



## After Organization Studies

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Eradicate: 'to root out, destroy completely, get rid of' (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

### Fascinations

One sometimes wonders if there is something pathological in the mind of the child who, on finding a small dead animal by the side of the road cannot resist turning the corpse over (with a stick usually – children do know their limits) in order that they can better 'pick over' the remains. They uncover the rancid carcass, prod at the bits that are not totally decomposed, peer with intrigue at the maggots that wriggle through the dead body, eating out every last scrap of stinking meat and imagine what might have happened and what is still to come.

But then, a fascination with morbidity is not always a morbid fascination.

Here, as there, various authors walk along a trail and are fascinated by what they see and are tempted to 'pick over' the various parts of the corpus/corpse of organization studies. Figuring a possible death (if it hasn't already happened, that is) they toy with what has been organization studies. Not knowing if it is dead yet, or if anybody knows of this actual or immanent death, we have all the conditions of a perfect crime.<sup>1</sup>

Such childish 'toyings' with organization studies and what might come 'after' were where the idea for this volume began. The before of this particular after was a workshop 'after organization studies' held at Keele University in September 2001. Some of the papers in this edition were revised directly after this workshop, while others have come after the thoughts and discussions that it inspired. One of our starting points was the plurality of this word 'after'.<sup>2</sup>

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1 Jean Baudrillard (1996) *The Perfect Crime*, trans. Chris Turner. London: Verso.

2 On this, see Nicholas Royle (1995) *After Derrida*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, and Samuel Weber (1996) 'After deconstruction' and 'Upsetting the setup', in *Mass Mediauras: Form, Technics, Media*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

## First After

In the first, and most obvious sense, each of the papers in this issue is after organization studies in time, temporally 'later than', the classical region of what was known as 'organization studies'. In this sense, 'after' means later than, later in time, that is. Such a concept suggests something more modern, newer, (a post-OrganizationStudies?), which is such a painfully easy notion that it might even catch on. There is something ludicrously up-to-date about this kind of positioning. It's almost like reinforcing the cult of the new that was parodied in the editorial to issue 1(2). Almost.

But as with all that is fashionable (something in fashion is *à la mode*, as they say in Paris), there is always another mode (connected with, working alongside, or in the future). The idea that there might be something 'after' does speak of a fashionable newness, a keeping up with fashion. But it also speaks of a freshness, and it is perhaps more urgent than ever to encourage imaginative and creative talk of something that might come after today. And this is not for the simple and obvious reason that a slip of the button in a Texan ranch might mean that tomorrow won't come, but equally because of the almost complete impossibility, today, of even imagining a world that is radically different to the one that we currently inhabit.

A colleague of ours teaches a course on 'alternative forms of organization', and recently expressed her dismay at the inability of management students to recognise even the possibility that there might be different political and organizational arrangements than the ones that are with us at present. This is a lack of imagination, of course, but then we shouldn't think that imagination is something that happens only in our heads, and doesn't happen in our practices. These are the students who know, even before they arrive in Management 101, that it is good to be critical, to 'think outside the box'. But as is noted in a recent compendium of managerial wisdom, the best way to get into the habit of thinking outside the box is to make sure your box is very, very small.<sup>3</sup>

## Second After

If things are not going to change without our help, developing 'spontaneously', we clearly have in mind some kind of *active* relation to organization studies. In this sense 'after' also refers to a critical gesture, one of 'going after' organization studies, of looking what has taken place so far and threatening to take it apart, to shake its foundations. This is the grand project of more than a few today. We don't need to codify things here. We all know; we are sure. The future will not come without criticism.

(Probably.)

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3 Alistair Beaton (2001) *The Little Book of Management Bollocks: Why be Human when you could be a Manager?* London: Pocket Books.

### **Third After**

Still, and this is where things get tricky, we need to be careful and clear about the kind of criticism of organization studies we have in mind, and of what kind of space we are marking with the word ‘criticism’. Only in the most infantile utopian fantasies would we think that a criticism of organization studies would be achievable in the space of an issue of a journal, a volume of papers, the odd conference, or any combination of these.

Besides this we have the question of the stance that we wish to take in relation to organization studies. The ‘overall position’ of these papers (if it is possible to still talk like this) is one of *affirmation* of the possibilities of organization studies. In this sense our goal will not be to ‘end’ organization studies, even if we try to put ourselves in a position from which we might perceive the possibility of its closure.

This is one of the lessons that we can learn from the way that Heidegger, Derrida, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, amongst others, approach the philosophical tradition. They set out to think philosophy differently, to enable a different philosophical practice, but are aware that this cannot begin nor end from a position of exteriority to that tradition. So their effort is not to ‘end philosophy’ or to ‘abandon metaphysics’, but to rigorously re-examine the philosophical and metaphysical traditions, from a position that negotiates the space between inside and outside.

In this sense, a space ‘after organization studies’ would not destroy tradition in the name of an absolute break, but would embark on a project of persistently reconsidering (picking over) its past. This is not to uncritically repeat the past, or to accept what is currently known as organization studies. It is to stress that, in an era in which everyone wants to be a critical critic, we should not forget the project of continuation and development, one which ‘comes after’ and ‘follows on from’, even in the aftermath of organization studies.

### **Intervening, Overturning, Displacing, Liberating, Resisting (Binaries, Dualisms, Dichotomies...)**

All of this might seem a bit too abstract, too ‘theoretical’. So let’s try to illustrate what we’re saying by working with an example that is more concrete, more ‘empirical’. It would only be fair that we work with someone who has *already* gone after organization studies, someone with whom we would like to express a certain sympathy. In this going after, we take another step (does radicalisation involve anything more than taking one more step?) than is taken by this figure. Going after those who have gone after organization studies.

All examples are arbitrary, but let’s work with David Knights. So that we remain specific, we will focus on his comments on dualisms and binaries, in part because it is the issue of dualisms and dualistic thought that is the focus of the contributions of this issue, but also because of Knights’ work on dualisms.

Now, Knights doesn't like binaries. His position is clear – dualisms are a problem. Let us cite his work, in case we are mistaken, or in case we are accused of making assertions without evidence (such is a crime in some circles – but maybe not enough). Let Knights speak then: “organization studies would still appear to subscribe predominantly to a representational epistemology that reflects and reproduces dualistic forms of analysis”.<sup>4</sup> Further: “There are many reasons why dualistic forms of analysis in general be rejected”.<sup>5</sup> Or: “...a concern of this paper is to eradicate dualisms”.<sup>6</sup> So, Knights having set out his stall embarks on a project of “deconstructing dualistic discourse”.<sup>7</sup> Fair enough, perhaps, but what is meant by ‘deconstructing’? Let's be pedantic and cite once again. Knights writes, in the conclusion to one of his papers:

Recently, the absurdity of hierarchical or present/absent dichotomies has been recognized, but instead of dismantling the dualistic edifice, attempts have been made to reconcile the terms of the polarity by generating some kind of balance between them...Deconstruction theory, however, does not simply mean an overturning or a reconciliation of the presence/absence dichotomy, but their complete eradication.<sup>8</sup>

At the end of this sentence, after the word ‘eradication’, Knights adds a parenthesis, enclosing a citation to ‘(Derrida, 1982: 329)’. Let us look carefully at this citation, and what it implies. Let us pick it over. Knights cites a text by Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, in order to emphasise that deconstruction (and presumably Derrida) seeks the ‘eradication’ of binaries. Do we accept this? Do we have enough evidence? Our first problem is that the word ‘eradication’ does not appear on the page that is referred to (p. 329) by Knights’ citation. On that page we find many other words, including words such as: intervene, overturning, displacement, liberated and resisted. But not the word ‘eradication’ nor ‘eradicate’, nor much that looks to be similar to a logics of eradication.

Are we going after Knights too violently here? We certainly don't want to eradicate him, or all people. Going after, we go with him. But still, and here is the double bind, we need to work at this question of what it means to intervene, overturn, displace, liberate and resist (organization studies, for example).

To set it in stark terms, we just don't believe it when deconstruction is enrolled to do the kinds of things that Knights wants it to do. We are amazed, almost incredulous, if that word weren't now impossible to us. Surely, deconstruction will help Knights, but it will not be a handmaiden to the kind of death that he wants it to inflict. Too much violence, for example, when he concludes that “Derrida (1982) has declared that metaphysics is

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4 David Knights (1997) ‘Organization theory in the age of deconstruction: Dualism, gender and postmodernism revisited’, *Organization Studies*, 18(1): 1-19, citation from pp. 1-2.

5 *Ibid.* p. 3.

6 *Ibid.* p. 4.

7 David Knights (2001) ‘Hanging out the dirty washing: Labour process theory and its dualistic legacies’, *International Studies of Management and Organization*, 30(4): 68-84.

8 David Knights (1997), p. 16.

dead”.<sup>9</sup> But is this a fair citation? Note that he once again fails to mention the page of the *Margins of Philosophy* in which Derrida is alleged to this declaration. A simple mistake, or for the simple reason that we will not find it?

Violence of the end, then. How do we end something? If only we knew, our struggle would have come to completion some time ago. But of this we can be certain: if deconstruction is our ally, then it is not by providing another Hammer, but by fine-tuning our tools (lots of little hammers?). Perhaps it is something more to do with a re-imagining of the past and of our relation to the past, and in so doing, reconfiguring the possibilities of a practice today. This means that we are not in the space of eradication, but of remembrance. We are not out to destroy dualisms, but reconfiguring our relation to the parts of the past. A ‘doing dualism’, to be sure, but differently.

## Strategies of the After

This, then, and you will have to excuse us if we have taken a roundabout way of saying it, is what holds all of the papers in this issue together. Each paper represents an effort to pry open organization studies by posing the problem of one or more binary. In the process of prying, it takes a critical relation to the tradition that we have known as organization studies. Not to disband organization studies, and not with a morbid fascination. But with a promise that something different emerges, from refiguring the past. And each radical step that is taken, every effort that promises something ‘after’ is also put to the test. So the gains of Foucault, or of aesthetics as a clue to organizational life, to offer something new, are put to the test.

In the first paper in the issue, Peter Fleming delves into the issue of resistance, one of the key analytic, if not political, (re-)discoveries of contemporary organization studies. Focusing on Foucault, this outlines a historical sketch that positions Foucault’s framing of resistance in relation to recent continental thought. In doing so, Fleming stresses the traces of the past that are often ‘between the lines’ in Foucauldian accounts of resistance, whether this comes in the form of recourse to motifs of transgression, or to the themes of ethics, death and animality that were central to early formulations in this tradition, but largely silent in contemporary organization studies. Setting the scene for what might come after Foucauldian accounts of workplace resistance, he argues the importance of acknowledging the past by tracing the history of the study of resistance in the workplace, and in so doing demonstrates that contrary to the popular impression, intellectual stimulus of resistance studies should neither begin nor end with Foucault. Elaborating the historical traces that run through contemporary possibilities, Fleming’s paper is also dialectical in the way that it stresses the potential of what could be done with other thinkers of transgression, he indicates the risks of such an endeavour, and hence actively tries to neither simply embrace nor dismiss these thinkers. As such,

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9 David Knights (1997), p. 6; see also David Knights (2000) ‘Autonomy retentiveness! Problems and prospects for a post-humanist feminism’, *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 9(2): 173-185, in particular p. 182.

Fleming performs a subtle resistance in relation to intellectual fashions, a resistance that steps between established convention and the space after it.

While Fleming's concerns are largely 'theoretical', Emma Surman's paper is more directly 'empirical' (now there is a terrible binary, if ever there was one!). Drawing on empirical rather than historico-critical experience, Surman makes explicit the need for a dialectic view of dualisms. After researching the experiences of a group of teleworkers, Surman describes how a situation which is experienced as ambiguous leads to the conscious *reproduction* of a dualism. In order to cope with the loss of the geographical divide between home and work, the teleworkers consciously seek to symbolically maintain this division within their own homes. In order to engage with the experiences of these teleworkers, Surman argues that we need to work with the dualism, a position that flies in the face of suggestions that dualisms should be eradicated. By drawing attention to the mobilisation of this dualism for the purposes of resistance and subjective security, she suggests that we need to see both sides of the picture that is being painted 'for' and 'against' dualisms.

In the third paper in this issue, Samantha Warren discusses a set of methodological and epistemological difficulties presented with using photography to research the aesthetics of organizational life. She describes her own experience of researching the aesthetic experience of people within the web-site design department of a global IT firm, and offers a number of insights into adopting 'alternative' research methodologies. Most importantly, she cautions of the dangers and difficulties of this method, for example, identifying the risk that photographs invite positivistic treatment, having the appearance that they can provide a mirror to the outside world. Further, and relatedly, Warren indicates the temptation to set photographs outside and in opposition to the textual field of other inscriptions, and in inviting such a dualism fail to see the mutual inter-relations of photographs and inscription in general. Hence we have another movement that looks forward and out, but insists on a continual methodological and epistemological reflection and on a recognition of past debates in order to imagine the future.

In a note from the field that threatens the boundaries between simple divisions between theoretical, empirical and methodological writing, Bevan Catley, Shayne Grice and Sara Walton discuss community and national reaction to the planned closure of a 'local' brewery in New Zealand. They highlight the complexities of a situation in which the battle lines can not simply be drawn between the global and the local, and in which resistance cannot be thought of in terms of distance. At one level they outline a simple case, but at another level stress the risks (and the benefits) of thinking historically. Hence their analysis of the complexities and ambiguities of the 'Monteith's Affair', while clearly grounded in a tradition of critical thought, also poses problems to the melancholia of those who would seek simple solutions or strategies in the struggle with globalisation.

In the first of the two book reviews Ferguson looks at *Marketing and Social Construction: Exploring the Rhetorics of Managed Consumption* by Chris Hackley. In her review, Ferguson performs all of the senses of 'after' that we spoke of above. She embraces the possibility that social construction may move marketing theory beyond its current impoverished state, and therefore works with Hackley's movement. But she

shows the way that, at the same time that he calls these disciplinary divides into question, he is unable to move beyond their reproduction and perpetuation. In a combination of measured and polemical vitriol, she tests this after, explores its politics, and offers some other headings we might go after.

Paul du Gay and Michael Pryke's edited collection *Cultural Economy*, which is reviewed here by Gavin Jack, explicitly sets out to move beyond a dualism of culture and economy. The goal of this book continues in the spirit that we here both extend and call into question – moving beyond the dualism of culture and economy. While praising the many positives of the book, Jack highlights a methodological shortcoming. The concern of many of the authors in this edited collection to move beyond the binary results, he notes, is in a focus on intellectual inquiry and a neglect of empirical material. Without the voice of human subjects he is left feeling that the usefulness of dualism is not fully explored. Jack ends with a suggestion which reinforces the stance taken by many other contributors to this issue, that a more fruitful way to go 'after' this field would be to revisit seminal texts.

So, there they are. We've said enough, and at this rate we might invite the impression that what follows is a coherent project, or that these authors are simply following the machinery of a new dogmatism. This is probably the risk that critical thought always runs. But perhaps we might better equip ourselves for the future when we are informed by the past. So our project 'after organization studies' bears the mark of a strange form of traditionalism. We want more evidence, more careful theory, more empirics, better histories, better method. But strangely, maybe, none of this is sought in the name of melancholy, but in the name of an alternative future. Who us? Radicals? No, just children who came across a dead animal by the side of the road. Perhaps a project of 'after organisation studies' has to keep with the tradition of remembering the dead animals, in order to become a different animality.