



Writing Politics

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If you must unite, Marx wrote to the party leaders, then enter into agreements to satisfy the practical aims of the movement, but do not allow any bargaining over principals, do not make theoretical ‘concessions’. This was Marx’s idea, and yet there are many among us who seek – in his name – to belittle the significance of theory! Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement. This idea cannot be insisted upon too strongly at a time when the fashionable preaching of opportunism goes hand in hand with an infatuation for the narrowest forms of practical activity. (V. I. Lenin, *What is to be Done?*)

What more can we say today about the relations between writing and politics? ‘The pen is mightier than the sword’ goes the old slogan, but is it mightier than the traditional forms of direct action, political protest and insistent recalcitrance? Further, what hopes can we have for protest and resistance without these being inscribed – in the first case inscribed in an already existing conjuncture that must be understood in all its complexity, but also inscribed in the sense that action must be mobilised through language, and its results and effectiveness communicated and criticised?

At a time at which the passing allusion – never mind the writings (or the politics) – to Lenin seems so easily dismissed out of hand, perhaps we should remind ourselves of what we can continue to learn from the traditions of progressive theory. Avoiding vague generalities, we are referring to Lenin’s insistence on the dual demands of concrete politics and abstract theory. For Lenin there is no attempt to grant absolute priority to one or the other, but equally there is no idea that we might reduce one to the other, a practice that so often amongst academics results in an idealism that sees the world changed by caressing a computer keyboard. For a critical theory, the dual demand of writing and politics remains inescapable, as is an insistence on the duality of this demand.

In various ways each of the papers in this issue open questions of writing, politics and their relations. Regular readers of *ephemera* will probably not be surprised to find a wide range of approaches to these issues and we will be the first to admit that the connections between confessional reflections on life without God, the future of the Left and of post-essentialist politics are not immediately obvious.

In the first two articles Carl Rhodes and Anthony O’Shea write in two columns, presenting a major, principally academic discourse in one column, and a second column running alongside and offering a reflection upon the discourse of the first. This doubling

commentary exposes the personal and, in contrast to the traditionally neutral and objective language of much academic writing, makes clear the implication of the writing subject in the text, and in O'Shea's hands it exposes the pretences of neutrality by offering an explicit and touching personal confession. Indeed, both of these papers are suspicious of the notion that the first, academic discourse is more 'objective'. They show how this discourse is the product of a set of received conventions that we in the social sciences have been trained to perceive and accept as objective. This opens up the question of whether a personal reflection is any more or less authentic than the discourse upon which it reflects. As (one of) Carl Rhodes concludes, "there is a reflexivity, which, while questioning textual authority, also reinforces it by trying to answer too many questions". Similarly, O'Shea suggests that his *confiteri* – a confession or declaration – is not an exposition of a 'subjective position' but rather an opening to difference. Both authors draw attention to the margins that are simultaneously excluded from and enframe dominant academic representations of organization. By using parallel streams, they also manage to bring the margins literally into the middle of their writing. In this small white margin that separates and joins the two discourses the politics of writing is made explicit, and the possibility of another politics of writing starts to take form.

There is more than one way of executing reflection, and more than one possibility for a politicised writing. Although Glen Whelan does not follow the same two-fold writing strategy as Rhodes and O'Shea, his article reflects on the specific locations of the production and reception of academic writing. Considering the reception of Pierre Bourdieu's critical analysis of television and the journalistic apparatus, Whelan draws attention to the disparity between the activity of Bourdieu's writing in relation to these two audiences, and in doing so clearly indicates the ways in which even the most intentionally political writing cannot entirely escape from disciplinary protocols. In the same way that Bourdieu claims that he founded the notion of field both with and against Weber, in his paper Whelan articulates a reading of Bourdieu that works both with and against Bourdieu. Hence he argues that Bourdieu's critique of television might be more effectively executed by taking Bourdieu's very concepts more seriously. Rather than propounding a vanguardism of theory, Whelan insists upon a recognition both of the complexities of the practice of theory and the need for theoretical reflection on practical politics.

In the context of a generalised suspicion toward journalistic writing, which is clearly evidenced in Bourdieu, we are happy in this issue to present an interview with George Monbiot. Both a journalist and activist, Monbiot discusses attempts by New Labour in the UK to surreptitiously privatise the public sector through schemes like the Private Finance Initiative. Opening the provision of public services to private finance, this scheme accepts without question the idea that the 'free market' is the universal basis for efficient economic organization. Monbiot's careful research into the realities of these schemes tells a rather different story – one of gross inefficiency and the squandering of public monies in what amounts to extortion or fraud. In the face of the increasing compromising of government by industry – for example Lord Sainsbury as UK science minister in charge of making decisions on the future of genetically modified crops and agriculture when his family partly owns one of the largest supermarket chains of the country – Monbiot considers the question of what might be done to resist this seemingly

endless incursion of the market into every aspect of our lives. Drawing lessons from recent protests against the globalization of capital and the possibilities of resistance through the media, Monbiot considers the importance of the mundane and day-to-day work of organization that needs to be at the centre of any attempt to resist these changes. Putting forward strategies for resistance to global capital, Monbiot raises important questions that we are here advancing as questions of organization – the organization and mobilisation of resistance and of alternatives to the increasingly undemocratic organization of liberal capitalist societies.

In his short intervention Tony Tinker offers a reflection on the broader significance of the Enron/Andersen debacle. As he clearly indicates, media coverage of this affair – where it is not conveniently diverted towards propagandising on the ‘war on terror’ – has fallen into an uncritical parody of personalised recrimination. With striking analogies to the current stage of global violence, the structural dynamics of accounting and auditing practices have been reduced to the work of a few bad eggs. If only we can seek and destroy those evil people, then global goodness will once again be reinstated, or so it would seem. But as Tinker insists, there is something less to do with psychological inadequacies and more to do with ritual practices that enable the possibility of the Enron/Andersen affair. It is then the responsibility of, amongst others, those who educate accountants, auditors and other occupants of contemporary organizations to recognise their silent complicity with this affair.

Each of the two reviews in this issue take up books that have had a significant impact in social and critical theory broadly, and bring these in relation to contemporary thinking about management and organization. Alessia Contu reviews the second edition of Laclau and Mouffe’s *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, which originally appeared in 1985 and was reprinted last year. She introduces the work of Laclau and Mouffe, a body of work that has been important in critical, Marxist and political theory for some years, to Organization Studies, a field that has been strangely uninterested in engaging with the possibilities of a post-essentialist and post-Marxist conception of the social and of theory. Introducing a work to Organization Studies nearly twenty years after its publication – what might we say about the margins of Organization Studies, and the omissions and silences that it more or less officially sanctions?

In the second review, Iain Munro discusses Hardt and Negri’s *Empire*, once again introducing and reflecting upon the importance of their arguments for Organization and Management Studies. Munro places the role of the academic at the heart of his analysis. Hardt and Negri point to the increasing centrality of immaterial labour in the (re)production of social organization and surplus value. Developing Foucault’s concept of biopower, they point to the ways in which the production of knowledge, emotion and social networks are increasingly dominating the forms of production, revolutionising in their wake the previously dominant forms of production: agriculture and manufacturing. As well as suggesting the need to reconceptualise the revolutionary subject as a multitude, based on difference rather than identity, Munro alerts us to the central role played by academic labour in this new regime of production. Rather than being able to take an external position to production, from which to reflect objectively and comment upon its logic, those reflections and commentaries are themselves part of the production of biopower, social organization and surplus value.

As Munro, and indeed all of the papers in this issue recognise, it is no longer enough for academics to take organization as an ‘object’ of analysis. To write on organization is, directly or indirectly, to effect social organization. If this point is taken to heart, it is surely crucial that academics, as part of the maintenance crew of the knowledge economy, reflect on what it is they are producing, and on the nature of the labour processes that they are engaged in. When we take into our hands the production of knowledge, both inscribed (as in this journal) and embodied (in students), we cannot avoid a responsibility for reflecting on our writing and our politics. As Lenin, Bourdieu and Whelan insist – if we can construct such a motley grouping – a recognition of the limits of current practices is a condition *sine qua non* of effective change. Recognising the limits of the current political economy of academic writing might remind us of basic questions of how and where, maybe most importantly, of *why* we write.