



## Why Neo-disciplinary? Why Now?



It is 10 years since we wrote our original outline of what and how we hoped *Organization* might contribute to the study of 'organization'. As an opening to this 10th anniversary issue we are compelled to consider where the journal has been, where we see it now, and where we imagine it may be going. Alas, we feel obliged to produce another 'manifesto'.

Today we are celebrating what may be understood as a success story, if time is the measure of such, for we have indeed been present for 10 years in 'the agora of academic ideas'. If number of issues per year counts as success, we can also think ourselves successful as we are inaugurating a bimonthly format in Volume 11 (2004). Yet, have we been successful intellectually in achieving what we intended to accomplish 10 years ago? Readers are likely to answer this question in ways different from ours. But we thought it important, nonetheless, to remind ourselves, as well as others, about what we were trying to attain when we began this enterprise, the context in which we were writing, and how things may have changed since. Several aspects of the original 'manifesto' are worth highlighting as we move along in these reflections, addressing how our earlier expectations differ from the way we see the journal's current mandate, and articulating, as well, what we understand to be our main accomplishments and failures.

In reading our editorial from 10 years ago it is poignant for us to observe how absorbed we were by what we thought were central issues for our academic community: attempts to intellectually colonize the field of organization studies by those who wanted to promote a developmental narrative of 'origins'. This narrative offered a teleological view of the field as moving (normatively) from fragmentation to wholeness and coherence. We were particularly preoccupied with the possible dominance of this narrative, offered against 'paradigm diversity', for it would render invisible other very different facts about the field and could silence many possible voices within it. Prompted by that concern we wrote:

We, at *Organization*, want to return to a different 'original story', where multiplicity and fragmentation . . . enrich organizational analysis. In recognizing the multiplicity of the field and its historical relationship with other disciplines, we want to provide the space for exploring possibilities. Too



## Organization 10(3)

### Editorial

much has been invested already in delineating boundaries and closing up opportunities. In these efforts too much has been forgotten, ignored, or simply set aside as belonging to other disciplines, and to other interests. In the process the notion of 'organization' has been sanitized, sterilized and emptied of any meaning that didn't serve the purposes of some at the expense of others. (1994: 9)

To address these issues we opened the journal as 'the space for neo-disciplinary work', for:

We want to engage with the world we face today, with a complex net of understandings arriving from different locations and probably moving into different destinations. But it is in the space of the journal (journey?) where we find each other and exchange our differences, hopefully becoming better through these encounters. Thus, from this 'non-place', organizational analysis moves towards a different space located nowhere but being everywhere . . . a space we would like to call 'neo-disciplinary'. (1994: 9)

This space, which we considered to be ever moving, had few territorial boundaries, even though we conceded that interdisciplinarity (as it pertains to traditionally configured disciplines) would at least provide a starting point in a 'never-ending process of "knowing organization"' (1994: 9). And so it happened that we became *Organization: The interdisciplinary journal of organization, theory and society*.

As we think of it today, we should have risked then to be 'subtitled' *The neo-disciplinary journal* . . . and simply conjured up over the years whatever might have arisen out of its meaninglessness. For we have learned, perhaps more than we wish to, about product branding and identity and, thus, we realize now that 'neo-disciplinary' might have been a better 'package' for our product. Which also goes to point out how our (idealist and idealistic) thinking from 10 years ago has arrived at the somewhat harsh material realities not of the agora of debate but of the 'marketplace of ideas' today.

That is to say, now we are almost amused by how much importance we then placed on the 'inside' of our field, how much power we conceded to a few academic voices, and how blind we were to 'the real world' that was paying less and less attention to the 'thinking community'. The boundaries that we should have addressed were the ones being drawn by those who kept all of us in our places, regardless of paradigmatic preference, out of sight and out of trouble, while they went about their business reforming our institutions and converting our identities into their own images. We should, in fact, have been paying attention to *the institutional conditions ensuring our increasing loss of relevance, as academics, in the corporatizing, privatizing, globalizing world*.

These somewhat cynical sounding remarks are not the product of disillusionment. Rather, they are probably a good reflection of where 'our field' is today – within a wider context of Newsspeak, where many taboos have become outdated, where values are often perversely transposed, and where, ironically, the reappropriation of polysemia by dominant factions



## Why Neo-disciplinary? Why Now?

The Editorial Team

has provided us with amazing facts, for instance that ‘war’ really means ‘peace’.

Nietzsche’s imagery of his *fin de siècle* world has come to reflect a contemporary imagery of our own world as also equally propelled by a ‘will to power’. For many take for granted that ‘life itself is essentially appropriation, injury, overpowering of the strange and weaker, suppression, severity, imposition of one’s own forms, incorporation and, least and mildest, exploitation’.<sup>1</sup>

It is in the context of this world that we are rethinking how *Organization* has arrived at its resting point 10 years later. It is also in this context that *we want to reclaim neo-disciplinarity as a more fully formed contribution that Organization may be able to make (in)to this world.*

### **Where Are We Now?**

The inaugural issue articulated six key themes to serve as the focal points for the journal. Below we sketch further aspects of the current context, as connected to these six themes. We address these themes as points of reference the journal may abandon, do more of, or change altogether as it moves on toward neo-disciplinarity. Within these themes we introduce the contributions contained in this issue, and we highlight in endnotes representative works from the past 10 years. Together they represent our past and our future, what is taking place and where we would like to go.

Our more general theme, represented in all the pieces in this issue, is that *we envision a future for Organization in which **relevance to the world** is ever more present, and more critically so than we may have articulated in the past.* Yet, this relevance must be qualified to acknowledge the obvious: that we are primarily writing for academics concerned with organizations, and that such is our audience. And so, *our more general message is that writing for Organization means to write for (our)selves in ways that encourage each and all of us to challenge the received wisdom such that we then go ahead and challenge others, students, colleagues, managerial and organizational audiences of whatever kind, **to dare to do a better world for all.*** In this we reaffirm a commitment to ‘Critique’ in its original form.

### **Our Six Themes**

- **New organizational forms taking shape in the global economy.** In the period 1994–2003, we have changed and so has the world we inhabit. The rhetoric of globalization is now taken by many to be an unassailable truth. For us however globalization itself was and still is a contested concept.<sup>2</sup> Not only are there those who argue that complete globalization is very unlikely to be developed in its full economic, political and cultural forms, but there is also a significant body of opinion that challenges globalization in the partial forms it does take in practice.



## Organization 10(3)

### Editorial

If globalization is economic and political integration and cultural homogenization, we observe that we cannot naively dismiss the ubiquitous presence of the nation-state as a daily reminder that we 'ain't there yet.' For many Europeans, globalization in fact means Americanization and the imposition of American culture, power and organizational practices on European institutions. Resistance to globalization expresses itself in resistance to the realities and symbols of US power.<sup>3</sup>

The US represents today the world's only 'superpower', and what that may mean is not yet clear but the signs are not auspicious. There is no doubt about the might of its military power, and that in itself is troublesome. More troublesome, however, is the combination of such force with the paranoia brought about by the events of September 11, 2001.<sup>4</sup> Labeling as 'war' any action intended to address that which appears as a 'terrorist' provocation has allowed for extending broadly both concepts (war and terrorism) to individuals, citizens and nation-states, curtailing rights while sanctioning the desirability of 'pre-emptive' action under the aegis of ever-moving pre-texts. Such power subjugates forms of resistance through divide and rule tactics, pitting the so-called Old Europe against New Europe, 'moderate' Islamic states against those accused of supporting 'terrorism', and modernizing states against those labeled backward and corrupt.

In this regard, much has changed from the time when the journal was inaugurated. In 1994 we were barely coming out into an optimistic world expecting what was then dubbed 'the peace economy', a consequence of the end of the Cold War, with an expected peace dividend that would enable a switch from arms production to socially useful production, the very short military stint known as 'the Gulf War' notwithstanding. Today we can see that 'the peace economy' and 'the peace dividend' were a brief mirage. Neither the promised peace, nor the promised economy, nor the promised dividend ever materialized. History came to no end.

More immediately, on the issue of cultural homogenization, the forces that may bring societies together, such as global media, bring at the same time contacts and recognition of differences that produce still other differences. Thus in the era of globalization, there are more nation-states recognized than ever before and more demands for the recognition of minority rights within the framework of nation-states than ever before. The world becomes more divided as it becomes more connected! If technology brings culture and economy together at a faster pace, it also advances, as Appadurai would remind us, the disjuncture of all these forces.

Further, anti-globalization movements based around electronic modes of organizing allied to anarchist and syndicalist principles has meant that there are thousands who have read the work of Naomi Klein<sup>5</sup> and George Monbiot and who see it as their own sort of analysis. Adopting ways of combating globalization which eschew direct engagement with large, led, leaden bureaucracies, the movement has achieved something in becom-



## Why Neo-disciplinary? Why Now?

The Editorial Team

ing defined as a threat to the G8 nations. It has also achieved concrete results as some of their central issues (e.g. the intersections of globalization and poverty) are now on the agenda of dominant multilateral institutions (e.g. Doha, 2001). Nonetheless, continued US dominance in the Bush era inhibits much in the way of practical achievement, such as the administration's refusal to sign the Kyoto accord.

Closer to 'home', as editors of *Organization* we note that it is nationality which marks our division of labor/labour and segments the sources for our material, with an Anglophone hegemony but all too obvious. Our contributors come primarily from Britain, the USA, Australia, Canada and New Zealand, and much less from other European, Latin American, African or Asian regions, no matter how much we have hoped to reach them.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, Anglo-based intellectual divides on both sides of the Atlantic are similarly present in ways that more often than not deny a 'common ground'.

The 'stories' about institutional theory in this issue are excellent reminders of such a situation. Richard Whitley shows the significance of national borders to business systems that equate to the powerful forces of globalization, while Michael Lounsbury and Marc Ventresca recount the past, present and future of institutional theory in the USA. Taken together, however, they tell a broader story. No doubt that both articles are asking for an institutional theory that diffuses disciplinary boundaries and gets back to 'big social questions' without being constrained by professional boundaries. No doubt, as well, that both articles recognize the multiplicity of the field and its historical relationship with other disciplines, as our original call for neo-disciplinarity hoped for. However, one can also notice through a pattern of citations that what is meant in each case is quite different, for the points of institutional reference, both professional and disciplinary show few coincidences: with the US piece focused on a US-centered view of the academic world, and the UK piece speaking perhaps more directly to non-US sensibilities in which national differences across such a limited geographical area as Europe still appear salient. The theorist's position in space still offers a kind of tyranny. Geography has come to no end.

Yet these authors indicate the renewal of energy occurring in organization theory as researchers have sought to come to grips with the growing power of international financial markets, multinationals and the deregulation of markets. The dread term 'capitalism' has gradually fought its way back into the vocabulary of organization theory as a tool of critical analysis. In the process, theories of capitalism have been stripped of the quality of 'grand narrative' and humbled by historical events in eastern Europe and beyond, yet they retain their centrality to motivate both reformism and utopianism.<sup>7</sup>

And, thus, through these examples one can appreciate how globalization and the nation-state exist in relational patterns as we encounter ourselves in our 'academic community'. Certain, yet ephemeral, contours



emerge from minor seismic disturbances of readers, writers, publishers, and editors producing a hegemonic region known as 'the organizational academic marketplace', a dominant if invented region that leaves out most other intellectual communities. At the same time, this hegemonic region, much like the world outside of it, is not a featureless two-dimensional community but rather a patchwork of interests, institutions, and intellectual and political positioning in which divergence rather than convergence come to be sedimented.

- **Power/knowledge discourses crystallizing around fundamental shifts in institutional context and organizational forms.** From the perspective of 10 years past, it is indeed the case that our fears of a single 'narrative of origins' has not materialized, for organization studies is today as multivocal as it may have been 10 years ago and perhaps even more. However, the fragmentation that continued to happen may not have always gone in the directions we were hoping for. Our hope was to build on existing fragmentation 'seek[ing] to put to an end the emigration of organization thinkers to more and more diasporic locations'. We were instead 'desirous of immigration' (1994: 13). The journal was to serve as a space 'where a regenerating sense of mutuality can still be found' (1994: 14, citing Burke, 1989). Our hope, indeed, was for stronger intellectual engagements and more encounters between diversity of ideas, disciplines, histories, languages, identities.

Several developments since then indicate the presence of such encounters. For example, there is now a Critical Management Studies Interest Group in the US Academy of Management, in the making for the past five years. It has demonstrated itself to be a particularly welcoming space for international, and for younger, scholars. Further, most of the dominant academic journals today accept a multiplicity of intellectual positions and methodological approaches far beyond the feared totalization by positivism of a few years ago. There is, as well, an increasing international presence in organizational academic publications and conferences all over the world.

This traffic of ideas may also represent the realization of a world 'outside' the academic space in which networks and networking, as well as knowledge and learning, occupy much of the trade lexicon no matter how disparate the concepts that sustain these signifiers.<sup>8</sup> Further, despite the suspect shape of the 'new economy' these days, the hype of the 1990s created a sense of change in the air in which structure has been replaced by process,<sup>9</sup> fixity by mobility and space by time. The current influence of ideas such as Virilio's 'dromology', Bauman's 'liquid modernity', Castells' 'space of flows', and Deleuze and Guattari's 'nomadology' in the academic organizational space suggests the need for new intellectual discourses to represent these times where nothing is fixed or stable.<sup>10</sup>

We observe, however, that as with the hyperbole of the 1990s in reference to the world 'outside', there is perhaps much hype around the



## Why Neo-disciplinary? Why Now?

The Editorial Team

thought that things have changed in the intellectual landscape. An acceleration of 'old' economic forces serving dominant actors is reflected increasingly within our academic communities. These patterns were already present 10 years ago when we wrote: 'we have seen a pattern in academia where more and more specialized journals develop in order to divide up the field in more precise ways' (1994: 13). We also noticed 'the pressures to publish; the commodification of knowledge, the blocks to careers . . . the intensification of work' (1994: 14), which continue to be present today with a vengeance in most academic markets. It seems as if both the processes of intellectual engagement and the substance of theorizing have become nothing but another representation of shifts in institutional contexts and organizational forms: the ultimate commodification of the intellectual space of organization studies. We ourselves are more and more subject to imposed (and self-imposed) 'grids of intelligibility' which position our work relatively closer to or more distant from the alleged goal of 'relevance' to powerful decision makers.

The loss of relevance for what *really* matters is a cause for concern, no matter how fancy or fanciful our intellectual engagements.<sup>11</sup> Up to what point has 'being critical' or 'being POMO' entered the fads and fashions<sup>12</sup> of the 'marketplace of ideas' to further enhance careers, sell journals, or play reputational games, while keeping all of us, regardless of where we come from, 'out of trouble and out of sight' just in case we had the audacity to point through our intellects toward the craziness of the world outside of our lauded hallways? The hono(u)rs system of our profession locks academics into a certain servility towards hierarchical power.

The immediacy of this condition can hardly be overlooked, for all of us, together, are in fact producers of 'organization' with our ideas, our discourses and our actions. Under these conditions, what kind of organizations do we want to see produced through these pages after this resting place? Bill Starbuck, Denny Gioia, and Ken Gergen suggest some directions in the 'Speaking Outs' in this issue.

- **More sophisticated surveillance and control systems emerging and reflecting back from these discourses.** During the previous two decades, organizational analysis and research was dominated by a focus on the mechanisms and processes through which control was and is effectively secured and sustained within an increasingly 'turbulent' and 'uncertain' environment. Recent work and debate around this pivotal theme suggest that a highly significant 'paradigm shift' or 'epochal transformation' is underway, if not yet complete, in the logics and technologies of control through which contemporary institutional governance and organizational discipline are realized. Indeed, many have gone so far as to insist that a 'new control model' is emerging that fundamentally breaks with the logic and mode of control that has shaped the evolution of organizational forms for much of the 20th century.



Foucault's metaphor of the 'panopticon' has been invoked, often rather generally and loosely, as a meaningful way to capture and articulate some of the key elements of this putatively innovative and novel form of organizational governance.<sup>13</sup> The latter is seen to consist of a 'hybrid' logic and technology of control facilitated through the, often uneasy, combination of vertical electronic surveillance and horizontal peer group discipline located within a re-engineered corporate culture characteristic of the 'new paternalism'. Taken together, this package of control innovations seems to make more conventional, structurally based, control strategies redundant or, at the very least, open to incremental displacement and eventual replacement by much more flexible and mobile 'network-based' control logics and practices.

However, this 'new control model' can be re-interpreted in a rather more negative and pessimistic light. The emergence of 'concertive control', under the post-bureaucratic work system of self-managing and disciplining teams typical of post-Fordist production regimes, can be seen as embodying a new substantive rationality that is more pervasive, manipulative and oppressive than anything prevailing under Fordism. Far from remedying the 'democratic or participatory deficit' implicit in Fordism, 'concertive control' imprisons both managers and workers within a 'velvet glove', rather than the 'iron cage', of indirect, unobtrusive and detailed regulatory control.

The 'velvet glove' may be much more seductive and manipulative than the overtly hierarchical, and often authoritarian, control strategies and structures found in Fordist factories and Weberian bureaucracies. But it also encourages and legitimates a more capricious and arbitrary managerial ethos and style in which workers collectively collude in their self-surveillance and discipline by internalizing the economic norms and production values that define the substantive rationality of managerial practice. Once this is overlaid with the organizational carapace of unobtrusive and indirect surveillance made possible by new communication and information technologies, then Weber's bureaucratic 'iron cage' may come to be seen, with more than a hint of historical nostalgia and social irony, as a preferable mode of control to the much more insidious and manipulative control regimes emerging in advanced capitalist societies.<sup>14</sup>

At another level, this is perhaps the most dramatic power/knowledge shift experienced by the world in the last 50 years. The reformulation of institutions and organizations in topsy-turvy images of what we used to know as 'democracy' and 'freedom' is being matched by the re-signification of discourse both in organizational and in other public contexts. These come together, for instance, to secure a 'homeland' that has never been more insecure, because of the anxiety thus inspired by the loss of civil rights and the fear of surveillance.

Under these circumstances, while in the cultural arena postmodernism has lost the vitality of a decade ago and the influence of critical realism





## Why Neo-disciplinary? Why Now?

The Editorial Team

has resurrected itself after a slumber of 15 or so years, what may be needed is an acknowledgement, such as that offered by Campbell Jones in this issue, that there has been a premature closure of exploration of the 'postmodern condition'. The political possibilities offered by post-structuralist analytics, insofar as they can be articulated in the context of everyday life to contribute to a public and broad-based 'hermeneutics of suspicion', may have been lost amid the 'fads and fashions' of academic posturing. We, no less than others, have been contributors to this situation. But, as we are reminded by Stan Deetz in this issue, such political possibilities continue to be available.

- **The interactions between organizational discourse and identities as they account for the cultural meaning and significance of 'organization' in late modernity.** One might imagine that the discourses of re-engineering and restructuring, 'taking control of one's own career' and 'offering employability', corporate responsibility and ethical business, and so on, offered new ways of conceptualizing the relationship between self, organization and society. Yet, in the Schumpeterian desire to obliterate, the creation of shareholder value as measured by share price hikes became paramount.

Organization implied re-organization and the influence of downsizing, delayering and restructuring is now seen as having cost the jobs of 12 million middle managers. But it is and was based upon a metaphor of 'leanness' that can bear no analytical weight. Corporate liposuction and corporate anorexia as notions point in the direction of less substance, less space occupied in the face of the drive to increase the *lebensraum* of the Other.

There are several aspects of this situation worth remarking. Leanness is more than downsizing and there seems to be no stopping point in this trend. Since the mid-1980s, when the trend first appeared, leanness reflects not just the number of jobs lost but also the kind and worth of jobs created after downsizing. Work intensification, flexible jobs, and increased productivity in industrialized nations appear concurrently with downsizing. The new norm(al) is 'to do more with less'. Even during the boom of the 1990s most jobs created were cheaper jobs for a flexible workforce, often in service industries, while manufacturing continued to foster runaway jobs to other countries with cheaper labor forces. Today, even white-collar jobs in 'knowledge-intensive' professions and industries, including research and development jobs, are running away to countries with well-educated but cheaper labor. Yet of course the concept of a job which is 'runaway' only becomes of concern when it is running from the core to the periphery. The millions of jobs which ran away from the periphery to the core are not counted in this dynamic.

In the meantime, other social trends appear. The welfare state continues to be dismantled in most countries, and there are new configurations of 'work and family', with more women in the labor force and more



dual-earner families. At the same time it seems that pink-collar work has increased in value but only in contrast to the lost value of jobs, such as middle management and manufacturing jobs, in which men used to be dominant. Still the gender division of labor remains skewed against women. In industrialized nations, the top executive positions with the highest salary scales and compensation packages, which in the US and the UK in particular have reached scandalous proportions, continue to be occupied, by far, by white men.

In the middle of this turmoil, what has happened to the lives of ordinary organizational members and their core identities? It is difficult to address this question because much organizational research, given its managerial bent, does not focus on 'ordinary organizational members'. At the same time, if our observations are of any value, it seems that 'ordinary organizational members' (ourselves included) have yet to realize the pervasiveness and persistence of what is happening. It seems as if nostalgia has set in as a form of incredulity, in which even the most egregious acts of workers' dispossession are responded to with a 'wait and see' attitude. It is as if 'this cannot be happening to us'. And yet, it is the 'us' to whom it is happening that is no longer there. Who are 'us' now?

This existential question is indeed reflected in the centrality the topic of 'identity' has acquired in the past several years in organizational theorizing and research, as well as more broadly in social and cultural studies. Since the late 1980s, 'identity' and 'organization' have come together in various ways, including concerns with 'organizational identity and image', issues of individuals' identification with their organizations, questions of identity regarding gender, race, ethnicity in organizations, sometimes about 'diversity', as well as critical and post-modern theorizations of 'identity and subjectivity'.

It is in these latter critical and postmodern theorizations, and their intersections in material and performative problematics that we find the most promising avenues for addressing the current 'us' as we continue to become.<sup>15</sup> For it is through these intersections that it is possible to engage with and examine, as argued by David Collinson in this issue, 'the multiple asymmetries and insecurities of the contemporary workplace' (p. 543) while making explicit, as Nikki Townsley's review of 10 years' worth of 'gender work' in these pages reminds us, 'the enabling and constraining possibilities of any approach as well as the ironies arising from the production of fractured knowledge in the field' (p. 635).

- **Problems/possibilities associated with interpretation, representation and authority in research and text production and the researcher's responsibility in the construction of social reality.** Most of the issues we have highlighted come together as we observe the organizations we so seldom analyze because they are part of our identities, namely universities and academic publishing. The changes occurring in these institutional



## Why Neo-disciplinary? Why Now?

The Editorial Team

domains, our 'inside', reflect a general sense that, like in the 'outside institutions', our employability as organizational members is attached to our presumed willingness to embrace management-sponsored change. The rhetoric of diachronicity is now everywhere.

In these domains, a new conservatism stalks the land, which we could not have predicted a decade ago. From an intellectual perspective, the dominance of positivism has been loosened and one seldom needs to justify the existence of alternative paradigmatic perspectives or methodological approaches, including critical perspectives and qualitative methods. Yet, while emanating from a very different location, a reaffirmation of positivism as the only legitimate grounds for 'expertise' is again encroaching upon us.

Specifically, in Britain the ESRC appears to be driven by an image of the social sciences as naturalistic imitators of the quantitative sciences. The rhetoric is of measurement, user groups to evaluate the work and the superiority of the hypothetico-deductive approach. We are told that the state is the largest employer of social science graduates and therefore PhDs had better be able to manipulate data effectively in the service of their new paymasters. Sponsored research activity therefore is to produce state statisticians and stabilizing data on behalf of whichever government is currently in office.

In the arena of knowledge production, the influence of the 1994 book by Gibbons et al.<sup>16</sup> has proven to be dramatic. The easy distinction between Mode 1 (traditional knowledge, generated within a disciplinary, primarily cognitive context) and Mode 2 (knowledge created in broader transdisciplinary social and economic contexts) has influenced much of British thinking about how knowledge should develop and what forms of knowledge should be invested in. Concurrently, a contrast is made between Mode 1 and Mode 2 forms of knowledge production with the intention of highlighting profound and supposedly inevitable shifts in this production, as it becomes an increasingly institutionally dispersed activity and more and more driven by practical concerns and perspectives.

There are many benefits to be gained from understanding the ways in which knowledge is constructed, extemporized, contested and situated in practice. However, such a project is quite different from that found in the account of the development of Mode 2 thinking. In drawing only selectively and anecdotally on evidence to present a case for a unidirectional and unavoidable shift in the way knowledge is being produced, the account manages almost entirely to distance itself from its scientific aspirations as well as to abstract itself from history and context. Further, the tendency to conflate description, prescription and analysis that, despite claims to the contrary, pervades the account, demonstrates the basic error behind these notions of knowledge production—whatever 'Mode' one may care to associate them with. 'Tis a pity that this shallow and a-historical piece should have exercised the minds of those who



## Organization 10(3)

### Editorial

should have known better and excited the policy makers into demanding more and more of the relationship between social science and policy formulators. 'Tis a pity, in particular, when the social science and the policy to which it refers have been narrowly constituted to respond to particular managerialist interests.

A similar trend can be observed in US universities, a trend that can also be understood in the context of globalization as demonstrated by the interest in these topics by representatives from over 20 countries, from both North and South, who attended the 1999 conference sponsored by this journal.<sup>17</sup> While the outcome in the US may be similar to that of the UK, the context in which it occurs exhibits particularities worth mentioning. In this case, the public/private configuration that fragments the university system and, therefore, the sources and approaches for funding the 'research university', has been increasingly attacked over the years by the generalized anti-intellectualism of the country.

The extreme reliance on public funding for the public university, funding that is determined more often than not by 'elected officials' who depend on the direct votes of their constituencies for their continued positions of power, has skewed the balance of teaching and research. With a preference for teaching over research, the constituencies claim, in ways which we have already alluded to, the thrust should be on 'practical knowledge'. This narrowness of vision often extends to notions of research as 'of practical and immediate use'. At the same time, as public funding for education continues to recede, more public institutions have become dependent on 'other sources of funding', which are often dominated by private and corporate interests. In this climate, 'measurement' and (ac)countability is the name of the game. More and more quantity over quality is the identifying marker of 'education and research', and therefore what is 'knowledge' has come very close to what is 'measurable'. We see the clear linkages reappearing between the venerable notion of rationality and its dependence on ratios and on rations.

The question of whether the 'university as the house of knowledge' will survive in these turbulent times for higher education is now mediated by the question of whether the university can be a self-sustaining institution. Insofar as these questions have become intertwined, two other issues have become increasingly clear. First, if funding determines the type of research that counts as 'knowledge', it will be the funding bodies, whether private or public, who will determine the knowledge that will be produced. Second, the form such knowledge may take in the social sciences in general, and organization studies in particular, might indeed look very much like a 'Royal Science', namely positivism, even if of the 'lite' variety. We believe that the academy does not progress through such a mechanism but rather moves unwittingly *back* in time to the patronage of an untheorized, pre-existing 'Mode 0' perhaps. Here, historically, the patron conjured up his (or her) problems and findings



## Why Neo-disciplinary? Why Now?

The Editorial Team

and inventions which were designed specifically to further their own power.

From our perspective, then, considering the changing relationship of the university to its 'outside' is of foremost importance when it comes to considering the researcher's responsibility in the construction of social reality. It seems to us that as a community of critical scholars we can no longer address the epistemological questions without addressing the institutional ones that touch us directly. For the past 10 years questions of epistemology have dominated much of what the journal has produced.<sup>18</sup> With some minor exceptions,<sup>19</sup> our 'production of knowledge' has focused on problems/possibilities associated with interpretation, representation and authority in research and text production while refraining from addressing too directly the practical consequences of resolving such problems and engaging such possibilities. Knowledge for whom? Knowledge for what? Those are questions that must be now explicitly answerable in our research and writing.

And yet, as we look into the future, how to maintain the critical edge that orients our knowledge when all signs point toward an unreflective adoption of 'knowledge that can be sold' as the dominant feature in our institutions? Is indifference, that is, a further retrenchment into 'irrelevant knowledge' of little social impact, the only alternative? To be 'out of sight and out of mind' of the dominant corporatist factions as a way to maintain our jobs and the 'purity' of our intellectual voices? We don't believe this is tenable any longer.

Pointedly, we ask those who may want to publish here in the future, for what and for whom would you write? Regardless of epistemological preference, those are the questions critical organizational scholarship can no longer refuse to answer. But, how to do so? Of particular interest as an opening into these considerations is the *Connexions* by Srilatha Batliwala in this issue. In her voice, 'we cannot hope to achieve sustainable, equitable and peaceful societies without new kinds of partnerships and alliances *within* and *across* traditional research–practice communities concerned with social change' (p. 612), but she also shows us how to do that in the context of practice–research interactions in South Asia.

- **The ethical and political relevance of 'organization'.** We have come full circle. The changes in our institutions are a microcosm of the broader changes in the geopolitical and economic climates. The world economy is much less stable than it appeared 10 years ago. Recession and worse haunt the world. As new forms of the 'contradictions of capitalism' emerge via the collapsing dot.com bubble, the Enron debacle, and the implosion of stock markets, the interrelationship of rapid and uncertain organizational changes and the instability this brings to the fabric of social and community life increases in intensity as eloquently described in Richard Sennet's recent books *Corrosion of Character* (2001) and *Respect: The Formation of Character in an Age of Inequality* (2003).<sup>20</sup>



## Organization 10(3)

Editorial

Corporate governance was spoken of a decade ago, but not in terms of the absolute need to regulate the activities of all the largest companies on the assumption that they were bound to be acting against stakeholder and shareholder interests and, even less, that they were bound to be acting against broader social interests. And yet, today there is deep concern about incomes that were dependent on stock market performance, and many have been told that their pensions are in severe danger. Meanwhile, accelerated privatization of the common wealth the world over demonstrates, more often than not, that the 'private interest' has never been, nor will ever be, an interest in the 'common good'. Increasing income disparities within industrialized nations, which carry the banner of 'privatization' as if it had been the cause of their historical economic growth rather than the seeds of its current economic demise, show all too clearly—and perhaps too late—that the social interest cannot be entrusted to a 'business logic'. Limiting the possibilities of 'privatization' for its inherent social abuses as well as articulating the required economic contributions that it must make to the common wealth should now come under all nations' political purview.

Yet, as corporate greed and misbehavior are now assumed rather than being considered rogue activities, one must then ask, what role did social science or organization studies play in unmasking such corporate greed and incompetence? Hardly any. Academic accountants in handfuls suggested that this might be a disaster in waiting but Enron was typically used as a benchmark corporation, where its inventiveness with its balance sheets gained envy and not derision. Concurrently, one must then ask, what role did the assumed amorality of social science and organization studies play in furthering these activities? How far should what and how we teach, as well as what we write in our research, be up for scrutiny as possible apologies for corporate greed and incompetence? In fact, is it here, in our teaching, research, and writing, that we must engage immediately to unmask the faulty logic pervading the 'business logic', because it is this reasoning that our public servants show to 'the world' as the unimpeachable logic of a 'free market' economy? The Speaking Outs on Enron in this issue reflect this new mood of suspicion as a signal that much more should be done in this regard.

To be sure, questions of ethics and morality as political concerns have been present in these pages from the beginning.<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, and attuned to the changing times, we see these questions coming onto center stage as we engage in a reconfiguration of organization studies for now and into the future. How to do that?

### ***Reclaiming Neo-disciplinarity***

In summary, it seems to us that during the past 10 years much has changed in the world in which our community of critical organizational scholars must engage, and little of it has been for the better. As we observe now the conjunction of forces constituting our present, it is at



## Why Neo-disciplinary? Why Now?

The Editorial Team

this point that we must reconsider neo-disciplinarity as a possible mode of engagement.

Despite the evident changes in university systems towards a business or corporate model, there is something that has seen few changes, and that may today be even more entrenched than in the past. That is, there continues to be a domination of intellectual endeavor within the disciplinary boundaries enshrined in the Humboldt reforms to the German university system in the 19th century. Disciplines suggest classification, boundaries, divisions and separation. They also imply good order, quiescence, regulation and stability. They owe their existence to an ideal of service to the state with the university professor being a civil servant whose allegiance is to the government of the day.

Disciplines inhabit fragmented, hierarchical spaces where horizontal movement or even drift is deemed to be problematic. They are forms of science which fix. They are also means of control and self-formation that foster agonistics benefiting the few at the expense of the many as we struggle among ourselves for that which few care about. Neo-disciplinarity takes discipline as its antithetical Other. It implies a rejection of classification, a rethinking of boundaries and their use. It encourages the breakdown of good order, a vocalization of grievances, considerations of radical change and efforts at destabilization.

What kind of knowledge is neo-disciplinary knowledge? There is a distinctive institutional and cultural space we seek to inhabit. Neo-disciplinarity is not two-dimensional like a map of our respective turfs, or a struggle for a territory that has to be defended. Rather, neo-disciplinarity rests in the interstices between disciplinary and interdisciplinary spaces. These interstices are not stable but exhibit much fluidity and dynamism. They are the places where the mixing of flows occurs and where structures of power melt in their solidity.

Neo-disciplinarity provides a transitional discursive space outside of the colonization of the life-world of which Habermas speaks. It is not where two discourses meet but represents the possibility of ideal speech situations outside of instrumental rationality. It is world of new discourse. Imagine the cogs in the giant wheels of Modern Times. The teeth of the machine are dangerous but where the cogs do not mesh completely exists a space for neo-disciplinarity. It is a place that is in the heart of the machine but cannot be engineered out. It is a place and a space for Benhabib's unstable participationist conception rather than a fluid communitarian blueprint of shared fundamental values. Or it is perhaps the paradise envisioned by Barbara Czarniawska's *Speaking Out* in this issue, where creole researchers, hybrid disciplines and pidgin writing coincide and have fun!

In terms not well received by science, it is a space of sparks, lit by alchemy, of the newness of materials; it is a place of fleeting glimpses of the life yet to come, of revitalization. Reading, conversation, flashes of someone's brilliance are part of this process. It is a place too of the



mayfly, of living fleetingly, fitfully, forcefully, fittingly but knowing that things could be better next year, next May, next time around. This is why we call it neo-disciplinarity—because it needs reinventing all the time.

And yet, let us not forget that neo-disciplinarity has a clear purpose as we reaffirm a commitment to ‘Critique’ in its original form. As indicated from the start, we envision a future for *Organization* in which *relevance to the world* is ever more present, and more critically so than we may have articulated in the past, for writing for *Organization* means to write for (our)selves in ways that encourage each and all of us to challenge the received wisdom such that we then go ahead and challenge others, students, colleagues, managerial and organizational audiences of whatever kind, *to dare to do a better world for all*. It is in this context that neo-disciplinary work must show its contribution, for it is in these different forms of encountering our ‘disciplines’ that we may find ways for speaking (in)to the world in the voices so often negated by our own disciplinary contests.

As we envision it today, it will be the work of the journal’s next decade to elaborate upon this notion of neo-disciplinary in ways that challenge conventional wisdom. Thus, from the beginning of Volume 11 when we enter the next decade of the life of *Organization* we will seek to move on from this current resting place and publish material that is more obviously critique, more avowedly challenging of political systems, more iconoclastic, more open to alternative forms of organizing human life and altogether less worried about appearing utopian.

**The Editorial Team at  
Amherst, Cardiff, Leicester, Warwick**

**Notes**

- 1 Nietzsche, F. (1973) *Beyond Good and Evil*. New York: Penguin, p. 259.
- 2 See, for instance, the thematic section on globalization in 1(2), 1994; the forum on Rewriting Globalization, 3(4), 1996, and the Connexions piece in this same issue. More recently, the topic is addressed directly in some articles in 8(4), 2001.
- 3 For a recent analysis of this topic see Finnegan, W. (May 2003) ‘The Economics of Empire: Notes on the Washington Consensus’, *Harper’s Magazine*, 41–54.
- 4 A Connexions on ‘terrorism and spirituality’ appeared in 9(3), 2002.
- 5 A review of this book appeared in 9(1), 2002.
- 6 For example through the Latin American issue, 4(4), 1997. In this issue we insisted that the majority of the contributions should come from Latin America (that is, not from Latin American scholars working in US or European universities), even if they needed to be translated into English. The guest editors obliged and put together a remarkable collection.
- 7 In the style of the ‘varieties of capitalism’ literature (e.g. P. Hall and D. Soskice, eds, 2001, *Varieties of Capitalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press) and analyses of utopianism (e.g. M. Parker, ed., 2002, *Utopia and Organiza-*





## Why Neo-disciplinary? Why Now?

The Editorial Team

- tion, Oxford: Blackwell, and M. Parker, 2002, *Against Management*, Cambridge: Polity.
- 8 The themed section on Actor-Network Theory and Managerialism, 6(3), 1999, and the special issue on Knowing in Practice, 7(2), 2000, discuss more fully several of these points.
  - 9 See, in particular, the themed section on Bergson and Organization Theory, 9(1), 2002, and the special issue on Elias and Organization, 8(3), 2001.
  - 10 The special issue on Modes of Organizing: Power/Knowledge Shifts, 5(4), 1998, articulates several of these arguments more fully. This issue came out of the first international conference sponsored by the journal (Warwick, April 1997).
  - 11 On these issues, see, in particular, the symposium on Critical Management Studies, 9(3), 2002.
  - 12 See the special issue on Management Fads and Fashions, 8(1), 2001.
  - 13 Some aspects of this argument are represented in the themed section on Foucault, Management and History, 9(4), 2002.
  - 14 Forthcoming special issue on Bureaucracy in the Age of Enterprise, 2004.
  - 15 For instance, the thematic issue on Gender, Race, Class and Organization, 3(4), 1996, considers these topics through critical intersections allowed by various feminist perspectives. See also the symposium on Self-Organization in 3(3), 1996, and the section on Employment Futures in the special issue on Organizational Futures, 2(3/4), 1995. Using HRM as a critical lens, most of these arguments come together in the thematic issue on Human and Inhuman Resource Management: Saving the Subject of HRM, 6(2), 1999.
  - 16 There has been, in fact, an explosion of writings about the restructuring of knowledge and universities in the recent past. In addition to Gibbons, M., Limoges, C., Nowotny, H., Schwartzman, S., Scott, P. and Trow, M. (1994) *The New Production of Knowledge*. London: Sage, see, for instance: Soley, L. C. (1995) *Leasing the Ivory Tower*. Boston, MA: South End Press; Readings, B. (1996) *The University in Ruins*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; Scott, P., ed. (1998) *The Globalization of Higher Education*. Buckingham: SHRE and Open University Press; Ibarra Colado, E. (coordinator) (1998) *La Universidad ante el Espejo de la Excelencia*. Mexico: Universidad Autonoma Metropolitana; Tierney, W. G., ed. (1998) *The Responsive University*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press; Herman, P. C., ed. (2000) *Day Late, Dollar Short: The Next Generation and the New Academy*. Albany: SUNY Press.
  - 17 The special issue on Re-Organizing Knowledge, Transforming Institutions: Knowing, Knowledge, and the University in the 21st Century, 8(2), 2001, comprises a collection of papers from this international conference sponsored by the journal (Amherst, September 1999).
  - 18 See, for instance, Essays on Aesthetics and Organization, 3(2), 1996; themed section on Discourse and Organization, 4(2), 1997; Thematic Issue on Pluralism and Incommensurability in Strategic Management and Organization Theory, 5(2), 1998; themed section on Chaos, Complexity and Organization Theory, 5(3), 1998; Thematic Issue on Organization as Science Fiction, 6(4), 1999; Debate on Discourse, 7(3), 2000.
  - 19 For example, the symposium Beyond Armchair Feminism, 7(4), 2000; and, again, the symposium on Critical Management Studies, 9(3), 2002.



## **Organization 10(3)**

### Editorial

- 20 Sennett, R. (1999) *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism*. New York: W. W. Norton; Sennett, R. (2003) *Respect: The Formation of Character in a World of Inequality*. London: Allen Lane.
- 21 The section on Ethics and morality side by side, 2(2), 1995, has various commentaries including questions of subjectivity; there are also two themed sections pertaining to these concerns in 10(2), 2003: the first one on Ethics, Politics and Organizing and the second on Spirituality, Management and Organization.