



Towards a politics of dis/organization: Relations of dis/order in organization theory and practice

Mie Plotnikof, Consuelo Vásquez, Timothy Kuhn and Dennis Mumby

[T]he work of organization is focused upon transforming an intrinsically ambiguous condition into one that is ordered so that organization as a process is constantly bound up with its contrary state of disorganization. (Cooper, 1986: 305)

[T]he undecidable can only become decidable through the practice of power and 'violence' (Cooper, 1986: 324)

There is no organization without disorganization, Cooper (1986) famously proclaimed. All organization is an effort to order the disordered by framing, shaping and differentiating the organization/disorganization relationship in an ongoing dynamic process (Spoelstra, 2005; Vásquez and Kuhn, 2019). Thus, any organizing process is inherently entangled with and defined by disorganizing forces, making the emerging and multiple relations between order and disorder a critical, yet often understated aspect of organizational practice and theory (Cooper, 1986; Cooper, 2005). Cooper's important essay argues for an ontological shift from the foregrounding of order, boundary and substance – which has traditionally characterized organization and management studies – to the engagement with disorder, unboundedness and process, as correlated dimensions of the mode of existence of organization. This assumption has since inspired many critical scholars to develop new understandings of *how the ordering of intrinsic disorder and the disordering of*

order is constitutive of organization – how we may theorize and conceptualize it, and not least explore it empirically and analytically – including through scholarship published in this journal (see the special issue introduced by Böhm and Jones, 2001).

Munro (2001), for example, argued that the contemporary work of managing is an ongoing act of disorganizing the organizational lives and spaces it concerns by the way managers enable a multiplicity of orders hence co-creating chaos, instability and disruptions that call for more management, as a form of ‘unmanaging’ (see further discussion of this by Munro, this issue). Other studies of dis/organization include Thanem’s (2001) and Spoelstra’s (2005) explorations of organizational boundaries not as fixed but differentiating and transforming relationships that dis/organize (for further discussion of dis/organizing spaces see e.g. Knox et al. (2015) or Simonsen and Vikkelsø, this issue). Moreover, rooted in feminist theory, Thanem (2001) questions the corporeal aspects of dis/organization, exploring the body itself as a site of disorganization that may well disrupt the organizational processes of which it is part. For example, a pandemic disconnects bodies across social and organizational life, which then dis- and re-organize anew (Plotnikof et al., 2020); the material becoming of a baby’s body disorders the very (masculine) order of the work day (Ollilainen, 2020) – both kinds of dis/order that have affected the writing of this very editorial.

Of course, critical organization and management studies have long discussed issues of dis/order, (non)control and power(-resistance) in multiple ways and with different inspirations in addition to Cooper – from Marx, Foucault, and Deleuze, to Law, Butler, Barad and many others (Grey and Willmott, 2005; Mumby and Plotnikof, 2019; Parker, 2016; Pullen et al., 2017). Nevertheless, as much of this work focuses on the power-infused and political functioning of dis/organization across discourses, materialities and affects, it also taps into and re-energizes the ontological challenge (i.e., the deconstruction of the idea that organization—and the theories that explore them—defaults to stability, structure, and order) that Cooper (1986: 331-332) posed to us:

the statements of that discourse we call “organization theory” are supplementary, for they represent the “organization of organization,” that is to say, that as texts *on* organization they are themselves organized according to normalized criteria (often called “scientific” and/or “academic”) so that it

becomes impossible to disentangle the “content” of organization studies from the theory or methodology that frames it [...] the statement produces what it denotes.

Thus, in moving beyond order, control, and power as baseline assumptions of much organization theory, a shared concern is to embrace dis/organization by exploring how the entanglement of order and disorder performs in theory and practice; how it comes to mean and matter to the specific worldings (Barad, 2007; Harraway, 2016) that we recognize as organizational life and critical scholarship. In scholarship, this can take several forms, including (but clearly not limited to) examinations of how decisions occasion opposition, revision, and rejection in project-based organizations (Grothe-Hammer and Schoeneborn, 2019); how the ambiguity marking important organizational happenings at airports generates confusions that are impossible to resolve by human sensemaking (Knox et al., 2015); how an array of tensions and contradictions intertwine in situated practices making innovation management a precarious endeavor (Sheep et al., 2017); or how digital data infrastructures may be developed to organize connections between specific governance areas, but easily spiral out of control and disconnect or reconnect unintended areas and actors (Ratner and Plotnikof, 2021).

Although Cooper’s original essay on organization/disorganization was published over 35 years ago, we think the time is ripe to return to what can be seen, researched, and done as dis/organization. Further, taking stock of dis/organization in the present and beyond is no coincidence; the last two years have seen a global health crisis turn our becoming worlds upside down; the political climate is boiling with a (re)turn to hateful, discriminatory and unequal agendas with little historical sensitivity; mis/management and mis/uses of the natural and social resources of our shared Earth are intensifying environmental problems and segregations amongst the un/privileged, rich/poor, global North and South. All of these politics and practices are exacerbating the current dis/organization and societal dis/orderings of, for example, class, gender, race, ethnicity, capability, and age (Butler, 2020; Özkazanç-Pan and Pullen, 2020). Indeed, these social constructs are often weaponized as ‘floating signifiers’ (Hall, 1997) that have dislocating and disordering effects. Witness, for example, the far Right’s recent efforts in the US to demonize Critical Race Theory as a way to sow

division and undermine progressive, coalitional politics. Obviously, this begs further understanding of such organizational practices and politics – and their effects as relations of order and disorder – an agenda more important now than ever.

Yet, dis/organization is not the theme of this special issue because everything that is going on is bad *per se*, or because the world is burning up as we speak, or because we think foregrounding disorder at the cost of order is – or should be – the new black. Rather, we think that we need to explore dis/organization in *ephemera* (and elsewhere) in order to further sensitize us to the practices and politics of dis/order, not as something extra-ordinary or extreme, but as that which is already here, there, everywhere.

In short, we think we need to care (Haraway, 2016) even more for all that makes up organization, including mess, undecibility, misunderstanding, nonsense, nonconforming thoughts, bodies and practices and irrationality—basically all that disorganizes as we are busy trying to organize everything, and thereby co-constitute exactly that. Attending to those untidy, ugly, or even shameful parts of organizing (Plotnikof and Utoft, 2021) are all the more important as our world order shuffles in the wake of climate crisis, a pandemic and even warfare. But how may we rearticulate, revisualize, reanalyze and rework dis/organization theory, beyond what we think we already know?

In the rest of this introduction, we explore this question in three ways. First, we provide brief discussions of influential thinkers in the development of dis/organization theorizing. These include Robert Cooper, Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and John Law. Second, we introduce the contributions to this special issue and address their contributions to the ongoing movements of this field of study. Finally, we gesture towards a politics of dis/organization as a future agenda.

Encouraging understandings of dis/organization

Organization/disorganization as a play of difference

Thirty-five years have passed since Cooper's (1986) provocative piece on organization/disorganization; the organization studies field is still discussing

it and trying to wrap its mind around what exactly this means (see for example Burrell and Parker's 2016 edited book *For Robert Cooper*). Cooper offers a sophisticated conceptual apparatus for understanding the compound formation of organization/disorganization as a play of difference that characterizes the relationship between the signifier and the signified. Inspired by the work of Saussure, Derrida and Mauss, among others, Cooper notes that in language, the sign as meaning is always incomplete, as it is always deferred by the multiple and potential meanings of the signifier. Hence, any attempt to fix meaning implies a reduction, an oversimplification of the multiplicity of meanings.

Transposed to the ontology of dis/organization, the play of difference highlights the centrality of undecidability and multiplicities. Disorganization as the excess of meaning—or zero degree—is what calls for organization. Cooper thus inverts the dominant logic favoring organization and order by putting forth disorganization as the triggering for organizing. It follows that the reduction of meaning and the attempts to fix it correspond to organization. In Cooper's (1986: 328) words, 'organization is the appropriation of order out of disorder'. Organization is the process through which the undecidable is made decidable. Importantly, this transformation of undecidability to decidability is a question of control, mastering and authority. For Cooper (1986: 323), 'cleaning the undecidable' is an act of power, which is made possible by the management and control of language.

For example, the neoliberal reimagining of employees as 'human capital' rather than 'workers' or 'participants in organizing' is an act of power that restructures the employment relationship, destabilizing the erstwhile social contract and creating a new system of order under which all social actors—regardless of employment status—must think of themselves as 'enterprise selves'. Thus, the 'disorder' of a disintegrating socio-economic system (Fordist capitalism) is appropriated as a new form of order under neoliberalism.

Cooper's (1986: 304) invitation to shift our analytical focus from order and 'already formed' social entities to disorderly processes and the forcible suppression of undecidability has paved the way for critical and processual studies of organization (e.g., Burrell and Parker, 2016; Chia, 2004a; Chia,

2004b; Böhm & Jones, 2001). On the practical level his legacy has rather remained discreet (Winkler and Seiffert-Brockmann, 2019; for an exception see Abrahamson, 2002), and yet Cooper (2001) himself was a fierce promoter of the concrete political and social implications of paying attention to organization/disorganization.

Cooper is by no means the only one who has attuned us to dis/organization; indeed, he is one of many we may use as a stepping stone to generate new understandings of the emerging relations of dis/order in today's organizational life and theory.

Dis/ordering regimes of power/knowledge

Foucault is a key inspiration to destabilize the dominant modernist narrative of order and progress emerging out of chaos and disorder. His writings have been central in critical organization studies' efforts to deconstruct mainstream epistemological frameworks and explore the intimate connection between 'games of truth' and the organization of power. While early Foucauldian organization studies focused mainly on the disciplinary effects of workplace power regimes (and the resulting effects of those regimes on the worker subject), more recent work has explored organizing as forms of governmentality (Fleming, 2009; 2014; 2017; Mumby, 2016; Munro, 2012) through which neoliberal subjects figure out how to exercise freedom (as enterprising human capital) in the context of the competitive social relations of late capitalism. Foucault's (2008) later work on biopower and governmentality lends itself well to the study of dis/organization in that much of the subject's exercise of freedom within biopolitical systems is framed within systems of risk and precarity.

Indeed, one might argue that chaos and disorder are defining features of neoliberal capitalism insofar as they create fear and anxiety among social actors, who are constantly told that they must be flexible and adapt to changing economic environments. Look no further than Amazon boss Jeff Bezos' philosophy that it is always 'day one' at Amazon because 'Day 2' is stasis. Followed by irrelevance. Followed by excruciating, painful decline. 'Followed by death' (Del Rey, 2017: np). In other words, innovation and change is a permanent condition; disorder is the order of the day; chaos and

anxiety are good for business (as Amazon's increased profits during the Covid-19 pandemic attest).

The link between late capitalism and disorder is even clearer when we examine the discursive frame within which neoliberal subjects must govern themselves. Neoliberal capitalism both creates disorder and insecurity and provides the mediatory mechanisms through which to manage that disorder. For example, the brand strategy company Interbrand's report on the 100 most valuable corporate brands of 2020 (published at the height of the global pandemic) states the following: 'In conducting this year's study of the one hundred most valuable global brands, one question emerged as the keystone of our analysis: what is brand's role in an anxious [post-Covid] world?' (Interbrand, 2020: 9).

There is perhaps no clearer statement of the way 'communicative capitalism' (Dean, 2005; Dean, 2009; Mumby, 2018) monetizes disorder by providing – at a price – the discursive frame through which the individual, isolated, divided neoliberal subject can receive soothing balm for their anxiety. 'What is brand's role in an anxious world?' is an explicit expression of communicative capitalism's efforts to productively articulate together subjectivity, disorder, and economic value.

Of course, Foucault stresses that power, in whatever form, only exists in relation to resistance. As such, capitalism's latest technologies of power are being resisted on numerous fronts including, for example, a widespread rejection of the notion that we must 'love' our work. As Jaffe (2021: 2) has stated recently, 'The labor of love ... is a con'. 'Work, after all, has no feelings. Capitalism cannot love' (*ibid*: 12). In other words, people are increasingly recognizing that 'work won't love you back' and extracting themselves from an abusive, exploitative relationship that Covid-19 has brought into particularly sharp focus. At the same time as people are rejecting the 'love your work' capitalist mantra, they are also increasingly recognizing the economic value of their work and demanding adequate compensation. At the other end of the capital accumulation cycle, sharing economy movements are rejecting hyper-consumerism and developing structures for circumventing consumer capitalism (although here we are fully cognizant of platform

capitalism's ability to colonize sharing economies, as we have seen with Airbnb, Uber, Lyft, etc.).

Foucault therefore helps us to think about how order and disorder are mutually constitutive within the 'games of truth' that characterize particular power-knowledge regimes. Dis/organizing in late capitalism is, at least in part, a function of how freedom is practiced within these truth games.

Troubling performativity and politics of gender

Along with this line of thinking about the ordering and disordering capacities of power, Judith Butler provides inspiration through her questioning of the dis/ordering politics and performativity of gender, difference, and identity (Trethewey and Ashcraft, 2004; Pullen and Knight, 2007, see also Guschke and Sløk-Andersen, as well as Carreri, this issue). Drawing on anti-essentialist assumptions about discursive power and the subject argued by Foucault, and about performative utterances by Austin (1962), Butler (1990; 2004) suggests that we think of gender as performative and, more generally, view all identity work as political acts of doing and undoing subjectivities and bodies of difference. Instead of viewing gender and identity as biological, essential, or innate, Butler points to discourses and social norms functioning in everyday practices that performs gender(s) and thereby (re)produce and (dis)orders differences in identity categories with great normative effects on what, how, and whose behaviors and bodies are accepted in society. In stressing the political aspects of gender and identity performativity in everyday life, even the most intimate and private aspects of selfhood become matters of societal ordering (and potential disordering) through the discursive forces and material world enveloping and saturating us, e.g. via societal institutions such as hetero-normative family constructions, and educational, health care and work organizations.

Inspired by this along with related feminist/queer theory (see e.g. Ahmed, 2017; Barad, 2007; Crenshaw, 1991), critical organization scholars explore how those ideas enable insight into the gendered dis/organization of work life (see e.g. special issues introduced by Pullen and Knights, 2007, and Trethewey and Ashcraft, 2004), for example by approaching the dis/ordering of differences and identity categories (such as gender, sex, ethnicity, capability

etc.) as more or less professional, employable, resourceful, and powerful. Following this line of thinking, studies have unpacked how work identities, bodies, spaces and practices may be riddled with discursive and material forces and controlling efforts to retain certain organizational understandings and practices of orderliness that privilege some forms of living while oppressing others.

Pullen and Knights (2007), for example, discuss the fruitfulness of understanding the un/doing of gendering in work life as powers of dis/organization, emphasizing the ever-present political aspects in all kinds of organizations that legitimizes some behaviors, bodies, identities, ethnicities and capabilities (hence disorganizing and discriminating others) as an inherent dynamic of dis/order.

Recently, Ashcraft and Muhr (2018) showed how gendered conceptions of leadership not only saturate leadership practices and identities, but also order scholarship by organizing our understandings in gendered binaries of masculine vs feminine leadership models (hard vs soft, rational vs. emotional, etc.). Their study disrupts this binary by developing a 'promiscuous coding' approach that, via queer theory, promotes a 'productive confusion' that undermines the heteronormativity that typically frames coding practices in leadership studies. Their study of the Norwegian military—an organizational structure traditionally synonymous with masculine, command and control leadership models—revealed an inconsistency between the dominant military leadership metaphors and the on-the-ground practice of leadership that they encountered. In one interview an officer identified 'gender fluidity' and the development of 'soft' skills as a crucial competency for leadership and combat. Such insights challenged the authors' own gendered preconceptions about military leadership such that, 'Masculinity and femininity began to seem like unmoored notions..., washing out and blurring into each other, difficult to hold apart, much less in contrast' (ibid: 211). Ashcraft and Muhr's own (productive) confusion about this mismatch led them to the promiscuous approach to coding mentioned above, thus enabling them to escape the ordered binary thinking that underlies much leadership research and practice.

Messing with mess

A related line of thought comes from the British sociologist John Law, a thinker often associated with Actor-Network Theory, or ANT (see Law, 1999; Law, 2009; Law and Singleton, 2013). As might be expected with an ANT sensibility, Law's work generally seeks to understand the complex interconnections between that which we render as material and that which is considered symbolic, with an eye toward transcending conventional oppositions by showing the relationality between all participants in a living network. In collaboration with co-authors such as Annemarie Mol, Law's thinking suggests that the objects that fall under our scholarly gaze are always multiple, despite analysts' efforts to tell the stories of coherent and relatively stable objects.

For instance, Mol (2002; Mol and Law, 2004) shows how bodies escape any simple effort to code, define, or characterize them; as 'the body' is implicated in health care practices associated with particular slippery maladies such as atherosclerosis, and known through particular technologies for sensing, it *becomes* many different things. Sometimes practices eliminate the multiplicity by making the meanings of bodies coherent, and other times the excess of meanings prevents such a reduction. The heterogeneity of the body, like all objects, is a matter of toggling between its presences and its absences; how (or whether) it shows up in given practices. Indeed, Law aims to show 'that objects are not singular, indeed not self-identical. That in their heterogeneity they are instead fractional and can only be apprehended fractionally' (Law, 2002: 10). Thus, objects are not *objects*, and no object simply brings about order (or disorder).

Particularly interesting with respect to this special issue is Law's thinking on method(ology), which foregrounds *mess* as the basic condition of the technosocial world. Law's assertion of the status of mess not as a deviation from order but a foundational ontological characteristic of the world aligns closely with the thinkers on dis/organization presented above. His methodological move advises analysts to resist the urge to order a convoluted world, which stands in stark contrast to dominant methodological thinking, where the task is to produce a singular reality (think a variable to be operationalized or a straightforward ethnographic tale) from complex

phenomena. Reflecting on studies conducted with Vicky Singleton (e.g., Law and Singleton, 2005; Law and Singleton, 2013), Law recounts how their work on alcoholic liver disease led them to realize that

maybe we were dealing with a slippery phenomenon, one that changed its shape, and was fuzzy around the edges. Maybe we were dealing with something that wasn't definite and didn't have a single form. Perhaps it was a fluid object, even one that was ephemeral in any given form, flipping from one configuration to another, dancing like a flame. (Law, 2007: 598-599)

Phenomena like this (or *these*) require researchers to honor multiplicity by rejecting the conventional approach to methodological representation and, instead, work toward unconventional forms of expression that follow the fractionalized object as it (dis)appears in practice (Law, 2002; Law 2004). Efforts to honor mess in organizing can be seen among those who explore the multiplicities of spaces (Knox et al., 2015; Kuhn and Burk, 2014; Simonsen and Vikkelsø, this volume), those studying democratic engagement and digital infrastructures (Porter and Jackson, 2019; Ratner and Plotnikof, 2021), and those examining the ontological excesses of objects (de Laet and Mol, 2000). And as this special issue indicates, there is a good deal of continuing interest in this line of thinking.

Staying in the mix

While this is in no way an exhaustive list, it nevertheless counts some of the major sources that have sparked current understandings of dis/order and dis/organization across the broader field of organization studies over the years. Importantly, these thinkers and work inspired by them highlight a specific attentiveness or concern within dis/organization studies that we want to emphasize, which is also running through several of the contributions of this special issue. Despite epistemological and ontological differences, all of these essays attend to the relationality of multiple agencies to understand questions about dis/order and dis/organization and their mutual constitutive processes, the latter dynamic highlighted by the slash (for further discussion see Vásquez and Kuhn, 2019; Vásquez et al., 2022).

Yet, understanding exactly *how* this plays out in theory and practice depends on the ways in which the inspirations are picked up to conceptualize and

methodologically approach the specific dis/organizing and dis/ordered phenomena at hand, as this special issue also demonstrates. Amongst the influences we have touched upon, an interest in some kind of relational multiplicity resonates. But as noted, relational multiplicity may refer to multiplex discourses, knowledges, things, bodies, etc., and their entanglements or assemblages, materializing in struggling efforts of ordering disorder or controlling disorganization and resistance (e.g., in studies inspired by Foucault, Butler, and Barad). Or it can be seen as multiple modes of ordering, co-existing in the effort to suppress excesses of meanings and differences and with these undecidability (e.g., in studies inspired by Cooper, Law, or Mol).

Therefore, instead of advocating for one definition or understanding, we want to emphasize these varied bodies of literature as a rich array of concepts that generate further inquiry into matters of dis/organization and relations of dis/order. They do not give one easy answer or a single model to follow, but rather invite us to critically scrutinize and develop analytics with which to explore, for example, how emerging relations of disorder and order interplay in times of crisis; or how mutually constitutive processes of dis/organizing (work) life function in powerful ways locally as we live with a pandemic; or which new types of self-governing forces are internalized as mis/managing working from home - become normalized in many places with uneven effects on the involved actors (see, for example, Özkazanç-Pan and Pullen, 2020; Plotnikof and Utoft, 2021).

These lines of thinking challenge us to continuously approach matters of dis/order and dis/organization in ever more nuanced ways, not necessarily as opposite poles, binary, or competing contradictions, which can be strategically 'employed' (e.g., organizing order when we need to work for certain goals, or disorganizing work relations when we need to create disruptive innovative collaborations). Rather, we are encouraged to rephrase questions, discuss and maybe even redefine how relations of dis/order, along with the very idea of what can be recognized as organization in relation to disorganization, are continually transforming, in both theory and in practice.

Contributions of the special issue

What becomes central to further this agenda, then, is to investigate how we can grapple with those unsettling constitutive dynamics, which is exactly what the contributions of this special issue do. Deploying different theoretical ideas, vocabularies and methods, and unpacking them in varying empirical contexts, these diverse articles, notes and reviews pose new questions and offer novel insights regarding relations of dis/order and dis/organization.

As mentioned, some dis/organization studies draw on Butler, a move that is on display in this issue. In advancing this line of thinking, Guschke and Sløk-Andersen, in their article ‘Paying attention to tension: Towards a new understanding of the organizational mechanisms enabling sexual harassment’, explore dis/organization as a matter of organizational contradictions that create tensions regarding sexism. They analyze how sexual harassment is reproduced through contradictory tensions that both organize and disorganize gender discriminatory practices in workplace contexts of military and higher education. The study gives empirical insight into how young professional subjects attempt to navigate local contradictions, e.g., when decoding norms expressed in sexist jokes and discriminating behaviors, while still adhering to the limits of local intelligibility. Thereby, the young professionals also reproduce sexist norms and orders to be recognized as intelligible subjects, simultaneously disorganizing any possibility of resistance. Thus, Guschke and Sløk-Andersen elucidate how the dis/organization of sexism can be understood in terms of contradictory tensions that feed gender-based harassment by self-sustaining discriminatory gender norms, which disorder any potential alternative.

A very distinct case is presented in Richards and Mollan’s article, ‘Organizational mythopoeia and the spectacle in postfascist (dis)organization,’ which examines the efforts of a far-right organization to make political capital out of the purchase of a car once owned by Enoch Powell (a UK anti-immigrant politician who, in 1968, gave his infamous ‘rivers of blood speech’ warning of the ‘dangers’ of immigration to the UK). The case study provides interesting insight into what might be called the ‘epistemological chaos’ that surrounds fringe organizations’ efforts to gain purchase in the politico-cultural landscape. While we are all familiar with

'QAnon'- type conspiracists and their hold over tens of millions of people, it is perhaps at the margins, with the conspiracy failures, that important lessons can be learned. As such, Richards and Mollan examine the purchase of Powell's car from the perspective of organizational mythopoeia (myth-making), exploring how the right-wing fringe group 'Generation Identity' attempts to project the car ideologically into public consciousness through its construction as spectacular (in Guy DeBord's sense). The group's efforts are a (spectacular?) failure, but its attempts via social media to harness disorder, nostalgia, and a particular aesthetic form speak to the ways that anti-democratic groups—however marginal—can gain legitimacy in a post-truth era where disorder is the order of the day.

With Simonsen and Vikkelsø's 'Organizational space as sites of contention: Unravelling relations of dis/order in a psychiatric hospital,' the special issue turns to the materiality of physical space. Their ethnographic study centers on a newly-built hospital in Denmark designed in line with the 'healing architecture' movement, which promises improved patient outcomes through spaces that balance community with privacy, create transparent lines of sight and visibility, and reduce rigid hierarchies (see Lawson, 2010). The space was intended to not only foster empowering relationships, but to also produce orderly behavior, by both patients and staff, in what is often a disordered site. Moreover, the nursing staff in the hospital sought to generate a sense of orderliness and routinization in their daily work through practices such as collecting and washing laundry, putting items in their proper storage locations, and monitoring social interaction. Drawing upon Mary Douglas's thinking on purity and danger, Simonsen and Vikkelsø show that what they call 'spaces of contention' are often indeterminate, such that action with and for patients becomes unpredictable. And that unpredictability is due to the very openness of the healing architecture. The practices of organizing in this particular space, then, generate tensions and augment dis/order because of the architecture's functional indeterminacy. Showing the connections between the symbolic and the material—and transcending the longstanding distinctions between these domains—is a key contribution of the article, made possible by foregrounding the complex workings of dis/organization.

Rolland Munro's article 'Order under erasure? Disorganisation and the disorganising of "unmanaging"' offers a novel engagement with Robert

Cooper. Munro debates Cooper's influences, predilections, and ambitions, with particular attention to the 'will to cleanse' Cooper associates with the drive for ordering. Yet Munro notes that, in equating power with cleansing, Cooper paid too little attention to the force of management as both practice and institution, largely ignoring the dis/organizing it generates. Armed with a novel reading of institutional theory, Munro shows how management has colonised organizational thought, aided by the increasing financialisation of organizational life (see also Munro, 2003). The route for the future, he holds, requires not merely an abstract recognition of institutional permeation, but an immersion in intellectual disciplines to both confront their distinctions and to grasp the (dis)connecting and boundary-making practices managers, along with management as an institutionalized force, produce in the world. Munro's article, therefore, challenges scholars to understand the commitments involved in Cooper's thinking and, in turn, interrogate the institutionalized force of management in dis/organized practice.

Following this, Pallesen and Bjergkilde's article 'Dis/continuity and dis/organizing effects: Exploring absent presences in educational change projects' draws on Barad's (2010) conceptual framework to empirically explore dis/organization in the context of an organizational change project they call Co-time. Central to this exploration is a commitment to a processual temporal perspective that acknowledges that 'time matters'; that is, time acts upon intended radical changes of practice in often unintended and spectral ways (Derrida, 1993). Focusing on how dis/continuities affect the course of Co-time and how in those disruptions and obstructions past and future are reworked and enfolded in to the present, the article shows that absent presences, initially in the shadows of the planned change, gain agency and create increasing disorganizing effects as the project progresses. This empirical ethnographic study conducted in a municipal school in Denmark sheds light on the unintended disorganizing effects of a change project in shaping the experiences, practices and engagement of those involved in it. Of interest is the authors' conclusion and practical implications regarding the importance for managers to account for the meaning-making processes, feelings and past experiences that emerge as important in the change process, that cannot be erased by a clear vision or explanation. This finding illustrates Cooper's argument concerning the play of difference that characterizes

organization/disorganization, as well as the importance of paying attention to undecidability. To this, Pallesen and Bjergkilde's study adds the importance of attending to feelings, as any change project (or organizational phenomenon) is first and foremost an embodied experience, which can intensify dis/organizing effects.

In the article, 'The stings of command', Sverre Spoelstra addresses the reciprocal relation of order and disorder by discussing popular and mainstream understandings of leadership, which have to a great extent contributed to this idealized version of leadership as having nothing to do with commanding, i.e. giving orders. Yet, quite paradoxically, as Spoelstra notes, leaders are positioned and envisioned as the ones who create order. His overall argument, built through a reading of Elias Canetti's 'Economy of the command,' is that the violence of the command (its 'sting', in Canetti's terms) can also make itself felt in seemingly benign models of leadership (transformational, collective, distributed leadership) that challenge various forms of authoritarianism – and this hiding of the sting is highly problematic. Hence, Spoelstra's suggestion to put the sting back into the 'stingless' leadership world by (a) giving up on the paradoxical idea that it is possible to create order without giving orders, (b) by re-articulating leading and commanding and (c) by unveiling the hidden stings of organization/disorganization.

In addition to these articles, the issue also includes two thought-provoking research notes. We begin with a rupturing piece that asks us not only to understand relations of order and disorder through offering a new vocabulary, but also to feel them anew. In her note 'Fantasy to evade order: Vicarious schadenfreude', Victoria Pagan pushes us to the limits of being comfortable, as she challenges us to consider and even evade what may be conceived of as orderly by disorderly emotions of fury and even schadenfreude nurtured by fantasy. In discussing her reading of Dante's *Inferno*, Pagan explores the affective energy of these disorderly emotions and facilitates through the use of fantasy a bypassing of the ordering idea(s) for researcher positions through which we scholars typically approach topics and data. Pagan somersaults us beyond more controlled research practices, as she helps us imagine and examine how fury and schadenfreude evoked in fantasy may well equip us with new, although disorderly, modes of inquiry and understandings of

various organizational phenomena. As such, this note opens us up to how that which disorders us by discomfort, may indeed be exactly what we need to reach novel insights and unleash a new kind of disorganized serendipity.

In her note and accompanying video footage, 'Gender identity (dis)order in dual precarious worker couples: The 'Family Speaking Drawers' installation', Anna Carreri invites us into the livelihoods of precariously hired academic subjectivities and the gendering relations of disorder and order enveloping them. Her invitation is facilitated by both her writing and an installation of video footage linked to in the note. With an intimate insight into the gendered practices and contexts of short term hired academics, we move beyond the idea of balanced work-life limits and drift along the blurry lines of various organizing and disorganizing practices bound up with each other in the mix of home life, work life, becoming a scholar, a parent, a partner, and a person recognizable to self and others as worthy. In her discussion, Carreri draws on feminist organization studies and debates about writing differently to unfold the gendered ordering and disordering that saturates and circumscribes the subjectification processes of the academics in the making. This depicts how contradictory tensions of, for example, fast and slow, experienced and newcomer, as well as productive and unproductive may at once denote a gendering order and disorder, that privilege some while suppressing others and the livelihoods organized thereby.

A last section includes three book reviews that concern dis/organization in distinct manners. Viviane Sergi offers a insightful reading of Alison Pullen, Jenny Helin and Nancy Harding's *Writing differently* published by Emerald Publishing Limited in 2020. As Sergi notes, *Writing differently* follows a series of workshops, conference activities, articles, book chapters and special issues on the topic of writing that have aimed at discussing writing as it takes place in management and organization studies, and opening spaces to experiment with writing. And this is exactly what Sergi does in her note by sprinkling her review with 'fragments' that offer a snapshot of the book, shares her reaction in reading it, taps into the mundane features of organizational life, and reflects on the constitutive force of texts and writing. At the core, both the book and Sergi's review interrogate academic writing (and more specifically in our field) and the central role intuition, reflexivity, surprise and affects play in knowledge construction. Sergi puts it nicely in her conclusion in the

following ways: ‘Writing Differently can be read as a freeing demonstration that any form, any format, any approach, any tone, any style is possible because writing is, inherently, about creating – and in our field, in our research, about creating meaning and meaningfulness, for us and for others, in academia, in organizations, in society.’

In their review of Roberto Bolaño’s book *Nazi literature in the Americas*, first published in Spanish in 1996, Thomas Burø and Christian De Cock unravel how this work disorganizes Nazi literature and in so doing reorganizes our understanding of it: ‘But most of the literature is listed, ordered and described in an incoherent pattern as if mocking the very organizing force of the encyclopedic form’. We not only learn of Bolaño’s work; Burø and De Cock also show us *how* it works by ordering (a) Nazi literature across explicit authors, (b) writings that communicate Nazi ideas, and (c) works that aestheticize specific political ideas. Through the review, the authors unfold the ways in which a book published in Spanish in 1996, translated to English in 2010, can be relevant to review in 2022; they interweave its insights across geo-political times and spaces spanning from the 1930s to the 2020s. Thereby, we are both inspired to read Bolaño’s book and equipped to see how relations of order and disorder continuously intertwine in (dis)organizing fascist politics as they are picked up and aesthetically enact specific pasts, presents and futures.

As a perfectly imperfect ending, we find Sine Just’s meta-reflective review of the book *Dis/organization as Communication*, edited by two of the guest editors of this special issue, Consuelo Vásquez and Tim Kuhn. In engaging deeply with both the overall idea of the book – to understand the communicative constitution of all kinds of dis/organization in theory and practice – and with each of the book’s singular contributions, Just interacts, comments, and troubles the points being argued in the text. She does so by continuously throwing questions regarding dis/organization and relations of order and disorder into the mix time and again, just when we think the dust has settled. Her ongoing questioning of the idea to create order in the thoughts about disorder invites the reader into reflecting on the book’s various contributions, as well as to self-reflect on how that may spur one’s own understanding of dis/organization regarding various phenomena being discussed in the book, such as digital technology, branding, hoarding, project organizing and more.

A politics of dis/organization?

Standing on the shoulders of critical thinkers, and inspired by the contributions of this issue, we see the contours of future dis/organization studies as involving a bolder debate around *how* all research into relations of order/disorder also inherently involves a politics of dis/organization theory and practice. By this we mean that exploring dis/ordering relations involves an acuity for the political functioning of power production, a sensitivity to the performative forces in play that critically questions how they come to matter, how they become consequential, how they move and affect actors in dis/organizing local worldings (Ahmed, 2017; Barad, 2007; Cooper, 2001; Haraway, 2016). In effect, we believe, such endeavors can more explicitly unsettle theoretically and empirically how the insights they bring forward may at once trouble and co-create (or maybe even transgress?) certain modes of organizational normativity. It follows, of course, that this also involves a collective debate of ethical considerations, amongst us as scholars, and in our educational activities and collaborations with others.

Moreover, this also includes a shared effort to (self-)critically debate and reimagine methodologies for dis/organization. Thinking about and studying dis/organization and dis/order through non-representational premises, using relational, poststructural and posthuman approaches, calls for turning our destabilization of the taken-for-granted against ourselves too. Relations of dis/order are also manifested in our writing of theory and empirical studies, as Cooper (1986: 331-332) reminded us. So, while efforts to develop dis/organization as a field of study have sensitized us to new objects of analysis outside the organized, the orderly and planned, where disorganization and disorder are forefronted as constitutive, we most often continue to account for these objects of analysis in traditional ways.

In encouraging us to develop theorizing that relocate our focus beyond the organization, then, this returns to the challenge that Cooper originally called upon us: to question the theoretical discourses, vocabularies, and methods for studying dis/organization. As scholars, we take active part in the worldings that we study (Barad, 2007; Haraway, 2016; Mol, 2002) by the ways that we engage with, observe, and write about them. So, we have a great chance to more explicitly discuss and take part in the politics of what and who our

research co-perform. Such considerations motivate us to develop new empirical methods to ‘see’, ‘observe’, ‘ask’ and ‘account’ for disorganization as just as important as ‘orderly’ organizing processes (Dille and Plotnikof, 2020; Gilmore et al., 2019). Furthermore, it demands that we develop new vocabularies, images, ways of writing up and visualizing organizational worlds that put dis/organization at the center.

Importantly, then, extending our work of inventing and reconfiguring dis/organizational (research) communication in theory, method and practice is vital – potentially corresponding to similar movements in, for example, organizational process studies, and feminist organization studies of writing differently (Amrouche et al., 2018; Pullen et al., 2020), which is already manifesting in this issue (see, for example, contributions by Bjergkilde and Pallesen, or Sergi).

To this end, we look forward to engaging with much more dis/organization theory and practice in the years to come, starting with the puzzles of this special issue.

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the editors

Mie Plotnikof is Associate Professor of Public Governance and Organization, Department of Education, Aarhus University, Denmark. Her research questions the constitutive processes of organizational discourse, subjectivity, temporality, dis/order and power/resistance – often in the context of public governance within

educational and social services. She is a member of the editorial collective of *ephemera* as well as an associate editor of *Gender, Work & Organization*.

email: mp@edu.au.dk

Consuelo Vásquez is Associate Professor of Organizational Communication in the Département de Communication Sociale et Publique at the Université du Québec à Montréal in Canada. Her research interests include ethnography, volunteering and the communicative constitution of dis/organizations. She is the co-founder of the Research Group Communication and Organizing (RECOR) and the Red Latinoamericana de Investigación en Comunicación Organizacional (RedLAcO).

email: vasquez.consuelo@uqam.ca

Timothy Kuhn is Professor and Chair in the Department of Communication at the University of Colorado Boulder, USA. His research addresses how authority, agency, knowledge, and identity are constituted in sociomaterial, power-laden, and dis/orderly communication practices. He is a Fellow of the International Communication Association, a former Associate Editor at the interdisciplinary journal *Human Relations*, and chair of the organizational communication division of the International Communication Association.

email: tim.kuhn@colorado.edu

Dennis Mumby is Distinguished Professor of Communication (Emeritus) at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, USA. His research interests include workplace dynamics of power and resistance, communicative capitalism, and branding. He is a Fellow of the International Communication Association and a National Communication Association Distinguished Scholar.

Email: mumby@email.unc.edu