capture the essence of phenomena by producing and policing value-neutral, 'validated knowledge' (Weick, 1989, p. 524)³. Emblematic of this ethics is the practice of 'concept cleansing' (Hirsch & Levin, 1999) that, combined with the application of ostensibly value-neutral methodological protocols, aspires to transform messy, ambiguous phenomena into constructs possessed of an alluring clarity⁴.

Science and Craft(iness)

In the fourteenth century, science was conceived to combine ‘skilfulness, cleverness and *craftiness*’⁵. The Western (European) notion of science emerged during the Enlightenment when emancipatory, post-feudal ideas of human betterment and social progress were blended with an emphasis upon reason and empirical inquiry (Edelstein, 2010; Robertson, 2022). Although rooted in an Islamic and Central Asian (Buddhist) heritage (Beckwith, 2012), the contemporary manifestation of recursive argument(ative) method marginalizes recognition of the constitutive role of ethics and politics in the production and dissemination of scientific knowledge. This self-understanding of science, as a universal model of rationality, disregards its entanglement in norms that, for example, determine its purpose, and resolve which amongst many competing theories (e.g. of management) is preferable (MacIntyre, 1981). Recalling this entanglement is consistent with recognizing the constitutive presence of ethics and/or politics in generating and communicating scientific bodies of knowledge (Proctor, 1991) including MOS.

As already noted, the etymology of craft points to its connectedness to ethics and politics. These connections include, yet extend beyond, an appreciation of how research is situated *in* ‘a political and ethical *context*’ (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2017, p. 13, emphasis added) and even an awareness of how knowledge is ‘infused with ethical and political *implications*’ (Schwandt, 2007, p. 12, emphasis added). In addition to being intrinsic to the context and pregnant with implications, ethics and politics are, arguably, constitutive of the methodological production and communication of MOS (Steinmetz, 2005; Ezzamel & Willmott, 2014). The craft metaphor is also invoked here to disclose how scientific

knowledge claims are developed and disseminated in tacit, crafty ways that are pervasive but routinely undeclared and unexamined.

Craft(iness) is present in processes of forging, preserving, or disrupting claims about the scientific status of knowledge. Politically, craft(iness) conceals, and also exposes, the underdetermination of social scientific knowledge by facts, or its overdetermination by theories (paraphrasing Alexander, 1987, p. 23 cited by Shadnam, 2019, p. 685). It enables indeterminacies of scientific practice to be obscured behind staged compliance with established protocols that warrant its knowledge claims (Delamont & Atkinson, 2001). In MOS, an example is the production of bodies of knowledge that ostensibly test *a priori* hypotheses when the hypothesis has been developed *post hoc* in order to better fit the data (see Anonymous, 2015). Another is the programmatic retrofitting of method(ology) sections (Butler & Spoelstra, 2023). Such disingenuousness is exposed by the critical self-reflection of critique.

The Neopositivist Methodological Ideal and the Normativity of Methodology

When positioned within the normative order of neopositivism⁶, science is conceived as a process of producing and communicating value-neutral knowledge by generating ‘a more coherent set of statements of relations explaining or predicting empirical phenomena (Corley & Gioia 2011; Gioia & Pitre, 1990)’ (Clegg, Pina e Cuna & Berti, 2021, p. 21). Its objective is to develop and finesse techniques (e.g., improving protocols) to detect and remove sources of bias, and thereby realize a value-neutral representation, or ‘capture’, of phenomena of interest. The value-free methodological ideal of neopositivism is preserved, as Wicks & Freeman (1998, p. 124) note, by ‘avoid[ing] discussion of ethics [and politics]’.

To appreciate better how neopositivist research avoids recognition of its ethics and politics, consider Grodal, Anteby & Holm, 2021) commendation of active categorization in processes of theory building as a means of achieving increased rigor and diversity. Their neopositivist proposal acknowledges how ‘the theoretical insights that are drawn from the data are not simply “given” but *actively constructed* by researchers to address puzzles that they find interesting and important’ (Grodal, Anteby & Holm, 2021, p. 606, emphasis added). They contrast this approach with a ‘*positivist* orientation [that] has, in practice, engendered uniformity...’ (Grodal, Anteby & Holm, 2021, p. 607, emphasis added)’, contending that the positivist approach takes inadequate account of how ‘categories are actively formed’ (Grodal, Anteby & Holm, 2021, p. 607). However, Grodal, Anteby & Holm’s (2021) prescriptions for the conduct of rigorous qualitative analysis pay no attention to the constitutive role of ethics and politics in generating and communicating knowledge claims. Reflexivity is limited to explicating the ‘eight moves’ of categorization processes (Grodal, Anteby & Holm, 2021, p. 592, Table 1). ‘Transparency’ as a vaunted indicator of ‘rigor’ is restricted to the identification of those moves (Grodal, Anteby & Holm, p. 592, Table 2), without regard to how values condition processes of categorization and their analytical dissection. The nearest that the study comes to a *postpositivist* understanding is when it is noted that the creation of categories cannot be ‘decoupled from the person(s) who created them or the context in which they were created’ (Grodal, Anteby & Holm, 2021, p. 592). But no consideration is given to the presence and significance of ethics and politics in the formation of ‘person(s)’ or to the social construction of ‘contexts’.

The Other of neopositivism is encountered when, for example, attention is directed *from* refining techniques for removing bias *to* disclosing ‘the ongoing *struggles* related to

authorship, truth, validity, reliability...’ (Amis & Silk, 2008, p. 464, emphasis added). These ‘struggles’, which hinge upon ‘what may count [or is valued] as rational knowledge’ (Haraway, 1988, p. 587), are, in *postpositivist* framing, understood to be conditioned by ethics and politics. Non-epistemic values – androcentrism and anthropocentrism, for example – are seen to be widely and routinely encoded into epistemic claims (Rooney, 1992; Ward, 2021).

Acknowledgement of the normativity of methodology (e.g., Flyvbjerg, 2001), as contrasted to its dissembling or denial, permits researchers to attend to the value-laden ordering of scientific practice. Fujimura’s (1992; 1996) study of the construction of ontogene theory, for example, shows how the production of temporarily stable representations depends upon an ethical and political process of crafting and enacting ‘packages of ambiguous concepts and tools’ (Fujimura, 1992, p. 204). When ostensibly stable, value-free representations are deconstructed, scientific practice becomes more open to ‘other possible representations, other ways of knowing and practicing’ (Fujimura, 1992, p. 205). In another example, Meskus (2018) unpacks how biomedical researchers deploy the craft metaphor to examine the ‘*material politics of science*’ (p. 4, emphasis in original), noting how ‘[h]istorically, the word “craft” has connotations of ‘power and power relations’, and remarking that it is ‘invested with the meaning of power, as in political acumen and shrewdness’ (Meskus, 2018, p. 30).

In MOS, ‘the material politics of science’ are evident in how the presumption of value-neutrality, embedded in the dominant normative order of neopositivism, operates to discredit other, explicitly value-imbued, methodologies of scientific knowledge production, including critique. Such exclusionary epistemic politics derogate knowledge claims that do not affirm and display a ‘seemingly neutral and objective “formal” form of reasoning...where

arguments [appear to] stand on their own ground and are separate from their own values' (Cornelissen, Höllerer & Seidl, 2021, p. 8). To acknowledge those values, and thereby expose them to the scrutiny of critique, brings the objectivity of neo/positivist claims into question.

Critique attends to how 'science is made, really made rather than as publicly reported' (Gouldner (1962/1973, p. 25) by doubting that 'arguments...can stand on their own ground', and by problematizing and transforming their practical conditions and consequences.

Neopositivism stands accused of bestowing objectivity upon politically and ethically contingent knowledge claims. Its crafty masking of this process is seen to lend 'normative dignity to [the] practical imperatives' (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 111) of demonstrating validity, reliability, generalisability, etc. Façades of neutrality and objectivity are, however, fragile, especially during 'moments of unknowingness' (Butler, 2005, p. 136) when power asymmetries operate to disrupt and potentially transform social realities. At such times, greater awareness can develop of how 'neutrality serves to camouflage interests, to remove the moral and political from the realm of [scientific] discourse itself' (Proctor, 1991, p. 270). As neutrality is unmasked, the conjecture that 'solutions to problems of knowledge' are political (Shapin & Schaffer, 1985, p. 342 cited in Shapin, 1992, p. 354) and ethical is confirmed.

The Ethics And Politics Of Neopositivism: The Case Of GM Protocols

So far, the case for reframing methodology has been made in comparatively abstract terms. Consideration is now given to the constitutive role of ethics and politics in 'Gioia

Methodology’ before extending the critique of GM to abduction. GM is chosen because it has had a major impact upon how qualitative research is undertaken within MOS: by January 2026, the key text (Gioia, Corley & Hamilton, 2013) had been cited over 20,000 times⁷.

In ‘Seeking Qualitative Rigor in Inductive Research: Notes on the Gioia Methodology’, Gioia, Corley & Hamilton (2013, p. 15) commend a set of protocols for advancing a ‘systematic approach to new concept development and grounded theory articulation’. GM is, in effect, built upon grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967): the Appendix to Gioia, Corley & Hamilton (2013) is titled ‘Features of the Methodology that Enhance Grounded Theory Development. Its exponents claim that GM provides an impartial, transparent ‘way of demonstrating evidence in support of conclusions a researcher might draw’ (Gioia, 2022, p. 3). Its purpose is to facilitate rigorous theory building by creating a data structure that is intended to enable readers to grasp how (first-order) informant-derived meanings are translated into more abstract (second-order) theory-forming constructs in a transparent manner that aspires to postpone and minimize the researcher’s imposition of theory upon the data.

The objectivity of the researcher’s knowledge claims is warranted by the application of research protocols, a stratagem that is broadly paralleled by employees’ application of company protocols, as illustrated below. In each case, protocols are devised to discipline behaviour and improve accountability. Despite the different contexts and objectives of scientific knowledge generation and the corporate maximizing of profit, protocols are devised to standardize tasks. In each case, protocols - that are introduced to render behaviour more reliable, accountable and potentially replicable - encode political and ethical judgements about what, for example, is ‘scientific’ or ‘commercial’.

To draw out the political and ethical formation of GM, its protocols are compared to those devised by the Ford Motor Company (hereafter Ford). This comparison is not randomly made as Professor Gioia, the principal architect of GM, was once employed by Ford as the leader of a Recall Team where he was obliged to enact its protocols . At Ford, protocols (‘script schemas’) connected accident data, including reports of vehicle fires, to safety problems (Gioia,1992). Shared by GM and Ford protocols, it will be argued, is an ethics of dissociation combined with a politics of exclusion. To be clear, when making this comparison, the intention is to critique GM, and not to scrutinise, let alone judge, Gioia’s conduct at Ford where, as he recounts, he sought to raise concerns about the safety of the Pinto when a series of deadly fires broke out in its trunk (Gioia, 2011).

Protocols at Ford and in GM

In the scientific domain, protocols typically emerge from a network of institutions and practices that include established conventions of scientific inquiry. GM protocols are explicitly responsive to the demands of the dominant normative order of ‘positive’, often quantitative, research in MOS. That order inspired Gioia and colleagues to develop a methodological framework (GM) capable of “getting past” neo/positivist reviewers and editors who would otherwise dismiss their work as idiosyncratic and unscientific. Likewise, at Ford, the protocols, or ‘script schemas’, were devised to address and satisfy the requirements of a network of agencies⁸ (Lee & Ermann, 1999). During the 1970s, when Professor Gioia worked for Ford, those protocols permitted the placement of the Pinto’s fuel tank in the trunk as ‘a fundamental and unalterable design feature’ (Lee & Ermann, 1999, p. 37)⁹. In GM, the equivalent ‘unalterable design feature’ is its “data structure” (Gioia, 2022, p.

3) that connects informant-based, first-order codes with research-based, second order themes (Gioia, 2022; see also Gioia, Corley & Hamilton. 2013, p. 20).

Of most direct relevance for considering how ethics and politics play a constitutive role in the production of knowledge, the ‘schemas’ at Ford, as reported by Professor Gioia, ‘precluded consideration of issues *in ethical terms* because the scripts *did not include ethical dimensions*’ (Gioia, 1992, p. 379, emphasis added). The company’s non-inclusion of explicit ‘ethical dimensions’ is paralleled by how, in GM, ‘consideration of issues in ethical [or political] terms’ is displaced by the imperative to show ‘the evidence that supports an inferential conclusion’ (Gioia, 2022, p. 3). The absence of any explicit reference to ‘ethical dimensions’ in Ford’s ‘script schemas’, as reported by Gioia, is not questioned here.

Doubted, however, is whether the omission of explicit reference to ethics (and politics), which is common to GM protocols, indicates that their formulation and communication are devoid of ethics (and politics). Since every protocol specifies and normalizes what is desirable, they are media and outcomes of political and ethical processes that determine what is valued, including what is un/ethical.

The contents of the Ford ‘schemas’, it is conjectured, are equivalent to ‘first-order’ understandings conveyed by ‘informants’ in GM. Each is integral to, respectively, commercial and scholarly normative orders of knowledge production. As Professor Gioia comments, the vehicle safety ‘script schemas’ tacitly expected and enabled Ford employees, including members of the Recall Team, to distance themselves from taking ethical responsibility for their decisions (e.g., regarding the recall of the Pinto). Ethical disassociation was achieved by limiting employee responsibility to their contractual obligation to adhere to the company protocols (see Helin & Sandström, 2010; MacIntyre,

1999). The normative force of this distancing is affirmed by Professor Gioia when he relates how, during his employment at Ford, his ‘identity shifted to a more corporate definition’ (Gioia, 2011, p. 100). Accompanying this shift was a weakening of Gioia’s prior identification with ‘activist history and advocacy of business social responsibility’ (Gioia, 2011, p. 99). Professor Gioia found that, as a Ford employee, his earlier commitment to broader concerns, such as ‘business social responsibility’, became diluted, and was perhaps suspended. *Qua* Ford employees, members of the Recall Team aligned their ethics to fulfilling their contractual obligation to comply with company safety protocols.

A parallel can be drawn between the behaviour of Ford employees and researchers who adopt GM, often at the urging of advisors and reviewers. As *citizens*, members of the Recall Team did not necessarily share the values of the Ford corporation (Lee & Ermann, 1999) as inscribed in protocols that sealed the fate of those killed or injured by Pinto fuel tank explosions. As *employees*, however, they ‘doubted a recall’s legitimacy, or its chances of approval’ (Lee & Ermann, 1999, p. 37). They anticipated that recommending a recall of the Pinto would make them a “laughingstock” of the company’ (Lee & Ermann, 1999, p. 37). In this regard, researchers who, craftily, adopt GM protocols to limit the risk of (humiliating) rejection of their manuscripts by (neopositivist) reviewers are not unlike members of the Recall Team. In Berger & Luckmann’s (1967, p. 127) terms, compliance with Ford/GM protocols reduces the prospect of a beating by those wielding a ‘bigger stick’. To escape the humiliation of being treated as a ‘laughingstock’, as well as possible disciplinary action, members of the Recall Team complied with the computational reasoning (Mantere & Ketokivi, 2013) that denied a recall of the Pinto. Likewise, as *persons*, adopters of GM may not be persuaded by its neopositivist discipline and associated scientific claims. But, as *authors*, they engage GM to reduce the risk of their manuscript being rejected by editors or reviewers who judge its

methods to be insufficiently systematic or transparent. The exercise of context-sensitive judgement is subordinated to (but not eliminated by) the exhibition of procedural compliance.

Whether earnestly or expediently, members of the Ford Recall Team were sense-takers of Ford's safety regime. They subscribed – whether blindly, reluctantly or cynically – to the company's protocols. *As employees*, they lost, or surrendered, their capacity to conceive of the fires and fatalities in ethical and political, rather than protocol-compliant (e.g., financial), terms (see note 9). When, as researchers, we subscribe to, and comply with, GM protocols, our ethical and political responsibility is, likewise, limited to demonstrating direct and tight connections to the data. When situated in the normative order of GM, a 'justifiable interpretation' of the phenomenon of interest is one that is '*data-based and somehow relates to informants' interpretations*' (Gioia, 2022, p. 5, emphasis in original). The 'somehow' in this account suggests a craftiness that simultaneously acknowledges *and* glosses the problematic –ethically and politically charged – status of 'data' and their relationship to researchers' interpretations. GM does not deny the role of theory or the interpretive power of researchers, but it is disciplined and directed by the adoption of *ostensibly value-neutral* protocols that, arguably, *are value-laden* in how they prioritize what is un/important and de/valued in the domain of scientific knowledge production, no less than they do in the world automobile manufacture.

Gioia Methodology and the Limits of Neopositivism

Ontologically, the social world is conceived by GM to be actor-dependent and accomplished through sense-making processes that construct the social world. GM self-identifies as 'social constructionist'. But its apprehension and analysis of phenomena of interest is neopositivist.

The avowed anti-positivist, non-objectivist ontology of GM is disconnected from its methodological privileging of procedure over the researcher's positionality.

Methodologically, meanings (e.g. first order accounts) are treated *as if* they are observer-independent. An outcome of this inconsistency, or crafty ploy, is GM's accommodation and affirmation of the hegemony of positivism in MOS, rather than posing of any significant challenge to it.

GM exemplifies a genre of qualitative research that makes 'objectivist assumptions to find, instead of construct, relations in data' (Hansen, Elias & Stevenson, 2025, p. 5). It makes the neopositivist assumption that "brute data" or "facts of the matter" exist, taking the form of accounts provided by respondents (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 56). Social reality is conceived as an array of entities, including meanings, whose reality is amenable to faithful representation by researchers who diligently apply the protocols of GM in support of the objectivity of their knowledge claims (e.g. Saied & de Stobbeleir, 2026). Confidence in the 'correctness' of the representations of phenomena of interest is warranted by reference to the facticity of empirical data combined with the use of protocols (e.g., methodological triangulation) that signify reliability and validity¹⁰. For example, in their study of 'not-me identities' which deploys GM, Saied and de Stobbeleir (2026: 8, emphasis added) consulted their informants' websites in order to 'validate' their work roles. Absent from the analysis is any reflexivity about how the researchers' assumptions and sense-making practices inform the making of such claims.

Outside of the normative order of GM, the 'data' or 'facts' comprising 'informants' accounts are conceived to be embedded in diverse worldviews that endow them with contextual meaning. Instead of apprehending informants' responses as the outpouring of a set of 'objective

facts' (Stutz & Sachs, 2018, p. 106), such responses are acknowledged to be rendered meaningful (e.g. as significant 'facts') by researchers' (emergent and provisional) mobilization of their (developing but frequently limited and partial) knowledge of 'informants'' sense of context (Schaefer & Alvesson, 2020). The theorizing of informants' responses is conditioned by researchers' (value-laden) understandings of the contextuality of their analytical sense-making. The significance of those sense-making resources is overlooked or backgrounded by GM. When, in contrast, attention is paid to the *conditions of possibility* of the 'first-order' accounts, their contents are seen to be contingent upon a social world of available narratives, including situationally germane 'vocabularies of motive' (Mills, 1940) that enable, but also constrain, what is communicated. Fulfilment of the aspiration to 'adhere faithfully' to 'informants' terms' Gioia et al, 2013, p. 20) requires, at a minimum, an *intimate appreciation* of respondents' worldviews.

GM researchers strive to be 'rigorous' - by 'accurately capturing all that is relevant and significant to the informant's descriptions' (Reinhardt, Kreiner, Gioia & Corley, 2018, p. 517). Yet, researchers 'can only begin to understand' what respondents' accounts may mean by engaging in *critical reflection* on (i) the *conditions* that 'place [respondents' accounts] in their broader webs of meaning...practices, institutions and power structures' (Mees-Buss, Welch & Piekkari, 2022, p. 415); and (ii) *the constitutive role of ethics and politics* in researchers' interpretive frameworks (Ezzamel & Willmott, 2014). Researchers' sense-making efforts are necessarily contingent upon, and compromised by, the *undisclosed* ethics and politics of the normative order that enable them/us to identify, interpret and warrant what is deemed to be 'relevant and significant' (Reinhardt, Kreiner, Gioia & Corley, 2018, p. 517). Only by suspending a social constructionist ontology to allow contingencies – contextual meanings and researchers' sensemaking – to be disregarded is it possible for empirical material, such as that

derived from interviews, to be intelligibly characterized simply as ‘data’, or as established ‘facts’, that await processing into ‘aggregate dimensions’.

Consider Professor Gioia’s account of the practices of vehicle recall at Ford as an example of ‘first order’ ‘data’ . It has been questioned whether such accounts express ‘any “truth”’ (Schaefer & Alvesson, 2020, p. 34) about the phenomenon being investigated. That is not because informants deliberately deceive researchers but because their responses are, inextricably, an expression of context-dependent considerations and available vocabularies of motive as well as their own agendas and preoccupations, such as a wish to appear interesting, competent or moral (Schaefer & Alvesson, 2020, p. 34). Yet, GM craftiness ensures that little or no consideration is given to how ‘first order’ accounts are ‘assembled’ by informants (Silverman, 2022, p. 12 citing Holstein & Gubrium, 2016, p. 69). Those accounts are, in effect, treated as ‘facts’, not as contextually organized claims. A case in point is Saied and de Stobbeleir’s (2026) uncritical extraction and use of their informants’ ‘business profiles’ on networking sites. That ‘data’, they explain, ‘gave us clearer picture of participants’ work roles...which helped us contextualize and better interpret participants’ accounts’ (sic) (Saied and de Stobbeleir, 2026, p. 7).

GM researchers also disregard how their (‘second order’) interpretations of informants’ responses articulate researchers’ engagement of particular, value-infused ‘paradigms’ or ‘traditions’ that differ, for example, in how the agency of respondents is theorized (Silverman, 2022, p. 12; Pratt, Sonenshein & Feldman, 2022, p. 217), as well as subscribing to ‘alternative conceptions of the social good and preferred ways of living’ (Deetz, 1996, p. 204). GM protocols obscure or mask the operation ‘of power and its relations to knowledge, the meaning of moral action and the place of knowledge within it’ (Mills, 1959, p. 127). For

exponents of neopositivism, exemplified by GM, attentiveness to the constitutive role of ethics and politics in the production and communication of its knowledge claims is, in effect, rendered redundant by its *faux* value neutrality.

The unintended pathology of protocols

GM is commended for lending discipline and rigor to researchers' sensemaking processes, thereby bestowing authority on the resulting knowledge claims. By engaging GM protocols researchers mitigate the risk of becoming the equivalent of a "laughingstock" amongst those - colleagues, editors and reviewers - who subscribe to the neo/positivist normative order of scientific knowledge production. Legitimacy is provided by the protocols enshrined in a 'data structure' (Gioia, 2022, p. 3) that connects informant-based, first-order accounts with research-based, second order themes. The process of connection and testing involves considerable (undeclared) imagination and craftiness. Nonetheless, researchers whose knowledge claims are assessed to be inadequately 'coupled' are reprimanded for being 'cavalier about showing data-to-theory connections' (Gioia, 2022, p. 3).

When researchers fail to engage GM or a similar protocol, they are lampooned for generating 'fanciful interpretations that grant [them] an unlimited license to be brilliant' (Gioia, 2022, p. 6). Lacking a traceable demonstration of how theory is directly connected to data, those interpretations are dismissed as 'impressionistic', not scientific: they do not, and cannot, 'show the basis of [their] claims' (Gioia, 2022, p. 4, emphasis added), a scientific inadequacy ascribed to their 'arrogance' or 'omniscience' (Gioia, 2022, p. 6)¹¹. In sum, GM combines a neopositivist ethics of dissociation that attributes properly scientific knowledge to the

disciplined, impartial application of protocols with a politics of exclusion that is dismissive of knowledge lacking such discipline.

The allure of protocols and a disinclination, or calculated reluctance, to challenge them, can, however, result in unintended outcomes- as illustrated by the deaths and injuries occasioned by compliance with Ford's 'script schemas'. In acknowledgement of such pathological effects, Gioia, Corley & Hamilton (2013, p. 25) note that, in numerous cases, adopters of GM have 'essentially reproduce[d] the exact format of the data structure from recently published studies... [including] procedural descriptions that are almost identical to those in the published works'. Reflecting upon such slavishness to GM, Professor Gioia has insisted (convincingly, in this author's assessment) that there was never an *intention* for GM to be used as a "methodolatrous" 'template' or 'cookbook recipe' (Gioia, 2022, p. 5; see Bell & Wray-Bliss, 2009, p. 85). However, disclaiming responsibility for what GM invites (i.e. the fetishization of its protocols) is testament to a limited reflexivity regarding how ethics and politics play a constitutive role in its design, and not just its application.

Reflection on the context and conditions that nurture GM and render it credible, or at least make it pragmatically useful, is largely absent from proposals and commentaries on GM, including those prepared by Professor Gioia. There is little deliberation on how MOS authors, journal editors and reviewers have come to believe, or profess, that GM protocols 'generate a plausible, defensible (abductive) explanation of how and/or why a phenomenon occurs' (Gioia, 2022, p. 3). A suspicion, voiced by Kohler, Smith & Bhakoo (2021, p. 199), is that GM is adopted just because it courts 'less reviewer push back', regardless of whether its application 'fit[s] the data'. That conjecture is disturbing. But it is also plausible in a context where, congruent with the hegemony of neopositivism in MOS - which, it will be recalled

spurred the very development of GM - ‘fewer and fewer early career scholars (ECRs) are being exposed to core philosophy of social science ideas that undergird organizational theorizing’ (Lounsbury and Gehman, 2024, p. 6). A possible consequence of this institutionalized incapacity is that when acting as reviewers and/or editors, ECRs and others are ill-equipped to problematize GM’s crafty obfuscation of its limitations.

This critique of GM resonates with Weick’s (1989, p. 547) doubts about the value of research dedicated to ‘compliance with protocols developed to produce and validate knowledge claims’. This does not, of course, deny the importance of undertaking empirical work (e.g. Ezzamel and Willmott, 2014) or seeking to interpret empirical material in novel and challenging ways (e.g. Lok & Willmott, 2014). But, following Weick, the principal contribution of MOS scholarship lies in advancing ‘*the suggestion of relationships and connections that had not previously been suspected, relationships that change actions and perspectives*’ (Weick, 1989, p. 547, emphasis added)¹². Endorsing Weick’s conjecture, engaging critique, in addition to craft, can facilitate the identification and exploration of significant ‘relationships and connections’, and thereby contribute to ‘chang[ing] actions and perspectives’ (Weick, 1989, p. 547).

Critique

In this section, the distinctiveness of critique is explicated before applying it to abduction, to which GM subscribes. Critique is rooted in critical philosophy whose politico-ethical purpose is to enable the radical, emancipatory transformation of social relations. Critique is expressly value-laden and politically motivated in its commitment to ‘social transformation as an ethics’ (Aronowitz & Ausch, 2000, p. 716). Its constructive intent is ‘to infuse the world with

the values of compassion, equality, solidarity, autonomy, and social justice (Harcourt, 2020, p.1). Critique differs, therefore, from the idealism of contemplative philosophy as well as from ideas oriented to the pursuit of self-interest or increased rationality as an end in itself.

When an exponent of *critique* examines the formation and application of protocols, such as those developed at Ford and by the architects of GM, the intent is not primarily to improve the means of predicting and controlling the phenomenon under investigation, or even to enhance our understanding of it. Rather, the objective is to unify theory and practice by harnessing the production and communication of scientific knowledge to processes of emancipation (Willmott, 1997). Critique does not reject empirical-analytic (explanatory) scientific knowledge - that is, knowledge concerned with predicting and controlling social reality apprehended as a field of manipulable, objectified processes. Nor does critique reject historical-hermeneutic (interpretive) forms of scientific knowledge that are oriented to understanding how social reality is (re)produced. Instead, each of these kinds of scientific knowledge is refocused to facilitate human flourishing (and that of other sentient beings) by reducing unnecessary suffering associated, for example, with social divisiveness and ecological breakdown.

The Methodology of Critique

Researchers working within empirical-analytical and historical-hermeneutic normative orders of knowledge production are inclined to be dismissive of critique 'for abandoning any pretention of neutrality' (Boltanski, 2011, p. 4). Alternatively, critique is mistakenly confined to 'problematiz[ing]... the emphases, values and moral orientations that we [researchers] have been using' (Cornelissen, Höllerer & Seidl, 2021, p. 11) and/or with facilitating

‘potential *reform*’ (Cornelissen, Höllerer & Seidl, 2021, p. 11, emphasis added). Here, in contrast, exponents of critique are conceived to strive to mobilize reflection with the emancipatory intent of changing the oppressive relations that provoke such critique (Banerjee, 2022, esp. 1084). Oppression is distinguished by institutionalized subordination to a ‘master’ that takes diverse forms – of discrimination on the basis of sex, race and/or class, for example, but also methodological hegemony in the form of neopositivism. Oppression is overcome through the praxis of struggle, including against GM, in the face of resistance from those who are invested, materially or psychologically, in its normalization (Freire, 1993).

To further illuminate the meaning and methodology of critique, I turn to Marx’s (1845/1975) *Theses on Feuerbach*. In the *Theses* in which its target is Feuerbach’s championing of secular humanism as an alternative to Christianity. Marx assesses Feuerbach’s neo-Hegelian analysis to be politically incoherent and ethically indefensible. His critique is summarized in the final thesis: ‘The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the *point* is to change it’ (emphasis added). Marx anticipates a unification of theory and practice, enabled by critique, that requires a change in the conditions perpetuating the self-alienation, exemplified by Christianity. Feuerbach’s proposed substitution of secular humanism for Christianity is critiqued by Marx because it leaves the material conditions of human existence unchanged. For Marx, worldly relations must be *changed in practice* as a condition of transcending the self-alienation of Christianity. Equivalent in the present analysis are the conditions of knowledge production that foster and legitimize the hegemonic position of neopositivist research, as illustrated by GM.

In Marx’s *Theses*, critique ‘proceeds in a negative way, focusing on the obstacles to revolutionary self-emancipation’ (Celikates, 2011, p. 113)- obstacles, including Christianity -

while recognising that removing them requires theory-informed, emancipatory action (*praxis*). As Kenneth Benson, organization theorist, puts it, the intent of critique is to ‘contribute to the process of reconstruction, to the liberation of human potential through the production of new social formations’ (Benson, 1977, p. 6; see also Lather, 1986).

Methodologically, critique typically situates phenomena of interest within their historical, cultural and political conditions of existence¹³; challenges what is ostensibly self-evident or ‘naturalized’; attends to what is silenced or marginalized; exposes forms of domination, internal contradictions and inconsistencies; and acknowledges the positionality of the researcher who, in the present case, is a senior white male closely identified with the development of critical research in MOS that, in principle, is aligned to the values of equity and justice.

Enabled by critique, mass emancipatory movements (e.g. desegregation, LGBTQ) have overcome diverse obstacles to establish existentially different, if still imperfect, relationships, life experiences and related kinds of knowledge. Imperfections necessitate *on-going* critique, or ‘reflective critique’ that is ‘indexed to emancipation’. Critchley (1999, p. 114, emphasis added). Accordingly, critiques of Marxian critique have been directed at its marginalization of human embodiment and mortality (see, for example, Kristeva, 1982; Rizq, 2013). It follows logically that the present critique of neopositivism/GM, must *itself* become a (continuing) target of critique. Reflective critique challenges, ethically and politically, how established ‘knowledge communities’ and ‘certain ways of thinking’ are preserved, and anticipates their emancipatory transformation. Through critique, ostensibly ‘factual’ evidence is reframed as ‘value statements... based on taken-for-granted ideologies that [are consequential as they] justify the status quo’ (Hibbert, Sillince & Diefenbach, 2014, p.281).

To extend this explication of critique, attention is now turned to abduction to which GM subscribes.

Critique of Abduction in MOS

GM is explicitly identified by Magnani & Gioia (2023, p. 3) as *abductive*: ‘[t]he overall GM analytical process develops through an inferential path that departs from an inductive-reasoning approach towards a *more abductive one*’ (Magnani & Gioia, 2023, p. 3, emphasis added). Abduction, which is typically contrasted with the (methodo)logics of induction and deduction, has been attributed to Aristotle and, more recently, to Peircean pragmatism (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014). Peirce conceives of abduction as the generation of explanatory hunches, formalized as hypotheses, that are developed to account for puzzling observations.

In GM’s declared shift from induction ‘towards a more abductive’ approach (Magnani & Gioia, 2023, p. 3), the keyword is ‘towards’ as, in important respects, GM deviates from Peircean pragmatism’s post-Cartesian contention that ‘the fact/value dichotomy is untenable’ (Putnam, 1990, p. 14, cited by Bernstein, 2010, p. 14; see also Mirowski, 1987, esp. pp 1007-1011). Consistent with neopositivism, GM places greater emphasis upon what Folger & Stein (2017, p. 309 et seq) term ‘fact/foil’ analysis. The challenge to the fact-value dichotomy, and the associated intent of Peircean abduction to re-unify theory and practice¹⁴, is downplayed or overlooked (e.g., Gioia, Höllerer & Seidl, 2013, p. 21; Gioia, 2022, p. 3). In effect, GM effects a selective, neopositivist appropriation of abduction.

Abduction is ontologically and epistemologically radical but, notably in MOS, is restricted in its range of critical self-reflection. It ‘scrutinize[s] the practical relevance of a set of ideas *as defined by their purposes and those shared by their community* (e.g., within a country, a corporation, a research stream)’ (Wicks & Freeman, 1998, p. 129, emphasis added). The value, or ‘usefulness’, of the resulting ‘explanation[s]’ is determined by reference to the ‘purposes’, and associated ‘issues at hand’ (Martela, 2015, p. 553), of *whatever* community presents those issues. The *sole* criterion for identifying an issue worthy of examination is that ‘the resultant explanation is *useful to the community of practice affected by [it]*’ (Rumens & Kelemen, 2103, p. 17, emphasis added; see also Watson, 2013, p. 65). The outcome is a propensity to accept and adopt established ends-in-view.

Insofar as the ‘community’ presenting ‘issues’ is more likely to have sufficient material and symbolic capital to define and communicate as well as fund the investigation, exponents of pragmatism/abduction and GM are servants of power. From the standpoint of critique, abduction (e.g., Lorino, 2018, esp. Ch 7) is flawed ethically (and politically) by its uncritical reception of the issues that it addresses. Critique, in contrast, deconstructs and challenges established ‘ends’, and seeks to facilitate an emancipatory transformation of the conditions which bestow a self-evident reality and taken-for-granted value upon those ends.

In sum, abduction absolves its exponents from reflecting critically upon *their* ethical responsibility for acceptance of the ‘issues’ that are addressed and the effects of the resulting research. Reflection does not extend much beyond ensuring that abductive reasoning is properly applied. That restriction is evident in ‘Generating Theory By Abduction’ (Saetre & Van de Ven, 2021; see also Van de Ven, 2007) where consideration of the ethics and politics of scientific knowledge production is confined to ‘the ethical rules of conversation’ *between*

researchers (Saetre & Van de Ven, 2021, p. 695). '[C]riticism and debate' (Saetre & Van de Ven, 2021, p. 691) is incorporated within 'Generating Theory', otherwise '[we] would only see what we wanted to see' (Saetre & Van de Ven, 2021, p. 692 citing Verganti, 2016, p. 71). However, in the absence of critique, the outcome of such 'criticism and debate' is a version of what the community *already* 'sees'¹⁵.

Abduction as Technocratic Reason: Two Cases

The limitations of abduction are illustrated in Novak's (2014) *Hitler and abductive logic: The strategy of a tyrant*. Novak provides a critique of the use of abductive logic by Germans to comprehend a series of puzzling historical events visited upon them after World War 1, including punitive reparations, hyperinflation and widespread immiseration. Abductivist reasoning, he contends, generated the (imaginative) 'hypothesis' that those bewildering developments resulted from an international conspiracy with Jews at its center. In turn, the credibility of that narrative, for which the population had been well 'prepared' (cf Saetre & Van de Ven, 2024), justified the Holocaust (Herf, 2006, esp. Ch 3). It is a chilling example of how 'through narration of a plausible story, abduction brings coherence and a future orientation to an indeterminate situation' (Golden-Biddle, 2020, p. 1954) - at least when the capacity to reflect critically on the mutual constitution of knowledge and power is weak or suppressed. If abductivist reasoning is not to depend upon, and reproduce, established background understandings when, ostensibly, bringing 'coherence and a future orientation to an indeterminate situation' (Golden-Biddle, 2020, p. 1954), then it must be challenged by critique.

Another example, closer to the world of business, is the perennial ‘issue at hand’ of how to address the mystery of an economy, or firm, burdened by multiple economic woes (e.g., low productivity, absenteeism, etc.). Abductivist reasoning might attribute these troubles to “inflexibilities” in working practices, resulting from collective action in the form of unionisation whose restriction or elimination then becomes the ‘end-in-view’ (Martela, 2015, p. 553). Critique of such reasoning draws attention to how, by generating such plausible hunches, abduction may lend legitimacy to techniques of persuasion (or propaganda) developed to suppress employee voice. It may, for example, commend “human relations” techniques to convince potentially recalcitrant employees of the fairness and/or economic necessity of their employer’s policies and practices. By exposing the politics, and challenging the ethics, of seemingly rational, HR interventions, critique may prompt and facilitate but, of course, cannot itself drive, collective resistance. By situating knowledge claims within relations of domination and exploitation, critique advances counter-narratives that, for example, valorise the rights and protections enabled by union organization and membership, thereby anticipating and potentially enabling a transformation of the non-democratic structures of work organization.

When subjected to critique, abduction is shown, like Feuerbach’s *Essence of Christianity* that was the target of Marx’s *Theses*, to perpetuate a naturalization of the present, and so buttress a restrictive identification of ‘ends-in-view’. Abduction in MOS has been associated with concern with ‘improving the conditions that enable individuals to thrive in their everyday lives’ (Rumens & Kelemen, 2013, p. 3). But its advocacy has not incorporated a challenge to the damaging consequences of Cartesianism that permeate the established order in the form of pathologies of possessive individualism (e.g. institutionalized narcissism) and an

ecologically destabilising framing of nature that treats is as an object of extraction, or sink of 'externalities'.

Defenders of abduction may object that the selection of 'issues at hand' and the 'ends-in-view' (Martela, 2015, p. 553) remains an 'open question', and that inquiry itself (e.g., into multiple economic woes) 'should be seen as a way to re-evaluate the value of the chosen ends' (Martela, 2015, p. 554). They may also insist that abduction is integral to '[a] pragmatist approach [that] fosters...the need to engage in discussion about which *purposes* are advanced and why' (Wicks & Freeman, 1998, p. 129, emphasis added). These suggestions are welcome. What, at best, remains opaque about abduction, however, is the basis for (re)selecting 'purposes' and 'ends-in-view', other than some imprecisely defined 'discussion', or a promise of 'new insights gained in the process of inquiry' (Martela, 2015, p. 555). When unmoored from emancipatory intent and decoupled from *praxis*, abduction is instrumentalized. 'Purposes' and 'ends' that are simply received are particularly vulnerable to technocratic or autocratic means of fulfilment.

Critique and Praxis

The limits of abduction can be further illuminated by considering its advocacy by Alvesson & Kärreman (2007, esp. pp. 1268-9) who commend 'problematization' that may be mistaken as a placeholder for critique. Upon inspection, their referencing of problematization is to the reflexive questioning of the epistemic adequacy of theory 'in relation to the [empirical] phenomena that it is supposed to explicate' (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007 pp. 1265-6). This questioning does not incorporate *praxis*. Problematization is a concept most closely associated with Foucault but Alvesson & Kärreman (2007) invoke it without reference to his

‘genealogy of problems or *problématiques*’ (Foucault, 1984c, p. 343; see also Koopman, 2003). The omission is significant because, for Foucault, ‘problematization’ is not just expressive of an ‘endeavour to...*think* differently’ (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011, p. 253, citing Foucault, 1985a, p. 9, emphasis added). It is also a call to *act* differently in ways that are potentially *transformative*, for example, by engaging in political activism, such as Foucault’s support of the human rights for prisoners or the Vietnam boat people (Foucault, 1971; 1981)¹⁶.

Exponents of critique embrace a *radical*, activist conception of problematization that does not restrict reflexivity to the ‘generation of new ideas’ (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007, p. 1279). As Marx argues in *Theses*, reflexivity is a necessary, yet insufficient, means of *changing the conditions* that currently impede the *enactment* of liberating ideas. Radical change is less a matter of ‘changing people’s consciousness – or what’s in their heads – than it is a matter of changing the political, economic, institutional *regime of the production of truth*’ (Foucault, 1984a, p. 74, emphasis added). Neopositivism, as exemplified by GM in MOS, is an example of a methodological ‘regime’ that reflects and reinforces the contemporary alienated confinement of consciousness. GM endeavours to capture what is taken to be social reality, as conveyed in ‘first order’ accounts, without regard for how ‘reality’ is stabilized through oppressive, asymmetrical relations of power. By default, a potent effect of the application of GM is the provision of ideological support for established power structures (e.g. Warner & Wäger, 2019).

Critique draws attention to how abductive reasoning, as exemplified by GM, accepts and affirms, rather than critically scrutinizes, the values of whatever ‘ends-in-view’ it serves. As Cornel West argues, abduction has a limited capacity to recognize and interrogate ‘the

operations of power within the personal, social, and historical contexts of human activities' (West, 1990, p. 1748). Only by expanding this capacity through critique that guides praxis is there the prospect of transforming the conditions that foster and preserve entrenched groupthink (e.g. about the value of GM). Scrutiny of abductive reasoning discloses how, even when the dissociation of facts and values is rejected, a politics of exclusion (of critique) is assumed and sustained¹⁷. At best, an 'engaged fallibilistic pluralism' may emerge that encourages 'dialogical encounter(s)' and enables a shared search 'for a common ground in which we can understand our differences' (Bernstein, 1991, p. 337). However, pragmatism and its progeny, abduction and GM, lack the capacity of critique to discern the material and institutional conditions that impede and restrict the dialogue commended by Bernstein. A preoccupation with what will work in the present circumstances displaces deliberation on, and enactment of, conditions that realize what is right.

Concluding Reflections

The proposed reframing of methodology has invoked the craft metaphor to explicate tacit yet also vital aspects of scientific knowledge production and communication. Excavation of the etymological origins of the craft trope has heightened awareness of the constitutive role of ethics and politics in the construction of MOS. To reframe methodology, critique has been advocated and illustrated by probing Gioia Methodology and abduction.

Critique acknowledges and discloses 'the importance of ethical practice at every stage of research' (Meskell & Pels, 2005, p. 24; see also Tsui, 2016, p. 5). It also recognizes how politics infuses processes of generating and warranting scientific knowledge claims.

Engagement of critique shows how the '*transport[ation of]* politics out of science' (Shapin & Schaffer, 1985, p. 342, cited in Shapin, 1992, p. 354, emphasis added; see also Thatcher,

2015) establishes a faux value-neutral normative order. Within this order, exemplified by neopositivism, an *ethics of dissociation* of facts and values is tacitly conjoined to a *politics of exclusion*.

Attending to the constitutive role of ethics and politics in scientific knowledge production is consistent with understanding that different forms of theorizing ‘come with distinct criteria for judging their contribution and “value”’ (Cornelissen Höllerer & Seidl, et al., 2021, p. 14). When no single criterion for evaluating scientific knowledge claims is universalized, diverse traditions are able to ‘have their place’ (Cornelissen Höllerer & Seidl, 2021, p. 14). In principle, pluralism acknowledges and respects diverse traditions of scientific inquiry. In practice, asymmetrical power relations condition the process of ascribing or denying credibility, and providing funding, to different research traditions. If exponents of the dominant, neopositivist order of scientific knowledge production ‘are already convinced that there is nothing important to be learned’ (Bernstein, 1991, p. 336) from other traditions, then pluralism is rhetorically alluring but substantively hollow.

Exposing this problem, and transforming the conditions that perpetuate it, is responsive to recent and recurrent worries expressed about how ‘little real innovation’ there has been in MOS in recent decades (Cornelissen & Durand, 2014, p. 995-6; see also Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013; Bamberger, 2020, esp. p. 241). The failing is attributed here to ‘the limits imposed upon us’ (Foucault, 2000, p. 319) by ‘taken-for granted ideologies’, including the value-neutrality ascribed to neopositivism, ‘that justify the status quo’ (Hibbert, Sillince & Diefenbach, 2014, p. 291). Diverse potential sources of innovation, including research inspired by variants of feminism, postcolonialism, poststructuralism, posthumanism, radical ecology, and so on, are routinely crowded out despite their capacity to address directly the

“strap” of recent Academy of Management Annual Meetings such as ‘Creating a Better World Together’ and ‘Putting the Worker Front and Center’.

Critique complements, and has the potential to recast, three more established MOS ‘themes’ of ‘care’, ‘courage’ and ‘curiosity’ (Howard-Grenville (2021, p. 3). Care directs scholarly attention to significant issues, such as ‘grand challenges’. Courage urges scholars to leave their methodological comfort zones. Curiosity invites researchers to address complexity and avoid reductionism. As a fourth ‘c’, critique, shares the craft-resonant value of devoting ‘*serious attention*, especially to the *details* of a situation or thing’ (Howard-Grenville, 2021, p. 9, emphasis added), such as the tacit ethics and politics of GM. This ‘seriousness’ has also included, in the present analysis, a close attentiveness to (the etymology of) craft as integral to knowledge production that recalls its deep connectedness to ethics and politics.

To *realize* the reframing of methodology as critique necessitates a fifth ‘c’: a change of conditions that currently impede its realization. In the context of mounting national and global crises, and activism around ‘grand challenges’, it is not inconceivable that increased pluralism increasingly will be practiced, not just espoused. In this scenario, the potency of critique is valorised, rather than maligned or ignored, and so contributes to a revival of innovation in MOS. Since power is relational, there is always a chance, however slim, of *praxis* that radically ‘recraft[s] our ways of theorizing’ (Howard-Grenville, 2021, p. 13). In this optimistic scenario, those who presently wield the ‘bigger stick[s]’ (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 127), and who determine what counts as “good” and “bad” scholarship (Bell & de Gama, 2019, p. 940), are progressively disarmed.

Finally, it is relevant to heed Foucault’s warning that ‘everything’ can be ‘dangerous’ (Foucault, 1984c, p. 343). Ostensibly enlightening, emancipatory knowledge is susceptible to degeneration into totalizing dogma (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1992). Proposed ‘solutions’ to

methodological ‘problems’ - including those advanced by critique - may spawn new, often unanticipated, troubles, including descent into unblinking certitude that is the nemesis of critique¹⁸. This conundrum cannot be cracked by damning or abandoning critique (Latour, 2004). Instead, recalling and renewing the radical, emancipatory ethos of the Enlightenment, the safeguarding of critique requires on-going questioning of how the reframing of methodology can facilitate the practical realization of that liberating ethos.

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Notes

¹ The terms ‘value-neutral’ and ‘value-free’ do not imply that the generation of scientific knowledge(s) excludes reliance upon *all* values as it necessarily incorporates the values that warrant what is construed as ‘science’.

² See online etymology dictionary: <http://etymonline.com/word/craft> [Accessed 1 January 2024]

³ It should not be assumed that a preparedness to welcome some ambiguity in constructs is incompatible with subscription to an ethics of dissociation. Suddaby (2010), for example, commends the value of ‘[s]ome degree of linguistic ambiguity [as] a useful component of any theoretical construct (Suddaby, 2010, p.348) before he declares that ‘[t]he challenge is to create constructs that ...are conceptually broad enough to *capture* the underlying *essence* of the phenomenon’ (Suddaby, 2010, p. 348, emphases added; see also Harley & Cornallisen, 2022, p. 256) -signaling a quest for disambiguated facts cleansed of their value-ladenness.

⁴ Engagement of Hirsch and Levin’s (1999) discussion of umbrella concepts does not endorse the view that ‘the dynamics arising from the debates between umbrella advocates (lumpers) and validity police (splitters) may help to keep the overall research system in a kind of equilibrium where neither extreme [of ‘openness’ and ‘discipline’] can achieve total victory over the other’ (Hirsch & Levin, 1999, p. 209). This claim presumes access to an (elusive) impartial vantage point for determining where ‘equilibrium’ lies.

⁵ See online etymology dictionary <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=science> [Accessed 1 January 2024].

⁶ In MOS, neopositivism is sometimes identified as, or conflated with, postpositivism (e.g., Gephart, 2004).

⁷https://scholar.google.co.uk/citations?view_op=view_citation&hl=en&user=bjYIwrIAAAAJ&citation_for_view=bjYIwrIAAAAJ:TQgYirikUcIC

⁸ The agencies included the court system, safety organizations, and the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA).

⁹ Before manufacturing the Pinto, Ford had identified the risk of fires resulting from the car’s deliberately low budget design. Executives required the production of a vehicle that could compete with other cheap sub-compact imports priced, in 1970, at around \$2000. The total cost of modifying the Pinto to correct the safety problems was estimated at \$113 million. This compared to projected compensation payouts for deaths and injuries attributed to the design of around \$49 million, a saving, or profit improvement, of more than \$60 million. The Pinto rolled out unmodified. During this era, the Pinto was not exceptional. It did not have a worse safety record than its direct competitors (Nader, 1965). See <https://www.motoringresearch.com/car-news/ford-pinto-the-eco-car-that-was-an-ethical-disaster/>.

¹⁰ ‘Facticity’ results from the ‘dialectical process’ of reality construction becoming solidified or reified (Berger & Pullberg (1965, p. 207).

¹¹ Apparently, there is no inkling that those ‘arrogant’ researchers may have principled, scientific objections to the ethics and politics of GM.

¹² It may be that GM can contribute to this endeavour but that outcome is serendipitous rather than intended. The meaning of ‘suspected’ in this quote is ambiguous. It could be framed within a perspective where truth claims are warranted by their declared correspondence to some facet of reality. Or it could be framed within a perspective where truth claims are justified in relation to the ethics and politics of the sensemaking of particular research traditions, or epistemic communities.

¹³ Providing an examination of the historical, political and cultural conditions of GM and abduction is outside the scope of the present analysis. It has, however, been noted that GM was devised in response to epistemic, political and institutional pressures impeding the publication of qualitative studies in top-tier management journals. Historically, abduction was a reaction to the comparatively closed nature of induction and deduction that marginalized the role of imagination and downplayed the communal and corrigible production of scientific knowledge. In this regard, abduction has contributed to a shift towards a more open-ended conception of science.

¹⁴ Superficially, this (pragmatist) position coincides with Marx’s *Theses* II and IV. Crucially, however, it omits the distinctive element of praxis. In this regard, the pragmatism of Peirce, Dewey, etc. and the neopragmatism of Rorty (1979) shades, by default, into a technocratic vision supportive of liberal democracy.

¹⁵ Saetre & Van de Ven (2021, p. 692) partially acknowledge the limits of abduction when referring to the dangers of ‘groupthink’ and ‘adopting perspectives of the majority’. But, instead of engaging critique to interrogate and reduce such ‘dysfunctional behaviour’, they commend ‘developmental feedback, a shared problem framework, trust and safety’, in addition to ‘diversity in both evaluation criteria and evaluators’ (Saetre

& Van de Ven, 2021, p.692). Such anodyne proposals for theory refinement lack a recognition of the relevance of (ideology) critique when seeking to expose and disrupt ‘groupthink’.

¹⁶ A consequence of downplaying or ignoring the connection between problematization and the possibility of emancipatory transformation (see Foucault, 1984b, p. 384) is that the meaning of reflexivity is confined to taking ‘greater interest in researcher reflexivity in dealing with the empirical material’ (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007, p.1268; see also Hibbert, Sillince & Diefenbach, 2014). For critique, in contrast, the value of reflexivity does not reside primarily in the ‘generation of new ideas’ (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007, p. 1279) as ends in themselves but, rather, as inspiration and guidance for *changing the conditions* that impede the generation and *enactment* of liberating ideas.

¹⁷ The ethico-political indifference at the heart of abductivist reasoning is congruent with Peirce’s opposition to the abolition of slavery and his hostility towards women’s struggles for equality (Talisie, 2004, pp. 21-22). While acknowledging the pitfalls of making *ad hominem* arguments, it is implausible completely to separate or abstract ideas from their authors. Peirce’s (reactionary) views are difficult to reconcile with the claim that his pragmatism was one of ‘revolution’ as well as creativity and imagination, and therefore that ‘Peirce was a critical theorist in his *own right*’ (Smith, 2015, p. 9). Peirce’s views on slavery and women’s rights rather deflate his claim to stand for “‘the very freeist of free thinking’” (in a letter from Peirce to Francis Russell cited by Smith, 2015, p. 25) unless, perhaps, the claim to ‘free thinking’ is aligned to a misogynistic and racist expression of intellectual libertarianism.

¹⁸ See Anker and Felski (2017) for a recent commentary on the limits of critique; also Latour (2019).