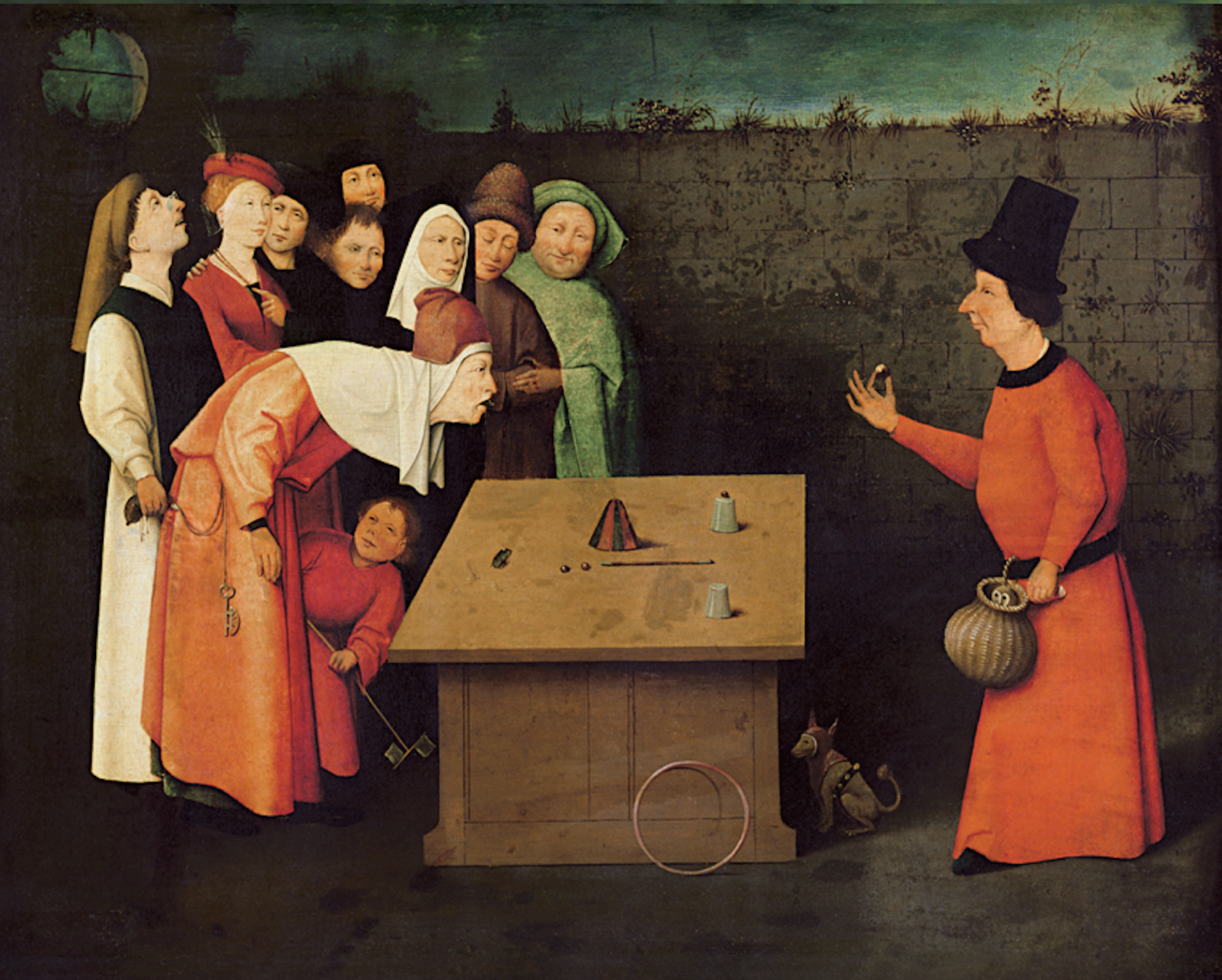
ephemera: theory & politics in organization



Open secrets

What is *ephemera: theory & politics in organization*?

ephemera is an independent journal, founded in 2001. *ephemera* provides its content free of charge, and charges its readers only with free thought.

theory

ephemera encourages contributions that explicitly engage with theoretical and conceptual understandings of organizational issues, organizational processes and organizational life. This does not preclude empirical studies or commentaries on contemporary issues, but such contributions consider how theory and practice intersect in these cases. We especially publish articles that apply or develop theoretical insights that are not part of the established canon of organization studies. e*phemera* counters the current hegemonization of social theory and operates at the borders of organization studies in that it continuously seeks to question what organization studies is and what it can become.

politics

ephemera encourages the amplification of the political problematics of organization within academic debate, which today is being actively de-politized by the current organization of thought within and without universities and business schools. We welcome papers that engage the political in a variety of ways as required by the organizational forms being interrogated in a given instance.

organization

Articles published in *ephemera* are concerned with theoretical and political aspects of organizations, organization and organizing. We refrain from imposing a narrow definition of organization, which would unnecessarily halt debate. Eager to avoid the charge of 'anything goes' however, we do invite our authors to state how their contributions connect to questions of organization and organizing, both theoretical and practical.

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Open secrets

Rowland Curtis and Kenneth Weir

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Open secrets

Rowland Curtis and Kenneth Weir

Introduction

In the days preceding the final preparations of this *open issue*, something happened. On 3 April 2016, details concerning Panamanian law firm Mossack Fonseca and its client list were leaked via several journalists and global news services, centring on the firm's documented role in providing offshore incorporation and wealth management services to a number of high profile clients. Journalists at the *Washington Post*, *Fox News*, *The Guardian* and elsewhere, were quick to label this as a scandal, with *Washington Post* claiming it as 'the biggest global corruption scandal in history' (Drezner, 2016). Hyperbole aside, this development was intriguing, particularly as the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) anticipated an imminent full release of the companies involved in the alleged tax evasion and money laundering schemes developed for clients. These events, and other stories like this, highlight the secrecy and opacity of corporate arrangements, as identified by the first of no doubt many organisational theorists to comment on the breaking story.[1]

The last issue of *ephemera* opened by posing questions regarding the corporate form and its regulation (Jansson et al., 2016). It includes a focus on how intersections between economic, political and legal practices and institutions have shaped the nature and purpose of the corporation. Through a study of these intersections, the issue explores how regulatory mechanisms and codes have shaped the specific ways in which corporations are publicly judged. With regard to questions of transparency and openness, such mechanisms have shaped

1 Interview with Professor Carl Rhodes, available at: http://www.2ser.com/component/k2/item/21540-the-panama-paper-trail, last accessed 5th April 2016.

channels of public communication in ways that, while enabling claims as to the transparency of their operations, have also served to screen off public attention from some of the murkier realities of corporate life.

A multiplicity of power relations operate through organisational features such as agent-principal privilege and the production of an expert technical class (see Jansson *et al.*, 2016; Levina and Orlikowski, 2009). These combine to facilitate the production and disclosure of public information while important processes and their outcomes are placed backstage (Costas and Grey, 2014; Power, 2004). The partial disclosure of activities or information can provide the appearance of transparency in meeting particular legal obligations, while also conferring a privilege to organisations that limits further disclosure of information. Studies of corporate disclosure testify to this, as narratives of corporate impact on the environment are twisted into statements of self-congratulation, publicised largely in pursuit of economic benefit (e.g. Gray, 2006). Environmental impact disclosures thereby create a duality of transparency-secrecy, sustaining the primacy of commercial imperative while shielding organisational interests from further public scrutiny. Changes in legislation have also afforded additional protections to compliant organisations (Levina and Orlikowski, 2009), reinforcing a legal environment that continues to uphold significant degrees of organisational privacy (Costas and Grey, 2016).

Leak events, such as those of the files of Mossack Fonseca, are largely received as disruptions to the normal order of retention and disclosure of information, providing insights into the mundane operation of organisational secrecy. In a recent interview on the subject, however, Yanis Varoufakis, Economics Professor and former Greek Minister of Finance, was equivocal:

> Well firstly I am exceptionally pleased that there are many of those who have enjoyed, not so much tax avoidance but tax immunity, who are having sleepless nights; this is a wonderful whiff of transparency. Even though it may be short-lived, it fills me with joy; but at the same time it fills me with worry, that we are focussing too much on a fake sense of surprise; the only thing that is surprising is that we get surprised by this.[2]

In these terms, the leak event is, on the one hand, something that might be celebrated by those concerned with tax justice; on the other, something which can sensitise us to a certain inertia and complicity with the mundane order of things. For Varoufakis, we might interpret, the sense of surprise is 'fake' to the extent that knowledge of offshore banking and tax avoidance mechanisms has

2 Channel 4 News, 4th April 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gZjqicN8Zug, visited 12th May 2016.

been in the public domain for some time. We may be talking about corporate secrets, but in this sense we are talking about open secrets – known unknowns we might say, in Rumsfeldian terms – and thereby an operation in secrecy in which we might all, to some extent, be complicit. Activities of leaking and whistleblowing, furthermore, are also rarely innocent with regard to the play of political interests, and can just as easily serve the reproduction of privilege and inequality as help reduce it.

With regard to management and organisation studies, in our empirical research we regularly make appeals for 'access' to organisational sites and informational sources. Critical studies of organisation have often been in harmony with transparency campaigners in an implicit project to help make visible that which has previously been hidden or rendered obscure in organisational life (see Alvesson *et al.*, 2009 for a review). In these ways, scholars of organisation can be seen to have reinforced certain ideals regarding transparency and disclosure, but in so doing some may have neglected a sensitivity to the way in which secrecy and disclosure always work in a binary way: in both foregrounding and backgrounding, and in promoting always partial and provisional ways of seeing in organisational life (see Neyland, 2007; Law and Mol, 1998). We are thereby led to a reckoning with the tinge of injustice that attends our representational endeavours, as we reinforce what are always contingent accounts and perspectival truths. Full disclosure therefore as an ever retreating, mythical horizon.

The visible and invisible

While drawing on a range of distinctive subject matter and contexts, such themes of openness, closure, and the intertwining of the visible and the invisible run through this 'open' issue. These can be seen perhaps most directly in the article 'A vanishing act: The magical technologies of invisibility in care work' by La Cour *et al.* (this issue). It explores how those providing home care service to elderly citizens in Denmark have adapted to the introduction in 2005 of a personal digital assistant (PDA) in the monitoring and managerial oversight of their work. While the goal of introducing the PDA was to increase the transparency of service provision at the point of care, in practice its introduction had the effect of enabling care workers to shape and bend what is recorded in official records, such as the time taken between particular jobs and locations. The article explores the complex interactions of levels of representation-and-reality in the interactions of government care workers with both patients and practices of official record keeping. While the PDA was introduced with the intention of rendering the movements of workers more transparent, the PDA instead often became a tool for care workers to engineer degrees of autonomy and creativity in their working lives – degrees of autonomy seen by the workers as essential for achieving the high levels of patient care the PDAs were originally introduced to support.

The PDA meanwhile is viewed by the authors not as a neutral tool, but as something imbued with a 'magic' that lends legitimacy and primacy to its representations of organisational reality. This stems from their application of Bourdieu's (1991) work on the concept of the skeptron – a technology bubbling with social and symbolic capital that delegates power to the speaker. For the authors, the state-sponsored use of the PDA ascribed it a measure of symbolic capital and legitimacy, and the PDA's vision of the world increasingly 'gained a monopoly on what counts as real' in the workplace. Technology here is bound up with relations of power that are productive of authoritative accounts of organisational worlds, yet which also provide degrees of invisibility and autonomy to workers acting on the ground.

Openness and closure

Where the La Cour et al. article offers some illuminating reflections on questions of visibility and invisibility, the articles by Maestripieri (this issue), Almqvist (this issue) and Rodin (this issue) can be seen to share related themes of openness and closure by reference to some very different contexts of organisational life. In the article 'Professionalization at work: The case of Italian management consultants', Lara Maestripieri draws upon the case of Arianna, a management consultant, to examine struggles for professional accreditation and identification among contemporary knowledge workers. For Maestripieri, management consultants face many contemporary challenges, brought about not only by changes in the nature and composition of the workforce but also by the weakening of professional organisations and affiliations. Such knowledge workers are thereby seen to oscillate between positions of informal recognition and social acknowledgement, but as generally lacking the visibility of a defined professional status – as explored here in the context of changes in Italian labour markets. The experiences of Arianna are thereby drawn upon to explore the challenges faced by knowledge workers in seeking to consolidate and legitimise their professional status. Instead of judging such phenomena according to what Maestripieri describes as more traditional Weberian accounts of professionalisation entailing worker strategies for professional closure, through the example of Arianna, contemporary questions of professionalisation are reposed according to combinations of reputational, performative and relational elements. Maestripieri thereby offers a reconception of professionalisation according to ideals of more fluid market principles and contingent networks.

Where Maestripieri explores themes of openness and closure through the increasingly mobile and contested nature of professionalisation in Italian business services, Martin Fredriksson Almqvist (this issue) explores similar themes through reflections on the Pirate Party phenomenon as a set of organised interventions into the politics of openness and closure in the digital domain. As explained by Almqvist in the article 'Pirate politics between protest movement and the parliament', the Pirate Party is a global network of political parties concerned to challenge parliamentary actions perceived by activists as impinging upon the freedom of information in the digital age. Reviewing developments in social and digital protest movements, Almqvist begins by questioning how a decentred movement came to take more conventional party-political forms. Building upon work by Ulrich Beck (1997) and Maria Bakardijeva (2009), this is theorised in the article as sitting in tension with the parties' earlier 'sub-political' or 'sub-activist' lines of association. Through interviews with members of Pirate Parties located in Sweden, Germany and the US, Almqvist provides an analysis of how activists have come to terms with the Pirate Party as a parliamentary political formation. With regard to themes of openness and closure, Almqvist's paper explores the divide that emerged between those seeking to further the aims of the political movement through the political party, and those who sought to do so through supposedly more disruptive 'sub-political' associations. By situating the Swedish example in the context of experiences from Pirate Parties further afield, Almqvist is able to explore the tensions and harmonies between these different political strategies and the different openings and closures that they have entailed for those involved.

In the article '"Developmental talk" as confession: The role of trade unions in workplace governance', Lika Rodin (this issue) also offers an example from the Swedish context, but rather than looking at party political activism, she instead focuses on trade unions and their changing roles in the contemporary workplace. While Swedish trade unions have been adjusting to a period of economic deregulation, Rodin examines the role of trade unions as a force of change in opening up workplace subjectivities to new managerial styles and the promotion of an enterprise ethos. In the Swedish context, trade unions have traditionally been associated with a social democratic outlook that promoted notions of solidarity between employer and employee in workplace relations. As documented in Rodin's account, Swedish trade unions have been at the centre of such changes, shifting away from social democratic norms towards more direct modes of managerial intervention. Such trade unions, for Rodin, are increasingly informed by neoliberal ideals of a market-oriented individualisation, inhabiting a space through which neoliberal logic and ideology is promulgated into contemporary Swedish working life.

The focus Rodin takes to explore such transformations is with regard to performance appraisal interviews known as 'developmental talks', but which are conducted by trade union representatives rather than line managers. Rodin offers an analysis of a developmental talk training video through a Foucaultian framework: workers' participation in such confessional practices are seen to involve a project of self-transformation, as part of projects to adapt workers to the entrepreneurial demands of the neoliberal workplace. The article thereby draws attention to the role of trade unions in the workplace in the embedding of new forms of marketised subjectivity. With regard to the themes of openness and closure running through this issue, by contrast to the supposed openness of these developmental discussions, they can also be seen to entail particular closures in workplace subjectivity. Through a discourse analytic approach meanwhile, Rodin is also keen to explore the potential openings that such discursive practices may also afford as the basis for new forms of resistance to the competitive individualism of enterprise culture.

Circuits of imitation and distinction

Having traced themes of openness and closure, visibility and invisibility running through these diverse articles, two further contributions extend these earlier themes with regard to the operation of a certain duplicity or presentational sleight of hand in management knowledge. Simon Lilley and Martin Parker (this issue), in their article 'Management knowledge in the mirror: Scholarship, fashion and Simmel', offer commentary on the study of management fashion in the field – in particular the work of Timothy Clark and colleagues (e.g. Clark, 2004; Clark and Greatbatch, 2004). In noting the largely ceremonial referencing of writers on fashion from beyond the field – such as Simmel, Veblen and Tarde – they offer their own engagements with these authors to develop an understanding of fashion and the fashionable as intrinsic to the workings of sociological phenomena rather than as superficial distraction. Through this perspective, they explore how certain authors writing on management fashion in the field have taken (fashionable) interest in fashions in management knowledge, while also displaying certain anxieties concerning the drawing of lines between the authentic and inauthentic in management knowledge.

The authors' review of literature on fashion in the field thereby becomes an opportunity for a set of reflections on the nature of academic fashions, and a reckoning with the inevitability of our own embeddedness in 'circuits of imitation and distinction'. With regard to themes of openness and closure, visibility and invisibility, we might say that certain commentaries on management fashion have required the careful 'dressing up' of their arguments in concealing the central ironies at play in the pursuit of unblemished objectivity or utility. Lines drawn between the substantive and the merely fashionable may therefore be harder to sustain than some in the field may have liked to suggest. As the authors put it, once fashion is admitted, we all need to look in the mirror more attentively.

It is this very irony of management knowledge that is also manifested in the note by Nick Butler (this issue), offering a reflection on Alvesson and Spicer's (2012) introduction of the term 'functional stupidity' into the lexicon of management scholarship. Butler delivers a critique of the authors' contribution, set in the context of debates on the 'impact' of management research beyond the business school. In considering the broader reception of Alvesson and Spicer's article, Butler suggests a divide in purpose in the article. Whilst produced for both academic and practical audiences, for Butler ambiguities and inconsistencies in Alvesson and Spicer's notion of 'functional stupidity' suggest tensions between scholarly rigour and popular reception that prompt further reflection on the 'impact' and value of academic knowledge.

To place this alongside Lilley and Parker's reflections on fashions in management scholarship, both articles seek to engage particular academic literatures as an occasion for wider reflection on the nature of our scholarly practice. Where Lilley and Parker provoke a reckoning with the inseparability of our practice from phenomena of imitation and differentiation, Butler's note questions the stakes of a striving for fashionability, both within and beyond the business school. It is in rendering visible these tensions and contradictions that the two contributions resonate with themes running through the wider open issue, with regard not only to the openness and closure of academic debate, but also to what might be both backgrounded and foregrounded in our engagements in organisational life.

Book reviews

The four book reviews that complete this open issue offer evaluations of recently published treatises on organisational scholarship and contemporary capitalism. In brief, Frost's review of Jessica Whyte's *Catastrophe and redemption: The political thought of Giorgio Agamben*, considers the redemptive element of Agamben's work, covering his work on biopolitics, human rights and contemporary commodity culture. Mary Phillips next considers the power and poetry of poetic writing in Pitsis' *The poetic organization*. Ann-Christina Lange reviews Max Haiven's analysis of financialisation presented in *Cultures of financialization*, praising Haiven's contribution to contemporary theorising on both finance capitalism and financialisation. Complementing this is Roscoe's examination of Martijn Koning's *The emotional logic of capitalism*, which details how financial capitalism, in spite of recent economic failures, continues to maintain an affective hold.

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Management knowledge in the mirror: Scholarship, fashion and Simmel

Simon Lilley and Martin Parker

abstract

This paper explores the use of the concept of fashion in arguments about management knowledge, using the popularity of that literature during the 2000s as a case study. In order to do this, it will move through a series of linked arguments. First, that research on 'management fashions' has become fashionable, and that this has provided a topic for academics to write about. Second, that research on 'management fashions' appears to only ceremonially cite earlier work on fashion from outside the management disciplines, such as that by Simmel. Third, that this means that much research on management fashions appears to adopt an attitude which insulates its own judgements about what is mere fashion and what is well grounded science from a wider understanding of the role of fashion in social affairs more generally. We conclude by suggesting that once questions of fashionability are admitted into management epistemology, all practices and distinctions become necessarily understood in terms of imitation, including the ones in this article.

Introduction

> ...fashion lives only in a perpetual round of giddy imitation and restless vanity. To be old fashioned is the greatest crime a coat or hat can be guilty of. To look like nobody else is a sufficiently mortifying reflection; to be in danger of being mistaken for one of the rabble is worse. Fashion constantly begins and ends in the two things it abhors most, singularity and vulgarity. (Hazlitt 1991: 148)

Consider this scene, from the 2006 film *The Devil Wears Prada*[1]. It is an exchange between a dowdy new employee, Andy Sachs - a wannabe journalist who believes herself to be unaffected by the unimportant fripperies of high fashion - and Miranda Priestly - *Runway* magazine's editor. They are in the middle of a discussion about a possible feature on 'The New Skirt' with a group of fashionistas at the time that the exchange takes place. Miranda and some assistants are deciding between two similar belts for an outfit. Andy sniggers because she thinks they look exactly the same.

> Miranda Priestly: Something funny?
>
> Andy Sachs: No. No, no. Nothing's... You know, it's just that both those belts look exactly the same to me. You know, I'm still learning about all this stuff and, uh...
>
> Miranda Priestly: 'This... stuff'? Oh. Okay. I see. You think this has nothing to do with you. You go to your closet and you select... I don't know... that lumpy blue sweater, for instance because you're trying to tell the world that you take yourself too seriously to care about what you put on your back. But what you don't know is that that sweater is not just blue, it's not turquoise. It's not lapis. It's actually cerulean. And you're also blithely unaware of the fact that in 2002, Oscar de la Renta did a collection of cerulean gowns. And then I think it was Yves Saint Laurent... wasn't it who showed cerulean military jackets? I think we need a jacket here. And then cerulean quickly showed up in the collections of eight different designers. And then it, uh, filtered down through the department stores and then trickled on down into some tragic Casual Corner where you, no doubt, fished it out of some clearance bin. However, that blue represents millions of dollars and countless jobs and it's sort of comical how you think that you've made a choice that exempts you from the fashion industry when, in fact, you're wearing the sweater that was selected for you by the people in this room from a pile of stuff. 2

The etymology of the word 'fashion' comes from the latin *facere*, to make or do. It is in this sense that we want to ask how one part of management knowledge has been made. That is to say, how has the domain of 'management fashion' been established, and what are its assumptions and limits? It is clear that in recent years there has been a growing interest in the notion that management ideas and techniques are subject to swings in fashion in a similar manner to clothing styles and music tastes. Timothy Clark has suggested that there have been a number of issues raised by the importance of management fashion as an area of research, and we cite two of them below.

> Second, some commentators have highlighted the need to explain and understand a puzzling paradox. Managers' enthusiasm for unproven conjecture continues unabated despite critical exposés in the popular press and academic research

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1 Thanks to the editor and referees for their comments on earlier versions of this paper.

2 http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0458352/quotes, consulted 24th February 2011.

> indicating that management ideas and techniques proclaimed as 'new' and 'revolutionary' do not deliver what they promise and indeed can do more harm than good (e.g. Carson et al., 2000; Clark and Salaman, 1998).
>
> Third, management fashion is seen as a potential threat to the role of academics in that 'scholars might lose ground and their traditional authoritative role over management knowledge might further diminish' (Abrahamson and Eisenman, 2001: 68). (2001: 1650-1)

This paper will explore the use of the concept of fashion in arguments about management knowledge, using the expansion of this literature during the 2000s as a kind of 'case study'. We are particularly interested in Clark's third conjecture, and the problems it suggests for academics in addressing his second one. It is clear enough that fashion has provided an useful subject matter for academics to write about but, oddly, the research on 'management fashions' appears to only ceremonially cite earlier work on fashion from outside the management disciplines, such as that by Simmel, as well as Veblen and Bell (or, for that matter, Tarde, Barthes, Benjamin, Bourdieu, Rancière and so on). We will suggest that this implies that much research on management fashions appears to insulate its own judgements about what is mere fashion and what is well-grounded science from a wider understanding of the role of fashion in social affairs more generally. In other words, there is a clear tension between Clark's second and third points because if we look at contemporary writings on management fashion through the work of Simmel, it becomes clear that there is no safe place to stand in order to condemn the tastes of others whilst also simultaneously claiming that your preferences are based on impartial judgements. And that, as we will show later, includes this paper too, with its implicit claim that we are better scholars than others, because we have read Simmel and are not merely citing 'ceremonially'. As Miranda Priestly understands, once questions of fashionability are admitted into questions of judgement, all our practices become embedded in circuits of imitation and distinction.

A fashion for fashion

First, we need to briefly understand something about the nature of the academic debates about management fashion. In an important contribution, Clark clears ground in the following terms:

> ...research on management fashions centres on attempts to explain managers' enthusiasm for ideas whose truth claims are characterized as fundamentally flawed. ... This paper is not concerned with a critical examination of such claims about the nature of fashionable knowledge... Rather, its focus is on identifying a number of shortcomings with respect to empirical analyses of fashion cycles and

> the general focus of the extant management fashion literature. Three issues are discussed: (1) the (over)use of citation analysis; (2) the focus on the dissemination/broadcasting phase of the fashion cycle; and (3) the incorporation of ideas into different domains within the management fashion-setting community. (2004: 298)

The problems with the fashion literature suggested by Clark are indeed worthy of addressing, but as Swan carefully shows in her response to his paper, there is a contradiction in Clark's argument here. He indicts research on management fashion for its fashionableness by utilising precisely the same sort of 'linear view of the production of management knowledge' (Swan, 2004: 310) that he sees as problematic in the objects of his critique. For example, he claims that the 'growing level of activity in this area is evidenced by the proliferation of conference papers, published articles, books and the publication of Special Issues on Management Fashion in the *Journal of Management History* (1999) and *Organization* (2001)' (Clark, 2004: 298). Yet on the next page he claims that the 'tendency in the literature to assume that there is a symbiotic relationship between the pattern in the volume of discourse and the trends in the adoption and rejection of ideas by organizations… is rather like conducting an analysis of the clothing featured in advertisements in fashion magazines, such as *Vogue* or *Harper's & Queen*, in order to determine what the average person is wearing'. He supports his point with a footnote to Kroeber's study of 'illustrations of dresses in a number of leading fashion magazines between 1844 and 1914', noting Kroeber's admission 'that "a knowledge of the course followed by ideals of dress", while valuable in itself, did not reflect trends in "real dress" because "the actual wear of average men and women lags somewhat ineffectually behind the incisive styles of models or pictures' (1919: 238).

Kroeber and Clark are right, in the sense that we can't read off the everyday from the catwalk, but this does not mean that they are unrelated. Indeed, the very logic of fashion requires that there is some relation (Kawamura, 2004; Craciun, 2013; Corner, 2014). What Clark seems to be avoiding here is the idea that what management academics cite and what managers actually do might *both* have some relation to fashion. Just as Andy Sachs wishes to assert that her choices about belts are hers, so does Clark wish to suggest that the froth of citations should not be mistaken for actual decisions about what is to be done in actual organizations, or indeed the research agendas of proper academics who are capable of understanding that a particular fashion is 'fundamentally flawed'. He is certainly right in pointing to the difference between different forms of data, but it might be misleading to then go on to suggest that fashion is somehow less important in some domains, and of course that some choices about what to write about are not influenced by questions of fashion. The distinction between appearance and essence which Clark deploys here relies on a division which a more generalized understanding of fashion necessarily erodes. Once fashion is admitted, we all need to look in the mirror more attentively.

Pseudoevents and synthetic products

In another example of this sort of logic, Clark and Greatbatch (2004) report an interesting study of the production process of 'best-selling management books' that entailed conducting repeated lengthy, semi-structured interviews with a number of the authors, book editors, editor/publishers and ghost-writers of six exemplars of the genre identified. The study was well conducted and such backstage accounts of the production process of managerial texts are undoubtedly rare. However, what really intrigues us about the piece is the section on 'Fashion as Image-Spectacle'. It follows a recapitulation of an account of research on fashionable management ideas and then moves on to a very promising line of argument concerning the deployment of the notion of fashion in such literature. They begin by noting that the management fashion literature tends to be uninformed by broader discussions about similar social phenomena or theories of aesthetics.

> Management fashion is regarded as a special case requiring new theory and explanation. For example, in the most cited article on the topic, Abrahamson (1996 ... , p. 255) has argued that in contrast to the beauty of aesthetic fashion, management techniques must appear rational and progressive and are shaped by technical and economic forces in additional to sociopsychological forces. Consequently, theories of aesthetic fashions are deemed inappropriate. ... We wish to build on this latter point by arguing that management and aesthetic fashions both express and exemplify broader social trends to which they are inextricably linked. In this sense they are not different forms of fashion. (Clark and Greatbatch, 2004: 402-3, our emphasis)

However, instead of turning to a huge literature theorising fashion as a general social process (such as Tarde, 1890/1903; Veblen, 1899/1994, 1934; Simmel, 1904/1957; Bell, 1948 and so on) the paper turns instead to the work of Boorstin (1961/1992) and Debord (1967) on the 'Image' and 'Spectacle', respectively – primarily as interpreted by Best and Kellner (1997; 2000). This appears to reflect Clark and Greatbatch's tendency to situate contemporary fashion as distinctively modern, a reflection of 'broader social developments with respect to communication' and the 'pre-eminence of the image' (2004: 398). We think that this is misleading, in part because it allows the contemporary to be understood as constituted by fashion, whilst the past and certain academic practices can be putatively insulated from such developments. Bell (1948), for example, is at pains to trace aspects of his account of the development of human finery to at least the medieval period, Tarde (1890/1903) asserts the presence of fashion in antiquity, and Simmel (1904) repeatedly evokes the ways in which the relatively timeless practices of certain 'primitive' (*sic*) societies can be grasped through the notion of fashion. Fashion, all these authors suggest, has always been with us.

The distinctiveness and the continuities of fashion are hence lost in Clark and Greatbatch's argument, but just as puzzling is their classification of knowledge. They suggest that modern circumstances are constituted by 'pseudoevents and synthetic products' which build upon one another 'so that we can no longer assume the image we consume bears a direct relationship to an original' (2004: 398). They then single out fashionable management texts as exemplary of these processes. However, despite asserting these general truths about the (post)modern world, they are then deployed as a contrast to other products and processes which (still) bear 'utility' (*ibid*.: 410) and authenticity (*ibid*.: 419). The problematic nature of this move is most clearly revealed in assertions such as 'some of the books upon which a number of recent management fashions are founded are pseudoforms in that they are manufactured coproductions' (*ibid*.: 419-20). Some processes and products are synthetic while others are authentic. Just how this distinction is made is considered in a footnote.

> We recognize that this article also forms a coproduction in that prior to its publication we received and responded to the constructive feedback from three referees. These comments have affected the development of the article. However, where this process differs is that we were responsible for the subsequent amendments and overall authorship of the article. (ibid.: 421)

Clark and Greatbatch are interested in fashion, but worry that fashion is corrosive and fake. In order to construct a platform to say this, they used some references to postmodern ideas which were fashionable at the time that they were writing in order to diagnose the problems of the present age, but insist nonetheless that they can tell the difference between work which is merely fashionable, and that which is authentic. In an age when the author is often enough claimed to be dead, they claim authorship as a guarantee that their text is somehow different to others. This is a common enough move in the human sciences generally – the assertion of a generalization concerning the social or the human underwritten by the implicit guarantee that the author (and usually the implied reader) are somehow able to remain detached from these conditions of possibility. For the intellectual, this is a problem if they want to explain how a particular configuration is shaped by social forces, but rarely also attempt to simultaneously explain how it is that 'intellectuals' (or even academics) are somehow free from the determinations that press so heavily on others (Gouldner, 1970; Parker, 2002). It's a problem which this paper is not exempt from either, but more of this later.

In the next section, we will turn to some writing on fashion which writers on management fashion might have used, in order to begin reflecting on this puzzle.

History and fashion

Quentin Bell's well cited and multiply reprinted (1948) work on fashion, *On human finery*, wears its considerable erudition exceedingly lightly. It is also, in its engagement with and development of the work of Thorstein Veblen, insightful in its grasp of the mechanisms of fashion, but is very rarely cited in the management fashion literature. Bell asserts the omnipresence of fashion in at least the last 500 years of European history; the massive importance yet essential slipperiness of the demands of sartorial morality and hence reputability; the absolute necessity of social classes for its functioning; and the essential role of sumptuosity, itself tied to futility, at its core. Building upon Veblen's themes of conspicuous leisure and waste (1899), Bell provides an introduction to the history of fashion 'tied to that of the resurgent middle class and the emulative process to which that class gave birth' (*ibid.*: 101). The endlessness of the processes and their contrary demands of sameness and difference at their heart are perhaps most vividly captured by his quote from Hazlitt:

> Fashion is an odd jumble of contradictions, of sympathies and antipathies. It exists only by its being participated among a number of persons, and its essence is destroyed by being communicated to a greater number. It is a continual struggle between 'the great vulgar and the small' to get the start of, or keep up with each other in the race of appearances, by an adoption on the part of the one of such external and fantastic symbols as strike the attention and excite the envy or admiration of the beholder, and which are no sooner made known and exposed to public view for this purpose, than they are successfully copied by the multitude, the slavish herd of imitators, who do not wish to be behindhand with their betters in outward show and pretensions, and then sink without any further notice into disrepute and contempt. (1991: 148)

Bell (1948: 126-7) notes that the 'goodness' of any garment is not reducible to its use value and that this goodness is of importance regardless of whether or not it belongs to or is worn by a particular person. That is to say, understanding fashion involves understanding our judgements of others. It is a mobile social relation, not an immanent property of goods, opinions or actions. Bell further contends that goodness in attire is in large part the product of sumptuousness, with that sumptuousness itself depending upon the capacity to demonstrate that expense was incurred in its production. This leads him to consider the ways in which sumptuousness is realised: via expense incurred in the acquiring of the object of display, via the ways in which it doesn't suit a productive existence, via its echoes of 'reputable' pursuits that are themselves of no direct utility, and via its indifference to the morals and mores of the common social participant as expressed in their 'vulgar prejudice'.

Bell consistently reminds us of the abiding importance of 'class' in all matters of fashion in order that we understand that sumptuousness in attire can only deliver 'goodness' if its mode of realisation is simultaneously recognised as signalling membership of 'a reputable class' via its 'uniform' nature. And it is this tying of fashion to class that gives the whole process its dynamism. As changes in methods of production and access to new materials enable variations in what can be produced, existing relative values of sumptuousness, and hence goodness, between different attires are agitated. This provides fresh fuel to fire changes in fashion as classes jockey for position whilst running the ceaseless race for appearances. For Bell, the changes wrought by the industrial revolution in the nature of the ruling class, as well its capacity to demonstrate its position via its consumption practices, are a key moment of acceleration in the race, but the process is one that precedes this moment.

Bell's historical fleshing out of Veblen's insights seems to us to be a pretty comprehensive and defensible set of ideas that one might apply to understanding shifting fashions in apparel. Moreover, and this is the key point here, it is a conceptual structure which clearly opens the possibility of a fuller understanding of how and why both the academy and practice of management are subject to 'swings in fashion' (Clark, 2004: 297). However, Veblen and Bell have been cited hardly at all by writers on management fashion, unlike Simmel, who has been cited a little, though often in some ways that suggest that his work hasn't actually been read either. This is curious, but it suggested to us that it might be worth investigating whether citations might also be understood through the lens of fashion. That is to say, can we understand the production of work on management fashion as involving the same sort of oscillation between reputability and novelty which Veblen and Bell describe?

Prêt a Porter Simmel

As we will see in the next section, the writings of Georg Simmel are subtle and insightful, and he is often regarded as a social theorist on a par with Marx, Durkheim and Weber (Frisby, 2002; Schermer and Jary, 2013). Yet his work is not as well-known as these three, in part because he appears sometimes to be an eclectic essayist, but also because his writing is also rather inaccessible. His 1904 essay on fashion is typical in this respect, a piece which is dense and appears disconnected from the concerns of his other works. That being said, Simmel is not unknown to the management fashion academic, so let's start there. We begin with Abrahamson's very heavily cited paper (1996) in the *Academy of Management Review*. After first attributing to Sapir (1937) the insight that 'fashions gratify competing psychological drives for individuality and novelty, on the one hand, and conformity and traditionalism, on the other' (Abrahamson, 1996: 271), he moves on to Simmel's (1957) 'more *sociological* explanation', which he summarises as proposing that 'fashions serve not only to reveal who is in fashion, but also to distinguish high-status from low-status individuals' (Abrahamson, 1996: 272, italics in original). On the basis of this summary of Simmel, Abrahamson formulates the following proposition – '*New management fashions will tend to emerge when old management fashions have been adopted by lower reputation organizations'* (*op cit*., italics in original).

This sort of understanding of fashion as a stratified field where innovation begins at the top is the commonest way that Simmel is mentioned in the literature on management fashion, when he is mentioned at all. If we look at work published in the 2000s combining 'management fashion' and 'Simmel' as search terms, then there are a few references, though only a fraction of the number that we find to, for example, the work of Abrahamson, or Clark and Greatbach. Look in more detail, and you discover that the citations are largely decorative or ceremonial, with no substantial attempt to apply Simmel's ideas to the field of management fashion. For example, an article by Mamman (2002) contains no reference whatsoever to Simmel, despite the fashion essay appearing in the reference list. Kretschmer et al. (1999), includes only the following mention: a bracketed 'much can be learned from sociological literature on fashion; cf. Hirsch, 1972; Simmel, 1957' on page S63. Hamde's (2002) piece is exemplary in the ways in which Simmel is apprehended. He appears first, on page 393: 'Although there has been substantial work on fashions (Sellerberg, 1987; Simmel, 1957) it was Abrahamson (1996) who specifically applied the fashion perspective to organizations'. Later down the same page we find 'Three approaches to fashion have been identified: the trickle down-theory (Simmel, 1957), ... first used extensively in the clothes industry (Simmel, 1957; King, 1973), according to which lower classes copy the dressing styles of the upper classes'.

Most often, Simmel is invoked as an authority with weight, such as in Clark and Greatbatch's chapter in Kipping and Engwall (2002), which contains the phrase ''classic' theorists such as Durkheim, Marx, Simmel, and Weber...'. A piece by ten Bos and Heusinkveld (2007) mentions only Simmel's *Philosophy of money*, and then only as additional reading, whilst Guler et al. (2002) draws on the 1950 publication of the 1917 text, *The sociology of George Simmel*, with reference to a point about dyadic and triadic relations. Only a piece by Czarniawska and Panozzo (2008) represents anything approaching a serious engagement with Simmel's work, attributing (but problematising) a trickle-down notion to him, but nevertheless also noting the similarity of the trickle down notion to Herbert Spencer's 1880 notion of 'reverential imitation'. It seems that, this last example notwithstanding, the use of Simmel in the management fashion literature is largely ceremonial, in the sense that his name is duly checked, but his ideas do not appear to have been read. The citing of Simmel clearly serves some sort of purpose, but it is not to explore in any detail what Simmel actually wrote. It seems to us that this is interesting, in the sense that it shows us an example of academic fashion at work, but it is also a shame, because we think that Simmel's writing helps us to answer the problems that Clark formulates as issues for the field in general.

Simmel on Fashion

Whilst Clark and Greatbatch (2004) problematize the bases of all distinctions in a 'postmodern' world, before subsequently seeking to draw on distinctions that they find of merit, Simmel shows the ways in which difference and similarity are always co-implicated. He situates fashion in the broadest possible terms, beginning, as in much of his work, with an articulation of an unceasing, de-centred, dialectic to apprehend our (social) world of 'two antagonistic forces, tendencies, or characteristics' (1904: 130)[3].

> The whole history of society is reflected in the striking conflicts, the compromises, slowly won and quickly lost, between socialistic adaptation to society and individual departure from its demands ... Each in its sphere attempts to combine the interest in duration, unity and similarity with that in change, specialization, and peculiarity. It becomes self-evident that there is no institution, no law, no estate of life, which can uniformly satisfy the full demands of the two opposing principles. (ibid.: 131)

The ceaseless movement of fashion thus appears as an exemplary case of the deferral and extension of the tensions manifest in human life – 'the continuous movement that characterizes all aspects of human existence' (Cooper, 2010: 69). This is the ability to affect and be affected as an inherently social being whose identity is always only grasped as it oscillates between similarity and difference in a shifting context within which it is forever pulled. Cooper (2010: 69) suggests a poststructural and processual reading of Simmel in which the human agent is always one element in a wider whole. Simmel, like Cooper, understands human beings as restlessly moving between others, an infinite movement of parts forever trying to complete themselves in the pursuit of a wider whole that always recedes when approached.

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3 A conception of the social that he may well have developed through his readings of Gabriel Tarde, particularly his 1890 *The laws of imitation*.

Simmel's argument in his fashion essay suggests that not only are the twin tendencies toward imitation and differentiation 'irreconcilably opposed' but that this opposition means that 'social life represents a battle-ground, of which every inch is stubbornly contested, and social institutions may be looked upon as the peace-treaties, in which the constant antagonism of both principles has been reduced externally to a form of cooperation.' Moreover, it is this understanding of human beings that suggests his understanding of fashion as an 'universal phenomenon in the history of our race… one of the many forms of life by the aid of which we seek to combine in uniform spheres of activity the tendency towards social equalization with the desire for individual differentiation and change' (Simmel, 1904: 132-3). This takes his analysis much further than Veblen or Bell's historical sociology, embedding an understanding of fashion in a philosophical argument about what it means to be a social being at all.

It is within such an understanding that fashion's function in class distinction (of which it is seen by Simmel to be 'a product') is made clear, with its 'double' role consisting in demonstrating collectivity and distinction at one and the same time. This means that the logic that applies to fashion is not concerned with practicality, but with the display of difference and similarity. 'The absolute indifference of fashion to the material standards of life is well illustrated by the way in which it recommends something appropriate in one instance, something abstruse in another, and something materially and aesthetically quite different in a third' (*ibid.*: 134). Fashion is useful, but the utility to be considered here operates within the domain of the social, not that of the practical, of the utilitarian.

If we agree with Simmel that this is the case, then fashion can operate within any social context – including those which parade greater objectivity in the delineation of their concerns, such as science, medicine or academic life. However, Simmel suggests, such sources can only become resources for fashion if and when their relations to their origins become distanced:

> Fashion occasionally will accept objectively determined subjects such as religious faith, scientific interests, even socialism and individualism; but it does not become operative as fashion until these subjects can be considered independent of the deeper human motives from which they have risen. (ibid.: 135)

In other words, any symbol can enter the fashion system once it becomes detached from the dense social relations that produced it – whether a particular belt or a citation to a certain social theorist. When the linkage to origins remains, when our concerns are seen to derive from timeless considerations of the ethical, the true, the just and so on then Simmel suggests that the rule of fashion can become 'unendurable'. The ephemerality and fickleness of fashion seems to trivialise those matters which are generally considered to be beyond its grasp. It is perhaps a mild version of this discomfort that motivates many management writers to seek to isolate as the product of fashion ideas about effective managerial techniques and practices whose 'truth claims are characterized as fundamentally flawed' (Clark, 2004: 298) and whose popularity results from their progressive garb and their perceived novelty. This means that they can then be separated from other ideas – presumably the production of 'scientific interests' and the like – which ostensibly deliver what they promise.

The desire of writers on management fashion to make these sort of distinctions finds some support in Simmel:

> [T]here is good reason why externals – clothing, social conduct, amusements – constitute the specific field of fashion, for here no dependence is placed on really vital motives of human action. It is the field which we can most easily relinquish to the bent towards imitation, which it would be a sin to follow in important questions. (1904: 135)

Yet the designation of a phenomenon or approach as sinful does not make the sin impossible or even unlikely. Simmel understands that social relations are constantly transformed by fashion, and he does not appear to believe that there are any areas which are somehow immune from it. That suggests that ideas about appropriate and effective management techniques and practices must also be put forward by people who are also shaped by fashion themselves. But this is not a condemnation. Simmel is clear that fashionableness in itself provides no direct indictment of an object, practice or process (*ibid.*: 139). Rather the notion of fashion must be transformed from a general to a bounded process if it is to function effectively as a term of opprobrium.

Despite the frequent use of 'fashion' as a negative dismissal, as it is in the hands of many of the management writers we have been considering, Simmel suggests that people are most likely to be drawn to its virtues and seek its display when their (privileged) current status is at risk. 'Segregation by means of differences ... is expedient only where the danger of absorption and obliteration exists' (Simmel, 1904: 137). And for middle and senior managers, whose entitlement to the privileges of their positions depends upon their ability to perform a role which often has responsibility and status but little power, anxieties continually exist (Knights and Willmott, 1999; Lilley, 2001; Armstrong, 2002). Managers are more and more short-lived in their role inhabitation and more and more driven to be seen to be making an immediate impact through change initiatives of all sorts, justified on the basis of a world in which change is supposed to be the only constant (Grey, 2003; Kavanagh et al., 2007). Simmel suggests that the 'more nervous the age, the more rapidly its fashions change', and that this is exacerbated by the desire for differentiation which continually demands symbols of exclusivity which are supposedly associated with the upper classes. It is this idealised image of the upper classes – whose operation in our managerial world is most clearly signalled by aspirational products such as the 'Executive Lounge' and the 'Executive MBA' – that might be the key to understanding the motivations of many middle managers whose participation in this ideal is continually deferred. The adverts in business magazines incite desire for certain airlines, hotel chains, watches, cars, holiday destinations – all sold on the basis of their exclusivity. But such marketing ensures that exclusivity never lasts, and the best kept secrets always leak.

What is at stake in fashion is the perpetuation of distinction and its attendant privileges in the face of the perpetual degeneration of the grounds on which they depend and their re-establishment through a ceaseless procession of the new (and, by implication, better). It is this that makes fashion so pronounced a part of modernity. It is not unique to the modern period, being found in all societies, but Simmel certainly suggests that its reach is extended in societies which accentuate the present. This means that 'it has overstepped the bounds of its original domain, which comprised only personal externals, and has acquired an increasing influence over taste, over theoretical convictions, and even over the moral foundations of life' (1904: 140). It seems that fashion has become imperial in its reach, being an obligatory passage point that must be traversed by all, *regardless of whether they seek to stand with fashion or against it.* For as Simmel notes

> [T]he same combination which extreme obedience to fashion acquires can be won also by opposition to it. Whoever consciously avoids following the fashion, does not attain the consequent sensation of individualization through any real individual qualification, but rather through mere negation of the social example. If obedience to fashion consists in imitation of such an example, conscious neglect of fashion represents similar imitation, but under an inverse sign. (ibid.: 142)

This, it seems to us, is a very useful way of thinking about the claimed virtues of the management academic, apparently freed from the fripperies of appearance and display. Simmel helps us to understand the desire of some management scholars to claim to be able to trade reliable distinctions in the market for managerial knowledge; the discrimination of that which works from that which does not, of relevance and impact from mere fluff. But whether fashion avoidance is a reliable sign of 'scientific neutrality' is far more moot a point because there is very little evidence which would allow anyone to make a claim about effectiveness that did not involve social evaluations, always embedded in particular times and places. At best such a claim about 'unfashionability' likely represents assertion of one's location within a particular class of people; at worst an admission of the fear of being washed away by the tides of fashion, as Clark noted in his third conjecture.

So we might understand why management academics are so resistant to being branded as creatures of fashion, but why do managers adopt fashions when their image as utilitarians seems so distant from this dizzy world? We suggest, again following Simmel, that management fashion enables managers to function as managers whilst believing that they are setting some part of themselves apart. That is to say, if we add a little Marx to the Simmel, it allows them to feel it legitimate to expropriate the labour of others for themselves and the capital that they in part represent, since they exist in a group or class that does the same and demonstrates its rectitude to itself in the shifting forms it adopts and circulates as signs of its progressiveness.

> Fashion... is... one of the forms by the aid of which men seek to save their inner freedom all the more completely by sacrificing externals to the enslavement by the general public... [F]ashion is... a social form of marvellous expediency, because... it affects only the externals of life, only those sides of life which are turned to society. It provides us with a formula by means of which we can unequivocally attest our dependence on what is generally adopted, our obedience to the standards established by our time, our class, and our narrower circle, and enable us to withdraw the freedom given us in life from externals and concentrate it more and more in our innermost natures. (Simmel, 1904: 147-8)

There is a symmetry here, in our Simmelian analysis of management fashion academics and fashionable managers. The former claim not to be fashionable in order to ensure that their knowledge claims can be claimed to be demonstrations of timeless values. The latter embrace fashionable ideas because they are a signal of relevance in a turbulent world, but also because it is then easier to construct the idea of an authentic inner life which is untouched by such trivia. Fashion, once admitted as an explanation of human conduct, will not be expelled easily. And it is to this that we now turn in our conclusion.

Conclusion

> What is society? I have answered: Society is imitation. (Tarde, 1903: 74)

Following Simmel, who himself follows Tarde, we have argued that fashion is found almost everywhere. Despite the fact that its application to important matters often produces policing calls for its administration and ideally its exclusion, histories of science continually show us that 'thought collectives' and 'paradigms' shape thinking which is ostensibly established by reason and experiment (Fleck, 1935/1979; Kuhn, 1962). We have also seen that despite its 'real seat' being in the upper classes, that its sway is powerful in the middle layers of stratified societies. Furthermore, claiming that you are unconcerned with fashion is itself a stance which is socially structured by the shifting meanings of the fashionable. As Bourdieu (1984) suggested, 'taste' is not simply a set of personal choices, but a structured hegemony of distinctions which are already provided in a social field. And there is no escaping that field, no way of being positioned outside it.

The rise of ideas about management fashion during the 2000s is merely a case here, but it is an interesting one because of the way in which it demonstrates some of the dynamics at work in claiming difference and similarity, both for managers and management academics. For the latter, the dangers are greater, because admitting fashion into such discussions necessarily presages a time in which research on management fashion might itself become old-fashioned. Now, a decade or so after these papers were published, we can probably say that is just what has happened, and this paper is perhaps best understood as a late footnote to those discussions. However, we do think that it throws light on some general processes. As Veblen suggested, the more esoteric the knowledge (in his day, Latin and Greek) the better suited it is to being useful within the conspicuous world of 'higher learning' (1918). Writing about management fashion has clearly been a useful way for academics to both display their fashionability and simultaneously to deny it, precisely the social processes which Simmel suggested were central to human sociality. Further, the construction of this area, like others (Parker, 2000), has involved a certain amnesia about writings which predated it – such as Bell and Veblen – and also a very selective appropriation of one writer who is sometimes cited as a classic but whose ideas have been largely ignored – Georg Simmel.

So what are we to do with the concept of 'fashion'? Rene ten Bos has an interesting take on this. In *Fashion and utopia in management thinking* (2000) ten Bos contrasts utopian rationalism with fashion, but it is the former which is denigrated and the latter celebrated. This is substantially different from the majority of other work on fashion conducted by management scholars, and it leads ten Bos to ask whether the discipline of management needs to become more, not less, fashionable. He suggests that the heart of the difficulty inherent in management scholars' critique of fashion, and particularly its implicit dismissal when compared to the elevation of utility and authenticity, lies in their disregard of the specificities of its deployment. The meanings of notions such as utility and authenticity are situated and shifting, and this is exactly what we would expect in a context in which the worth of ideas and people always depends in part on fashion. The following is more than capable of demonstrating the point[4] –

> Dear Annie
> Could my tatty old jeans pass for designer ones?
> I have been perplexed recently by the trend for tatty old jeans. They're in every magazine, frayed and grotty, but with huge price tags. I have a number of pairs I keep for wearing around the house and garden, and wonder if my comfy old Levi's are OK for a (fairly relaxed) meeting I have to go to soon in London. Or will everyone know they aren't designer scruffy, just scruffy?
> Sarah, Edington, Wiltshire
>
> That depends very much on the meeting, but either way you're out of luck. If the meeting is with 'meedja' types, they'll probably see jeans as acceptable 'business' wear but will spot a mile off that they're the wrong make. See, the jeans you've seen in magazines may look grotty, but it took at least one designer, a stylist, art director, fashion-college intern and small pug-like dog to create them. The frays will be of just the right length, the colour just this side of French Riviera sun-bleached, the waistband allowing the pudenda just two inches of modesty. If, on the other hand, the meeting is with normal folk then they will just think you are scruffy. My advice is to leave the jeans at home and when you're in London, go to Harvey Nichols (020 7235 5000) or Liberty (020 7734 1234) and have a look at Juicy jeans, though they cost from £100 up. (The Observer Review, September 16, 2001)5

Like many a management and organisational theorist, perhaps most particularly those who claim to plough a culturally informed approach to their subjects and objects of interest, there is often an abiding unwillingness to take *seriously* that which is entailed by a cultural turn. As Simmel, ten Bos and Miranda Priestly suggest, fashion matters, and it should be scrutinised carefully, not used as a negative category which makes some other practice appear immune to it. Once you let culture into the explanation, you have to recognise that it is there all the way down. It cannot, with any consistency or coherence simply be used as a differentiator to claim that one phenomenon is *just* cultural whilst another is useful and authentic.

In the social sciences, the practices of academics are always implicated in the construction of their objects of interest, and this is as true of our rhetoric and citations as it is of anyone else's. In focussing on Simmel, a 'classic' author who we have suggested has been neglected, we are situating ourselves within a certain sort of unfashionability which is itself, of course, a claim which allows us to present ourselves as real scholars and others as fakes. We could have deployed

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4 Thanks to Peter Armstrong for this example.

5 Note that, in using this as an illustration, rather than some example from management, we are simultaneously making a cultural claim about our slightly daring fashionability.

other citations as well or instead - Tarde, Barthes, Benjamin, Bourdieu or Rancière (or Deleuze, Žižek, Badiou, Serres and so on) – each capable (for the right kind of reader) of signalling different sorts of claims to sameness and difference. In that sense, all citations are 'ceremonial' in that they do their work as signifiers regardless of whether what they signify has actually been read, or is used in an argument. We think Simmel does the work we wanted to do in this paper, but are very conscious that we are creatures of fashion too. Our use of Simmel, like the decision to wear jeans which have been artfully ripped, itself says something about our attitude to fashion. Ultimately, we are no different to those we have criticised, and cannot escape this self-contradiction.

That being said, we think that the problem with many management writers' mobilisation of the notion of fashion is that at times their grasp of the phenomena that is the object of their interest seems limited to the practices of *others*. Their gurus are mere fashion baubles, whilst our authorities are serious theorists (Lilley, 1997). What most concerns us, and motivated the writing of this paper, is the distinction that most writers on management fashion have made between a virtuous authenticity and consistency and the vices of a lack of it. The irony is that this is exactly what fashion achieves, in its 'what's in and what's out', its play of fake and authenticity (Craciun, 2013), and which applies just as much to topics and citations as it does to belts and distressed denim. That understanding these processes seems beyond the purview of much of the 'management fashion' literature remains its 'central irony' (Clark, 2004: 299).

More generally, we might say that management is subject to fashion not because it is the realm of the utilitarian, but rather because it is futile. If it was a practice which was merely the technocratic co-ordination of organization, ten Bos's 'utopian rationalism', we might imagine that it could be more or less immune from fashion. But management clearly isn't some sort of scientific engineering of the social, involving as it does the endless deployment of all sorts of hesitant and shifting attempts to legitimise means and ends, as well as to appropriate the value produced by the labour of others and then claim a value in that. And as academicians of management, we should always be careful not to sit too smugly as we observe and comment, because the displays of our catwalks, commentaries and, indeed, of our own good selves in the mirror, are fashioned all the way down. There is no escape from this conclusion, particularly in writings about management and fashion. Including this one, citations to Simmel and all.

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Professionalization at work: The case of Italian management consultants

Lara Maestripieri

abstract

Professionalization is one of the most ancient and popular issues in the sociology of the professions. Starting from the seminal article of Harold Wilensky (1964), scholars have extensively debated on which are the criteria to identify professionals, usually focusing on liberal professions. However, in recent years, post-industrial trends have transformed the character of the labour force dramatically and new groups have raised demands for professionalism going beyond this model. Such a dilemma raises a new interest on the topic: the paper, instead of applying the liberal professional model assumed to be an a-historical standard, will face the problem by analysing the challenges facing knowledge workers' seeking to legitimize their professional status.

In this paper, I address this issue through an in-depth analysis of Arianna's account, a female management consultant, using the technique of positioning. The interview with Arianna reveals the strategies and argumentative referents of a freelance management consultant who chooses to stress her professionalism. It presents the role of personal networks, on-the-job training, and market success as evidence to classify who is professional and who is not, but also to explain how she uses her competencies and market experience as the basis of her claim to professionalism. Using Arianna's interview as an emblematic example, this paper argues that management consultants are trying to establish professional status based on a process of professionalization, albeit an innovative one that does not pursue public regulation nor the mediation of intermediate bodies.

Introduction

Professionalization is the term used to describe how an occupational group achieves professional status. Scholars belonging to the traditions of functionalism and neo-Weberianism have previously theorised and established a standard model by which a profession achieves this status; the model would involve prescribed steps in accordance with a specific time frame (Neal and Morgan, 2000). Thus, these theories have effectively described and explained the process by which those working in traditionally professional roles obtained public acknowledgment and recognition in the past (Malatesta, 2006).

However, in recent years, post-industrial trends have transformed the character of the labour force dramatically; notably, the upskilling of workers in a variety of jobs has been constant since the beginning of the 1980s, and was increasing noteworthy during the financial crisis of 2008 (Gallie, 2013). New expertise demands the application of technology to working activity, and expert workers are now required both inside and outside organisations, transgressing the traditional boundaries that denoted professional status (Evetts, 2011; Noordegraaf, 2011). Meanwhile, the success of neoliberal policies in western economies has resulted in strong opposition to labour market regulation, thereby questioning the privileged position of those working in roles where they are designated professionals (Neal and Morgan, 2000). The theoretical reactions of scholars have been somewhat misleading; instead of analysing the alternative strategies of professionalization promoted by knowledge workers, the sociological debate has primarily concentrated on a 'pro-professionalism'/'non-professionalism' distinction. This divide assessed advanced business professionals by applying the liberal professional model, assumed to be an a-historical standard (Neal and Morgan, 2000; Alvesson and Johansson, 2002; Groß and Kieser, 2006; McKenna, 2008; Butler et al., 2012).

This paper addresses the challenges facing knowledge workers' seeking to legitimize their professional status, by looking at the discursive strategies of management consultants (henceforth MCs) (Meriläinen et al., 2004; Muzio et al., 2008; Donnelly, 2009; Bologna, 2011). MCs have increased in number, and are now one of the main occupational groups in the management domain (Kipping and Engwall, 2001). The role of market success in the social acknowledgement of the professions is increasing among knowledge workers, while intermediary bodies are reducing in importance (Cucca and Maestripieri, 2014), thus diverting the standard followed by liberal professionals substantially (Wilensky, 1964).

The current reality is that MCs continue to lack formal recognition for their activities, especially in countries such as Italy, where the system of professions incorporates a strong cleavage between protected professionals and other groups of expert workers (Ranci, 2012). For many reasons, those professionals are not able to accomplish the standard stages, as identified in the literature on professionalization. Even if they identify with a corpus of knowledge, the constant drive towards innovation and transformation complicates the possibility of setting a standard level for each professional, while the dualism between individual professionals or SMEs and big international corporations in Italy is fragmenting the market, impeding the formation of a single interest group (Crucini, 1999; McKenna, 2008; Maestripieri, 2013). Consequently, Italian consultants are unlikely to achieve classical professionalization status, and the associated recognition (Groß and Kieser, 2006; McKenna, 2008).

Despite the barriers MCs face, this paper argues that they are trying to establish professional status based on a process of professionalization, albeit an innovative one that does not pursue public regulation nor the mediation of intermediate bodies. Their strong relationship with organisations, and their ideological aversion to any form of protection from the market is pushing them to search, not for the institutionalisation of their profession, but to gain a reputation in the market, as equal to and in competition with other experts in the management field (Maestripieri, 2013). This paper presents a narrative revolving around the professional legitimisation strategy of a freelance management consultant named Arianna; finding the alternative strategies implemented by her explicit in her arguments. In combination with other scholars (Essers, 2009), the arguments put forward here emphasise the consistency of a narrative approach, highlighting Arianna's efforts justifying her status as a professional by employing a positioning technique (Bamberg, 1997).

The interview with Arianna reveals the strategies and argumentative referents of a freelance MC who chooses to stress her professionalism, based on her own internal discourse and anecdotes taken from her daily life. It is anticipated that this will represent a small step forward in furthering understanding of the professionalism of MCs as an occupational group (McKenna, 2008). This investigation attempts to go beyond the traditional model of professionalization's analysis, based on the archetype of the *liberal professional*, to jointly analyse credentialism, autonomy, and professionalism. It presents the role of personal networks, on-the-job training, and market success as evidence to classify which MCs are professional and which are not, but also to explain how MCs use their competencies and market experience as the basis of their claim to professionalism.

At present, a lack of public acknowledgement forces MCs to search for recognition in their everyday interactions, bypassing the role of lobbies and formal associations (Maestripieri, 2013). In view of this, debate is fundamental, as interaction is the main social space in which legitimation might occur (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Garfinkel, 1967; Goffman, 1969). As deliberation is on going, it is logical to analyse the argumentative strategies by which MCs justify themselves as professionals, to understand how they are seeking to gain legitimacy. In particular, their claims cite the expertise and experience they have amassed within the field; they might also reference their survival in the current labour market. The story of Arianna adds to the contemporary debate about professionalization through a timely analysis of the discursive strategy of a management consultant, highlighting the arguments used in practice by a management consultant actively claiming professionalism.

The paper is structured as follows. First, the framework used to address professionalization is presented. It draws on theoretical perspectives about the concept of professionalization, as first defined by functionalist sociologists (Wilensky, 1964). The literature review also covers the stances of contemporary scholars who have revised the concept, following criticism of a narrow view based on public acknowledgement. Then the paper proceeds to outline the precise role of MCs in Italy, to explain why the Italian context constitutes an interesting case study for studying the dynamics of professionalization. After a brief presentation of the author's field research and a description of the methodological approach applied (involving an exemplary narration collected during an interview), the context is illustrated and analysed using the aforementioned case study about Arianna, a freelance MC. Conclusions will finally be presented, highlighting the theoretical assumptions of Arianna's case, as they emerged from analysis of the interview.

Studying professionalizing occupations

Harold Wilensky wrote an article in 1964, now considered a milestone in terms of disputing the issue of professionalization. Although his approach was deeply informed by functionalist theory, his article focused for the first time on the dynamics by which an occupation develops expertise, and the features that might integrate it within a group of acknowledged professions. For him, professionalization follows a standardised path, involving a number of steps that progressively institutionalise their members as professionals. These are: the development of identification with a body of knowledge, the creation of a group of practitioners to discuss common problems, the creation of schools and a university to provide specific oriented training to practitioners, institutionalisation by public regulation, and lastly the establishment of a formal code of ethics. These steps, as identified by Wilensky (1964), all apply to those professions with a high level of social recognition (Butler et al., 2012), i.e. lawyers, doctors, etc. (Abbott, 1988; Malatesta, 2006). However, in many cases scholars have interpreted this trajectory not as a historical and contextual solution to the problem of legitimation (Brint, 1994; Middlehurst and Kennie, 1997; Neal and Morgan, 2000; McKenna, 2008), but as a process of inevitable and unproblematic acknowledgement of a professional activity (Butler et al., 2012).

Thus, it is evident that sociologists examining professionalization have considered this issue over many decades (Neal and Morgan, 2000); certainly professionalization, as an enforced by law designation, has been one of the main differences dividing the continental and Anglo-Saxon system of professions (Sciulli, 2005). Starting from the pioneering work of Harold Wilensky, the debate has involved several scholars working from different theoretical perspectives.

For neo-Weberian scholars, the importance of professionalization centred on the attainment of a form of legal regulation and protection, permitting members to perform strategies such as market closure and to create boundaries within different groups (Sacks, 2012). Abbott (1988) defines the professionalization process as the development of professional activities based on attaining a jurisdiction over a particular specialisation of knowledge, which can then be regulated and protected. This typically follows a common pattern for all professions, although there may be differences relating to timing. Similarly, Freidson (2001) states that professionalism is recognised when an organised group of workers obtains the power to determine who can access the profession, impedes others from performing similar activities, and controls the criteria by which good work is judged. Credentialism is the basic mechanism sustaining a monopoly on the jurisdiction and access to the professional market (Larson, 1977; Brint, 1994; Freidson, 2001; Malatesta, 2006). However, formal knowledge and formal education should not be overestimated. Even among well-established professions, many acquire qualifications within the field during on-the-job learning, contradicting the role assigned to credentialism by previous literature (Alvesson and Johansson, 2002).

In the cases of both functionalist and neo-Weberian scholars, attention is limited to well-established professions that have already achieved strong social recognition, and which have acquired full jurisdiction over certain bodies of knowledge (Abbott, 1988). For this reason, they deem only institutionalised professions as worthy of inclusion as objects of study, since the main objective of neo-Weberians is to assess closure strategies; by contrast, functionalists are more interested in defining the criteria by which an occupation can be considered a profession.

Interestingly, although contemporary post-industrial economies emphasise professionalization, an increasing number of occupations fail to comply with the traditional process of professionalization. This is despite their expert nature, and despite the fact that organisations increasingly need competent workers able to utilise their knowledge (Brint, 2001). Professionals working in advanced business services have not developed a strong identification with prescribed bodies of expert knowledge, as these quite often overlap with similar occupations (Butler et al., 2012). Moreover, the success of neoliberal discourse has raised doubts about the pathway to professionalization: market-driven approaches, a stronger deregulation in public regulation of professional activities, and the increasing promotion of individual values that are not easily attributable to market closure strategies or to integration into intermediate bodies (Neal and Morgan, 2000; Adams, 2012).

Thus far, the inability to professionalize oneself following traditional steps set out by legitimate professionals has not impeded the growth of knowledge occupations. Over the last decade, advanced business services have been among the fastest growing branches of the economy. In recognition of recent changes in practice, there is a growing interest in professions on the margins (Butler et al., 2012). A growing proportion of knowledge workers do not abide by a traditional notion of professionalism, and scholars have begun to focus on their neglected position in the sociology of professions.

Extending the field beyond the perspectives of functionalist and neo-Weberian authors, scholars have increasingly criticised the institutionalised conceptualisation of the professions since the 1970s. Authors including Becker (1970) and Hughes (1984) confirm that nominal professional status only functions to sustain an individual's claim to be recognised as an elite worker (Hughes, 1984); this leads them to criticise the supposed neutrality of the concept (also in De Saint Martin, Bourdieu and Boltanski, 1973 and Chapoulie, 1973). These scholars argue that it is misleading to suggest that professionalism is a scientific term, offering evidence that professionalism has been used largely as a tool to sustain a claim to a privileged social position (Schinkel and Noordegraaf, 2011). Professionalism, in this sense, conveys a pervasive and taken-for-granted superiority: it is built into discourse and pursues arguments to justify the special status of workers based on the possession of specific expertise that extends beyond formal credentialism (Hanlon, 1998; Alvesson and Johansson, 2002). For as long as a group is permitted to claim professionalism for its own activities, this recognition might be a basis for ascending mobility (Hughes, 1984).

In view of the ongoing granting of a professionalism status to some groups, scholars have raised the unsolved theoretical issue of the professional legitimation of knowledge workers, since they do not typically share the standard form of credentialism evidenced among the well-established professions.

Legitimation usually implies external validation, and an interlocutor must perceive and accept such claims as proper and appropriate in reference to a wider system of shared norms and values (Suchman, 1995; Sillince and Brown, 2009; Maclean et al., 2012). As already stated by Goffman (1969), the legitimation process is based on a moral judgement by others based on everyday interaction; i.e. when an individual chooses to position himself or herself as a professional, she or he is claiming a moral right to be treated as a legitimate professional. Individuals use argumentative justifications to define their own behaviours and claims as reasonable: the content of social norms are then expressed via those justifications (Goffman, 1969). The legitimation process is complete when an entity becomes embedded in the taken-for-granted assumptions of actors (Suchman, 1995; Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005).

The question of how subjective meanings become objective taken-for-granted assumptions has been widely debated since Berger and Luckmann's theorisation (1966), but remains unanswered, as professionalization processes extend beyond the path of the classical professions, such as lawyers or doctors. Self-legitimation strategies are the key to determination, as over the previous decade, scholars addressed this issue by lending credence to legitimating accounts by individual actors, especially in the organisational domain (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005; Vaara and Tienari, 2008; Maclean et al., 2012). The analysis of the arguments presented in this paper demonstrate in practice how a freelance professional in the management consultancy field uses different argumentative resources to justify her position as a professional, in particular how she bases her claims for professionalism on her own expertise. This case is particularly interesting since the uneven integration of MCs into the Italian system of professions forces its members to press their arguments forcefully.

Management consultants and the problems of recognition in Italy

The post-industrial society (Bell, 1973) has been defined by a shift from an economy based on the production of goods to one focused on scientific and technical knowledge. This transformation is apparent in the steady growth of service producers and professionals (Bell, 1973; Drucker, 1993; Maione, 2001). In this context, knowledge gains importance at the expense of capital and manual labour as the labour force becomes progressively professionalized (Collins, 1997). Labour in the new society is based on advanced business services incorporating features like expertise, autonomy, discretion, reputation, prestige and professional standards; workers perform professional activities beyond traditional forms of institutionalization, operating mostly within in conjunction with organisations. Some scholars have used the label 'knowledge workers' to identify this group (Brint, 2001; Darr and Warhurst, 2008); among these MCs are considered prototypical (Meriläinen et al., 2004; Donnelly, 2009; Bologna, 2011).

In Italy the contemporary difficulties facing those in diverse employment arise from an imbalance in public regulations. These divide workers into those in the protected professions and the remainder of the unregulated market (MCs included), who are excluded from public intervention and related credentialism (Ranci, 2012), creating a huge gap between professionals. Italian public regulation has been slow to respond to the transformation of the labour markets, following the shift to a post-industrial pattern of economic development. In the Italian system, a strong corporatist approach, in which public institutions protect the professionalism of certain activities, is followed (Salomone, 2010). These bodies (named Orders and Registers in Italy) aim to not only protect professionals' activities and their knowledge, but also serve as a guarantee for the client. As a consequence, only those professions considered of social relevance have been included in the group of protected professions, for example, doctors, lawyers, engineers and architects. Unlike the bottom-up evolution that characterises the professionalization process in Anglo-Saxon countries (Sciulli, 2005), the establishment of professions in Italy has followed the continental model, relying on the state to structure a system of professionalization (Neal and Morgan, 2000; Malatesta, 2006).

As knowledge workers grow in importance within the economy, an increasing number of professionals are excluded by this model, in which the state has institutionalised its systems of public regulation (Collins, 1997). Although the services provided vary, knowledge workers are generally not integrated into the classic system of professionals, and are not easily recognisable in terms of standard definitions, because of the absence of public acknowledgment for their activities, as well as the precarious formalisation of training and the missing standardisation of competencies (Cucca and Maestripieri, 2014).

The most important consequence of workers being outside of the traditional system of professions is that they cannot participate in standardised credentials schemes. The professional/client relationship is based on trust, and clients buy expertise that they do not have and which they are often unable to assess (Alvesson, 2001). The professionalization process should resolve this dilemma by offering a series of guarantees: ensuring a minimum level of competencies for certified professionals, as well as protecting the members of a community against peers who have not met the standards required to engage in the professional activity (Groß and Kieser, 2006; McKenna, 2008). This is why the Italian state previously created a system of orders and registers accessible only by acquiring formal credentials, such as a specific university degree for each profession, a state exam to certify competency, and inclusion in a register of professionals (Malatesta, 2006). At present, this system is in crisis: instead of acting as a guarantee of a minimal standard of quality, it has become the most important instrument of social closure (Collins, 1990), as played out by professional groups in order to maintain privileges. Professionals are increasingly forced to address new forms of credentialism that extend beyond this model to include informal social networks, reputational mechanisms and organisational brands (Greenwood and Epson 2003; Brock 2006; Cucca and Maestripieri, 2014).

For MCs, much like other groups of knowledge workers characterised by the recent process of professionalization, there is no public regulation; meaning there is now no formal requirement to meet in order to perform the job. Perceived public 'indifference' has resulted in a situation in which there is no recognised community of experts, whose formal membership can guarantee expertise (Alvesson, 2001). This means MCs struggle for recognition, activating individualised strategies to state their credentials, building long-term relationships with clients, relying on reputation mechanisms mostly based on word of mouth, and the tactical use of organisations to denote quality (Alvesson, 2001; Alvesson and Johansson, 2002; Cucca and Maestripieri, 2014). The market structure makes it difficult to operate a synthesis between the different interests of MCs organisations through the institution of a professional association. In Italy, there are only two associations for MCs: one is devoted solely to enterprise (ASSOCONSULT) and the other (APCO) to SMEs and freelancers (Crucini, 1999; Maestripieri, 2013); thus far, neither has become the main referent for professionalization claims by MCs.

Nevertheless, even where MCs claim professional identity based on the possession of expert knowledge and a specific competence, their social recognition as professionals is fragile, and their integration into the system of professions is unstable at best. Some scholars have described their position in the labour market as precarious, even vulnerable, in the sense that they are open to exploitation (Kitay and Wright, 2007). MCs are embroiled in a struggle for legitimation (Demazière, 2009), and as scholars have already underlined, since this is a matter related to power, they still do not have enough to sustain their position as professionals (Vaara and Tienari, 2008). Meanwhile, legitimation is not a process that happens immediately, as long as its function is to make objectively available and subjectively plausible a fixed set of institutionalised knowledge (Berger and Luckmann, 1966).

The next section describes MCs' strategies for professionalism, by illustrating the case of an MC seeking to position herself as a professional. The in-depth analysis of her argument reveals her strategies to claim legitimation at a micro level, and contribute to knowledge of how the process of professionalization functions for knowledge workers in the absence of public acknowledgement. MCs argumentative claims for identity as professionals are much stronger than for many other professional groups, who have already achieved strong social recognition. It is essential for MCs to state these arguments when they present themselves as professionals, and Arianna's words show some of the stock of arguments MCs use to justify their position.

Research design

This paper is derived from a larger body of research conducted in 2007-2010 as part of the author's PhD thesis project, the general aim of which was to study the professional identity of MCs in Italy (Maestripieri, 2013). For the original thesis, 22 biographical interviews and 33 semi-structured interviews were conducted with MCs in Italy; 23 of whom were freelance professionals. The following discussion section revolves around a single narration by Arianna, chosen from the authors' PhD corpus of interviews because it clearly shows the argumentative strategies utilised by the speaker in order to legitimise her position as professional (Davies and Harré, 1990; Bamberg, 1997; Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003; Kohler-Riessman, 2008; Watson, 2009). The account of Arianna, a freelance professional, active in the management consultancy market for the last three decades, questions the issue of social recognition, discusses the absence of a role played by intermediate bodies, and the strategies put in practice by professionals to legitimize themselves.

Scholars have already presented discursive accounts of the professions in order to highlight issues of professionalization, especially when examining how it can function to create organisational and occupational meaning (Vaara, 2002; Adams, 2012). Interviews are the discursive vehicle by which individuals reaffirm their subjectivity and identity (Maclean et al., 2012; Jansen, 2015). Using narrative methods makes it possible to investigate how workers use rhetorical strategies to justify their claims: first, by focusing on the temporal dimension of biographies (Bichi, 2000) and, secondly, by respecting the subjective dimensions that interviewees place on their accounts (Kohler-Riessman, 2008; Jansen, 2015). Therefore, the subsequent section of this analysis will revolve around a narrative approach, using the positioning method to highlight Arianna's argumentative strategy (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Poggio, 2004; Kohler-Riessman, 2008).

The narrative analysis in the following section problematizes the existing framework of professionalization theory. Arianna's arguments challenge its standard approach and encourage the need for critical reflection upon it, given the challenges set by the post-industrial transformation in professional activities, and rethinking conventional wisdom about the professionalization process (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007). The positioning technique of analysis can highlight the critical dimensions, by focusing on how an individual constructs his/her public image making himself/herself intelligible to others. In particular, it emphasises the flux in thoughts about oneself, and examines how feelings shift according to the situations (Jansen, 2015).

When using this technique, the researcher's aim is twofold: first, to analyse Arianna's account by considering her an individual creative agent of narrations, and by investigating her use of agency to define her professional self; second, to reveal how her identity is rendered social in reference to a common set of commonly acknowledged narratives, shared by members of her professional group (Tirado and Galvez, 2007). The interview method is ideal to interrogate such issues; as part of the biographical pact (Bichi, 2000), the interviewer guarantees the interviewee that their narratives are not subject to criticism or evaluation. Therefore, instead of focusing on their validity, this type of analysis is ideal when highlighting how professional identities are presented in the context of the interview, and when explaining why interviewees choose to present themselves as they do (Jansen, 2015).

Of course, a single interview cannot be representative of all Italian MCs, but the interview with Arianna is of particular interest because she puts considerable effort into justifying her position as a professional. It is possible to deal with the majority of the issues raised during the full set of interviews the author conducted by presenting Arianna's case. Her account is an emblematic example of the struggles lived by Italian MCs when seeking social recognition for their professional activities (Maestripieri, 2013).

Findings and discussion

Arianna is a 55-year-old female worker, who lives in a suburb of Milan. She has a degree in psychology and has worked as a freelance MC since the beginning of the 1990s. In 1997 she started her own small consultancy firm together with two partners. After some years of good results and strong engagement in the labour market as a small entrepreneur, in 2008 she decided to close her business after separating from her husband. Now, she is again performing her job as a solo freelance consultant. Her job has played a very important role in her life, and she has always been the 'breadwinner' in her family. She has a strong emotional and practical attachment to the consultancy market:

> I love my job, I have experienced difficult times when I had few projects on, but I've always been a positive person, I've always thought that things will get better in the future. For me, being a self-employed professional has never been a concern, I will work, I will earn, and projects will come because I've a network of colleagues, right? You need to cultivate your relationships. You must prove to be a likeable person; if people see a value in what you're doing, then clients and colleagues will call on you for projects.

Her main point here is that she has expertise and experience gained throughout her lengthy career as professional consultant, an argument already highlighted in previous analyses reported by other scholars (Hanlon, 1998; Hodgson, 2008). In her words, the success she has gained in the market and the recognition from her colleagues demonstrates her competence. Arianna's relationships are the basic element that sustains her career as self-employed professional, but her success in the marketplace enables her to define herself as a competent worker. Intermediate bodies do not mediate between clients and professionals in this case and only her reputation and personal relationships denote her professionalism, guaranteeing her competence.

However, Arianna still feels insecure as to regards the societal recognition of her profession. Her insecurity derives from the lack of a formal credentialism. In fact, firstly, she has not followed a standardised course to become a consultant as long as she trained herself *on-the-job*. Secondly, she belongs to a professional association (the association of psychologists) that does not recognise her specific competence. Not unsurprisingly, the main reason why she is a member of the professional psychologists' association is the practical advantage in terms of the social protection offered by Orders (Cucca and Maestripieri, 2014). Notwithstanding, in terms of social recognition and jurisdiction, her job has no relationship to the standards required of therapeutic psychologists in Italy: as a consequence, her specialisation in organisational psychology and her activity as a management consultant is not recognised by her peers.

Her argument continues then with affirmation of management consultants' solitude (she speaks about a *club*) and the substantial incapacity of people to recognise her professionalism.

> Sometimes I've the impression that we're few… we're kind of a club, we recognise each other, but I don't know how much… you know how that is! It is that the word consultancy fills up the mouth? I'm a member of a sports association, since I separated from my husband; I have been hiking with these people, and then you talk and someone asks me – 'but what's your job?' 'I'm a management consultant, working in the empowerment of human resources' 'and what does that mean?'

> [Arianna laughs] That is, somebody doesn't even dare to imagine it. In my opinion it is not really that people don't know, but it's barely defined, because the word consultancy has many meanings. Now my neighbour who sells Avon products calls herself a consultant [she laughs again]. They call themselves beauty consultants – them?! You understand me... what kind of a word is this? And so I've some remarks on this issue to share with you... but we should ask - those who look at us... what do they see in us?

Her main argument, in the first part of the extract, relates to the meaning of the word consultancy, which is insufficiently defined to legitimise her as a professional. People who do not participate in advanced business sectors do not understand her activity and role in the labour market; nor do they know what the job of consultancy means in practice. This is also a consequence of the fact that consultancy is not integrated into the language of common-sense reality, as long as, Arianna points out, people in general are unfamiliar with what consultants' professional activities involves. Although people understand that consultancy is somehow related to expertise, as long as it requires high specialization to be performed, it is difficult for her to understand how others perceive her ('those who look at us... what do they see in us?').

This inability to self-describe and be understood also relates to the fact that the word 'consultancy' not only refers to management activities, but also is frequently used by other workers aiming to participate in a discourse of professionalism (Fournier, 1999; Alvesson and Johansson, 2002). For Arianna, however, there are boundaries between her and them; these relate to the expertise she claims to have to perform her own job. In her opinion, the other consultants that she references (such as beauty consultants) are not professionals. She judges them on the basis of their human capital and she justifies her supposed superiority by basing her arguments on her experience as a real professional worker. Otherness is a quality that is very important when creating barriers between professionals and occupations, as long as references to the other define the legitimate limits of expert labour and non-expert labour are drawn (Adams, 2012; Ashcraft et al., 2012). This is argued on the basis of marginalisation and difference from others (Adams, 2012), something that Arianna references when mentioning Avon sellers. Indeed, the idea that people misuse the word 'consultancy' to connote professionalism is discussed in her interview; she states that it is a word used only to 'fill up the mouth'.

In fact, Arianna positions herself against other professionals in terms of competencies and expertise. Her attitude is not neutral, and relies on the fact that professionalism in itself was associated in the past with the dimensions of prestige and status, as professionals belonged to the intellectual establishment. Arianna's discourse about professionalism is instrumental; it lets her claim an identity *tout-court* professional, it also serves to make a good impression. It enables her to present herself as holding a prestigious and stable position in a system of professionals. Professionalism is something that a series of actors, from her viewpoint, do not want to assign to consultants.

> MCs are people who borrow your watch to tell you what time it is, and after that they'll leave with it [Arianna laughs], that's it, this is Robert Townsend. I believe that this idea is spread across a lot of firms... that the consultant arrives and he hasn't got anything special to say, he is just able to tell you something you already knew, but maybe you needed someone to do it, to legitimise you – OK? This is just a doubt I have, but moreover I've seen it in how people look at us, and the fact that there are a lot of braggarts in this world! They have discredited our profession as consultants – who is a consultant? You understand... everybody! That is, you see just graduated teenagers, who because they've taken a little course in counselling can become counselling consultants, and they go flaunting it right and left. And then they do things that make you say bah! What is a consultant?

These extract evidences another struggle lived by consultants when claiming professionalism. In fact, even theoretically, the concepts 'pro-consultancy' and 'non-professionalism' divide theorists. Scholars separate self-promoting manuals and critical academic analysis; designations largely based on theoretical assumptions rather than empirical analysis. Thus, the consolidated image of consultancy in theoretical debate is characterised by ambiguity, while at the same time being appealing and provocative (Alvesson and Johansson, 2002). If enthusiastic supporters highlight the capacity of MC professionals to promote organisational change, academic detractors can reject their expert status, because the criteria of liberal professions are not accessible to liberal professionals (Groß and Kieser, 2006; McKenna, 2008). MCs certainly struggle with this ambiguity in their everyday interactions, explaining Arianna's need to justify herself relative to Townsend's critique.

At least in Italy, this situation is not only a matter of theoretical debate, but a direct consequence of the public regulation regime, which characterizes the Italian professions system. Protected professions have the right to take legal steps when someone abuses their professional title (as it is stated by Law 348 of the Penal Code); however, there is no protection extended when using consultants and other unregulated professions' titles (Salomone, 2010). One of the reason why MCs are not subject to protection lies in the structural dualism that characterises their market: the tension between the interests of professional services firms and the professional aspirations of individuals impedes the collective effort to achieve full professionalization, following the traditional steps taken by other professionals (McKenna, 2008). Consequently, the lack of a generalised system of formal credentialism determines the presence in the market of a large number of suppliers because of weak closure mechanisms.

Even where there is an individualised claim of professionalism, based on the possession of specific expertise, there is still no social space identified from Arianna's point of view to determine which group might direct legitimation. Furthermore, the word 'consultant' has not yet acquired common sense meaning in everyday life: along with MCs, this word is used instrumentally as a 'status symbol' by a series of other subjects (more or less expert in their field), thereby putting into question the recognition of MCs' professional status.

The practical consequences of the lack of formal recognition for freelance professionals include the difficulty in marginalising malpractice and problematic acknowledgement of others. Building a solid reputation and maintaining this throughout one's entire career is fundamental to successfully competing in the market; this is also the foundation upon which to build legitimacy as a professional. In fact, especially for freelance MCs, word of mouth is the main mechanism by which to acquire customers, since they cannot prove their credentials other than informally (Cucca and Maestripieri, 2014). Since they are unable to exercise closure against those who do not respect a minimum standard of quality, self-legitimation is one of the few strategies they might employ to gain trust from the client, aside from referencing branding and organisations (McKenna, 2008; Maestripieri, 2013; Cucca and Maestripieri, 2014), as Arianna clearly explained in her interview.

The situation in which MCs live and work often results in mockery and accusations, and a common allegation that consultants simply sell 'hot air'. In fact, as Arianna also confirms, the popular image of consultancy is extremely negative; with MCs characterised as legalised fraudsters. Italian management consultancy professionals are aware of this negative reputation (Maestripieri, 2013); they affirm that their clients believe consultancy is somewhat redundant, and MCs are just good at selling themselves and convincing clients of the usefulness of their projects. Clients often hire consultants instrumentally, as Arianna points out, in order to legitimise a managers' power within an organisation and to share the responsibility for decision-making, or to spread blame if something is wrong (Alvesson, 2001; Sturdy et al., 2009; Maestripieri, 2013). This situation of general mistrust and diffidence is not simply a linguistic concern, but also one that has a direct impact on MCs relationships with clients, as long as it effects the consolidation of trust between professionals and clients (Hughes, 1984; Clark, 1995).

In conclusion, there were two rhetorical goals expressed during Arianna's interview, both based on her expertise and experience as a mature member of the field. Firstly, she sought to convince the interviewer of her legitimate position as a professional, despite the fact that a series of key actors do not acknowledge it (as common people or state); secondly, she defines and presents her identity as a professional in contrast to other 'non-professional' actors. Nevertheless, she cannot be wholly successful in her claim; the Italian system of professions and its corporatist approach in public regulation excludes from formal acknowledgement all those professional activities that do not participate in the system of Orders. Thus, Arianna cannot make reference to an institutionalised set of common knowledge associated with the concept of management consultancy, because her idea of professionalism is embodied in a discourse of justification based on individual expertise and ability to survive in the marketplace.

Conclusions

Starting from a theoretical position that considers acknowledgement in reference to public regulation as one possible outcome of professionalization, the discussion herein relied upon the account of Arianna, a freelance MC since the beginning of the 1990s, working in Italy. The Italian case is particularly relevant, as it is characterised by a stronger corporatist approach than other European cases, thus increasing the divide between liberal professionals and knowledge workers in terms of social recognition, credentialism and social protection (Cucca and Maestripieri, 2014). Italian MCs, since their status is unstable and marginal in reference to the system of professions, highlight a new approach to professionalism more widely in their narrations, which make studying their cases interesting.

In the analysis of Arianna's account, it was possible to highlight how market mechanisms, rather than formal credentialism, were important in helping her claim professional status (Alvesson and Johansson, 2002). These assumptions contradict the classical notion of professionalism, in which standards and quality are assessed by peers through the mediation of intermediate bodies; instead Arianna relies on reputational mechanism, market success and personal relationships (Alvesson and Johansson, 2002; Maestripieri, 2013; Cucca and Maestripieri, 2014). Her professional claims are more likely to emerge in circumstances where she compares her professional standing against that of other relevant figures within society, such as among professionals or common people, rather than relying on positive affirmation from consultants as members of a recognised group.

The main elements raised when discussing Arianna's discursive strategies are that she uses her argument for professionalism to support her status and her legitimation as a competent worker. Such claims are commonly based on the possession of certain social characteristics, establishing aspects such as expertise and competence, and not formal regulation and acknowledgement. The attachment to the market and her expertise becomes the main component of her justifications. These trends have already been reported previously (Alvesson and Johansson, 2002): the demand for MCs knowledge from the market, and the rewards associated with professional activity imbue MCs with professionalism, even if they do not participate in the standard requirements set out for professionalization (Alvesson and Johansson, 2002). In the extracts presented, Arianna sustains the same point: she feels professional, because she can prove that over her longstanding career as a freelancer her professional activities have been approved by her clients and colleagues, and she has gained a specific professional profile due to her experience within the field. To all intents and purposes, Arianna's rhetorical strategies show how she justifies her claims of professionalization through individual agency, bypassing the need for credentials given by an intermediate body.

However, even if Arianna might share a set of values and identities with her peers, she lacks the foundation of an institutionalised social space (Wilesnky, 1964). At present, MCs cannot rely on a strong lobby to sustain the institutionalisation of their common knowledge. However, following the same path toward public institutionalisation that has characterised protected professions in the past is a false solution for MCs (Alvesson and Johansson, 2002; Groß and Kieser, 2006). First, the neoliberal approach is now mainstream in Europe, requiring national states to deregulate and weaken mechanisms of market closure in already existing Orders and Bars (Neal and Morgan, 2000). Moreover, management consultancy is composed of several components, which rely on heterogeneity and diversity as characteristics of their expertise. This means the practical content of MCs' professionalism is too complex to reduce to a standard set of competencies (Alvesson and Johansson, 2002). Last but not least, the Italian market is at present characterised by a strong dualism between big multinational corporations and PMEs or freelance professionals, who are serving the small firms that now typify the Italian economy (Crucini, 1999; McKenna, 2008), thus hindering the institutionalization of a unique professional association.

In addition, we argue here that formal professionalization would be more of a constraint than a powerful resource for MCs (Alvesson and Johansson, 2002), since it would promote conformism over innovation, not necessarily resulting in greater efficiency and effectiveness (Di Maggio and Powell, 1991). MCs would surely benefit from increased professionalism, but only if the formalisation of their knowledge base and the definition of a minimum standard allows them to protect clients and themselves from malpractice. Therefore, any professionalization must occur in a manner that upholds the peculiarities of their professional activities, supporting the plurality of their approach (Alvesson and Johansson, 2002). The model of liberal professions' professionalization does not align with these requirements, but capacity to underwrite innovation in public regulation might still come.

In conclusion, there is a theoretical problem regarding the professionalization of MCs. They have solved their lack of credentialism by drawing on alternative resources, such as reputational mechanisms and corporate credentialism, measuring their value as professionals in terms of their market success (Alvesson and Johansson, 2002; Maestripieri, 2013; Cucca and Maestripieri, 2014). However, in order to understand their peculiarity, scholars should go beyond the classical definition of professionalization when analysing knowledge workers. Critically, it is nonsensical to measure MCs' level of professionalism using the same criteria applied in the past to liberal professionals, as long as scopes, addresses, working practices, and even organisational context are so dissimilar (Alvesson and Johansson, 2002). Professionalism is not at odds with knowledge workers, and scholars should not persist in trying to fit them in old-fashioned schemes. This work states the call for professionalism (Boussard et al., 2010) played bottom-up by individual actors, relying on market principles and networks. Scholars look to embrace the establishment of a new approach to professionalism based on these principles.

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'Developmental talk' as confession: The role of trade unions in workplace governance

Lika Rodin

abstract

With increasing market deregulation, workplace relationships, identities, and functions are gradually transforming. This study problematizes the role of trade union organizations, looking at the phenomenon of performance appraisal interviews or so-called 'developmental talks' in the Swedish context. The critical tradition in organizational research and Michel Foucault's notion of 'technologies of governance' (examination and confession) are utilized to scrutinize discourses produced by a trade union's training video on developmental talk. As I will demonstrate, the trade union appears in the educational materials as an expert-therapist, assisting the worker in the development of a specific identity type – a 'disciplined entrepreneurial self' – that fits neoliberal demands addressed to labour. The paper emphasizes the legitimation of normalizing power by means of the video narration and it's special concern for a particular category of employees, namely workers with non-Swedish background. The study ends with a discussion on a possibility of resistance to the regularity and normalizing effects of the video discourse.

Introduction

The process of economic de-regulation currently taking place across Europe entails a transformation of employment relationships and problematizes the traditional role and position of trade union organizations (Garsten and Jacobsson, 2004; Huzzard, 2004). Today's political rhetoric actively promotes 'employability' (Chertkovskaya et al., 2013), while straying from the notion of guaranteed employment (Jacobsson, 2004; Huzzard, 2004). Innovative policies, such as skill-enhancement for the unemployed, grounded in the idea of individualization of employment arrangements have been implemented over the last decades in several EU countries (Huzzard 2004; Thedvall 2004). Correspondently, trade unions are reframing their programs to fit the new paradigm of self-promotion and continuous learning (Huzzard, 2004; Fogde, 2008). The case of Sweden is particularly interesting in this context. The 'Swedish model' that emerged during the early 20th century – based on the dominance of a social democratic doctrine, ideals of solidarity and institutionalized employee-employer negotiations with relative non-involvement of the state (Fogde, 2008) – is currently facing a challenge of neoliberalization regarding both social practices and ideology. In particular, trade unions were shown to be actively engaged in services for the unemployed (Edwards, 2008) and lifelong learning projects (Payne, 2001), shifting the locus of identity from the representation of workers' rights to coaching and 'management support' (Huzzard, 2004). Moreover, trade union organizations have been increasingly recognized as 'discursive agents' contributing to the currently promoted doctrine of a knowledge-driven, individualized society (ibid.: 108; Edwards, 2008).

Besides the proliferation of market relationships and logic, Sweden currently faces the issue of rising transnational migration (Swedish Migration Board, 2015). With the country's entrance into the European Union and the related increase in workforce mobility, maintaining fair employment and salary conditions for guest workers has become a challenge (Woolfson, Thörnqvist and Sommers, 2010). Several waves of forced migration to Sweden (Swedish Migration Board, 2016) have added complexity to the situation at the national labour market. General perspective of economic integration for newcomers has been declining since the mid-1990s (Bevelander and Lundh, 2007). Migrants' success in finding a relevant job appeared to be mediated by relatively high expectations of cultural fluency; the pattern reflecting both a subjective dimension of co-ethnic preferences in employment (ethnic-based discrimination) and objective change in the nature of labour towards communication and service provision that has elevated expectations towards workers' language skills and familiarity with the specific cultural codes (ibid.). In this context, a new task has been raised: groups increasingly joining the workforce need to be trained in line with culturally specific market demands.

In this study, I analyze ways in which the discourse of individualization is (re)produced in a white-collar trade union's educational video on performance appraisal interviews or so-called 'developmental talk', as well as how this discourse is employed to construct a new role for trade union organizations in the neoliberal context of workplace relationships. I utilize Michel Foucault's idea of different technologies of governance to explain the discursive organization of the didactic materials. The paper proceeds with a brief background on the concept and procedures of performance appraisal in the Scandinavian context, followed by a theoretical framework of critical organizational studies used in the current research. Critical discourse analysis is utilized in the empirical conversation. The paper concludes that the trade union can be seen as re-establishing itself within the field of neoliberal power relations as an expert assisting an ethnic worker in the process of becoming a 'proper' subject that is willing and capable to meet new market expectations.

Performance appraisal interview or 'developmental talk' as a managerial technology

Performance appraisal interview is generally defined as 'a formal organizational mechanism for controlling the performance of work tasks on a rational, subjective, and continuous basis' (Coates, 2004: 566). Invented during the rise of scientific management in the USA (Mikkelsen, 1998), the procedure presents a complex phenomenon in which the appraiser assumes the role of a motivator and supervisor assisting employees in their self-development (Granberg, 2003).

Reflecting regional socio-political particularities, the performance appraisal in Scandinavia is frequently termed a 'co-workers talk' (medarbetarsamtal) or 'developmental talk' (utvecklingssamtal) to emphasize non-hierarchical and pedagogical aspects of the procedure (Mikkelsen, 1998; Lingren, 2001). The developmental talk is oriented towards a manager-employee exchange aimed at reviewing the employee's work performance and perspectives of development in relation to overall organizational goals (Mikkelsen, 1998). It nurtures in employees skills such as quick adjustment to continuously transforming work-related expectations and demands. The notion of 'organizational learning' that grounds the current approach to work and developmental talk is considered non-positivistic and pragmatic. Principles of effectiveness and 'learning by doing' are especially highlighted today (*ibid.*).

The procedure is typically carried out once or twice a year. It takes up to two hours for employees 'to discuss things that deal with the work and themselves' (Lindgren, 2001: 10). To structure the conversation, a set of topics is usually suggested, such as (self)appraisal of employees' competencies and work accomplishments, revision of current goals and desirable vocational training, as well as possible formats of monitoring further developments (Mikkelsen, 1998). The discussion is documented and consented to by both sides. Third-party access to the record is prohibited. The document is used at later similar or related events, including a wage-setting conversation (lönesamtal).

Scientific inquiry addressing the phenomenon of developmental talk is multidisciplinary and frequently critical. Dissociating itself from a classical 'neohuman perspective' (Newton and Findlay 1996), international scholars increasingly apply the ideas of Michel Foucault to the field of Human Research Management (HRM) and general organizational studies (Barratt, 2002). Thus, Barbara Townley (1993), in her pioneer research on performance appraisal in the Western context, indicated two themes: the disciplining effect of the procedure on employees and the discursive construction of power. These themes were illustrated through the examination of institutional instructions for appraisal interviews obtained from a number of British universities, with an emphasis on the power/knowledge nexus as an explanatory framework for deeper understanding of surveillance and domination in work life. In one of her later projects, the scholar employed the notion of 'accountability' that is increasingly marked by a moral imperative, to scrutinize appraisal documentation and demonstrate the normalizing nature of appraisal interviewing (Townley, 1996).

In the Scandinavian context, critical and poststructuralist analysis of managerial technologies is an ongoing development. Until quite recently, the major body of literature on appraisal methodology predominantly represented a 'managerial perspective', though research addressing asymmetrical power relationships in the situation of appraisal interview has started to emerge during the last decades (see the related discussion in Lindgren, 2001 and Sandlund et al., 2011). Analyzing the micro-level details of a developmental talk, this research uncovered the mechanisms used to maintain domination through the conversational structure and communication routines (Lindgren, 2001; Forsström, 2000; Sandlund et al., 2011). A conversational analysis conducted by Lindgren (2001) illuminated a ritualized pattern in developmental talks that facilitates the manager in obtaining knowledge on the state of affairs of employers and in shaping their attitudes. Language was shown to be a tool in sustaining an order of the manager's supremacy and workers' compliance. This power asymmetry, however, may remain unseen by both sides. In another study on interactions, Sandlund et al. (2011) demonstrated how, in the course of developmental talks, workers' subjectivities are constituted in accordance with market logic. As shown in an examination of worker-manager exchanges, preferable standards of work attitude are conveyed by the manager in the course of the procedure and are maintained. Overall success of the performance appraisal interview was found to be secured by latently present standards of efficiently, self-management, and by the close proximity between performance appraisal and salary decisions.

A number of international and Scandinavia-based research projects (e.g., Townley, 1996; Triantaffilou, 2003) have approached performance appraisal/developmental talk as a power-laden procedure that builds on a certain model of governing and technologies of examination and confession, introduced by Foucault in *Discipline and punish* and elaborated upon in his later writings.

The current study uses this theoretical framework in in-depth analysis of the power-agency dynamics in performance appraisal interviews.

Technologies of governance

Foucault invented the notion of 'governance' to explain the current way that power is operating. Governing is said to champion oppression and direct command: 'governing people is not a way to force people to do what the governor wants; it is always a versatile equilibrium, with complementarily and conflicts between technologies which ensure coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by himself' (Foucault in Lemke, 2001: 204). It grounds in the knowledge/power nexus and is maintained by means of examination and confession (Foucault, 1995; Fairclaugh, 1992; Townley, 1996).

Examination rests on a 'disciplinary gaze' of surveillance and various types of assessment. It facilitates accumulation of knowledge on human subjects and enables the exercise of power over them (Foucault, 1995). Its disciplining effects are secured by techniques of 'hierarchical observation' and 'normalizing judgment' used separately or in tandem. Foucault is especially interested in architectural tricks that produce a space of inspection in different institutional domains: 'The old simple schema of confinement and enclosure – thick walls, a heavy gate that prevents entering or leaving – began to be replaced by the calculation of openings, of filled and empty spaces, passages and transparencies' (ibid.: 172). Examination is unimaginable without extensive documentation that turns an individual into 'a case' to be controlled and accommodated within the spectrum of established categories.

Distinctively, confession is not solely oppressive and objectifying; it works constitutive for the individual identities. Foucault (1980a) defines confession as a procedure embodying dialectic of personal agency and domination in establishing a mode of modern subjection. As a 'truth obligation', confession is an integral part of modern Western culture, driven to a large extent by the development of Christianity, a religion characterized by the affirmation of salvation and the related ethos of self-disclosure. Apart from loyalty to a certain doctrine, the confessant is expected to develop self-reflexivity and experience revelation, an ultimate condition for attaining the faith:

> Each person has a duty to know who he is, that is, to try to know what is happening inside him, to acknowledge faults, to recognize temptations, to locate desires; and everyone is obliged to disclose these things either to God or to others in the community, and hence, to bear public or private witness against oneself. (Foucault, 1997: 242)

A 'ritual of discourse' and 'an obligatory act of speech' confession is perceived and assessed by the confessor and grants the confessant with a purification or cure. The discourse ought to emerge as a deliberate act of subordination, and has major consequences for the confessant. In contrast to pre-Christian practices of self-documentation, confession – as a new form of self-inquiry – reaches down to the microscopic details of the individual's mental life (Foucault, 1980a: 61ff; Fejes and Dahlstedt, 2013).

The confessant does not necessary enjoy the truth from the start; truth needs to be uncovered in deep layers through engaging in individual self-reflection together with the confessor (Townley, 1995, 1996). As Fejes and Dahlstedt (2013: 6) specified, it is in 'the very act of disclosure that people come to know who they are'. The emerged knowledge is expected to be approved by the confessor in relation to a specific moral guideline: the ritual requests the individual as a 'certain type' of subjectivity characterized by particular features (ibid.), and it is therefore seen to be a productive one insofar as it produces subjectivity (Townley, 1996).

Thus, confession works in two ways; first, it exposes the individual to the external observation and makes attainable to control; second, it facilitates the formation of the individual as a subject of power relations.

> Through confessional practices and technologies of confession people's inner lives are brought into the domain of power. It is in the process of confessing that people are fashioned as active subjects, yet at the same time are enfolded in power as they become subject to confessional discourses and therefore sited for intervention. (Edwards, 2008: 31)

Confession is further positioned among other 'technologies of the self' or the individual's ways of fashioning his or her own affective, corporeal, and moral aspects and lifestyle, striving towards improved or valued states of feeling and being (Foucault, 1997: 225; see also Fejes and Dahlstedt, 2013). Foucault (1997) differentiated two central affirmations grounding practices of self-disclosure in different historical periods – 'care of the self' and 'knowing yourself' – demonstrating a shift in locus and methods of self-examination and self-narration in early Christian times towards supremacy of truth production and profound subsumption of self-work under power operation. Two further discriminated types – 'exomologesis' and 'exagoreusis' – signify 'ontological' and 'epistemological' aspects of self-examination for the scholar. As explained by Fejes and Dahlstedt (2013: 16), '[w]hile the former positioned the ontological being of a person as a sinner, the later positioned her in a constant search for self-knowledge'. This, however, does not mean an entire escape from power.

Study methodology

The study utilizes critical discourse analysis (CDA) developed by Norman Fairclough (Fairclough 1992, 1993, 1995). CDA derives its major framework from Foucault's archaeological and genealogical trends in conceptualization of discourse and attempts to translate those into a methodology that would allow for the examination of concrete 'discursive events' as to be open for contestation and change of dominant discourses (Fairclough, 1992). Discourse is defined as 'a way of signifying experience from a particular perspective' and is assumed to be both a product of social relations and a tool for their reproduction or transformation (Fairclough, 1993: 138). Fairclough perceives social reality as material-symbolic and attempts to explain dialectical relationships between discourse and non-discursive domains in a three-dimensional model presupposing nested analysis of text, discursive practices, and social practices in interpretation of a give discursive event (Fairclaugh, 1993; Winther Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002). Textual analysis looks at organization of the text and its particular features, including 'interactional control', 'identities', 'metaphors', 'wording' and 'grammar'. The discursive practice dimension presupposes scrutiny of interplay of different discourses and genres in the text, relations of the text with other cultural texts, and the text consumption. Analysis on the level of social practice situates the discursive event in a broader social context by employing a cross-theoretical perspective. This methodological scheme is assumed to be flexible and open, to adjust to the purpose of specific research (Winther Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002: 76ff).

In the current study, I apply an adapted version of the three-dimensional model to examine an educational video guide on a developmental talk produced by the trade union *Unionen*, in relations to the proliferation of ethos of individualization and employability in Sweden. Educational materials, as a major resource of socialization that translates moral and behaviour standards (Mustapha, 2012), has traditionally been used as objects of examination in studies on ideology, such as in gender analysis of textbooks (e.g., Evans and Davies, 2000; Frasher and Walker, 1972; Hellinger, 1980; Poulou, 1997; Talansky, 1986) and more recently in the analysis of training materials for security management and control (e.g. Hall, 2007). Unionen is 'the largest union in the private sector and the country's largest organization for white-collar workers' (Unionen, n.d.a). It is comprised of 600,000 members, including collective members, and claims for an ideological role as a part of its organizational mission. 'Together we are in the Union of the leading force that creates success, happiness and safety in the workplace; we need to form opinions on various issues' (ibid.: para 5).

Developmental talk: Examination and confession

The educational video guide presents different stages of a developmental talk. As well, it contains an introductory and concluding sequence that directs viewers to further materials available online. The video is of a didactic nature. It is divided into seven sequences (1-2 minutes long), accompanied by six integrated quizzes and closes with a short summary. In the analysis that follows, I will apply Fairclough's three-dimensional model to examine three video clips and the related quizzes that are most informative for the research question posed.

Developmental talk as a domain of individual agency

The first video sequence covered by voice-over provides an overview of the entire video guide. It opens with a challenging question: 'Do you what to have more influence over your development at work?' A male narrator refers directly to the viewer using an informal tone that immediately produces an atmosphere of egalitarianism and intimacy. The narrator indicates that the viewer is aware of the necessity to prepare for the developmental talk; a corresponding image shows a young man (apparently a worker) enthusiastically telling something to a female manager. The narrator questions if one recognizes the role of a goal setting in personal development; the worker and manager are now observed sitting at opposite sides of a long table and the entire interior is presented to the spectator (picture 1). The conversation takes place in a conference room outfitted with a blackboard and presentation equipment; some objects are placed on the distal part of the table, creating a busy atmosphere and evoking an idea of teamwork. The camera moves to gaze from the side of the manager and from behind a glass wall, creating a closed space where the conversation takes place. The worker is exposed to the observation (picture 2).

The gap in the social status of the participants is subtlety highlighted in aspects of clothing and poses. The manager – a white, middle-aged woman attired in a business suit – holds her body straight and confident; she occupies a significant space around her. The employee – a young man from an ethnic background – is casually dressed; his back is bent most of the time. The man frequently huddles up his body, keeping his hands in a protective position. The narrator continues to challenge the viewer by indicating that a developmental talk is one's 'own responsibility' (the camera focuses on the worker who communicates something to the manager). The sequence closes with the statement that one profits considerably (camera moves to zoom at the manager this moment) from actively pursuing one's own development, and that the union's expertise and materials will facilitate one's training in the successful techniques to be utilized during a developmental talk.

Picture 1

Picture 2

The scene introduces the viewer to the concept of developmental talk: causal, friendly, and orderly. It contains, however, an indirect reminder of organizational hierarchy, since the conversation is not between two equally positioned colleagues. The viewer is associated with the worker who sets up (and is encouraged to) goals for personal competence development and is responsible for individual achievements. This discourse of individualization (Huzzard, 2004) closely corresponds with Niklas Rose’s (1996) notion of an ‘entrepreneur of the self’ (see also Berglund, 2013). According to Rose, in advanced modernity, entrepreneurial affirmations deeply inform individuals’ existential perceptions as well as inter- and intra-subjective relationships. As never before, the self becomes a resource for valorization and a domain of continuous enhancement, potentially leading to pleasurable psychological states of self-accomplishment and satisfaction. As follows from the content of the video, the educational materials construct the worker in terms of ‘entrepreneur of the self’. The trade union (represented by a narrator) facilitates this managerial discourse of goal setting-achievements and undertakes the role of an educator.

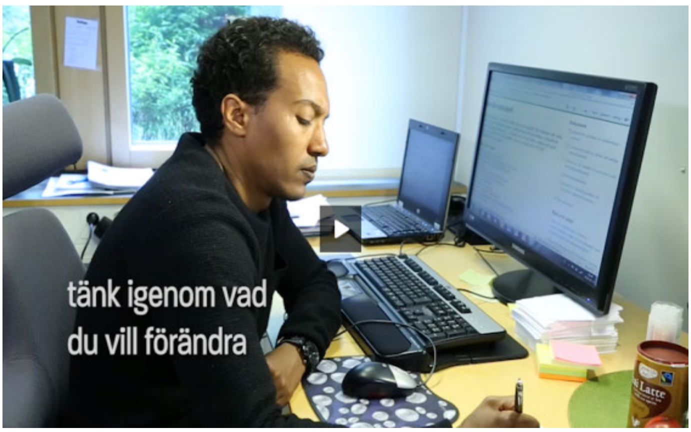
Critical studies have disclosed ways in which the individualizing ethos of self-activation makes individual workers vulnerable to sophisticated modes of (self)exploitation and eventually benefits the interests of capital (e.g., Ross, 2008; Nielson and Rossiter, 2008). Rose (1996) explained mechanisms behind this trend. In times of increasing de-regulation in the economic sphere, the content and outcomes of working activities and interactions are progressively framed in 'humanistic' terms and with respect to one's psychological needs, which will function as an engine for the organizational progress:

> Organizations are to get the most out of their employees, not by managing group relations to maximize contentment, or by rationalizing management to ensure efficiency, but by releasing the psychological striving of individuals for autonomy and creativity and channelling them into the search of the firm for excellence and success. It now appears that individuals will ally themselves with organizational objectives to the extent that they construe them as both dependent upon and enhancing their own skills of self-realization, self-presentation, self-direction, and self-management. (Rose, 1996: 160-161)

Discourse of entrepreneurship and individualized responsibility interweaves in the analyzed video with the semiotics of discipline: the viewer-employee is expected to know the procedure well and follow the prescribed rules (e.g., to prepare to for the conversation in advance). Technologies of subjectification (i.e., association of the viewer with the employee and the employee's active positioning) coexist with (self)objectification achieved by means of the visual experience of surveillance. The panopticon vision invites the spectator to join for a moment a privileged position in the system of hierarchical observation (Foucault, 1995). A feminist scholar, Laura Mulvey (1981), described this mechanism on the example of reproduction of gender ideology in Hollywood cinema. The scholar showed that Hollywood films are motivated by a male type of pleasure and framed by a particular perspective reflecting the structure of domination and control. A female viewer has literally no options except for to associate with the male's voyeurism; identification with the observed object would be 'the questionable pleasure of masochism — lack of power to the *n*th degree' (Nochlin, 1991: 40). In a similar manner, the audience of the educational guide is placed in a situation in which compliance to the managerial doctrine of control becomes the individual's (free) choice without a plausible alternative. Hierarchical observation is maintained with assistance of specific architecture, allowing the regime of visibility and soft pattering of the space.

'Go through what you would like to change'

The second sequence is devoted to the workers' preparation for developmental talk. The viewer observes an office environment; the young man – Mats – is sitting in front of a computer (picture 3). In fact, there are two computer screens on at once, providing an opportunity to accomplish several tasks simultaneously. The employee reveals his personal story in a voice-over, narrating in perfect Swedish. In parallel, written comments appear on the screen marking stages in the unfolding narrative and maintaining a certain structure of action. The first stage is termed 'making a flashback'. The man acknowledges having some changes in his work including an additional project which has resulted in overload and sleeping problems. Voice modulation and facial expressions display the employee's emotions.



Picture 3

A second note appears: 'go through what you would like to change'. The young man looks thoughtful now; he starts writing something on a piece of paper. The next note invites a viewer to acknowledge the value of the union's planning tools that have assisted Mats in managing his situation. The male narrator representing the trade union informs that the employee learned to sort out working tasks and make informed choices. He established the importance of a specific competence – project management – took an introductory course and started looking for advanced education that would lead him to a new professional specialization. The new specialization is promising, since a large project, as Mats has learned, is going to be launched soon at the company. The sequence closes with the man sitting wistfully in his room; the narrator's voice articulates his 'belief' and 'hope' to get support from his manager in this plan of self-promotion. A quiz that comes after the video points out the value of being proactive and attentive to managerial discourse (fig. A).

> *Figure A: Quiz 1*
>
> Mats has found out what it costs to train to become a certified project manager. Preparing for the developmental conversation, he has selected a training company where he wants to go for education. He also has an eye on a new development project that will start in six months. Is it right to be this proactive?
>
> Yes [...] No [...]
>
> The correct answer:
>
> Well, no matter what your answer is, we believe that Mats has a clear advantage in being proactive and taking hold of the situation. It is advantageous to be knowledgeable and make suggestions. It is also important to listen to the manager's comments and suggestions, and try to find a solution that suits both you and the business. (Unionen, n.d.b: part 3)

The portrayed image of an employee once again exhibits a model of a self-activated and self-motivated personality. It is moreover constructed to present an 'ideal type' of worker possessing a non-Swedish background: the one who is not only fluent in market logic, but also acculturated (Swedish-sounding name and privileged form of dialect). Explorative and experimental studies have shown that language proficiency and cultural-specific human capital are among the major factors shaping chances of adequate employment for individuals of foreign origin (Duvander, 2001; le Grand and Szulkin, 2002; Delander et al., 2005; Jönsson and Rubinstein-Reich, 2006). Thus, a symbolic power of personal names was highlighted by the research on 'pragmatic assimilation' of immigrants from the Middle East; Swedish names were found purposefully used by the newcomers to reduce the effects of structural discrimination (Bursell, 2012).

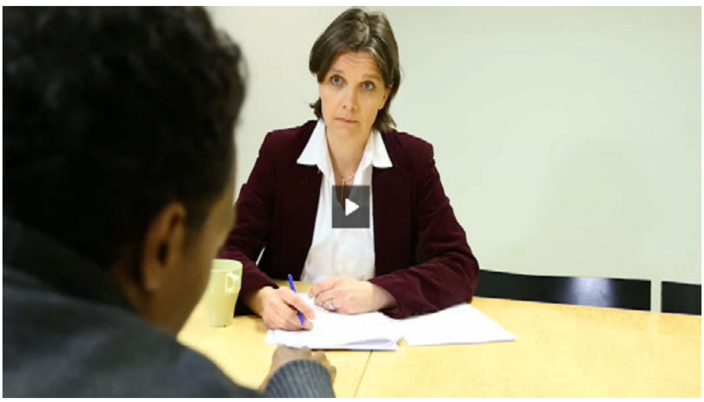
Confession appears in this scene for the first time as both a technology and a discourse (Fairclough, 1992). Troubling somatic symptoms – manifesting sleeping problems – prompted the young man to confess about his working conditions. And indeed, the work environment is presented in the video sequence as potentially inducing psychological problems (e.g., effects of multitasking), which the worker is left to resolve on his own. Control over the employee's emotions is established with the help of an expert and by means of rationalization, resulting in a curative effect (Fejes and Dahlstedt, 2013). The discourse of change and development is central in this sequence; it is closely associated with the means of sustaining one's own somatic and psychological wellbeing. As the viewer will further discover (in the omitted sequence 4), the work-related affective difficulties are not part of the conversation with the manager; these are personal matters that the worker must deal with individually. Along the same line, Sandlund et al. (2011), in a microanalysis of the developmental conversation, demonstrated that labourers' experiences with workplace stress are normalized and their related complaints are downplayed. Confession in the Unionen's video moreover manifests itself in as a discursive genre. It starts with the ontological modality of the confessional discourse – Mats exposes his psychological problems – and proceeds with an epistemological modality that is frequently thought of as enhancing and liberating, but it may become encapsulated within the logic of normalization (Fejes and Dahlstedt, 2013).

The personal goals of the worker are awakened and articulated during the video in communication with organizational objectives (fig. A). The worker is free to follow his own aspirations on the condition that those coincide with the company's objectives. Thus, in a controversial manner, the organizational mission appears to frame the individual's needs and developmental trajectories. In a similar vein, Fejes and Dahlstedt (2013) described the ambiguity of a didactical approach frequently observed in the educational context; class discussions are said to be voluntary, although active engagement is promoted as a prerequisite for successful learning. According to this logic, students are responsible for self-motivation that essentially involves self-monitoring and regulation of one's own psychodynamics.

The developmental plan

The seventh and the final video sequence covers the individual developmental plan. The manager acknowledges that a developmental plan has been produced and that both sides have agreed on it. Mats evaluates the plan as being 'well-thought out' and 'all-embracing'. As introduced in sequence 2, he will on a later occasion inquire with the educational institution on the acceptance of a divided fee payment for the advanced course in project management. Visual space is organized to include an additional empty chair on the side of the employee (picture 4). The manager promises to make a note and investigate the company's ability to provide financial support. Mats would like to be given a timeframe for the final reply and would like to have the request documented as well. The camera gazes from behind the employee's shoulder while he points to the paper where the note is supposed to be made. The manager, however, does not confront this challenge alone; the spectator can observe a line of empty chairs on the manager's side (picture 5). She shakes her head and informs that the document will be available in the internal electronic system for Mats to give a formal confirmation. Mats exhibits a degree of satisfaction ('Great! So, we agreed'), though he keeps a 'closed' pose with his hands crossed in front of his body. The last quiz addresses the issue of a written developmental plan at work (fig. B).

Picture 4



Picture 5

As appeared during the interview, the manager is responsive to the initiative of the worker and demonstrates engagement with his idea of additional training. Skilful and disposed to relearn staff is a crucial resource for the contemporary organization (Garsten and Jacobsson, 2004). However, the company's contribution to competence development is framed as assistance or support. Overall, the company's responsibilities for staff training remain rather unclear. At some point, Mats attempts to get control over the uncertainty of the situation. His position is strengthened by an unseen presence of the trade union (an empty chair). Huzzard (2004) demonstrated that certain conventional elements remain among unions' priorities, though individualizing discourse of 'competence development' profoundly shapes unions' rhetoric and policies.

Figure B: Quiz 6

Do you have a written developmental plan at your job?

Yes: It's good! A written individual development plan will considerably facilitate the stability of the agreement. A lot can happen in a year and if your current boss disappears, there can be a risk that a verbal agreement does not persist when the time comes to implement and follow up the development plan.

No: It's not good. Make sure to get a written individual developmental plan. It considerably facilitates the stability of the agreement. A lot can happen in a year and if your current boss disappears, there can be a risk that a verbal agreement does not persist when the time comes to implement and follow up the development plan. (Unionen, n.d.b.: part 13)

Goal setting is of special importance: it helps to simultaneously maintain motivation and calculability of the subject. The company's guide fosters worker's recognition of the necessity of documentation that allows 'the case' to be monitored. The documentation imperative is presented as natural and intrinsic for successful workplace performance, without any reference to salary decisions that usually follow developmental talks and utilize the accumulated data (see also Sandlund et al., 2011).

The order of discourse in developmental talk

Three distinctive discourses interplay in the analysed visual text. First, a strong managerial discourse builds on the affirmation of rationality, procedures of goal setting, careful planning and documentation that enable evaluation, and on the direct surveillance. The employee's personal development is seen less as a spontaneous move than as a set of carefully calculated steps reassured in their relevance for organizational goals. Second, the discourse of entrepreneurship appears in the video. It is an individualizing discourse since responsibility is fully ascribed to the employee himself. In this context, self-motivation becomes a type of discipline that helps to sustain a neoliberal organization. Finally, the discourse of confession manifests itself in the video guide. It is frequently championed by managerial/evaluation discourse, a pattern that problematizes the leading role of pedagogical inspirations in performance appraisal procedures (Mikkelsen, 1998; Lingren, 2001). At the same time, confession allows for a deep engagement of individual psychodynamics into the neoliberal project. Trade union interventions into the flow of the conversation are closely associated with the episodes of confession.

Three types of identities are constructed in the analyzed educational video: the worker, the manager, and the trade union.

The worker

The video's emphasis is on the 'power of initiative' (Garsten and Jacobsson, 2004: 1) as a mode of self-governing guided by business priorities. Normalizing technologies interweave with the operation of productive effects of power to fashion a disciplined entrepreneurial self that relies on experts, conforms management, and struggles to acquire professional expertise. The normalized neoliberal worker is encouraged to invest personal resources into self and organizational promotion. The domain of the worker's private life and emotions is largely absent in the educational video or appears as a source of trouble for workplace relationships. Through the process of self-narration, the employee comes to know himself (Townley, 1996; Fejes and Dahlstedt, 2013) and, with the assistance of an expert, to manage his own psychological welfare.

The educational materials address a specific social group, namely workers with a non-Swedish background, to be socialized in accordance with the neoliberal doctrine. It constructs a racialized figure of a desirable employee that satisfies both the requests from the de-regulated market and from the nationalistic political rhetoric. In the presented video, the developmental talk as governing technology is realized in full scale: the worker is both 'hailed' by neoliberal ideology (Althusser, 2008) and exposed to the controlling regime.

The manager/Management

A female manager in the educational video is personified but anonymous, which reduces possible accountability claims. She represents management at large as a stakeholder in the portrayed situation. Management appears predominantly concerned with the evaluation and control of the ethnic worker. The structural order of subordination is subtly constructed in the video, problematizing popular egalitarian inspirations of the developmental talk procedures (see Mikkelsen, 1996; Lingren, 2001). Management is further shown facilitating the worker's initiative in self-enhancement, even though the offer of help appeared as rather a precarious arrangement.

The trade union

Mats indirectly verbalizes to the manager his intimate desire for more balanced working conditions. The employee's work-induced health troubles and the related thoughts become even more open to the narrator representing the trade union organization. It is he who is a 'master' authorized to obtain all of the details of individual psychodynamics for further validation and facilitation. 'Even if the master, in his role as a discriminating power, does not say anything, the fact that the thought has been expressed will have an effect of discrimination' (Foucault, 1997: 248; see also Fejes and Dahlstedt, 2013). The master remains invisible and capable of producing power/knowledge on the basis of hierarchical observation (Foucault, 1995). Overall, in the analyzed video materials, the leading role of the trade union in regulation of workplace relationships is maintained on its privileged access to the both public performance of the worker and his private needs and thoughts – micro-details of the individual mental life. It is the unique role of an expert-therapist helping the worker to adjust in the best way to the environmental demands by means of self-mastering. A relatively open genre, confession can in principle generate unanticipated ideas, though in the development talk video the framing effect of organizational objectives is profound.

As with previous research, trade unions' rhetoric increasingly echoes 'neoliberal rationality', emphasizing individualization and self-promotion at the expense of social guarantees and collective interests (Forge, 2008; Edwards, 2008). This study provides new evidence of a decline in a 'critical stance towards the employer' (Forge, 2008: 110) among some trade unions and their active involvement in workplace governance through education that legitimizes new modes of normalization and control. The described identity is associated with a white-collar trade union organization for workers in the private sector, which seems to be at the forefront of ideological innovations at times of de-regulation. Unionen is the sole organization out of 55 other trade unions that provides such an elaborate and interactive guide for developmental talk (Fackförbunden, n.d.).

As follows from the study, confession as an element of workplace interactions serves wide discourse of individualization. It is both oppressive and constitutive for an individual worker; it allows for the maintenance of a sophisticated power order in which deep psychological mechanisms are exploited. Why would a trade union associate itself with confession? The technology promises deeper involvement into the economy of truth via the institution of expertise that secures regulatory mechanisms. Foucault (2003) emphasized the role of experts as facilitators of discipline proliferation into the private domain of an individual's psychology. Rose and Miller elaborated further on a rather complex positioning and operation of experts in the matrix of governing relationships:

> On the one hand they would ally themselves with political authorities, focusing upon their problems and problematizing new issues, translating political concerns about economic productivity, innovation, industrial unrest, social stability, law and order, normality and pathology and so forth into the vocabulary of management, accounting, medicine, social science and psychology. On the other hand, they

> would seek to form alliances with individuals themselves, translating their daily worries and decisions over investment, child bearing, factory organization or diet into a language claiming the power of truth, and offering to teach them the techniques by which they might manage better, earn more, bring up healthier or happier children and much more besides. (1992: 188)

Creating domains of knowledge – 'enclosures' – where their specific proficiency would be privileged and exclusive, experts obtain an opportunity to maintain their own power. They also function as essential agents of the regulatory regime that rests on the intermingling of individual sovereignty and power effects (ibid.: 188-189). In the analyzed video, the trade union can be seen as re-establishing itself within the field of neoliberal power relations in a role of an expert assisting the worker in the process of becoming a 'proper' subject willing and capable of engaging with new market expectations.

Conclusion

According to Foucault, discourses are capable of shaping identities as well as individual and institutional practices. The question, however, remains: is it possible to escape 'truth effects', to resist or counter-act discourse-powers? Foucault's writings are frequently found to be rather confusingly unsatisfying on the issue of agency (Barrett, 1991; Resch, 1992; Smart, 1993). In Foucault's early writings, discourses are said to work on and through bodies. The analyzed educational video has a good chance of achieving certain effects by means of visual didactics, followed by materialization of the discourse in quiz choices. Training for Foucault is the basis of socialization; it allows to sustain disciplinary regime. The presented video provides a training tool for incorporation of a certain model of workplace relationships and related behaviour scripts.

In an attempt to overcome the image of an all-embracing power, Foucault (1980b: 81-82) invented the notion of 'subjugated knowledge' that describes (a) 'the immediate emergence of historical contents' or contradictions manifesting themselves despite dominant scientific paradigms and (b) a type of knowledge not directly satisfying functional ends of the system – 'popular', 'disqualified' knowledge – that is typically downplayed and oppressed. This line of thought, however, did not get a substantial development in Foucault's work beyond his lecture from 1976. Fairclough's later elaborations on discourse, communication theory that builds on Gramci's idea of hegemony and cultural studies' critique of structuralism seem to be more informative on the issue of counter-action to a dominant discourse and perspectives of its transformation. Thus, Stuart Hall's (1985) notion of 'articulation', employed by Fairclough (see Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999; Winther Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002), highlights a complex relationship and a possibility of competition between discourses constituting the communicative event, a situation reflecting heterogeneity and contradictive character of social institutions and social practice. Yet another concept of 'encoding/de-coding' (Hall, 2006) allows for exploring the readers' perceptions of cultural representations and thus helps to overcome the limitation of discourse analysis, namely its one-sided examination of the linguistic aspects of communication (Winther Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002). In light of the ongoing discussion about counter-actions against normalizing and regulatory power regimes, further research is needed to address in depth the discursive practice dimension of the didactic interventions.

A number of studies argue for a certain space of resistance within the overall disciplinary regime of performance appraisal procedures (e.g., Towney, 1995; Triabtafiilou, 2003). Towney (1995) elaborated on Foucault's ethics of the self that can facilitate overcoming the dominant imperative of self-examination towards a creative fashioning of the self in non-individualistic and communitarian terms. Transgressing Foucault's framework, the scholar claims for reinstallation of the idea of citizenship into organizational rhetoric and organizational research; recognition of rights and mutual obligations should replace the currently salient discourse of needs. This would divert the process of individualization of social ills and return authority's lasting responsibility over organization as a social body at large as well as over situations of individual workers.

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A vanishing act: The magical technologies of invisibility in care work

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abstract

The use of information and communication technology (ICT) has played an important role in the reforms that have taken place in Western welfare societies over the past two decades. ICT is regarded as a way to provide transparency and information exchange among providers, users and politicians. This has also been the case for healthcare services in elderly home care, where ICT has been deployed to enable information exchange, knowledge sharing and documentation of delivered services. This article explores the extent to which the popular personal digital assistant (PDA) contributes to these types of activities in the provision of elderly home care services in Copenhagen, Denmark. We argue that despite the PDA's promising potential to provide increased transparency concerning the delivery of services, it has had the opposite effect. Rather than creating transparency, the PDA has become a tool for hiding internal contradictions in the organization of elderly home care services so that key processes have become outright invisible. This trick, the paper argues, is essentially an act of what Bourdieu calls social magic.

Introduction

In J. K. Rowling's epic fantasy novels about Harry Potter, the reader meets Hermione Jean Granger, a student at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry and the best friend of the protagonist, Harry Potter, and another central character, Ron Weasley. Hermione is referred to as the little know-it-all because of her encyclopaedic knowledge, which at times has the effect of making her ignorant of her surroundings. Hermione's snootiness, however, hides her insecurity and fear of failure. She wants to perform as well as possible in her classes at Hogwarts, but is challenged by an impossible schedule that requires her to be physically present in two separate classes at once.

The Headmistress of Hogwarts, Minerva McGonagall, notices Hermione's struggles and, feeling sorry for her, applies to the Ministry of Magic to give Hermione special permission to use a magical Time-Turner, which has the appearance of an hourglass and makes it possible for Hermione to manipulate time to allow her to take more than one class at a time. Hermione is ordered to keep the arrangement a secret from everyone, including Harry and Ron, who do notice the suspicious unfeasibility of her schedule and her sometimes bizarre disappearances and reappearances. Finally, near the end of the book, Hermione lets Harry and Ron in on her secret.

In many ways Hermione's story is similar to how Danish home care workers use the personal digital assistant (PDA). The story we tell here is about home care workers in Danish municipalities who find themselves in stressful work situations with apparently impossible schedules that require them to be in two places at once. Although not quite a golden Time-Turner that makes it possible to be physically present in multiple places simultaneously, the municipal counterpart is a small, handheld computer from the Danish Ministry of Social Affairs, not the Ministry of Magic. Obviously, this digital Time-Turner cannot actually be employed to enable home care workers to be physically present in two places at the same time but it helps to create the illusion that they can, thus allowing home care workers to keep pace with an otherwise impossible time schedule.

This article argues that the magic of the PDA becomes possible because the Ministry of Social Affairs gives the technology a monopoly on representations of reality. Their authorisation provides the illusion that the PDA has the same abilities as Hermione's golden hourglass. The story we tell has four parts. First, we introduce Bourdieu's work and his concept of the skeptron and show how it allows us to observe the technology's function in practice. Second, we present the technology and its authorisation. Next, we show how the technology functions as a magic Time-Turner in its everyday use. Finally, we discuss how the technology serves to make the impossible look possible, which has the effect of blocking necessary and comprehensive changes to the daily routines of home care workers.

The skeptron

For more than a decade information technologies have been widespread in social and healthcare services in Western Europe. This development has been backed by a generally optimistic political attitude toward the ability of new forms of information technology to create transparency and increase efficiency in social and healthcare sectors, and thus to contribute to the ideals propagated by new public management (see Clarke and Newman, 1997). Meanwhile, various studies call attention to the fact that the implementation of information technologies does not take place without considerable conflicts concerning their implementation. In these studies, the organisation appears as a place of conflict and struggle between social workers and their managers and as a place where the new technologies serve as strategic tools for both workers and managers to gain power (Sewell and Wilkenson, 1992; Thompsen and Ackroyd, 1995; Voukko, 2008; Webster and Robins, 1993). The question becomes how new technologies empower workers because of the increased visibility of the information and processes that the technology brings about but also the increased ability of managers to control work conditions.

These studies discuss important issues regarding surveillance and autonomy as well as the forms of resistance available to workers who have to use the technology in their everyday work. They perceive resistance as a way to undermine the rationality that the technology represents in the hands of management. There is a tendency, however, to see the struggle for workers' autonomy as something that happens in spite of the control and discipline produced by the different forms of information technologies. Thus, the new technologies are criticised for reproducing the subordination of workers and for enhancing employee control and regulation (see, for example Hjalmarsson, 2009, 2011; Sandalowski, 1997).

Other studies, by contrast, emphasise the varied and complex co-construction of technology and its users in the organisations. These studies stress that users and technology only emerge as such through their mutual engagement. Contemporary science and technology studies (STS), such as the social constructivism of technologies and actor-network theory (ANT), have complicated the issue and challenge the idea that technology simply serves as yet another instrument in the existing struggle for autonomy in the workplace by asserting that both technology and user only emerge as effects of their processes of interaction (Berg, 2001; Lyon, 2001; Mort et al., 2009; Oudshoorn, 2011; Oudshoorn et al., 2004; Timmerman and Berg, 2003; Winance, 2006). One of the main characteristics of the STS tradition is that it observes technologies as not preceding or as an effect of the social, but as an active participant in it. This approach has produced numerous empirical studies on various types of technology. Combined with analyses of previous information and communication technology (ICT) studies, the focus has been on the dynamic relationship between technological and the social aspects (Berg, 2001; 1999; Berg and Bowker, 1997; Ellingsen and Monteriro, 2003a, 2003b; Lærum et al., 2001; Lærum et al., 2003; Monteiro, 2003; Oudshoorn and Pinch 2005; Vimarlund, et. al, 2008; Winthereik et al., 2007).

ANT is a dominant STS theory whose proponents have challenged any sharp distinctions between technology and the social, focusing instead on the importance of the mutual interactions between them (e.g. Callon et al., 1986; Latour, 1987, 1988, 2000, 2005; Law and Hassard, 1999). According to ANT, technology does not enter into an already established social structure, such as the traditional struggle between workers and managers. ANT maintains that technology and the social structure are mutually constitutive. Technology functions as an actor within a network of several actors that interprets or translates the technology differently. Chemicals, bikes, airbags and doors are used as examples of how humans and technology actively partake in various kinds of interactions. Rather than conceiving actors - whether people or devices - as possessing agency independently, agency is perceived to emerge through the encounter between entities or in between entities (see for example Callon et al., 1986).

Technology is inherently social due to the prescriptions encoded in it, implying what Latour calls 'the script' or the 'inscribed reader' (1988: 307), but this does not guarantee that its translation will not end up being misread in various ways. Any translation of a technology, no matter how loaded with prescriptions, will add something. In other words, there is no such thing as pure translations. Actor networks encompass a large number of different translations of ways in which a technology can be used. According to ANT, weighting one actor's construction over another's does not make sense, for example ranking the technician's implementation over the user's application, or the inventor's intention over the technician's modification.

Inspired by ANT's dynamic understanding of the relationship between technology and the social, this article draws on Bourdieu, who is renowned for his attempt to overcome sharp distinctions between subject and object, as well as technology and society and who engaged relational thinking with regard to the social. According to Bourdieu, and consistent with ANT, if a technology cannot act without a user it becomes technology only by virtue of its use, through which it instantly becomes a part of a complex and dynamic social structure. Also in keeping with the ANT approach, the technology, on its own behalf, never enters the scene completely open to being filled with meaning on the premises of the social. Uninterested in the simple materiality of a given technology, Bourdieu and ANT are concerned with the kind of agency assigned and ascribed to technology. Consequently, technology appears as neither inherently human nor non-human, but as a composition of both.

In one respect, however, Bourdieu's work distinguishes itself from ANT in its emphasis on how power is delegated by the use of technology. Technology enters the scene not only with a certain script but also with different degrees of authority that are directly proportional to the authority invested in the technology (Bourdieu, 1991: 223, 1977: 170). In this way some technologies act almost as if they have magical powers; others are quickly forgotten. The outcome, according to Bourdieu (1980, 1993), depends on the social institutions that authorise the technology and assign it a position or status within a specific field.

In order to understand how this delegation takes place, we apply Bourdieu's metaphor of the skeptron. The Homeric orator holds the skeptron to indicate the right to speak, the skeptron allowing the speaker's words to gain a power that does not stem from the words alone; authority is conferred on them by the skeptron and the social institution of which it is a part (Bourdieu, 1991: 5). In order for the skeptron to take on this function of delegating power to the speaker, it must be endowed with symbolic capital beforehand. In other words, the distribution of symbolic capital is what gives the skeptron its illocutionary power. Symbolic capital is 'any property (any form of capital whether physical, economic, cultural, or social) which is perceived by social agents endowed with categories of perception which cause them to know it and to recognise it, to give it value' (Bourdieu, 1994: 8). Thus, showing how this symbol became institutionalised is important because it is by virtue of the inscription of symbols in everyday practices that they attain their taken-for-granted naturalness, and so become the basis for the recognition of legitimacy and for the investment of symbolic capital.

Consequently, investigating the distribution of symbolic capital in a social field is critical to understanding the conference of authority to and legitimation of the skeptron. In other words, the skeptron receives its legitimacy and position from the symbolic resources – what Bourdieu calls symbolic capital – being invested in it. This capital can also be economic capital, which means the skeptron receives its authority from the money invested in it; or it can be political capital, which represents the political establishment's legitimation of the skeptron; or, finally, it can be scientific capital, which supports the skeptron through its knowledge production. According to Bourdieu any symbolic capital represents a property 'which is perceived by social agents endowed with categories of perception which cause them to know it and to recognize it, to give it value' (1994: 8).

For Bourdieu, a technology is always inherently social due to the social institutions that created and authorised it. Contrary to the common insight of most traditional ANT studies, however, not all the different perceptions, interpretations and translations of a given technology are of equal importance. According to Bourdieu the technology does not simply represent a certain script that can be interpreted differently, but it also enters the scene with a certain amount of illocutionary power, depending on which institutions authorise its use. In other words technologies do not travel alone; they are carried by someone, which means, according to Bourdieu, that it is important who carries them and how much capital is invested in them.

Bourdieu's point is that the skeptron does not work independently, which means the choice of skeptron, i.e. technology, is irrelevant as its magic only works if it is supported by a given social institution that allows the technology to create an authorised fiction about that reality. Bourdieu's social magic theses contend that only by having been given the authority to speak is it possible to act on the world through language.

While translation plays a key role in Latour's understanding of how technology travels within different socio-technical networks, enrolling some actors and excluding others, Bourdieu's work focuses on the processes of authorisation invested in the technology. This is not an attempt, however, to discuss differences and similarities between the work of Latour and Bourdieu, as this has already been done elsewhere (see Fuller, 2000; Prior, 2008; Schinkel, 2007; Sterne, 2003; Turnbull and Antalffy, 2009). Instead this article investigates how a mundane communication technology such as the PDA becomes a skeptron through the symbolic capital invested in it and that creates its performative power. Our analysis of this process allows us to address some important issues regarding how technologies perform regarding the construction of reality.

Our analysis involves two primary steps. First, we show how the state authorised the PDA and gave the PDA its illocutionary power through its symbolic investment in it. Second, we show how its magical powers are used in the everyday work life of home care workers.

The making of a skeptron

In order for a technology to become effective it has to be supported by social institutions that have the right to authorise it. Once this has been granted and the right to speech recognised, the technology can produce a certain picture or vision of the world. To understand the power of a given technology, investigating the social investment in it is a good starting point (Bourdieu, 1991:105, 107, 109, 236). According to Bourdieu (1994) the state is in a unique position to authorise a technology and to give it a certain position within a specific field, because the state possesses a unique power to grant symbolic capital to the object in use.

When the PDA was introduced, the Danish state played an active role in presenting it as an important and legitimate tool for securing transparency and efficiency within home care services. In 2005 the Ministry of Social Affairs presented the PDA as a technology that could guarantee the final and absolute transparency of all the services and points of care people received in order to ensure that everyone received exactly what they were entitled to, and ultimately to monitor whether service providers lived up to their contracts.

Also known as a palmtop computer or a personal data assistant, the PDA was only slightly larger than a modern mobile phone and became a part of every home care worker's personal equipment. At the beginning of the workday, home care workers would download a schedule planned by their manager, a super user, at the municipality. The schedule listed where they should be at what time and what services they were to deliver. In addition to having to register when they entered and left people's homes directly on the PDA, home care workers had to register delivery of the services that the public administration, independently of the home care system, had determined that the individual was entitled to. If they deviated from the schedule and assigned services, they had to state the reason on the PDA. All data entered on the PDA by the home care worker was then immediately stored on a central computer, which was part of a larger system called Copenhagen Care System, or KOS. This system allowed the local authorities to check whether or not the services had been delivered.

While it is difficult to pinpoint the exact origin of the idea that PDAs could make home care more efficient (Nielsen et al., 2014), the public did not become aware of the PDA project until the state began highlighting the positive outcomes of the CareMobile pilot project it had initiated. Based on this project, the state concluded that not only could the PDA increase documentation of delivered services and thereby secure people's rights, but it could also help the home care service to save time (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2005a, 2005b).

The reports referred to in the following highlight how the CareMobile project bestowed scientific legitimacy on the PDA. One report states that, 'the experiences from the CareMobil project show that mobile technology is advanced enough to be a usable tool in the everyday work life involving elderly care' (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2005a: 4, 2006). In government reports from 2005 the PDA was given scientific capital in the sense that the reports recommend that the PDA be recommended based on existing knowledge about its practical usage. On this basis, the state also invested all its political capital in strong recommendations of the PDA to municipal home care services. In the report *Strategy for the digitisation of social services* the government emphasised the necessity of making use of new ICT technologies to increase the quality and efficiency of the delivered services, stating that, 'the positive experiences from the CareMobil project, with the implementation of mobile technologies, will spread to social eldercare in general' (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2006: 25). As a result the state invested its political capital by recommending the PDA to home care agencies. The knowledge and political legitimation of the technology was then quickly endorsed by a national investment of DKK 320 million for the implementation of mobile technology in home care (Nielsen, 2008: 146).

The PDA received strong backing by the optimistic expectations of politicians and subsequent financial support. By 2010, 98% of all municipalities in Denmark had implemented the PDA in their home care services (Rybjerg and Kamp, 2010). With the help of government funding, the City of Copenhagen was one of the first municipalities to introduce the PDA in its home care services:

> Our motivation has persistently been that we would be better at managing and documentation. And we have achieved our goal. We can say how many visits we have each week. We can say how many care workers enter the homes of care recipients. And we can say what the cost of the services provided is. We could not answer these important questions three years ago. (City of Copenhagen, 2006, in Nielsen et al., 2014: 177)

The City of Copenhagen exemplifies the government's optimistic expectations that PDAs would guarantee transparency in the complex area of home care services in Denmark. That same year, the minister of science awarded the Good Digital Management Prize to the City of Copenhagen's health and care mayor (Copenhagen has a lord mayor and six mayors for specific areas, in which the mayor of health and care is just one). In the description of why the prize was given, the implementation of PDAs in the City of Copenhagen is described as a 'pioneer project that everyone could learn from'. In a thank you speech, the mayor stated:

> With implementation of the KOS system, home care services in the City of Copenhagen are at the forefront when it comes to the use of handheld computers [the PDA]. Thus, information technologies and digitisation are a part of our home care services, which guarantees that home care workers receive the optimal framework for delivering services to senior citizens in Copenhagen. We achieve better quality and gain a connection to our home care services. (CSC, 2006, own translation)

The integration of the PDA into home care services was intended to support the division between the visitation process and service providers, as well as to create better overview, documentation and transparency to provide an improved foundation for decision making. The PDA, in particular, was implemented because it was expected to enable information exchange and to provide knowledge and documentation at the point of care. The goal was for it to increase the ability of home care service providers to share, transmit and communicate accurate information among the involved actors (Nielsen, 2010; Rybjerg and Kamp, 2010).

The legitimation of the PDA was a result of the unique power of the state to produce and impose the view of the PDA as an efficient tool for creating transparency and efficiency within home care services. Given the state investment of scientific, political and economic capital in the PDA, the PDA became authorised as such. As a result, the PDA expressed a certain universality, a representation of the 'point of view of society' rather than a particular interest in society (Bourdieu, 1994:17). The legitimacy of the PDA, in other words, was tied to its possession of the symbolic capital it had received from the state.

Initially authorised by the Ministry of Social Affairs and then by the City of Copenhagen, the technology gained a monopoly on what counts as real. This section has shown that the political investment of various kinds of symbolic capital in the PDA made it possible for the technology to appear as a popular tool for measuring what was happening at the point of care and that use of the technology is, in principle, replicable and independent of the care worker using it. The symbolic investments represent the foundation of the authorisation of the PDA as an impersonal and objective tool designed to increase transparency in the home care sector.

Through the state's symbolic investments, the PDA served as a skeptron and took on similar characteristics by being delegated the power to give an authorised picture of what was taking place at the point of care. The authorisation and power allocated to the technology, however, do not determine how the technology, as a skeptron, is being used in practice. After presenting our methodology in the next section, we will examine how home care workers made use of the PDA's illocutionary power in their everyday work in a manner that undermined its authority as an impersonal, objective tool for transparency.

Method

In contrast to Bourdieu's examples it was neither a king nor a priest who received the mandate to speak through the skeptron, but rather the City of Copenhagen's care workers. We have obtained our empirical evidence of how home care workers made use of the PDA's illocutionary power from eleven qualitative interviews conducted in the fall of 2008 with home care workers from two nightshift groups in the City of Copenhagen. Each group would work for seven days, which would be followed by seven days off. Depending on the number of people who were entitled to receive assistance at the given time, the number of staff in a group varied (by only one employee on average).

In principle, we cannot know the extent to which the impressions related by home care workers are representative of every home care worker in the City of Copenhagen. To achieve the highest degree of representation, however, the interviewees were chosen from among permanent employees who had the longest time of service in order to ensure that they had some experience with the use of the PDA.

Semi-structured, the interviews were used to lead and shape the direction of the analysis as opposed to testing a specific hypothesis. Beginning with a number of introductory questions on length of employment and what it is like to work in the homecare sector, we asked interviewees to describe their impression of their daily routines regarding workload, planning and whether they thought there was a sufficient numbers of employees. Next, they were asked to describe what they thought about the PDA (compared to the previous system with daily written work schedules); how they used the PDA; and what functions they found important and which ones they ignored. They were also asked to consider time registration; face-to-face time; white time (the time in between face-to-face time); overlap on assignments and what they thought about the feedback they received on these issues. Finally, they were asked if they would be interested in an expanded version of the PDA that has a feature that would allow them to write directly in KOS.

Making use of the skeptron

On the one hand, we have a newly developed technology that the political system has invested a great deal of prestige and money in. The aim was to find a solution to the overall issue of how to make delivered services transparent in order to guarantee a strict coupling of the services assigned with services rendered. On the other hand, there is a social structure represented by the daily work conditions of home care workers, which the authorised technology is intended to be a part of. A typical working day in a Copenhagen home care service begins with the local manager distributing a schedule with the tasks listed for each care worker that indicates where the worker has to be, at what time and which services are to be delivered. The schedule is put together by a supervisor responsible for optimising use of local resources to deliver services. When asked, home care workers do not consider the time schedules ideal.

From the outset, the lists they receive when they check in at work represent an impossible number of tasks. One care worker describes how the time schedules overlap in a way that seemingly means they have to be in two places at once:

> The planned scheduling and services – there's an overlap; they're highly misleading. There are time periods that do not reflect reality and that you cannot relate to, except to laugh at. Because things take the time they take.

Another home care worker emphasised that if she ignored this fact and insisted on living up to the time schedule instead, by finishing one elderly person's services before starting the next person's, she would not be able to do her job within normal work hours: if we were to follow the planned time schedule, we would never get home.

Another home care worker made the same point, stating:

> If they [the visits] were done bang, bang, then we'd have to be on the job for 12 hours….Because keeping up with the time schedules is physically impossible, the home care workers are doomed to fail to live up to them:… there is an essential difference between the time assigned and the time spent; they're incompatible.

When asked whether this overlap was well recognised by the management, one home care worker explained:

> Yes, the driving lists [time schedules] showed this. It's grotesque that they require us to be in three or four places at once.

Another home care worker explained that:

> The discrepancy is completely obvious, so nobody could get away with saying they didn't know about it. It's commonly known that an excess of visits happens throughout the municipality; everybody knows it.

The impossible time schedules make it possible for the management to live up to two different sets of expectations that often come into conflict with each other. On the one hand the visitation of what kind of care individual seniors are entitled to receive and, on the other, the scarce financial resources to do so. But even though the home care workers develop various strategies to survive in a work environment that places undue demands on them at the start of the workday, the lack of coherence in the time schedules creates undue stress and a miserable work environment:

> It creates a horrible working environment, because people have been promised something by someone. (Home help, 2008)

The goal of introducing the PDA was to make the services transparent at the point of care. As a result, we might assume that using the PDA would instantly reveal the miserable state of affairs and bring it to an end by identifying the impossibility of the home care workers' schedules. Instead, the home care worker cultivated a more pragmatic use of the PDA to develop various strategies for coping with their impossible time schedules. Because the schedules did not allow for enough time to move from one person's home to the next, the home care worker would end up with too little time to deliver the planned services for the next person. In the example below, the home care worker uses the PDA to render the transportation time, also called white time, between visits invisible:

> But then you just act cleverly [about using the PDA in practice] and refrain from registering the time at the exact moment you come and go, because there's only two minutes allotted to drive between each visit... KOS doesn't control me. I control KOS in order to avoid getting too much white time.... I have driving time and I need to get up the stairs, so then I just act cleverly and register a little early.

Another home care worker explained:

> Sometimes it takes seven, eight, ten minutes to get to the next visit... which appears as white time, which means it looks like I haven't been doing anything... in that case I might restart the visit, so it probably often appears as if I have three minutes between every visit.

In the above examples, the home care workers used the PDA to manipulate time by registering that they arrived at the elderly person's home earlier than was the case. By doing this, it appeared in the system as though they had only spent two minutes driving between visits, even though this did not reflect reality.

In other examples, white time appears not only because of the transportation time, but due to work situations where home care workers had to spend time, for example training a substitute to take over their duties and schedule:

> ...and you spend time with the substitute, finding the keys and filling them in on the next person to visit. A lot of time passes, which means a big 10-15-20-minute time gap appears in one's performance.... When that happens, I would say, you feel bad and then it might happen that the last visit gets edited and five extra minutes added .... Otherwise it looks too off. It looks like you've been lazy.

Another home help pointed out the same fact:

> If I'm a little unlucky with the substitute I'm assigned and I sit and wait in the car for an eternity, then I might add another 10 minutes to one of my visits.

Consequently, by fiddling with the amount of time spent on a visit, the PDA is being used to disguise the time home care workers spend. These strategies go beyond simply reducing white time in the effort to make an impossible time schedule seem possible. For example, the PDA is utilised to cover up the fact that home care workers reduce the time spent on delivering specific services:

> There's a paradox, which is – you have 25-27 people on your list – and even if the list states that people are entitled to 35 minutes, they only get ten. Even though you cancelled some of the services, the person would perhaps be entitled to 15 minutes, but would still only get ten.

In this case, the home care worker simply decides to cancel some of the services the individual is entitled to in order to make the overlap disappear with the help of the PDA. Another home care worker used the same tactic: 'Let's say you cancel a lot of services, then it would create a more accurate picture.... If you cancel the services we don't get to, then the overlap disappears'. The home care workers seem to have developed a cynical attitude towards the elderly and to independently establish what kinds of services are required. As one home care worker explains: 'A lot of them [services] could be cancelled'.

The home care workers use the PDA not only to hide the fact that some of the services people are entitled to are not delivered, but also to appoint themselves the status of determining what services should be carried out. The home care workers ignore the fact that these decisions are being made outside the home care system and without the support of staff trained to judge what kind of help an individual needs. Some care workers developed the idea that offering a service is the same as delivering it, which means they use the PDA to register that a task has been completed even if it has only been offered:

> We were there and we offered the help.... We have offered that service and that's the same as saying it has been delivered.

At this point, the question is why the care workers did not use the PDA properly to make it obvious to everyone that the time schedules represented impossible expectations about how efficient home care can be. The interviews indicate that the care workers were perfectly aware that this would create the need for a thorough reform of the overall structure of the municipal home care system:

> There's a big dilemma in it. If you were to cancel that service time and again, then you would have to report it to the coordinator. Then you'd get less time allotted,

> which would lead to fewer employees. In principle... no, not in principle, in reality... you only end up creating problems for yourself. If you're a little clever, then you just offer the service.

For the home care workers, keeping the system going in spite of its internal contradictions represents a better outcome. As one of the formerly interviews has shown, some of them even find that the elderly generally are provided with excess care visitation, and as long as they receive their meals, get their nappy changed, and are helped into bed, the home care workers have done their job properly. Even if they haven't delivered the care the elderly is entitled to.

To sum up: the technology does not achieve the function of making what is going on at the point of care more transparent; what it does achieve is to make the impossible seem possible. From the outset the time schedules and tasks are impossible to implement because they are overloaded with an unreasonable amount of activities. The home care workers simply do not have the necessary time to do what the schedule requires. Instead of complaining about impossible work conditions, the home care workers use the PDA to make it appear as if they have actually delivered what is impossible to deliver. As a result, the technology functions to protect a structure by making it appear as if the impossible is possible, and in doing so prevents from being manifest that the structure is based on impossible premises.

The PDA as a magic Time-Turner

As the initial analysis indicated, considerable political investment was put into the PDA as a technology designed to provide a flow of information and thus to contribute to the ideals of transparency and control promoted by new public management. The PDA represents an authorised technology based on the scientific, political and economic capital invested in it, which gave it the authorisation and legitimacy to produce an authorised picture of what happens at the point of care.

In the home care workers' daily work, the PDA ended up functioning contrary to political expectations. Instead of providing transparency, it enabled home care workers to hide what is actually going on at the point of care. As we have discussed, this occurred in an effort to reduce stress in the work environment. The home care workers put themselves in charge of deciding the type and length of services care recipients should receive, effectively taking on a managerial role. Paradoxically, this approach enabled the technology to prevent the system from confronting its own toxic shortcomings, which made the workplace very difficult to cope with for some home care workers (as one of the interviewees mentioned) while others responded by taking control of their own schedules. In spite of these differences, the situation illustrates the conclusion that Hjalmarsson (2009) reaches in her work on the use of new technologies in home care services, which is that home care workers resist political intentions while simultaneously taking part in their own subordination.

Bourdieu's skeptron, however, suggests that holding the care workers responsibility for making the impossible look possible does not make sense. It was the authority assigned by the Danish State and later the city of Copenhagen, which enabled the illusion that the PDA reflected reality. After all, the City of Copenhagen created the impossible schedules, not the home care workers. We will refrain from speculating about the motives of the various actors and from trying to expose any hidden strategies for creating this skeptron. We can conclude, however, that the official rhetoric on transparency became possible only to the extent that it was backed up by a technology that worked as a skeptron in the hands of the home care workers, which in turn was only made possible through the authorisation it was granted by the Ministry of Social Affairs and the City of Copenhagen. Who benefitted from this illusion? Certainly not the care workers. Instead, this illusion allowed the political establishment to praise transparency while simultaneously making the underfunding of social care disappear from the radar.

The technology had been given the monopolistic power to impose a certain representation of reality by informing the central computer at KOS about the services delivered. The effectiveness of the fiction relied on the use of the technology to authorise the creation of a particular representation of reality. The technology would not have held such power, however, were it not for the social institutions that recognised the technology as a legitimate tool. In other words, the technology had the mandate to speak because it had been provided with the authority to do so. The authorisation of the technology is only effective if the one 'authorized to authorize, has the authority to authorize' (Bourdieu, 1991: 223). The power of the technology to represent the world is nothing more than the power invested in the technology to do so.

We are not suggesting the existence of a hidden structure, i.e. a central place 'above' empirical reality which holds a permanent and stable ability or power to guide the construction of reality. Rather, our analysis shows that the use of the PDA differed greatly from the political establishment's rhetoric about transparency. Bourdieu's rigorous attention to the symbolic power attributed to and invested in a specific technology explains why some technologies are more efficient at speaking the truth than others. The argument goes as follows: With no or only a modest authorisation of the technology it would have lost its performative power and, rather than being able to construct what counted as 'real', it would be have been questioned by a large number of competing observations by the care workers, relatives and, of course, the elderly themselves. Instead, the technology represented the only legitimate representation of reality, which is why it increasingly became the ever more effective method to do so. It became a skeptron, which functioned as a magic Time-Turner in the hands of the care workers, exactly like Hermione's golden hourglass.

Conclusion

This article is far from the first to show how technologies of transparency, when first put into practice, often end up concealing more than they reveal and becoming part of the problem they were intended to solve. Critical studies, however, often focus on how this is a result of technologies that have been translated in unexpected ways and thus produce failed promises and unintended consequences. Bourdieu's concept of authorisation can add to these studies by describing how technology enters the scene with a certain kind of illocutionary power that can help to explain the discrepancy between outcome and expectations.

Political authorisation of the PDA gave it the authority to create what counted as 'real'. Our article has shown how specific use of the PDA produced the exact opposite of what legitimised it in the first place. Instead of increasing transparency, documentation and control, the technology produced the opposite effect: absence of transparency, misleading information and a lack of control. The article also shows, however, how the PDA became part of a symbolic network of government institutions, home care practices and the central municipal computer. This network imbued the technology with the authority to produce data and to provide a certain reality that ultimately allowed managers and politicians to draw conclusions based on information from the central KOS computer. As a result the technology created the illusion of complete agreement between the data provided by the technology and the factual practice at the point of care. In this case, the technology 'spoke' like a master who 'knows' what is going on, which means the technology data becomes performative. This is where magic comes in. The technology produced reality as a simple insight into 'what actually goes on' at the point of care.

The authorisation of the technology prevented other voices from being heard concerning the content of the care. The possibilities for the elderly and their relatives to challenge the PDA's fictions were very limited because of the heavily symbolic capital invested in the technology. More precisely, the elderly and their relatives were not authorised to speak because they do not hold the skeptron in their hands. The technology became a skeptron, the one object that must be possessed in order to obtain the *delegated* power to speak the truth. Our analysis has shown the risk of delegating complete power to a single technology as it may lead to the dismissal of all other voices that could challenge the given technology's illocutionary power. The article has shown the necessity of going beyond the compelling demand for authoritative technologies of transparency and of involving and legitimising various observations of what happens at the point of care. This approach, however, would place new demands on how to run home care services in the city of Copenhagen and would involve listening, asking questions and talking, rather than confusing the information provided by the PDA with reality.

Verbeek (2006) argues that designers shoulder some of the responsibility for the misuse of the technologies they develop, which is why they should also consider the gap that may occur between the context of use and the context of design. We contend, however, that the institutions that authorise the technology are the ones that should take on the responsibility for their actual use. The lesson to be learned from this analysis is not that striving for more transparency in social work should be abandoned, but that there are risks involved in giving a single technology the monopoly to speak the truth, i.e. in making it a skeptron. Remember that by the end of her third year at Hogwarts, Hermione realizes how problematic her use of the Time-Turner is and decides to drop a class to adopt a schedule that is at least humanly possible to adhere to. She returns the Time-Turner to Professor McGonagall and later explains: 'I can't stand another year like this one. That Time-Turner, it was driving me mad. I've handed it in'.

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Pirate politics between protest movement and the parliament

Martin Fredriksson Almqvist

abstract

Since the early days of parliamentary democracy, political movements have tried to come to terms with the conflict between the struggle for radical political change and the need to be accepted as a respectable alternative within parliamentary politics. This paper analyzes how this conflict has played out in the Pirate Party: a political party focusing on issues of copyright, surveillance, access to information, and right to privacy in a digital age. Since the first Pirate Party was formed in Sweden in 2006, national pirate parties have emerged across Europe, North America and Australia, and they have occasionally won representation in different parliaments.

This article looks at how the Pirate Party has handled the tensions between radical and reformist fractions, contextualized within contemporary social movement theories. The conflicts have largely dealt with colliding principles for political organization where conventional party structures are challenged by new, and assumingly less hierarchic, forms of interaction and decision making inspired by radical, digital protests movements. This study rests on a series of interviews with Pirate Party members in Sweden, the USA and Germany. It analyses the interviews in relation to Ulrich Beck's and Maria Bakardjieva's theories on subpolitics and subactivism, asking why a movement that comes across as the prototype for a decentered, networked, subpolitical movement decides to organize as a parliamentary political party and what consequences that has had for the Pirate Party.

Pirate politics between protest movement and the parliament

> The internet is the greatest thing that has happened to mankind since the printing press, and quite possibly a lot greater [...] And we have only seen the beginning. But at this moment of fantastic opportunity, copyright is putting obstacles in the

> way of creativity, and copyright enforcement threatens fundamental rights... (Engström and Falkvinge, 2012: 7)

In a pamphlet published by the Swedish Pirate Party in 2012, Christian Engström, member of the European Parliament at the time, and Rick Falkvinge, the party's founder, identifies the internet as a gateway to new and better world and copyright as its main obstacle. This polarization was typical of the debate over piracy and copyright that had been raging off and on since the closing down of the file-sharing site Napster in 2000, when the rights of copyright holders were contrasted against the freedom of information. In the first decade of the new millennium, this politicization of piracy and copyright gave rise to a wide range of activist groups and social movements, and its most explicitly political branch was the Pirate Party. This political party, dedicated to legalizing file sharing and protecting freedom on the internet, was formed in Sweden in 2006 and soon spread to a number of countries across Europe and the rest of the world (Burkart, 2014; Fredriksson, 2012, 2015). Although digital technology is central to the Pirate Party platform, the development of the party cannot be properly understood without acknowledging changes to the political landscape that began long before the internet became politically significant.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the impact of the environmental movement, the growth of identity politics, and the decline of traditional political parties, positioned along a left–right axis, inspired theorists to reconsider previous conceptions of how and where politics was conducted. Ulrich Beck used the term subpolitics (or sub[system]politics) to describe how politics was increasingly enacted outside of the institutionalized political system, focusing on issues that were previously excluded from the established political narratives: 'The old industrial consensus built into the social system is encountering new and different fundamental convictions: ecological, feminism and many others' (Beck, 1997). Beck described how the dominance of left–right politics and the parliamentary party system that it had created was challenged by a new social movement that raised political questions outside of the scope of traditional party politics. This new kind of politics is formed in alternative social movements, but most notably, it takes place in people's everyday lives and consists of the choices and acts that they make as individuals, citizens and consumers (Beck, 1992 and 1997).

More recently, Maria Bakardjieva has taken the discussion further and introduced the concept of *subactivism*. She identifies three levels of political action: *institutional politics, subpolitics,* and *subactivism*. If subpolitics primarily refers to social movements outside of the established political parties and institutions, then subactivism is

> a kind of politics that unfolds at the level of the subjective experience and is submerged in the flow of everyday life. It is constituted by small-scale, often individual, decisions and actions that have either a political or ethical frame of reference (or both) and are difficult to capture using the traditional tools with which political participation is measured. Subactivism is a refraction of the public political arena in the private and personal world. (Bakardjieva, 2009: 92)

Unlike subpolitics, subactivism also includes acts that are not necessarily aimed at political change in a strict sense but rather seek 'personal empowerment, seen as the power of the subject to be the person that they want to be in accordance with his or her reflexively chosen moral and political standards' (Bakardjieva, 2009: 96). This kind of subactivism is particularly enhanced by the internet and its capacity to affect everyday life and connect it to civic participation, making the personal political (Bakardjieva, 2009).

Although more than a decade apart, Beck's and Bakardjieva's theories represent a common tendency in political thinking since the 1990s to locate the political subject and political agency further and further away from the institutions of parliamentary politics: first to new social movements and then into the private life of the individual. Exaggerating the political agency of individual acts of self-expressions and fulfilment, however, risks exhausting the concept of politics as a collective force of change. Blair Taylor argues that the kind of 'neoanarchism' or 'lifestyle anarchism' emphasizing individual choices and individual commitments, that has become the norm in new social movements like Occupy Wall Street, essentially domesticates social resistance within a liberal world order. Drawing on Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) he concludes that 'the discourse on autonomism' within neoanarchism 'shares strong ideological resonance with market pluralism, rendering it functionally compatible with the existing social order' (Taylor, 2013: 745). New social movements thus tend to become not only a legitimizing factor but even a driving force behind what Boltanski and Chiapello called the new spirit of capitalism.

As the opening quote implies, the Pirate Party is an example of how digital technologies create new political visions and new modes of mobilization for social movements. According to Jodi Dean this cult of communicative technology also form the basis for what she calls 'communicative capitalism': a political economy based on the ideological presumption that communication by default promotes democracy. Dean argues that the 'fetishation of communication technologies' creates a 'fantasy of abundance' that 'emphasize the wealth of information available on the Internet and the inclusion of millions upon millions of voices or points of view into "the conversation" or "public sphere"' (Dean, 2009: 26). This fantasy relies on the false assumption that digital communication is egalitarian and free. It presumes that communication in itself is a democratic goal and focuses on keeping the public conversation going rather than formulating a consistent critique that the existing powers have to respond to. Communicative capitalism is characterized by an ongoing buzz of conversations that masquerades as democratic participation but actually pacifies any attempts at actual political agency: 'Networked communication turns efforts of political engagements into contributions to the circulation of content' (Dean, 2009: 31). From Dean's perspective one might argue that a concept such as subactivism only reinforces a capitalist hegemony by making the fulfilment of individual, often consumerist, desires look like political agency.

The question that I will get back to later in this article, is how a phenomenon like the Pirate Party, which is both a political party, a new social movement and potentially also an aggregation of subactivist interventions, fits into these theoretical perspectives. The article draws on a series of interviews with active members of Pirate Parties in Sweden and the United States (US) and a somewhat more limited study of the development of the German Pirate Party.[1] In addition to interviews, it makes use of websites and policy documents, such as party programs, as well as news reports and other secondary sources. This text will look at the conditions in Sweden, Germany, and the US, focusing on how a political party that relies to such an extent on alternative conceptions of mobilization, communication, and political agency can act within the confines of

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1 The material for the entire study mainly consists of semi-structured interviews with representatives of pirate parties in Sweden, UK, Germany, Australia, USA and Canada, but also includes information material, such as websites and party programs. All the interviews were done in person, in most cases individually, with the exception of three interviews with groups of 2-3 participants. The interviews in USA were conducted between December 2011 and May 2012, with follow up interviews in May 2013. The European interviews were conducted between 2012 and 2013, and the Australian interviews were conducted in 2013. Among the 31 persons interviewed for the entire project, only five are women. Most informants were between 20 and 40 years old, but a few were closer to 45. The interviews were semi-structured in the regard that they broadly followed an interview guide that was structured around four thematic clusters: the participant's individual motivations, the organization of the party, the ideology of the party, and the national and international context of the party. The interviews also allowed for individual variations within those themes. The material was analyzed following a qualitative, inductive methodology.The interviews were recorded and all participants agreed to be quoted by name. All interviewees play important roles in their local Pirate Party community, but these roles differ significantly due to the heterogeneity of the Pirate Parties. Although two of the interviewees were members of the European Parliament at the time of the interviews, the vast majority are amateurs dedicating their spare time to party work.

The project is funded by Riksbankens Jubileumsfond (The Swedish Foundation for Humanities and Social Sciences). For a more detailed account of this project, see Fredriksson (2013, 2015a; 2015b; forthcoming).

traditional representative democracy. It will ask what the Pirate Party as a case can tell about political mobilization and agency in contemporary society. In the following section I will give a background to the forming of the first Pirate Party and address the question of why they chose to organize as a political party. This will be followed by a section focusing more closely of the organizational structure and the conflicts it has caused in the Pirate Parties in Sweden, Germany and USA, followed by a discussion that relates this to the theories of Beck, Bakardjieva and Dean.

Why a Pirate Party?

The conflicts over copyright, file sharing, and the access to culture and information grew in the late 1990s with the passing of the American Digital Millennium Copyright Act and the takedown of Napster (c.f. Halbert, 2005; Lessig, 1999; Gillespie, 2007). These controversies were intensified and explicitly politicized with the prosecution and trial of the Swedish file-sharing site The Pirate Bay in 2006 and 2009 (Fredriksson, 2015a). Events such as these added to the mobilization of what can be called a 'pirate movement': a heterogeneity of loose groups and organizations that protest against how copyright can limit free speech and the access to culture and information (Lindgren and Linde, 2012)

The first Pirate Party was formed in Sweden in January 2006, when Rick Falkvinge, a software engineer with no political experience, launched a website declaring his intention to found a party dedicated to legalizing file sharing. The website had 3 million visitors in the first two days, and Falkvinge soon met his initial goal of collecting the 1,500 signatures required to register a political party in Sweden. Even though the party quickly attracted an extraordinarily large body of members, it received only a disappointing 0.63% of the votes when it participated in its first election to the Swedish parliament in September 2006 (Rydell and Sundberg, 2010: 115; Spender, 2009: 24). Nevertheless, the Pirate Party had made a name for itself. The breakthrough came with the election to the European Parliament in June 2009, when the party got 7.1% of the votes, giving the pirates two seats in the parliament (Burkart, 2013; Erlingsson and Persson, 2011).

The Swedish Pirate Party originally addressed three core issues: the protection of privacy online, the freedom of culture, and the opposition to patents and private monopolies (Fredriksson, 2013, 2015a; Fredriksson & Arvanitakis, 2015; Arvanitakis & Fredriksson, 2016). The buzz around the Pirate Bay raid and the Swedish Pirate Party paved the way for the international mobilization of Pirate Parties that caught speed almost immediately after the Swedish party was announced. Within a week, similar parties had been formed in five other countries (Rydell and Sundberg, 2010: 160), and by 2007, an international organization for coordinating and exchanging information – Pirate Parties International (PPI: About; Wikipedia: Pirate Parties International) – had been initiated. The German Pirate Party confirmed the success when it received 8.9% of the votes in a regional election in Berlin in November 2011; this was soon followed by similar results in other regions across Germany. Lately, the European Pirate Parties have lead a somewhat waning existence. The Swedish party lost its representation in the European Parliament in the EU election of June 2014, and although the German Pirate Party conquered one seat in the EU parliament, both the Swedish and German Pirate Parties still had poor results in national and European elections in 2014, with a mere 0.41% of the vote in the election to the Swedish parliament in September 2014 (Valmyndigheten, 2015). In December 2014, the Swedish Pirate Party also suffered a crisis of leadership when the party leader, Anna Troberg; deputy leader, Marit Deldén; and party secretary, Henrik Brändén left the party due to internal conflicts over the position on gender equality and LGBT issues (Troberg, 2014).

It is difficult to speculate on the future of the Pirate Party, but its swift rise and recent recession nevertheless offers an interesting example of the challenges facing new political parties. The Pirate Party is particularly interesting because, on the one hand, it appears to be a prime example of a subpolitical movement in a digital society and, on the other, it attempts to fit this subpolitical mobilization into an organizational form that is intimately intertwined with the established political system. In this regard the Pirate Party looks like an anomaly in the age of networked activism: while an entire generation is expected to discard old political structures, a potential spearhead of the pirate movement – the Pirate Party – is attempting to fight its way into the iron cage of parliamentary bureaucracy.

The interviewees, however, rarely indicated that the choice of a political party as an organizational form was considered particularly problematic. When I asked a member of the New York Pirate Party why they chose to organize as a political party and not as a social movement like Occupy Wall Street, she answered simply that 'It makes more sense overall, because, let's face it, we're trying to affect how policies are in the US, and there's really no better way to do that than making it a political movement' (Interview, Brunner and Adams Green, April 2, 2012). Many of their colleagues in different Pirate Parties across the world appear to more or less take it for granted that the political party is the best way to achieve political influence. Mattias Bjernemalm, staffer for Minister of European Parliament Amelia Andersdotter between 2010 and 2014, presents a similar argument:

> MF: Why did you choose to organize as a political party?
>
> MB: Because the Swedish system is constructed that way. If you want to hack the system, you have to get into the system and see what you can do … what shortcuts you can take and how you can make it better. You can't win elections if you are not a party, and you can't change the political system if you don't win elections or threaten those who win elections. (Interview, Bjernemalm, October 2, 2012)

He goes on to argue that The Pirate Bureau, a loosely organized activist group with close connections to The Pirate Bay at an early stage, had been debating copyright for some time before the Pirate Party was formed, but without any significant impact. When Falkvinge founded the party, he argued that it could not beat the lobbyists but it could threaten to take votes from the established political parties and affect the political agenda that way. According to Bjernemalm, this strategy worked since the established political parties actually began to acknowledge copyright and information politics as an important issue when the Pirate Party entered the political stage (Interview, Bjernemalm, October 2, 2012).

Getting into parliamentary politics was not alien to the wider pirate movement that preceded the Pirate Party. Several informants mentioned that the idea of forming a pirate party had circulated on different internet forums well ahead of Falkvinge's initiative. Jan Lindgren, Party secretary in the Swedish Pirate Party at the time of the interview, describes how he immediately caught on to the idea when he first heard of Falkvinge's initiative in January 2006:

> JL: I was already engaged in those questions. I had been hanging around at the Pirate Bureau's forum for about a year, and there it had been discussed several times. It popped up as… like, 'someone should start a pirate party'. I think I read about it three or four times, if not more. But it was always someone who came in and thought that: 'someone should do it'. And then the answer was always, 'So, why don't you do that in that case?' Something like that. But no one ever took the step… [---]
>
> MF: So no one had to tell you what a pirate party was?
>
> JL: No. (Interview with Lindgren, October 10, 2012)

Fredrik Holmbom from the Swedish Pirate Party agrees that 'the pirate movement already existed [and that] all that was missing was the political branch' (Interview, Holmbom, October 22, 2012). In this regard, Falkvinge's initiative was a trigger that catalyzed an urge and an expectation that had been brewing for some time. If people, as Lindgren describes, had been calling for a Pirate Party without ever putting the idea into action, this also explains why the Pirate Party spread so fast across Europe in 2006: the idea of a pirate party was already present in people's minds, and when someone took the first step, the movement mobilized swiftly. This, oddly enough, indicates that this spontaneously mobilized, loose swarm of netizens, who largely embody the model of the new subpolitical movements envisioned by Ulrich Beck, spontaneously take the political party and the parliamentary system for granted as the primary tool and arena for political participation. Therefore, the primacy of institutionalized politics is not only a pragmatic choice by the most dedicated party activists but also consistent with the political imagination of their less organized followers.

Forming and reforming the party organizations

The Pirate Party resembles what has been called an 'amateur-activist' party model: a kind of organization common to the Greens and many other grassroots parties, striving for a 'highly decentralized organizational format that has been designed to emphasize the voluntary organization' and relying on open access to party meetings, egalitarian decision making processes, 'collective forms of leadership; affirmative action; and close links to new social movements' (Miragliotta, 2015: 699 ff.). Initially the Swedish Pirate Party was however also strongly dominated by Rick Falkvinge who quickly came to embody what Gissur Erlingsson has called a political entrepreneur. In a study of new parties in Sweden Erlingsson concludes that one of the most important factors for the success of a new party is the existence of a strong political entrepreneur who can mobilize the party supporters (c.f. Erlingsson, 2005). Falkvinge came to take on this role, not only in Sweden but also internationally where he has been inspiring pirate parties across the world. Although he was totally unprepared for the party's sudden impact (Spender, 2009), Falkvinge soon adapted and began to set up a party organization that has been described as a combination of top-down corporate structure and a swift commando organization. At an early stage the Pirate Party quickly launched its so-called 'three pirate rule': if three pirate party members agreed on an issue, they were, by default, authorized to campaign for it (Interview, Nordström, September 21, 2011). While this structure was intended to be pragmatic and egalitarian, the early Pirate Party was also criticized for being nontransparent and authoritarian because the lack of formal organization in practice left the executive power to a few memebers who took the initiative (Interview, Nordström, September 21, 2011; Interview, Brändén, October 29, 2012; Interview, Nipe, November 1, 2012).

This organization was well suited to the party's initial mobilizing phase, but it failed to meet the demands for democratic participation that grew as the party expanded (Interview, Nordström, September 21, 2011). A driving force toward creating a more conventional organizational structure was the party's youth branch, Ung Pirat, which set up an organization that was much more similar to other parties when it was formed in late 2006 (Interview, Nipe, November 1, 2012). This was partly a consequence of the formal requirements that come with the fact that youth parties in Sweden receive public, financial support from the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society (Ungdomsstyrelsen). According to Gustav Nipe, the leader and cofounder of Ung Pirat, it was, however, primarily a demand from the members who wanted a proper party organization:

> If the Pirate Party had no classical party structure when it was formed, then as a countermovement … some people who were not comfortable in the Pirate Party's structure joined and helped to organize Ung Pirat. We are organized according to a classical associational structure with local clubs, and districts, and national boards, and national congresses… And all that was kind of like a counter reaction … or maybe not a counter reaction … but … Well, the Pirate Party had an organization without local clubs. It had a top-down military structure, and it was very efficient and good at getting things done, but the question is if such an organization can suffice in the long run … (Interview, Nipe, November 1, 2012)

It is also significant that many of those who set up the youth party had been active in the Swedish Gaming Federation (SVEROK), which was and remains Sweden's largest youth organization, in which they received a thorough schooling in the formalities of running a large-scale civil association. Mattias Bjernemalm is one of those, and he describes the party as composed of three different organizational cultures: 'the business-people, the association people and the swarm romantics' (Interview, Bjernemalm, October 2, 2012). If the business-people refers to entrepreneurs such as Falkvinge and the association people mainly consists of the former SVEROK crowd, then the swarm romantics come from the open-source side of the movement.

Although the Swedish Pirate Party incorporates many different organizational cultures, many of the interviewees described the transition to a more formal party structure as having caused no major disruptions within the party (Interview, Nipe, November 1, 2012; Interview, Bjernemalm, October 2, 2012). This does not, however, mean that the question is uncontestable. Nordström argued that although there have been no significant conflicts regarding the choice of a political party as an organizational form *within* the party, there is, nevertheless, a movement outside of the party that represents the extra-parliamentary struggle and keeps its distance from the Pirate Party. Nordström distinguishes between the Pirate Party and a wider pirate movement that he describes as being 'not political' but rather working with civil disobedience. In this regard, he, too, seems to acknowledge a distinction between politics and subpolitics, wherein politics is still equated with institutionalized parliamentary representation. He laments the weak ties between the Pirate Party and that extra-parliamentary movement and refers to the leftist movement as an example of how these fringes can coexist. Nordström's description thus implies that there are no conflicts within the party because those two fringes never merged when the party was formed: the extra-parliamentarians stayed alien to the Pirate Party (Interview, Nordström, September 21, 2011).

The clashes between parliamentary and extra-parliamentary organizations have been more open and antagonistic in other countries, such as Germany and the US. The German Pirate Party has been infamous for its internal quarrelling, which partly touches on the choice of organizational form. With its origins in the anarchist-oriented hacker organization the Chaos Computer Club, the Berlin Pirate Party has close ties to the anarchist movement, which are sometimes difficult to combine with party politics. An article in *Die Zeit* describes the self-destructive party dynamics of the German Pirate Party:

> The pirates had so internalized the distrust in politics that they rejected all representative politicians – including their own. Their representatives of the four state legislatures were soon despised as 'cush post keepers'. Essentially, becoming a party has estranged the party from itself. (Pham, 2014; transl. Sonja Schillings).

When I met her in July 2013, Cornelia Otto from the Berlin Pirate Party also acknowledged that there had been conflicts between activists and more moderate members within the German party, and that this had led to some activists leaving the party when they were expected to conform to the rules of parliamentary politics and adopt a wider political agenda (Interview, Otto, June 3, 2013).

The political importance of the organizational structure is also prominent in the American cases. The United States Pirate Party (USPP) has been suffering from, if not constant then at least reoccurring, conflicts over its constitution and its forms of organization ever since it was initiated in 2007. This has been bolstered by the complicated relationship between the national party and the state parties in the US. The American pirate parties are less centralized than their European counterparts. There is a national committee of pirate parties in America – the USPP – but this has more of a coordinating function, and the political initiative mainly rests with the state parties. These are fairly scarce and, in most cases, consist of only a handful of active members and a small crowd of loose followers on Facebook and Twitter.[2] Their working conditions also differ due to variations

2 A few of the parties are, however, formally recognized, and by the fall of 2013, Pirate Parties were, to my knowledge, fielding candidates in Massachusetts, Washington, and New York. The number of American Pirate Parties differs from month to month as new state parties are formed, and sometimes also dissolved, continuously. My original study included the parties that were most active in February 2012: Massachusetts, Florida, Washington, Oklahoma, and New York. Since then, many new state parties have, however, emerged, and I conducted an additional interview with a representative of the California Pirate Party in the spring of 2013.

in local legislation, which gravely affect the different state parties' possibilities of becoming formally recognized. This appears to create uncertainty regarding the relationship between USPP and the state parties, wherein the latter's sovereignty becomes an issue of negotiation and, thus, a zone of potential conflict.

Several members of the United States Pirate Party describe the drafting of the USPP constitution as a disruptive process where disagreements over technicalities of the party organization reflected both organizational and ideological differences (Interview, Emerson, April 21, 2012: Interview, Hall, March 14, 2012). In the USPP, a conflict between those who support direct action and a decentralized organization and those who wish to see a more conventional party structure is intertwined with a parallel conflict concerning the Pirate Party's relation to extra-parliamentary organizations like Occupy Wall Street and Anonymous. While one fraction finds it necessary for the Pirate Party to distance itself from all kinds of potentially illegal actions another see the Pirate Party as a political branch of a wider range of extra-parliamentary movements, including Occupy Wall Street and Anonymous (Interview, Emerson, April 21, 2012: Interview, Hall, March 14, 2012). A member of the New York Pirate Party for instance expressed the frustration he experienced when his attempts to build a working relationship with Anonymous was wrecked when another party member officially renounced them without consulting him (Interview, Emerson, April 21, 2012).

These conflicts between a radical left-wing fringe and a more moderate, reformist side caused an outright split within the New York Pirate Party where the former accused the parliamentarians of setting up a formalistic organization that centralizes power and hampers wider democratic participation (Interview, Emerson, April 21, 2012; Interview, Adams Green, May 10, 2013). Other party members, on the other hand, discarded the radical fringe as trendy lifestyle anarchists that derailed the party into an Occupy Wall Street support group. From their perspective, the informal and seemingly egalitarian organization of the Occupy movement in practice concentrates power in the hands of a few vocal members (Interview Brunner and Dan, May 11, 2013). This vaguely resembles the descriptions of how power could be both decentralized and centralized in the early, informal days of the Swedish Pirate Party (Interview, Brändén, October 29, 2012; Interview, Nipe, November 1, 2012). However, it also reflects more recent concerns over the decision making model Liquid Democracy: a digital voting platform mainly used by the German Pirate Party that is supposed to enhance direct democracy within the party but which, many argue, rather tends to concentrate power into the hands of the most active and initiated users (Cammaerts, 2015).

That this opposition between radicals and moderates, which is almost generic to new social movements and exists in all Pirate Parties to different degrees, has become so disruptive to the American Pirate Party may be a consequence of the particular state of American politics. Many Pirate Party members who belong to the reformist side fear that radical individuals can pose a threat to the entire party, not necessarily in and of themselves but because they might get other party members and the party as a whole in trouble with the authorities (Interview, Hall, March 14, 2012; Interview, Kesler, March 11, 2012; Interview, Norton, March 17, 2012).

However, this is not merely a conflict over political content and position – over what issues the party should have on its agenda, which groups it should associate with and where it should position itself on the political scale. The conflicts over parliamentary or extra-parliamentary methods and organizational models essentially rely on the fact that the form of political organization is inherently political in itself. This has always been obvious for anarchist inspired movements such as Occupy Wall Street, but it is also crucial to the pirate movement. Christopher Kelty has described the hacker community as a 'recursive public': a group 'constituted by a shared profound concern for the technical and legal conditions of possibility for their own organization' (Kelty, 2005: 185). Elsewhere I have discussed how this also applies to the Pirate Party which is consistently preoccupied with its own organizational forms, to the extent that it has developed its own voting system in the form of 'liquid democracy' (Fredriksson, 2015a) This might foster a sensitivity to the profound political implications of that form, which makes it harder to reconcile between parliamentary and extraparliamentary activists even when their explicit political agendas align.

The Pirate Party between subactivism and the parliament

Applying Ulrich Beck's theoretical perspective one could argue that the Pirate Party has grown out of a subpolitical movement that claims to protect the freedom and integrity of the emerging network society against government authorities' and commercial actors' attempts to control the internet and use it to their own ends (Burkart, 2014; Fredriksson, 2013, 2015a). Looking at the political mobilization around issues of piracy and copyright, from the introduction of The Pirate Bay in 2003 until the Swedish Pirate Party's exit from the European parliament in September 2014, it is possible to distinguish three phases. The first phase begins a few years into the new millennium as peer-to-peer (P2P) file sharing is becoming not only more commonplace but also increasingly articulated within an ideological and political context, for instance by activist groups such as The Pirate Bureau. Even though the large bulk of file sharers are motivated by self-interest rather than by ideology and rarely see their practices in an ideological context (c.f. Andersson Swartz, 2014; Da Rimini and Marshall, 2014), many of them were engaged in political discussions in chat forums, and some even took to the streets to demonstrate when the authorities tried to shut down The Pirate Bay (c.f. Kullenberg, 2010: 44). This was followed by a second phase starting in 2006, when more ideological file sharers, some of whom are present in this study, joined the Pirate Party either as active members or passive supporters. Here, the Pirate Party gave this multitude of sometimes politically alienated file sharers a subpolitical presence similar to that of the environmental movement and the emerging Green Party of the 1980s. This was also when the Pirate Party began to spread outside of Sweden. The third phase began in 2010 when the Swedish Pirate Party's poor results in the national election forced them to reconsider the initial strategy to focus entirely on information politics. Shortly thereafter, the German Pirate Party made an impact in local elections with an agenda that included a number of different issues, such as free public transportation and basic income guarantee. This initiated a process in which the party began to widen the agenda to attract voters beyond its initial core supporters of fairly young people who were mainly attracted by digital rights issues. Following the EU-election in June 2014 it is possible to see a decline in support for the Pirate Party, indicating that the wider agenda might not be a universal ticket to political success. It is however still too early to make any predictions on the future existence of the Pirate Party.

Simon Lindgren and Jessica Linde argue that online piracy can be seen as an expression of subpolitics regardless of whether it is motivated by ideological conviction. If 'subpolitics refers to the ways in which individual, small-scale decisions achieve political significance either because they have a direct political frame of reference, or simply because of their aggregation' (Lindgren and Linde, 2012: 145), then the consequences of online piracy as a collectively aggregated act is potentially political regardless of the file sharers' intent. Even though downloading is, in most cases, an act of individualistic consumerism, the collectivity of file sharing lies in the fact that a large number of people from across the world are actively uploading material and contributing to a common pool of cultural resources (Lindgren and Linde, 2012; Vaidhyanathan, 2004). Furthermore, it could be argued that this collectivity and mutual contribution is technically enforced by the BitTorrent protocol which assumes that everyone who is downloading is seeding by default and thus contributing to the distribution of content.

The strong reaction that many file sharers display when they see their possibilities to access media restricted can be interpreted as a textbook example of subactivism. When I asked one of the American Pirate Party members if file sharing is a political act, he argued that it is not political as such but that it is made political when politicians try to ban it and deny people the possibility to consume culture and take part in communities that emerge around file-sharing networks (Interview, Kesler, March 11, 2012). Bakardjieva points out that:

> Subactivism may or may not leak out of the small social world and become politically visible. [...] The potential for it to be mobilized by trigger events and transformed into overt political activism is always in place. It is that essential bedrock against which individual citizens' capacity for participation in subpolitics or in the formal political institutions of the public world is shaped and nurtured. (Bakardjieva, 2009: 96).

In most cases, the file sharers' reactions remain on the subactivist level: a private act of defiance as people continue to share music and movies hidden behind VPN encryption. In some cases, the subactivist impulses are transformed into subpolitics when people take their dissatisfaction to politicized discussion forums, such as that of The Pirate Bureau, or join the demonstration against The Pirate Bay prosecution. The Pirate Party takes this mobilization to the level of institutional politics. A concrete example of how subpolitics is translated into institutional politics is the closing down of the file-sharing site TankaFetast in October 2012. When the content was blocked, the owners of TankaFetast redirected all visitors to the Pirate Party's website, causing a growth of over 70% in party membership in two weeks (Interview, Lindgren, October 10 2012; Piratpartiet, 2015). Here, thousands of P2P users, who initially just wanted to download a movie, ended up joining a political party as a spontaneous reaction against being deprived of a source of enjoyment that had become a part of their everyday lives. What we see in the mobilization of the Pirate Party between 2006 and 2009 is, thus, an outburst of subactivism that grew into a subpolitical mobilization and, finally, an institutional political organization; or, as Jay Emerson from the New York Pirate Party puts it, the 'first step is uploading, second step is downloading, then you move on to the Pirate Party' (Interview, Emerson, April 21, 2012).

Jodi Dean's theories on communicative capitalism could provide a counter-perspective on this kind of subactivist mobilization. The technological fetishism that Dean identifies as part of communicative capitalism is particularly evident in relation to file sharing technologies:

> Napster is a technological fetish onto which all sorts of fantasies of political actions were projected… The technological fetish covers over and sustains a lack on the part of the subject. It protects the fantasy of an active, engaged subject by acting in the subject's stead. The technological fetish 'is political' for us, enabling us to… remain politically passive. (Dean, 2009: 37)

Dean mentions Napster, but this effect might be even more evident with the notorious politicization of the Pirate Bay which contributed to the rapid mobilization of the Pirate Party. The Pirate Party's strong focus on communication technologies, where free debate is often envisioned as the ultimate goal, might be seen as an expression of how the fantasy of abundance works in communicative capitalism (Fredriksson, 2015a). From that perspective, the pirate movement can be discarded as another example of the domestication of democratic participation in communicative capitalism.

Taking an opposite view, the Pirate Party might, in its turn, present a counter-perspective to the theory of communicative capitalism. Dean's critique focuses on how political protests are confined to a self-confirming and self-sustaining communicative loop of endless talk that remains alien to the arenas where actual political decision-making takes place, and how the cult of communication hides the fact that it lacks actual political influence. The defining characteristic of the Pirate Party is, however, that it does not confine itself to this communicative sphere of subactivist and subpolitical protest but aspires to play a role on the arenas of political decision-making. Although their political impact might be discussed, the fact that they did gain representation in political parliaments, and even in the European Parliament, indicates that subpolitical mobilization may have real political impact outside of its own circuits of marginalized communication.

As the history of the Green Party has shown, it is potentially possible to channel subpolitical movements into a well-functioning, large scale parliamentary organization. Recently a number of left wing grassroots parties, such as Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain, have reached significant political impact by doing just that. A challenge to all such movements is to find a balance between the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary fringes. This distinction between parliamentary and extra-parliamentary organization is not analogue to that between subactivism, subpolitics and parliamentary politics. Some subpolitical movements might be highly compatible with parliamentary politics while others are not, and subactivism has by definition no organizational form at all while it might emanate into both – as the example with the Pirate Party has shown. The development of the Pirate Party might however also indicate that it is harder to form a parliamentary organization from a movement whose initial mobilization has been highly depending on a range of different subpolitical groups with different organizational principles and values.

At the same time, the Pirate Party also presents a counter-perspective to a blind belief in subpolitical and subactivist engagement as the primary arena for political engagement in contemporary society. The understanding of the Pirate

Party as a new global subpolitical movement enhanced by digital technology indeed aligns well with the rhetoric and self-conception of the Pirate Party activists. If one scratched the surface and looks more closely at the Pirate Party's actual political organization and strategies, this emphasis on subpolitics and subactivism nevertheless becomes insufficient. In the interviews, forming a national political party comes across as the most efficient way to achieve political influence, even for the disillusioned American pirates. The choice of the political party as the primary organizational form indicates that most of the Pirate Party activists still see the national government as the center of power in legal and practical terms. What makes the Pirate Party interesting and exceptional is thus not its new social movement rhetoric but the fact that that it has become a political party in spite of that rhetoric. This, and particularly the members' spontaneous acceptance of the party form, suggests that the political subject and political agency still gravitates towards the parliament as the self-evident core of politics even within a young digital movement like the Pirate Party.

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Functional stupidity: A critique

Nick Butler

Alvesson and Spicer's 2012 paper 'A stupidity-based theory of organizations', published in the *Journal of Management Studies*, is an audacious attempt to introduce a new concept into academic discourse and public debate – the concept of 'functional stupidity'. To a large extent, the authors have been successful: not only has the concept been taken up by organizational researchers, it has also gained widespread coverage in the international business press. In Sweden, where one of the authors is based, the term has even been officially adopted as a new word within the Swedish language (translated as *funktionell dumhet*),[1] and has gone on to inspire an eponymous stage-play.[2] One might be consoled that academic research is having a wider impact beyond the university-based business school, especially from such well-known proponents of critical management studies (see e.g. Alvesson, Bridgman and Willmott, 2009; Alvesson and Willmott, 1992; Spicer, Alvesson and Kärreman, 2009). Surely we should celebrate the fact that critical scholarship is having an influence outside the ivory tower?

But matters are not quite as straightforward as they might appear. Although the idea of functional stupidity is presented as an academic concept, it veers worryingly towards a management buzzword. A concept in organization studies should contribute to 'the analysis of management as a complex and contested phenomenon', whereas a management buzzword serves to stymie debate by

1 The Swedish Language Council defines functional stupidity as 'an uncritical approach that improves productivity' ('*ett okritiskt förhållningssätt som förbättrar produktiviteten*').

2 *Funktionell dumhet* premiered at Malmö Dockteater in 2014. The play is based on Roland Paulsen's book *Vi bara lyder: En berättelse om Arbetsförmedlingen*, which draws on the concept of functional stupidity.

propagating a 'vocabulary of managerialism' (Collins, 2000: 13). As we will see, functional stupidity can be viewed as *both* a provocative concept for use in critical management research and a practitioner-oriented catchphrase. To this extent, functional stupidity appeals to two very different – and arguably mutually exclusive – constituencies. There is a case to be made that critical management studies (CMS) should not seek to fundamentally challenge managerial hegemony in organizations, but rather to gently reform it (see e.g. Spicer, Alvesson and Kärreman, 2009). But if we wish to take seriously the ethos of non-performativity as a defining principle of CMS, as outlined by Fournier and Grey (2000), then efforts must be taken to guard against producing research that blurs the distinction between academic concept and corporate slogan. As I will argue, Alvesson and Spicer end up presenting a management buzzword *as if* it were a piece of critical scholarship. This matters, I suggest, because it opens up a space for further research that is based on highly problematic foundations.

This note takes its cue from the 'practical criticism' approach pioneered by F.R. Leavis in literary studies (see Armstrong and Lightfoot, 2010; Armstrong and Lilley, 2008). Practical criticism, as originally developed by Leavis, involves 'a denial that great literature constituted an ineffable mystery, only to be approached in a spirit of reverential awe' (Armstrong and Lilley, 2008: 361). To this extent, practical criticism turns to the text itself for justifications of literary greatness. By the same token, practical criticism also seeks to unmask literature that 'announces nothing but its own genius, but which, because of that very fixation, can do so only in derivation and cliché' (*ibid.*). It is therefore both an evaluative and a debunking exercise. Applied to the social sciences, practical criticism appeals to the qualities of a specific text rather than the dubious benchmarks of journal rankings or, worse, professional standing. Exercises in practical criticism are thus all the more necessary for 'icons of authority' (*ibid.*), such as articles published in highly ranked journals by renowned scholars. It is in this spirit that I attempt a close reading of 'A stupidity-based theory of organizations'.

In what follows, I will summarize the idea of functional stupidity before outlining its 'positive' and 'negative' effects in organizations, according to Alvesson and Spicer. I will conclude by reflecting on the implications of functional stupidity for the future of critical scholarship in the university-based business school.

Introducing functional stupidity

The first point to address is the meaning of functional stupidity. Alvesson and Spicer define it as follows:

> Functional stupidity is [the] inability and/or unwillingness to use cognitive and reflective capacities in anything other than narrow and circumspect ways. It involves a lack of reflexivity, a disinclination to require or provide justification, and avoidance of substantive reasoning. (1201; emphasis removed)

Functional stupidity is understood by Alvesson and Spicer as an incapacity and/or disinclination on the part of organizational members to exercise critical reflection about what they are doing (*reflexivity*), why they are doing it (*justification*), and what the consequences of their activities are beyond the immediate task at hand (*substantive reasoning*). Functional stupidity is explicitly framed as an organizational issue, particularly for firms within the knowledge economy (1212-3). To this extent, the authors are writing against the orthodoxy of management thought that attributes the success of organizations to 'the intelligent mobilization of cognitive capacities' (1195). For Alvesson and Spicer, this grand claim about 'smartness' should be nuanced and qualified (1213). Towards this end, they propose the concept of functional stupidity as a way to 'shake up dominant assumptions about the significance of knowledge, intelligence, creativity, learning, and the general use of cognitive resources' (1214).

Alvesson and Spicer point out that functional stupidity is explicitly linked to 'power and politics' in organizations (1198). The phenomenon of 'stupidity management' occurs whenever actors in positions of influence (e.g. managers, consultants, business gurus) attempt to discourage critical reflection that calls into question organizationally-sanctioned norms and values (1202; 1204-7). This in turn leads to 'stupidity self-management' whereby employees intentionally limit their own critical reflection (1212). Ultimately, this has the effect of aligning employees' perceptions of work with the positive organizational visions espoused by senior management, thus minimizing doubt and uncertainty about what they are doing, why they are doing it and what the wider consequences of their activities are. It is worth pointing out that Alvesson and Spicer do not draw on empirical evidence to support their claims, but restrict themselves for the most part to generalizing about organizations on a rather abstract level, using phrases such as 'most organizations', 'some organizations', 'in many instances', 'in some cases', 'in other cases', etc.

At first glance, it would appear that the Alvesson and Spicer firmly adopt a critical position that seeks to challenge common-sense assumptions in the mainstream management literature. Indeed, the basic premise of the paper is founded quite literally on a joke: we commonly speak about knowledge-intensive firms, but a closer look reveals them to be 'stupidity-intensive' (1213). The same humour is also evident in the very title of the piece, an ironic nod to Grant's (1996) seminal paper 'Toward a knowledge-based theory of the firm'. At least one commentator has recognized the implicit comic intent of functional stupidity (Watson, 2015: 7-8). Certainly, part of the appeal of the concept lies in its cheekiness, overturning a self-satisfied supposition about contemporary organizations with a witty flourish. Viewed in this light, the paper seems to have a rather subversive take-home message.

However, we should be careful not to overstate the case. For, as we will see, Alvesson and Spicer's critical agenda is overlaid by a far more conservative – indeed managerial – aim.

'Positive' aspects of functional stupidity

Alvesson and Spicer make it clear that functional stupidity is a 'mixed blessing' (1201) in that entails both advantages and disadvantages. On the positive side, functional stupidity has 'significant benefits' (1201) because it provides 'a sense of certainty that allows organizations to function smoothly', which can 'save the organization and its members from the frictions provoked by doubt and reflection' (1196). Here, Alvesson and Spicer claim that a surfeit of reflexivity, justification and substantive reasoning can be disruptive on both an organizational and individual level. For individuals, critical reflection is detrimental because it erodes their sense of certainty about what they are doing and why they are doing it as well as distracting them from advancing their careers. Functional stupidity provides an antidote to this bothersome critical reflection:

> Instead of shouldering the burden of doubt and risking the diversion of intellectual resources into 'non-productive' critical thinking, existential anxiety, and other miseries, organizational members can plough their energies into negotiating the (post-)bureaucratic structures of the organization and building careers. (1209)

Organizations, meanwhile, need to avoid reflexivity, justification and substantive reasoning among employees for bottom-line reasons:

> Questioning can be costly because it requires significant time and resources to engage in critical thinking. For instance, if organizations were called on frequently to justify their actions, they would need to devote significant resources to creating and articulating these justifications. In many cases the structures and actions of the organization would be difficult to justify, promoting doubt among

> organizational members. This could decrease legitimacy and dissolve commitment to uncertain courses of action. (1210)

Addressing concerns raised by employees – let's say, ethical questions about the use of cheap overseas labour – may be prohibitively expensive for organization; for this reason, they should seek to minimize such inconvenient critical reflection. Stupidity management is able to prevent these doubts and concerns in advance by restricting communicative action among employees. What is striking here is the fact that Alvesson and Spicer appear to endorse this lack of reflection even when a course of action would be 'difficult to justify' – in other words, when the doubts and concerns about an organization appear fully warranted. It becomes abundantly clear at this point that the supposed 'benefits' of functional stupidity only make sense when they are viewed from the perspective of senior management, i.e. those with an interest in 'maintaining and strengthening organizational order' (1196).

The closing pages offers some 'implications for practice' (1216). Alvesson and Spicer make four specific recommendations. First, they suggest that organizations should adopt a more 'humble attitude' around knowledge-intensiveness and claims of smartness (presumably, this humbleness involves acknowledging the role of functional stupidity in organizations). Second, they argue that organizations should 'make greater use of anti-stupidity management' (2016). Unfortunately, they do not elaborate on what this might mean. Third, they suggest that functional stupidity is 'an important resource that organizations should cultivate, maintain and engineer' (1216). Although this seems at odds with their previous recommendation for anti-stupidity management, Alvesson and Spicer evidently wish for practitioners to 'strike a balance between the intelligent use of knowledge on the one hand, and propagation of functional stupidity on the other' (1216). This implies that, for Alvesson and Spicer, practitioners ought to mobilize the cognitive capacities of employees on the one hand whilst simultaneously seeking to inhibit them on the other. They write:

> In many cases, a dose of functional stupidity is what is required. Employing very highly qualified people may be a disservice to them and to the organization. Supporting a degree of functional stupidity is an important managerial task. (1216)

While they remain guarded, Alvesson and Spicer appear to align themselves with the task of 'stupidity managers' in these concluding remarks. Alongside its positive aspects, however, Alvesson and Spicer are clear that functional stupidity is not entirely beneficial but contains negative aspects that managers should 'guard against' (as they put it in their fourth and final recommendation) (2016). It is to these aspects that we now turn.

'Negative' aspects of functional stupidity

On the negative side, functional stupidity is said to trap individuals and organizations within 'problematic patterns of thinking' (1196). Such problematic patterns of thinking include 'the suppression of awareness of problems, narrow instrumentality, and lack of learning' (1211). The authors give the example of the 2008 financial crisis to support this view, which they suggest was sparked by a reluctance of organizational members to raise concerns about investment strategies that subsequently proved to be catastrophic. The implication here is that functional stupidity does not solely contribute to the smooth functioning of organizations but also results in 'less desirable outcomes' (1209). This suggests that functional stupidity is indeed a 'mixed blessing' since it entails both advantages and disadvantages for organizations and individuals.

Later on, however, their view shifts subtly but significantly. It becomes clear that the negative outcomes are related to an 'excess' of functional stupidity (1216). In other words, functional stupidity results in negative outcomes only when it *malfunctions* (i.e. when it isn't managed properly by stupidity managers). Alvesson and Spicer write:

> Functional stupidity can *backfire* by creating a sense of dissonance: increasingly yawning gaps between shared assumptions and reality may eventually produce accidents or disasters. So functional stupidity may not always be entirely functional. The contradiction in the term implies this and points to the internal tension in the concept. Functionality indicates the potential benefits. Stupidity draws attention to the risks and problems involved. Like many things in organizational life, it is a mixed blessing – at once, functional and stupid. (1213; emphasis added)

What Alvesson and Spicer seem to be saying here is that functional stupidity goes awry when there is *too much* stupidity and *not enough* functionality, which is presumably why it must be managed correctly. Functional stupidity is no longer a 'mixed blessing' because it generates both positive and negative results, but because it entails both a 'functional' component and a 'stupid' component. This seems to modify the concept of functional stupidity in an important way: whereas earlier the 'stupid' component was seen to result in positive outcomes (hence it was seen precisely as 'functional'), now the 'stupidity' component becomes precisely dysfunctional (since it detracts from functionality, at least when it is 'excessive'). Alvesson and Spicer may well see this as an 'internal tension' within the concept of functional stupidity itself, but a more plausible explanation is that it reflects an inconsistency within their argument as a whole.

A final question remains: how should functional stupidity be managed in such a way that it contains more positive (functional) components than negative (stupid) components? Unfortunately, there are no hints about how this is to be accomplished. In fact, Alvesson and Spicer omit any discussion about what kind of stupidity management they would like to see implemented in organizations or what the perfect balance between 'functionality' and 'stupidity' might look like. How much stupidity is 'too much' or 'too little', and what are stupidity managers to do about it? The neglect of such questions is curious, especially for a paper that makes so much of its 'implications for practice'.

Conclusion

In the closing paragraph of the paper, the authors articulate their wish 'to prompt wider debate about why it is that smart organizations can be so stupid at times' (1216). For Alvesson and Spicer, the answer to this question is clear: organizations seek to limit the cognitive capacities of employees because the alternative is costly and time-consuming, while individuals constrain their own internal reflexivity to minimize uncertainty and advance their careers. Such stupidity management and stupidity self-management is tentatively endorsed by Alvesson and Spicer, provided that stupidity managers take pains to prevent 'excess functional stupidity' (1216).

Since its publication, Alvesson and Spicer's paper has been widely discussed in the international business press. For example, *Fortune* magazine offers a summary:

> Alvesson and colleague André Spicer explain how what they call 'functional stupidity' generally helped to get things done. 'Critical reflection and shrewdness' were net positives, but when too many clever individuals in an organization raised their hands to alternative courses of action or to ask 'disquieting questions about decisions and structures', work slowed.
>
> The study's authors found that stupidity, on the other hand, seemed to have a unifying effect. It boosted productivity. (Hustad, 2013)

We cannot miss the managerial overtones in this description: 'too many clever individuals' may hinder productivity, while functional stupidity allows organizations to 'get things done'. Andrew Hill (2013), writing in the *Financial Times*, presents a similar take on functional stupidity:

> What intrigues me about the theory is the insight that stupidity is essential. Managers need to instill a little stupor into their staff (and imbibe some themselves) for big companies to operate at all. The 'functional' part of stupidity lubricates the work process and fosters greater certainty and a happier atmosphere. If you don't believe there's a place for stupidity, picture the opposite – an atmosphere of 'dysfunctional smartness', in which bright professionals run

> amok, questioning everything. Would the gains in terms of corporate self-awareness really be worth the total sacrifice of cohesion and efficiency?

Of course, Alvesson and Spicer are not entirely to blame for the way their work has been received in the business press. But it is certainly possible to read the paper from a managerial perspective as much as a critical one. What Alvesson and Spicer appear to have written is the academic equivalent of 'dog-whistle politics': a business audience will take away one message from the paper, while an academic audience will take away quite a different one. The paper is such a frustrating read precisely because it seeks to appeal to both constituencies at one and the same time, wrapping itself up in knots as it tries to do so.

Why is this such a problem? Should we not celebrate scholars who are able to appeal to multiple stakeholders, appealing to organizational members as much as organizational scholars? What does it matter if this involves rounding off a few edges here and there, provided it allows scholarship to reach out and touch the 'real world' beyond the confines of academia? There is a strong case to be made for producing work that is able to cross boundaries and impact on organizational thinking. But if one is not careful, this may lead to a blurring of the distinction between academic concept and management buzzword.

One of the reviewers for this note suggested that I have been '[i]f anything...too generous' in my critique of Alvesson and Spicer's paper since it is 'a frankly shoddy piece of work which rambles along to an inconclusive conclusion without ever making a coherent argument'. The other reviewer, meanwhile, suggests that the paper is 'a valuable starting point for further theoretical and empirical explorations', despite the fact that it contains 'some ambiguities and inconsistencies'. What this disagreement between reviewers sheds light on, I think, is the different ways in which academic research can be understood in the business school today. Should we strive to produce academic research that is internally coherent, logical and based on careful deliberation? Or should we aim instead to produce work that does not need to be clear and coherent as long as it is a little bit provocative and generates some discussion? If it is the latter, then 'A stupidity-based theory of organizations' has certainly achieved its goal. But the danger of this approach is that it comes to shape the research programme of scholars who take its suggestions for further inquiry seriously – and thus develop a research agenda based on very shaky ground. This paper has been an attempt to raise some critical questions about the paper in particular, but also – more generally – to open up a conversation about what kind of scholarship we should be striving to produce in organization studies.

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Redemption between politics and ontology: Agamben on the coming politics

Tom Frost

review of

Abbott, M. (2014) *The figure of this world: Agamben and the question of political ontology*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, (HB, pp. 232, £70, ISBN: 9780748684090)

Whyte, J. (2014) Catastrophe and redemption: The political thought of Giorgio Agamben. Albany, NY: SUNY Press. (PB, pp. US$ 26.95, ISBN: 9781438448527)

There is a prevailing view of the thought of Giorgio Agamben that reads him as a decidedly pessimistic thinker, and a modern day Cassandra, or even a philosopher who is channelling Chicken Little, telling all and sundry that the sky is collapsing and the modern world is on an inexorable path to destruction. This prevailing view has held sway for much of the past decade and a half, but it is, slowly, and thankfully, being challenged by a new wave of scholarship. This 'negative' reading of Agamben was not without apparent justification. Agamben's *Homo Sacer* series of works propelled him to fame in the Anglophone world. His volumes began being translated into English in the late 1990's, and his declaration that 'it is not the city but rather the camp that is the fundamental biopolitical paradigm of the West' (Agamben, 1998: 181) appeared to predict the events of the 'War on Terror', the detention facilities in Afghanistan, Iraq, Guantanamo Bay and CIA 'Black Sites' around the world, and emergency powers passed in the name of protecting citizens against terrorism. His work appeared to draw direct connections between the Nazi era and contemporary governmental actions, yet many scholars questioned his analysis of contemporary responses to terrorism, arguing that they were inaccurate and lacking the scholarly attention necessary to adequately describe what was happening in the first years of the twenty-first century (Neal, 2004; Rabinow and Rose, 2006).

Jessica Whyte notes in her introduction to *Catastrophe and redemption* both the fact that the reception of Agamben's work has been tied up with these outside events, and that this coincidence led to the obscuring of the underlying philosophical claims in his work (Whyte, 2013: 3). This obscuring ultimately led to Agamben's work and proposals for the politics to come to be derided as nebulous and esoteric, too removed from the everyday to be of use (Sharpe, 2005; Žižek, 2007; Bailey, 2009). Both Whyte and Mathew Abbott in *The figure of this world* attempt to redress the balance here, adding recent 'positive' reconstructions of Agamben's thought, which can also be found in recent books published by Sergei Prozorov and David Kishik, again illustrating a sea change in how Agamben is being viewed (Prozorov, 2014; Kishik, 2012).

The redemptive qualities of Agamben's thought often appear elusive within his writings, not least because of his claim that ontology is directly political (Whyte 2013: 32). Therefore, we can agree with Whyte that Agamben's writings on potentiality and life are also his contribution to political theory. His hope for the future comes from the collapse of the border between politics and life (Whyte, 2013: 44). Despite this, whilst Agamben has often spoken of the life and politics to come (Agamben, 1993: 1), details of this 'happy life' have often been scarce, particularly because they are to comprise the final part of his *Homo Sacer* series of works (Sharpe 2009; Kalyvas, 2005). This final volume has been published in Italian, and is titled *L'uso dei corpi*, and an English translation will be forthcoming. Those scholars eagerly anticipating resolution to all the philosophical problems Agamben has identified over the past 40 years will be disappointed. As Agamben himself declares in his introduction, he has 'abandoned' the *Homo Sacer* series of works. Abandoned, because every philosophical effort cannot be pushed to an end or concluded (Agamben, 2014a).

Because of this fact, both of these volumes should be read as crucial and indispensible additions to the secondary literature on Agamben. Both Whyte and Abbott weave together their own voices with Agamben's thought, and both are influenced by Agamben yet differ from him in clear ways, extending his thought in new and exciting directions. Both also share similar themes. Neither Whyte nor Abbott adhere to what Benjamin Noys has termed 'accelerationism', which is the tendency to read a dominant ideology and system as generating its own forces of dissolution, meaning that we need to radicalise the ideology we want to overcome: the worse the better (Noys, 2012: 5).

However, both differ in their methodological approaches to reading Agamben. Broadly speaking, Jess Whyte provides an overtly political reading of Agamben's thought, whereas Mathew Abbott's is overtly ontological. Despite this point, these volumes do complement one another and both authors open up crucial points of inquiry. Whyte's focus is Agamben's contention that our time is making possible a new politics that can free human life from sovereign power (Whyte, 2013: 3). Focusing her criticism on Agamben's own 'accelerationist' tendencies (Whyte, 2013: 3), Whyte draws on familiar tropes in Agamben's thought - the camp, his writings on Auschwitz and the *Muselmann*, the state of exception, biopolitics, and the influence of both messianism and Martin Heidegger, whilst reading him as heavily influenced by the Marxist tradition. Contrarily, drawing on Ludwig Wittgenstein and Heidegger, as well as Friedrich Nietzsche, Emmanuel Levinas and Walter Benjamin, Abbott focuses upon the ontological dimension of Agamben's thought. It is almost as if Whyte's noting that the redemptive qualities of Agamben's thought often appear elusive within his writings because of his claim that ontology is directly political have operated as the starting point for Abbott's analyses (Whyte, 2013: 32). Whilst Abbott does draw upon Marxism to illustrate the inextricability of theory and practice, Agamben's work for Abbott turns on the attempt to think the question of being. In an aim to clarify this positive 'political ontology', Abbott reads Agamben's 'coming politics' as requiring us to rethink our relation to the question raised by being (Abbott, 2014: 1). Abbott defines political ontology as the study of how our conception of the world as such conditions what we take to be the ontic possibilities for human collectives (Abbott, 2014: 13). In short, Abbott attempts to do for Heidegger what Marx did for Hegel: stand him on his feet (Abbott, 2014: 9).

In the first chapter of *Catastrophe and redemption*, Whyte focuses on Agamben's biopolitics and his relationship to the work of Michel Foucault. This is used as a base to assess Agamben's claim in *Homo Sacer* that Western politics has been a biopolitics since its very inception at the time of Aristotle. In Chapter Two Whyte moves on to consider Agamben's writings on the state of exception, which he argues today has become the normal form of government. The sovereign, and those who exercise sovereign power, retains the ability to exclude or include persons within the legal and political orders. It is in this way that 'desubjects' such as bare life are created. Building upon this in Chapter Three Whyte considers the ultimate catastrophe, namely Auschwitz and the accompanying figure of the *Muselmann*, the figure representative of bare life under the Nazis. Auschwitz is the paradigmatic camp, and the ultimate combination of the state of exception and biopolitics.

In contrast to these catastrophes, Whyte moves on to consider the redemptive element in Agamben's thought. Chapter Four engages critically with Agamben's messianism and its relation to the law. In particular, Whyte interrogates Benjamin's 'weak messianic power', and favours this, rather than Agamben's invocation of Herman Melville's law-scribe Bartleby, who offers the response that 'he would prefer not to' when asked to complete tasks by his employer, as better suited to thinking a form of collective praxis. Finally, in Chapter Five Whyte turns to Agamben's idea of the world-to-come. Here, Whyte contends that Agamben ignores the problems of economic exploitation and the use-value of labour power in his works. As such he is unable to adequately articulate how it would be possible to put human capacities to a new use.

Catastrophe and redemption attempts to reconstruct the history behind Agamben's philosophy. This is done in order to counter Agamben's 'one sided' teleology of Western politics. Whyte focuses attention on the 'other side' of the political events Agamben analyses in his works (Whyte, 2013: 155). She claims, with much validity, that the current political malaise in which we live is as much the result of the *defeats* of political movements of the past as it is the direct inheritor of those movements (Whyte, 2013: 41-42). In a salient point, she notes that Agamben does not spend any time contemplating what the world would be like where the political struggles of modernity – women's rights, human rights, workers' rights – had not taken place (Whyte, 2013: 41). A result of this is that Agamben turns away from active political movements today, which leads, in Whyte's view, to a potential deterministic understanding of social transformation in his work (Whyte, 2013: 45).

Whyte also points out the deficiencies in Agamben's work in relation to human agency. Agamben does have the tendency in his thought to exclude agency – notably in his treatment of pornography he leaves no room for the roles of political movements in challenging assumptions about the roles of women and the possibilities for sex (Whyte, 2013: 138). Perhaps more importantly in terms of concretising the political potential of Agamben's thought, Whyte identifies that Agamben has paid insufficient attention to the role of past political struggles in resisting the forms of domination that have existed, especially in relation to human labour (Whyte, 2013: 15-16).

It is the connection to Greece and capitalism that is the main strength of this book. Whyte situates Agamben within a lineage of Marxian thinkers who contend that the extension of commodification – the 'society of the spectacle' in Guy Debord's terms (Debord, 1994) – empties out the 'use value' of commodities, leaving in place empty forms which are made available for new uses. However, because Agamben assimilates his analysis of the commodity form into his analyses of the law, he risks giving credent to an evolutionary account of salvation history which pervaded through Marxist thought. As such, Whyte claims that Agamben's analysis of modernity is inadequate of adequately grasping the global dominance of capital (Whyte, 2013: 127).

Agamben has claimed that the society of the spectacle has destroyed traditional identities. However, as Daniel McLoughlin has argued, Agamben's more recent work has paid less attention to the homogenous planetary petit bourgeoisie, which he identified as the social form that replaced those identities (Agamben, 2000). McLoughlin sees this as a 'turn' in Agamben's work as a response to the uneven geographical development and the resurgence of nationalism in the wake of globalised capitalism (McLoughlin, 2014: 323-324). Even taking this into account, Whyte's view that Agamben has been overly dismissive of forms of political praxis that do exist in the present has some weight – Whyte provides the example of the protests in Greece after the imposition of stringent austerity measures in 2011 as an example of such a messianic coming politics of which Agamben speaks (Whyte, 2013: 17).

Agamben is read by Whyte as continuing Marx's inquiries, and in particular his critique of rights (Marx, 2005). Whyte addresses this particularly in Chapter One, but she argues that Agamben ends up dispensing with Marx's analysis of capitalism in his oeuvre, instead focusing upon 'modernity' (Whyte, 2013: 38). As such, Whyte can be read alongside many voices that are sceptical of Agamben's claim that the development of life as a political subject, which he traces to Aristotle (Agamben, 1998: 1), paved the way for the Nazi state (Whyte, 2013: 40). Whyte does accept that contemporary biopolitics could be traced to the great declarations of rights in the eighteenth century as Agamben claims (Whyte, 2013: 41). However, in reconnecting Agamben to the Marxian lineage Whyte makes clear the deficits in Agamben's thought that result from his lack of focus upon historicity.

This theme – the need for leftist thought to engage with concrete forms of social change – looms large throughout the work. Whyte's engagement with Agamben's treatment of Auschwitz is particularly insightful. Engaging with the Holocaust and the camps is fraught with danger, especially as Whyte attempts to elucidate forms of politics and resistance which did exist within the camps (Whyte, 2013: 93-94). However, Whyte is careful not to fetishize such forms of action. Instead, she skilfully connects Agamben's writing to Heidegger's influence, in particular *The question concerning technology* (Heidegger, 1993a). This reading of Agamben is useful, as it paints his thought as influential for political theory, but also both too optimistic and too pessimistic at the same time (Whyte, 2013: 95). Agamben is too pessimistic about the avenues for political transformation that are open to us in the present – as mentioned, Whyte points towards Greece as a possible example for this politics. However, she also contends that Agamben is too optimistic about the redemptive consequences of catastrophe. For Whyte, politics is a necessarily contingent event, a possibility that cannot be determined in advance (Whyte, 2013: 94).

Whyte sees politics as what is at stake in his theorisation of the exception (Whyte, 2013: 50). The on-going departure for legal norms offers opportunities for thinking the centrality of legalism to emancipatory political strategies (Whyte, 2013: 51). Whilst Agamben focuses upon developing a politics of withdrawal, giving the messianic figure of Bartleby as an example of such a life lived in pure potentiality, Whyte counters by noting that the fate of Bartleby at the end of Melville's tale was death (Whyte, 2013: 121). Concerned that such a fate could not be seen as 'salvation', Whyte adopts the notion of such a politics of withdrawal, but refocuses it, asking what a politics of withdrawal from *capital* would be. This is important because for Whyte Agamben underestimates the way in which capital creates new identities that are bound up with reactionary and emancipatory political claims (Whyte, 2013: 128). Perhaps related to this point, Whyte is clear that this work does pose more questions than is answered, concluding that what is necessary is to begin to formulate a political thought within a society where spectacular consumption of useless commodities exists with subsistence living for billions and where a flexible class of people have their belongings made in sweatshops and worry that their holiday destinations are being engulfed in separatist struggles (Whyte, 2013: 157). Such a world does not resemble Agamben's world to come.

However, Whyte identifies key questions which will need to be asked in order to transform this world. Such questions relate to challenging inequality, challenging capitalism's colonialism of the future, and creating new forms of solidarity. To address these issues, Whyte draws us to her conclusion – that it is not enough to accede to teleological formations of capitalism. We must begin to develop ways to contest it (Whyte, 2013: 157).

The figure of this world also ends with Mathew Abbott connecting Agamben's work with his Marxist origins. Marxism illustrated how ordinary life is marked by a contemplative tendency in which humans are separated from, and end up as distracted observers of, their own lives. It is this tendency *The figure of this world* interrogates. For Abbott, capital has exacerbated the ontological problems that he traces in the world to such an extent that it has opened the possibility for their resolution (Abbott, 2014: 191). However, Abbott's work operates on an ontological register. Central to Abbott's ontological focus is the fact that things *are*. Philosophy is ill-equipped to own up to this fact, which is, for Abbott, both banal and singularly inexplicable. Abbott's construction of 'political ontology' stems from this. Political ontology makes a particular kind of claim on us, which is political in the fundamental sense that it bears on our being in common, as we share exposure to the world (Abbott, 2014: 1).

The figure of this world openly engages with ideas that are not explicitly articulated in Agamben's thought. This is a deliberate move, and one which is designed to provide a defence and development of Agamben's thought, reflecting Abbott's aim to engage with Agamben's texts in 'a more vital way than direct exegesis allows' (Abbott, 2014: 3). Like Whyte, Abbott counters an accelerationist reading of Agamben (Abbott, 2014: 3). However, Abbott argues that it is impossible to understand Agamben's work except as a form of political ontology. On this view, if we see Agamben as a political philosopher or a critical theorist we misunderstand the claims he makes. As such, Abbott argues that criticisms of Agamben depend upon a 'category mistake'. His work and concepts are only intelligible if understood as grounded in an ontology that attempts to think the question of being (Abbott, 2014: 17). It is this that, for Abbott, distinguishes Agamben from Foucault, and explains why, unlike Whyte, he does not engage as directly with the question of biopolitics.

Crucial to Abbott's argument is the notion of the 'picture-concept', which is a metaphysical scheme that views the world as a concept, something that can be understood, grasped, mastered and appropriated, necessitating the need for a 'grounding' to all political and social forms (Abbott, 2014: 2). However, this effaces the fact that the world *as such* presents itself to us through its 'pure gratuity' (Abbott, 2014: 26). Picture-concepts are presuppositions, designed to ignore and exclude the question of being, closely connected to the question of nothing (Heidegger, 1993b). The consequence of these metaphysical foundations and presuppositions is a close connection between life, authority and violence, with violence providing the necessary authority for the metaphysical grounding of any legal order (Abbott, 2014: 117). The legal order, to maintain legitimacy, seeks to capture pure being, and the state of exception is the space where the sovereign tries to take hold of this fact (Abbott, 2014: 182).

The figure of this world comprises of nine chapters. In Chapter One Abbott defines political ontology, distinguishing it from both political philosophy and political theology. Chapter Two focuses on Heidegger's phenomenology of poetry, arguing that poetry that helps us realise that our relation to it runs deeper than knowing. In Chapter Three Abbott focuses upon the political aspects of experiencing the world's existence, which shows that human life desires for grounding and justification, but the question of being means such justification always rejects the absolute gratuity of the poetic experience that the world simply is. Chapter Four focuses on the problem of ground, drawing a connection between Agamben's thought and Emmanuel Levinas's use of the *il y a*. This helps understand what Agamben means by the possibility of the world's appearing 'as a good that absolutely cannot be appropriated' (Agamben, 2005: 64). Chapter Five illustrates the biopolitical stakes of the problem of foundation. Extracting a form of messianism from Walter Benjamin's *Critique of violence*, Abbott reads 'divine violence' as a radical disenchantment, transforming the individual's relationship to the law by intervening into our metaphysics of human animality. Chapter Six reads Nietzsche's philosophy of life with and against political ontology, arguing against a will to power and in favour of a Pauline conception of redeemed humanity as non-hierarchical, turning on the possibility of a collective appropriation of our common consignment to unassumable animality.

Chapter Seven reads Agamben with and against Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, connecting happiness to Wittgenstein's picture-theory of language, and arguing that Wittgenstein shows us that any talk that passes over the existence of the world as a 'non-problem' is itself a problem. Chapter Eight then reads Wittgenstein with and against Heidegger's world-picture, illustrating that the question of being leads to philosophical beguilement penetrating the ordinary. The final chapter refers to Agamben's 'remnant' as an attempt to think what it would mean to live beyond the picture-concept of the world which conceives of the world as a representable totality.

Abbott's resoundingly ontological reading of Agamben is buttressed by his incredibly engaging style and detailed reading. A particular example is his ontological treatment of bare life. The question of the existence and representation of bare life is a vexing one. Agamben himself gives several examples of the concrete manifestations of bare life in his work, including the inhabitants of concentration camps (Agamben, 1998: 81-86), refugees (Agamben, 1998: 131), and the global poor and 'the entire population of the third world' (Agamben, 1998: 180). Abbott's innovative approach is to treat the *zoē / bios* distinction as relating to Heidegger's ontological difference (Abbott, 2014: 19). This is based on Agamben's claim in *Homo Sacer* that bare life is akin to 'pure Being (*on haplōs*)'. Agamben's key difference from Heidegger is to insist on the ethical and political stakes of the question of being (Abbott, 2014: 58). From this, Agamben claims that there is nothing to life *as such* within our politics (Abbott, 2014: 19). Bare life is a metaphysical figure of thought, representing the unthought ground of the metaphysics that underpins our political systems. Abbott reads the discussions of concrete politics in Agamben's work as secondary, which operate only to illustrate his main ontological point (Abbott, 2014: 20). Importantly, this leads Abbott to downplay Agamben's hyperbolic statements in his work, which have been the source of much criticism. Very persuasively, he argues that Agamben's hyperbolic tone results from his method – hyperbole is what becomes of ontological thought when it 'bleeds into the ontic' (Abbott, 2014: 20).

As such, Abbott claims that sociologically, or ontically, Agamben's claims are exaggerations. However, ontologically their status is yet to be properly grasped. This means that bare life can never exist, and has never existed, an argument running contrary to much scholarship and even Agamben himself, who Abbott also sees as, on occasion, making the same category mistake his critics make. This neatly illustrates the 'breaks' from Agamben that demonstrate Abbott is interested in more than exegesis, and this argument has huge potential for future scholarship. Ontically, bare life is therefore a metaphysical condition of the possibility of ontic spaces of domination, which are the camps (Abbott, 2014: 20). No life is bare in the ontic sense. Rather, it represents the passing over of the question of being. What is exceptional is the ordinary – on this reading Agamben's work has transformative potential, in that his messianism should not be read as supporting an extraordinary event that would puncture the tissue of the ordinary (Abbott, 2014: 3). Our task is to seek a revolution of everyday life in the event of thought (Abbott, 2014: 29).

What strikes the reader about *The figure of this world* is how Abbott's argument is supported by incredibly close and careful readers of a number of different figures. As Agamben's name is in the book's title readers could assume that the book would be primarily focusing on him. This is not the case, and it is a better volume for doing so. For example, Abbott skilfully shows how Heidegger's writings on poetry and art can show that the experience of being is akin to poetry, which opens the way for a refusal of metaphysical grounds of existence (Abbott, 2014: 72). This clearly chimes with Agamben's happy life and refusal of biopolitical domination, yet it is a connection that to date scholarship has glossed over.

This 'refusal', as we can call it, does not involve an affirmative biopolitics, in the sense preferred by Roberto Esposito (Esposito, 2008). Abbott makes it clear, countering Nietzsche's call to 'affirm the beast' (Abbott, 2014: 133), that such a move will not render the biopolitical machine inoperative. Political ontology questions such an affirmation of life, considering that this sets up another metaphysical foundation for existence. Rather, our shared unassumable animal life should be attended to in its ungraspability (Abbott, 2014: 138-139). This Pauline non-hierarchical collectivity appears to invoke a kind of radical equality, but Abbott sees this as necessary to release politics from the dialectic of danger and salvation that characterises accelerationism (Abbott, 2014: 118).

This is the messianism that can challenge the picture-concepts that lead us to view the world as a representable totality. Like Whyte, Abbott's view of Agamben's politics places the emphasis on change on us – there is no hope of an outside intervention or event (Abbott, 2014: 11). Abbott's ontological reading leads him to see Agamben's happy life as akin to Heidegger's hermeneutic circle (Heidegger, 1962: 188-195) – namely, we must come to being in the right way. The 'real' state of exception which Benjamin refers to is an ontological experience of the world as such, when the real and the exceptional become indiscernible (Abbott, 2014: 186-187). In Agamben's terms, this life coincides completely with 'the destitution of the social and biological conditions into which it finds itself thrown' (Agamben, 2014b: 74). The ontological Agamben wants us to think what it means to live and think beyond the picture-concept of the world (Abbott, 2014: 193).

Similarly to Whyte's analysis of Agamben, Abbott makes clear that political ontology does not provide a blueprint for political action (Abbott, 2014: 188). Given his critique of metaphysical forms of politics, this is unsurprising. There may inevitably be some who react to such a conclusion in disappointed terms, once again making the point that Agamben's thought is not transferable into concrete political action. However, to do so would be to miss the nuance in Abbott's argument. The very critique of metaphysics he practices works for the solution of the negative ground, by thinking the conditions of possibility of radical change (Abbott, 2014: 188). There *are* ontic conditions for ontological change, and political ontology's role is to think practically by experimenting with new political forms. In respect of this element of Agamben's work, both Whyte and Abbott are in agreement. Most importantly, today's society of the spectacle has reduced the value of the world to exchange value. In doing so, it has denied any value to the world as such (Abbott, 2014: 196). This is not accelerationism. The task now is to attend to the fact that there will be no epochal event – once this is accepted, then we can think of what it means to be in common, exposed to the same world (Abbott, 2014: 195). Abbott's volume expresses the same desire as Whyte, but perhaps can be seen as adding an extra caveat – in order to contest the society of the spectacle, we have to come to the world in the right way.

Scholars of Agamben have long pondered about the coming community, and laboured to defend their Agambenian inspired work against accusations of negativity and esotericism. Now, thanks to Jessica Whyte and Mathew Abbott's scholarship, that task will become a little easier. If you at all interested in Agamben and his thought, you need to read both these volumes. You will not be disappointed.

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Seeing organization 'slant'

Mary Phillips

review of

Pitsis, A. (2014) The poetic organization. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. (HB, pp.197, £67, ISBN 978-1-137-39871-0)

The power of poetry and of poetic writing is that it plays with language in ways that subvert meaning, convey affect, enable embodiment and passion, and jolt and discomfort our perceptions of the world. To paraphrase the words of Emily Dickinson, through poetry we can see all the world but see it slant as it shifts our perspectives and we consider new understandings. There is something about the poetic that captures, or at least gets close to capturing, the unsayable and the inexpressible. *The poetic organization* could therefore be a timely contribution to a growing debate within some areas of organization studies that focuses on how scholars can both 'read' and 'write' organization in ways that escape the straightjacket of social science norms. The book claims that it sets out a different way, using ficto-analysis, of traversing organizational practices through what it terms poetic explorations, particularly referring to organizational coaching. It also aims to promote the active poeticization of organization. The cover 'blurb' promises the reader a poetic journey in which organizational members and practices can be seen in a new light.

The book opens with an attempt to define what is meant by 'poetic'; a task that it finds something of a struggle before settling on 'an approximate term referring to aspects involved in creating and processing semblances and thematics within organizations' (11). Pitsis freights poetics with a large number of claims; that poetic processes can be discerned in organizational existence, that poetic practices sustain organizational viability and that aspects of poetics establish and maintain professional identities. She also argues that there is something about a method grounded in poetics, and, relatedly, understanding organizations as texts to be unravelled by literary and fictive techniques, that brings into view those aspects of organization that are fleeting, difficult to access or to describe. This can assist the researcher coming to a reflexive understanding of the ways that knowledge is produced in organizations and organizational research.

Having established the centrality of poetics to organization and organizational research, Pitsis turns to review existing scholarship addressing the poetic in organization (Chapter 2) and that exploring the philosophical and methodological implications of reading organizations as fictive texts (Chapter 3). These chapters provide a thorough and useful overview of the context in which the book is situated. Indeed, for me, these reviews were the strongest sections of the book. In Chapter 2, 'A trajectory of poetics in organization', Pitsis notes that early work was very much focused on metaphor and storytelling. Some of this foregrounded poetics as a route to new and exciting ways of conducting and reporting research but Pitsis recognizes that more often, metaphor (in particular) was applied to organization as a type of productive tool that could be used to examine and analyse organization in a functional and utilitarian sense. This is a timely reminder of the stultifying tendencies of much social science research and especially within organization studies which arguably perceives itself as having a continuing problem with legitimation. The review goes on to discuss more recent work, such as that of Westwood (1999) or Linstead and Westwood (2001), which has highlighted the textual nature of organization and the ways in which language underpins organization. At the same time, this work pointed to the slipperiness of language such that it cannot be said to pin down meaning. This led to a turn to a 'fictive' account of organizations that regards them as collective inventions with no existence outside memories and imaginations (Case, 2003). The ways in which research is reported and represented has also come to be regarded as a literary and creative process (e.g. Rhodes and Brown, 2005). This is made explicit by some scholars who incorporate poetry into their accounts (e.g. Rippin, 2006) or who write 'differently' (e.g. Westwood, 1999), but the review makes clear that even objectivist research is a form of fiction even though it asserts the revelation of 'facts' that transcend the performance of language.

'Examining the fictive as a methodological stance' (Chapter 3) continues this exploration of scholarly antecedents. In this section, Pitsis draws on literary and philosophical expositions of the fictive in a discussion that ranges through, for example, Aristotle, Iser and Blanchot as well as current approaches within organization studies. For Pitsis, using the notion of the fictional is 'not about evading the truth of the research, but embracing it playfully' (43) and this notion of 'truth', and, in particular, that emerging from the poetic space between 'fact' and 'fiction', forms the heart of her discussion. She outlines how a range of philosophical approaches to the fictive could inform organizational research. This includes Aristotle's notion of poetics as creating potential future realities which can clearly be applied to the stories that organizations and organizational members construct about themselves. Other philosophers, such as Walton (1990) or Thomasson (1990), pose questions around the differences between what belongs in the realm of make-believe and what is part of materiality reality. They come to the conclusion that the same processes of cultural creation bring both into being such that they occupy the same realm. The characters, situations and so forth created through the literary process have no objective reality outside the text, but they have a reality that is both interiorized to the text and auto-references the material world in order to construct plausible narratives. This also is pertinent to studies of organization where the research process creates characters and situations through very similar fictive mechanisms and works in the same way to engage author, reader and participants in the co-construction of an agreed version of reality. Iser (1993) addresses the complexity of the relationship between literature and the ways in which humans can become present to themselves, while Blanchot's non-writing, the impossibility of capturing 'what is' through language, is related to research processes and data (1969/1993). Here, Pitsis, drawing on Blanchot's notion of question as 'speech as detour', offers an invaluable insight into the absurdity of the questioning at the heart of most research:

> ...each question poses the question 'not posed'. ... As a researcher I too was rendered paralysed by the absurdity of questioning as if it were to bring forth, or uncover, some realization and acute awareness on how these coaches engaged poetically. What I was left with was the feeling of standing in a profound space that could not be explained, a non-arrival at the research question/doctrine. (56, emphasis in original)

She thus weaves together resources from social sciences, philosophy and literary studies to formulate an interesting and provocative argument for seeing the fictive as a productive means to explore the immateriality of organization and to generate understandings of organizations and those who work within them. However, Pitsis does not claim that the use of fictive methods offers an 'authentic' or one-best-way way to research organizations and she takes care to emphasise that fictive approaches view a coherent and seamless representation of the world as just that; an illusory representation.

From this discussion, Pitsis develops the ficto-analytic framework that is positioned as one of the book's main contributions, but it is precisely here that the work begins to disappoint. She presents this framework as a 'general term to position the approach taken that relies on a poetic mode' (66-67) and, quite correctly, points to the subjectivity that is an inherent part of the research process but which, through the use of the framework, is allowed a space for reflection and play. This is followed by an outline of the main tools used in the research. However, I could not discern whether these tools comprised the framework or were an outcome of it. Moreover, such tools would not be out of place in an NVivo coding of interview data. To be fair, Pitsis does state that the research process involved the usual ways of obtaining data that would be deemed relevant and functional in 'classic' research, but she also claims that what emerged from her own 'reveries and intuitive explorations' as well as 'personal impressions and understandings' was a new poetic text.

Thus, Pitsis promises that her method of ficto-analysis provides a creative, experimental and vibrant way of viewing organizational spaces. However, *The poetic organization* ultimately fails to deliver on its promise of a poetic journey; indeed reading the book, at least for this reader, was at times a less than pleasing aesthetic encounter. Much of the writing is tortuous and in places repetitive. The methods used, which are not in themselves innovative (interviews, free writing, using an object to provoke discussion), have produced data that appears little different from other qualitative research projects. The coding framework is hardly less mechanistic than other coding frameworks and the idea that a researcher creatively applies their own interpretation to a text is not ground-breaking. But it is in the reporting of the research findings that Pitsis has really missed an opportunity to show how her method can add something creative, experimental and vibrant to organization studies. She could have been considerably braver in her representation of the poetic in her participants' responses – weaving them together in the form of a novel or a play, or taking inspiration from writers such as Annette Kuhn (cultural theory – e.g. 2002) or Kathleen Stewart (anthropology – e.g. 2007) who have challenged the boundaries between social sciences research and art. This would perhaps have enabled Pitsis to play more creatively with her insight that humans draw on 'poetic' language and weave elements of story, myth and music into the means by which they represent their lives – including their organizational and professional lives – such that organization is 'a perpetually *unfinished project* with inherent fictional processes contained within it' (173, emphasis in original).

In the final chapter (Conclusions and future issues), the book turns to discuss its potential value to the 'poeticized organization'. Pitsis claims the ideas in the book can be used by organizational members to 'foster the creative aspects of the organization', 'find ways to dissolve and re-emerge as a newly invented organization' and finally 'embrace the fluid and agile ways of being that can sustain a flexible organization in the changing global environment' (181). It is a great pity that ultimately, the book veers dangerously close to falling into the same instrumentalism as the earlier literature on metaphor and which Pitsis critiques.

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Reframing finance: From cultures of fictitious capital to de-regulating financial markets

Ann-Christina Lange

review of

Haiven, M. (2014) Cultures of financialization: Fictitious capital in popular culture and everyday life. London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan. (HC, pp.225, £60.00/$95.00, ISBN: 978-1-137-35596-6)

Financialization – the leverage and promotion of anything to be turned into a tradable product – and its cultures are what Haiven addresses in his book *Cultures of Financialization: Fictitious Capital in Popular Culture and Everyday Life*. Like many authors before him, he indicates that financialization is not only reduced to the transformation of currencies, goods, loans, etc. into tradable financial products such as swaps and futures, but that culture itself is under transformation and is being turned into an object of financial capitalism. The book's opening sentence states the aim of the book very clearly: He wants to re-theorize financialization. In Haiven's words financialization refers to 'the increased power of the financial sector in the economy, in politics, in social life and in culture writ large' (1).

The book makes an important contribution to the literature on financialization and points not only to the increased power of capital markets but also to the transformation of capital markets and how culture plays a crucial role at the very centre of capitalist accumulation. It is a crucial contribution for two reasons. First, it introduces the importance of culture to the increasing literature on financialization that mainly focuses on a shift from industrial to finance capitalism (e.g. van der Zwan, 2014). Culture is here defined as how we live our lives and reproduce our social surroundings – connected to the ways societies and individuals reproduce themselves. Second, it sets out to investigate how financialization has come to act as a category by which we have come to understand ourselves, that is, 'a process whereby a set of narrative, metaphoric and procedural resources imported from the financial world come to help explain and reproduce everyday life … [t]o the extend we see ourselves as miniature financiers, investing in and renting out our human capital' (14). Haiven believes that the relationship between culture and finance is problematic. However, he starts with a radical statement saying that re-regulation is not a solution to their problematic relationship. Instead, he calls for the abolition of capital altogether. Despite the radicality of such a vision, which puts Haiven in company with contemporary thinkers like Virno, Negri, Marazzi, Berardi and Lazzarato, it contributes and invites a problematization and re-evaluation of the conditions upon which we have built our society and how it is unavoidably intertwined with capitalist processes of accumulation and price formation.

Not only do the first two chapters of the book give us a nice overview of the different accounts of financialization (from cognitive capitalism to performativity), but it also serves to contest and contrast those different accounts. This part of the book investigates what Marx has called 'fictitious capital', which refers to capital that has lost the reference to any underlying value. This is capital defined as 'freely circulating claims to future surplus value that *act* as money' (30, original italics). Haiven here adds a fresh perspective to current discussions within the financializations literature by using Derrida instead of Austin to account for the symbolic meaning of financial capital. Whereas MacKenzie, Callon and others have developed their theory of finance from Austin's notion of 'speech act' to argue for the performativity of financial models (MacKenzie, 2006; MacKenzie, Muniesa and Siu, 2007), the aim of this book is to broaden this argument and deal with how financialization in itself transforms our culture. Haiven argues that financial assets have a metaphorical value and that this metaphorical value depends on its relation to other metaphors. He writes: 'While all financial assets may claim to be a real representation of underlying "real-world" values, they are, in fact, inter-referential within their own economy of meaning' (22). That is, rather than referring to material objects or some kind of underlying economic value, financial assets are self-referential. Instead of dealing with the culture of high-finance he connects the financialized imagination at work in Wall Street arbitrage trading rooms with the everyday labor of financial subjects, which opens up some interesting connections between previously unconnected fields.

Chapter 3 gives us some insight into the financial practices of Walmart to demonstrate the logic of securitization. Haiven compares Walmart's operation to those of financial machines. He mentions Walmart's practice of hiring employees as free 'associate' agents, their replacement of pension schemes for optional participation in a fund and the use of consumer data. Data on the behavior of consumers, employee schedules, shifting local demand, etc. are used and stored in massive secretive data centres in Bentonville Arkansas. The corporation is able (via its control over data) to not only identify threats but to acutely predict and leverage them. A practice that to Haiven resembles what he sees as 'the incredibly powerful algorithmic trading machines owned by major financial firms that process and respond to incredible quantities of rapid changing economic data' (89). Chapter 4 takes up the practice of children's culture and, in particular, the phenomenon of Pokémon playing cards. Children collect cards, the aim of which is to create attachment to particular figures, with which they identify. Haiven sees Pokémon cards as a refined articulation of the commodity, one that is almost currency-like, as the cards have no real use-value outside their own enclosed economy of meaning. He highlights this as a part of an addictive consumer gaming culture. The cards are less a personal possession (occupying children's creativity and imagination) as much as a social medium. The cards, he suggests offer themselves as a tool by which children's creativity and imagination can be expressed. These cases serve as nice illustrations of a theoretical point – namely that financialization happens everywhere and is not exclusively attached to the centre of finance of Wall Street investment banks – it concerns everyday life and points to something broader than these cases themselves, namely the logic by which financial capitalism progresses.

The last part of the book (chapter 5 and 6) engages with the concept of creativity. Here, Haiven treats the notion of financialized imagination in further detail by re-introducing Marx and he argues that re-regulation is no answer to the problem of financialization. The underlying normative tone that runs through the book cannot be mistaken. The question one needs to ask in such a normative account is: Is everyday life and culture reduced to nothing but finance? What comes first: finance or our cultural reproduction of it? His argument builds upon an underlying assumption that finance cannot be reduced to its singular form defined as a discrete object but must be conceived of as a processual development that might impact other fields than its own. But still what is being occupied by these processes of financialization? Are we in an era of financialization of everything? Where is the outside to such an account of the all-encompassing powers of capital? Ironically, Haiven seems to place himself on the outside and calls for the abolition of capitalism altogether as the only way to solve the problem of financialization. This ambivalence is a consequence of the fact that Haiven unlike his fellow thinkers re-reads *Capital* and not *Grundrisse*, which has been the current trend among critical (neo-marxist) thinkers such as Lazzarato, Negri, Virno, Lash and Thrift. This is both the strength and weakness of the book. It opens up the possibility of also talking about financialization in terms of a transmission in capitalist accumulation by addressing the changing ways in which profit is made, from earning a profit on production and trade to be made by financial channels.

The tone of the book is at times close to that of a political manifest: claiming to take seriously the structural and ethical problems of financialization, not by regulating the financial sector to make speculative economy better aligned with its 'real value' but by pointing to the abolition of capital altogether. Haiven even goes as far as to claim that recent scholars of financialization are caught in a neo-Keynesian regime. In fact, the book explicitly attempts to 'steal financialization's fire, to reclaim metaphor, narrative, ideology and imagination from financialization and turn them towards its undoing' improper citation. How this goes along with a claim to not study the phenomenon of financialization as a normative program imposed on us from above, but rather to study its rhizomatic manifestations is not totally clear to me. In my view, the fact that cultural production has become an integral part of the operation of capitalism does neither show that liberalism is wrong nor right. Finance has always been about fiction, imaginary futures and desire in various forms – think of early loan taking as shown by Martha Poon (2007). Opposite the political orientation indicated in the book Haiven might be read as an extreme radicalization of liberalism. Thus, he reproduces some of the dangers that Hayek foresaw in his writings on the corporation (Hayek, 1975 [1960]). Hayek is in some ways even more normative than Marx and argues for a total divide between society and the accumulation of profit. The bureaucratic state-controlled organization is no match for the temporality of capitalism (the regulators are always a step behind the practices that they attempt to regulate). Haiven and Hayek end up in the same place – they attack the Keynesian view with reference to the hypermobility of capital. As Haiven writes, securitization – the fact that jobs, social programs, currencies and economies are dependent upon capital flows – is caused by 'the massive growth of hyper-speculation in financial markets, now accelerated by computer networks and telecommunications technology that integrate the world's markets into a 24/7 global casino' (77). Perhaps we need new distinctions to address these issues. Haiven takes us some of the way but ends up calling for revolution and (perhaps unwillingly) places himself on one side of the debate, which prevents him from taking into account the ways in which such technological transformation also change the nature of the kind of financialization that he describes.

Haiven acknowledges that we cannot address financialization without accounting for its technological development. Yet he emphasizes that Marx described a stock or a bond as a 'claim on the future surplus value yet to be extracted from labour' (28). Financial trading and its technological development (such as high-frequency trading) is mentioned as an extended version of the abstraction of value that Haiven rightly addresses with reference to Marx. However, such developments have other implications than those pointed out in the book. Studies of new forms of capitalism and the increased use of algorithms have shown that financial actors (the algorithms) might in fact have agential capabilities or emergent properties, which implies a kind of self-organizing logic of interacting agents. This development radically transforms the way in which we should discuss the intersection of culture and finance. Haiven's book made me speculate if there could be a way to engage with Marx at all on issues of softwaretization and financialization as they become tied together. Maybe we need to speak of software and digitalization as a processual form and not only a subcategory of current capitalist practices. The labor put into programming and producing algorithms and their interaction is itself one of the most important and expanding fields within practices of finance today. The comparison between free-floating capital and its abstraction from its 'real' underlying value to the case of Walmart and Pokémon is an interesting one. To me it stays, however, on a rather metaphorical level and Haiven runs the risk of reducing everything to a matter of the same logic and of ignoring the technological transformations that also shape practices of financialization and which might operate according to multiple and different logics than the ones he outlines in the book.

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The promise and paradise of austerity

Philip Roscoe

review of

Konings, M. (2015) *The emotional logic of capitalism*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. (PB, pp. 184, £15.99, ISBN 9780804794473)

Certain questions dog progressive thought: why, in view of the manifest failures of financial capitalism, is its hold on our society stronger than ever? Why, despite the empirical evidence of foreclosures, vacant building lots and food banks are people unable to see the catastrophic consequences of current economic arrangements? How has neoliberalism emerged from calamity ever stronger (Mirowski, 2013)? Why, as Crouch (2011) puts it, will neoliberalism simply not die? With this slim book Martijn Konings, a scholar of political economy at the University of Sydney, sketches out an answer: that progressive understandings of capitalism have neglected its emotional logics – its therapeutic, traumatic-redemptive, even theological qualities – and failed to recognise our emotional investment in money, our belief in the social role of credit as an ordering, regulatory mechanism, and our need for the redemptive promise of austere, well-disciplined economy. Our commitment to these things, so central especially to the American polity, is such that with every disappointment and failure, capitalism becomes stronger than ever. The book sets out to rescue critical thinking about money and capitalism from the cul-de-sac of well-worn Polanyian narratives that emphasise the disembedding and destructive aspects of the market by presenting a double movement of Konings' own, showing how the 'distinctive qualities of human association' – morality, faith, power and emotion – have been subsumed into the logic of the economy.

Konings begins with money itself, exploring its semiotic, iconic powers. He considers, and dismisses, the existing – opposing – positions in thinking about money: on the one hand the Polanyian (2001 [1944]) tradition where capitalist money dissolves social ties and sets up cold, calculative abstractions in their place; on the other Zelizer's (1994, 2005) convincing demonstration that money is always embedded in specific patterns of social relationship. (In the latter case, he notes that certain characteristics of 'moneyness' must transcend these local settings and allow money to do what it does). He also dismisses the Marxist notion of money as an idol – 'a fiction that is autonomous itself and become reified into a material fact' (19) – for money resists this critique. As we go about our daily business we don't seem bothered by money being two things at once, an objective standard and a collection of symbolic attachments; for Konings, to view money as 'merely constructed' is to lose sight of its extraordinary facticity and semiotic power.

Konings proposes instead that we view money as an icon, capable of instantly communicating meaning and significance through the medium of itself. He theorises this iconic power as performative, where 'performative sociality is characterised by *both* complex relationality and the proliferation of multiple meanings *and* a high degree of stable social order held together by powerful public signifiers' (23). His argument follows Butler's (2010) discussion of the citational and self-referential capabilities of linguistic performance, proposing a fluid, reflexive and interactive performativity, one that establishes normative force only when it is subjectively meaningful and pragmatically useful (25). Hence we can begin to understand the paradox involved in the money icon, where its authority is dependent upon the relational networks in which it is set, yet its influence is 'organically embedded in the basic structure of our personality and character' (25). Performativity leads Konings to theories of power. He sees capitalism's authority as rooted in our subjectivity, and power operating through difference, its relationships characterised by volatility and unpredictability. In making this move, Konings invokes Agamben and Braidotti, Saussure and Deleuze; power modulates through plastic networks of effects that are imminent, generative and eventually causal (34). The real question, he concludes, is why 'moderns have generated more powerful sources of sovereign power despite having cut off so many regal heads' – it is *critique* of traditional forms of sovereignty that has allowed modernity to establish new and more potent forms of power (39).

The icon is central to the book's argument, and Konings offers an interesting, albeit compressed account of, the historical role of icons in ordering society. He argues that the icon was a metaphorical device capable of mediating between Earth and the divine. As such it served as the pivot of the economy – the orderly conduct of the material things of God's earth. The icon becomes the central point in the symbolic infrastructure through which God's authority diffuses into the world. The early church, as Konings notes, distinguished between the necessary husbandry of the economy and 'chrematistics', the making of money for money's sake. While the Protestant revolution rejected such moneymaking as idolatrous, Adam Smith's secularised theology saw economic action as a generative force and recognized the possibilities for government embodied in the 'regulatory power and semiotic fertility' of money, all of which is manifested in the iconography of the invisible hand. In a final step Smithian capitalism fuses with the Weberian work ethic of Protestantism. Icons, for Konings, roll through history accruing semiotic density, symbolic and practical authority. The harder we kick against them, the more powerful they become:

> Iconoclasm never annihilates the economy and its signs but rather forces transformation of our relationship to them...In this way they become ever more deeply embedded in the practices of everyday life accruing associations and gathering semiotic density...The fact that icons never deliver transcendence that they hint at does not lead us to question their efficacy but on the contrary means that they become all the more engrossing, captivating, and performative. (50)

Thus money came to represent the earthly life given by God, to be approached in a spirit of frugal austerity yet enhanced and enlarged wherever possible.

Having elaborated a theoretical basis for his arguments, Konings moves his analysis to America, and to the peculiar allure of austerity in the wake of crisis. Austerity, Konings argues, is a route to self-actualisation through the working out of God's economy on earth, and credit becomes democratised as part of a new, redemptive Republican regime, providing for the needs of the yeoman farmer, steward of this divine economy. So, for Konings, the Weberian critique of disconnectedness under modern capitalism is misplaced because novel subjectivities and capacities of this self are *constructed* through new forms of relationship and sociality; in fact, the Pragmatists and other early progressive thinkers were much impressed by the plasticity of capitalist society and its ability to set up and new forms of reflexivity and meaning. New forms of finance, consumer credit and everyday lending became regulatory devices and moral artefacts crucial to the state's organisation of human society. Credit is an icon too, an offspring of money that serves to produce practices, standards and modes of connectedness that performatively constitute the authority and symbolic density of money. Through these semiotic and regulatory mechanisms – and this is Konings' central, and most important, point – crises become points at which public anger inevitably calls for purification and deepening of the market order.

Neoliberalism, then, does not see credit as feckless or irresponsible. Quite the reverse: credit is an essential social technology. The mark of a good citizen is the ability to service credit reliably, responsibly and on an ongoing basis. In the 1970s and 1980s, as blue-collar America struggled to maintain its living standards in the face of the collapse of union power, redundancies and Reaganomics, the use of credit changed and 'revolving debt' became ever more common. Where the New Deal was predicated on the eventual cancellation, or least repayment, of debt, 'revolving debt institutionalised the possibility of acquiring a piece of the American dream, not by promising extinction of the principle but on the basis of indefinite penance' (109). The modalities of power spread through subjectivities as well as theological certainties: Konings argues that the growth of the financial self-help industry and associated media repeats and reinforce the affective content of the iconography of money. So the Oprah Winfrey show, that institution of American broadcasting, serves to underscore the legitimacy of wealth and the notion that possession of money is a reflection of spiritual worth. These capitalist logics provide means by which the hard-working individual living the anointed life of austerity may criticise and subjugate those perceived as lax or lazy; Konings finds in the Oprah Winfrey spin-off 'Dr Phil' a spectacle of judgement over moral (i.e. financial) traumas where the deserving and the undeserving can be separated.

Konings can't resist giving the poor, threadbare Polanyian critique a final kick, for it is 'unable to discern the distinctive spirit that lurks inside the neoliberal vision and the possibilities for social cohesion and political governance that this opens up' (114). Instead economy should be understood in the light of the traumatic/redemptive force of its iconic sign, as illustrated by the fallout from financial crisis. The discourse concerning the need for austerity that has arisen as a result of the crisis only serves to strengthen the hold of neoliberal governments over us. It was the bailout more than the crisis that angered 'ordinary taxpayers', and here's the rub: the sense of betrayal felt by those who ended up paying for the slackness and greed of the bankers only serves to reinforce the need for the restoration of order, intensifying our belief in the very structure that has just failed us. So we see the Tea Party fixated with austerity, aiming 'to restore an earlier, less decadent America founded on authentic Republican values, where the undeserving are not pampered with bailouts financed by taxes on hard-working citizens' (126). Certainly, Konings' thesis explains the messianic fervour of the GOP: economic austerity is redemptive, a source of moral strength and spiritual salvation. In the months since I completed this review, the rise of Trump and the crisis in the GOP has taken Konings' narrative in an unexpected direction.

As will by now be clear, Konings covers much ground in his 132 pages. I have not even mentioned the recurring psychoanalytic themes, which consider narcissism, albeit of an agreeable, defensive kind, to be the central condition of progressive thought, driven by perpetual insecurity as signs and institutions fail it again and again. I find these arguments less convincing, and not entirely necessary. The fascinating central claim – that neoliberal austerity is theologically inspired and written into the iconography of money – is sometimes obscured by the sheer breadth of Konings' argument. There are times, even, when readers might feel as if they have arrived at a fashionable party for the critterati. The celebrities are all here and nobody would be so impolite as to suggest that we have never met them before. Agamben, though an influential political theorist, may be a thinker less familiar to many who work in organisation studies or management (myself included). As Agamben's theological analysis of the modern constitution becomes increasingly implicated in Konings' account, I would have welcomed a little more content on his work. In a similar way, the theoretical arcs teeter on the brink of grand narrative: the icon moves from ancient religious artefact in the Eastern Church, through the Reformation, the birth of the New World, to the towers on Wall Street and beyond in the space of a few pages. This is not to doubt Konings' scholarship or ambition, simply to sound a note of caution at grand visions and causal narratives that span millennia. Synthetic histories are a tricky business.

There is, too, a flirtation with actor-network approaches. In the early stages of the book Konings depicts the economy as operating by translation and purification, enrolling actors and developing new relations, a process that involves the 'acquisition of skills, the ability to grasp a complex network of connections as a coherent entity, without having to retrace all the details of its historical emergence every time we encounter it' (3). I'm not convinced that Konings is a fully paid-up ANT, certainly not the by way he tells his story of discourses, theologies and subjectivities, dealing with material processes at a relatively abstract level. Perhaps that's a good thing, for if Konings had embraced ANT seriously then his failure to mention – even cite – Michel Callon's (1998) account of the economy as performatively embedded in the networks and translations of economics, not to mention the flourishing field of market studies that has grown up after it, would be a serious omission.

As it stands, Konings follows a different route. He is focus is on money, an icon that simultaneously occupies a place in our understanding as a powerful set of conventions and an everyday, objective fact. Critical approaches, he says, run the risk of doing money as 'merely constructed', and he does plenty to show us the richness and power of the semiotics behind that construction. It would be interesting, I think, to see these ideas linked to empirical studies of the social construction of money and credit (e.g. Poon, 2007; Vargha, 2011), the role of affect in everyday economic arrangements (Deville, 2012; Moor and Lury, 2011; Roscoe, 2015) or of self-referential, linguistic performatives in the construction of markets (Cochoy, 2015). Nonetheless, it is clear that there are many opportunities for Konings' arguments to make a significant contribution to our empirical understanding of the performative construction of the economy. His book serves to remind those of us interested in the organization of markets and the economy of the extraordinary power of signs – of icons – and encourage us earthbound ANTs to look occasionally to the heavens.

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