Speaking Truth to Power? Anti-Bureaucratic Romanticism from Critical Organizational Theorizing to The White House

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Abstract

In spite of their distinctive normative and political differences, critical organizational scholars use a vocabulary which in several respects resembles that adopted by right-wing populists. This vocabulary, we argue, consists of components that can be deployed in the pursuit of radically conflicting goals. At its heart lies a profoundly antithetical stance towards bureaucracy and the state. In this paper, we explore the components of this vocabulary as well as the role they play in both populist- and critical organizational theory-variants. In so doing, we further discuss the lack of critical potential this vocabulary has in the present. For critical organization scholars, we argue, this should perhaps lead to a renewed consideration and reflexivity concerning not only the merits of bureaucracy and the state, but also of how to conduct critique in populist times.

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Introduction

After the financial crisis of 2007-8, academics and political commentators prophesied the imminent demise of neoliberalism (Jackson, 2014: 193). Finally, there was hope that from the ashes of this debacle, the preceding decade's ruling ideas and institutions could be overturned and replaced by more democratic modes of organizing. And with the emergence of 'Occupy Wall Street' and 'The Arab Spring', it seemed that horizontal, leaderless community-based modes of organizing were forcing themselves onto the political stage and in the process overturning or otherwise dispensing with worn-out, anachronistic, bureaucratic organizations (e.g. Hardt and Negri, 2011; Graeber, 2015). As it turned out, however, this hope was short lived. Instead of neoliberalism being dissolved, wide-spread austerity policies have contributed to a rise in populist sources of political mobilization that have brought together and accentuated 'pretty much all the worst trends of the past half century' (Klein, 2017: 9; see also Crouch, 2011; Müller, 2016; Kakutani, 2018).

Although critics within organization studies as elsewhere find this development worrisome, the populist upsurge should at the same time make critical organization scholars question their own 'populist affinities', including their distrust of 'elites', 'mainstream politics', and 'established institutions', as well as the prevalent injunction to speak 'for the forgotten "ordinary" person' (Robinson and Bristow, 2017: 435; Zakaria, 2016; Grey, 2018). Thus, the arrival of contemporary populism on the one hand raises the troubling possibility that questioning and criticizing its central doctrines can involve a certain degree of indirect self-criticism for critical scholars, in OS as elsewhere. On the other, however, this uncanny situation also provides critical organization scholars with the possibility of revisiting some of their

cherished commitments, and thus provides the opportunity to pay more than lip-service to the often enunciated ideal of 'thinking differently' (Fournier & Grey, 2000; Cummings and Bridgman, 2011).

In this paper, we focus in particular on this latter option. In the slipstream of a number of works that over the last couple of decades have interrogated the interconnections between power and critique (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005; De Cock & Böhm, 2007; du Gay & Morgan, 2013; Cederström and Marinetto, 2013), and, more recently, between leftist theorizing and various groupings on the right (Dean and Villadsen, 2016; Lilla, 2017; Nagle, 2017; Kakutani, 2018; see also Rorty, 1999), we argue that some critical scholars within organization studies deploy a vocabulary which, in several respects, bears a similarity to that deployed by right-wing populists. This vocabulary, we suggest, consists of modes of argumentation that can be utilized in the pursuit of radically conflicting goals. At its heart lies an anti-bureaucratic and anti-Statist stance. The latter is supported by rhetorical operations that on the one hand allow for substantive flexibility in the utilization and political dynamic of the vocabulary, and yet also provide it with its shared form. After excavating its central components, we unpack what we consider to be a crucial 'lack' in this mode of critical enunciation. For critical organization scholars, we argue, this should lead to a renewed consideration concerning how best to conduct critique in populist times. The argument proceeds as follows: first we outline our theoretical and analytical point of departure; second, we highlight certain key components characterizing the anti-bureaucratic vocabulary; finally, we discuss whether and to what extent this vocabulary can still 'speak truth to power', and suggest that the time might have come

(again) to reassess the prevalent anti-bureaucratic stance characterizing much critical theorizing (Byrkjeflot & Du Gay, 2012; authors, forthcoming).

Theoretical and analytical approach taken in diagnosing the anti-bureaucratic vocabulary

In order to support this argument, we build on two strands of literature: studies of bureaucracy, and works from intellectual history. While opposition to bureaucracy spans from the 18th century (Albrow, 1970: 16) to the present, and ranges from Marx & Engels (1888/2002), anarchism (Proudhon, 1851/1923), and Austrian economists (Mises, 1944/2007) to business gurus (Hamel, 2009), and sociologists (Bauman, 1989), to name just a few, we predominantly restrict ourselves to recent works within organizational theorizing that have emphasized the importance and necessity of bureaucracy, and warned of the dangers associated with adopting an anti-bureaucratic stance (du Gay, 2000; Clegg, 2011; Willmott, 2011). As this literature indicates, however, the anti-bureaucratic stance is deployed by a number of exponents who, while agreeing on what to criticize, do not coalesce around a shared substantive agenda (du Gay, 2000). Among the anti-bureaucrats one will therefore look in vain for a common positive political program. Indeed, to utilize Parker's (2009: 89) apt phrase, 'even calling this a rainbow coalition is stretching the coverage of rainbows a little too far'.

Nevertheless, as we can glean from studies in intellectual history, the key issue is not whether political and intellectual adversaries have identical values or agree on all substantive matters, because what frequently fuels political-intellectual agendas and disagreements are partly overlapping concerns combined with fierce opposition

(Gallie, 1956; Koselleck, 2011; Foucault, 1997, 2001). Either in the form of a specific

and mutually cherished, or loathed, concept such as, for instance, 'democracy' or

'bureaucracy', (Gallie, 1956; Collier et al., 2006), or in the form of a specific

vocabulary that coalesces around a shared concept and, in so doing, employs a

number of associated concepts or modes of enunciation that allows for conflicting –

even oppositional – political positions (Skinner, 1989: 13; Foucault, 1997). Indeed,

this 'openness' and flexibility towards various usages, intellectual historians argue, is

one of the key characteristics that makes such concepts and vocabularies shared,

foundational, and influential (Gallie, 1956; Koselleck, 2011; Skinner, 1989). In his

later work, Michel Foucault (1997, 2001, 2007a) proposed the analytical category

'problematization' to describe this process (see also Castel, 1994; Borch, 2012;

Lopdrup-Hjorth, 2013). He loosely characterized a problematization as a combination

of the way in which something is made into a problem (e.g. 'madness' or 'sexuality')

and the different answers set forth as responses to the problem in question (Foucault,

2001: 171). According to Foucault, such 'answers' could at a surface level appear to

be unrelated. But 'what has to be understood', Foucault stated, 'is what makes' them

'simultaneously possible: (…) it is the soil that can nourish them in all their diversity

and sometimes in spite of their contradictions' (Foucault, 1997: 118). In addressing

such different uses of ethical-political vocabularies, the analytical task becomes to

ask: what are 'the elements which are relevant for a given problematization'?

(Foucault, 2001: 172). In exploring this question, Foucault's work straddled a range

of historical phenomena, from ancient self-practices (1992) to state-phobia in the 20th

century (2008). What remained a central concern across these different investigations,

however, was a persistent sensitivity towards the present, especially in the form of

how something is *problematized anew* in this present (Foucault, 2007a, 2007b) and

what the implications of this might be; a concern which Deleuze (1995: 178) likened to an attentiveness towards the 'forces knocking at our door'.

By bridging literature on bureaucracy with certain characteristics of Foucault's analysis of problematizations, we aim to shed light on how bureaucracy is challenged in seemingly likeminded ways by critical organization scholars and populists, as well as to inquire into what this might engender in our present.[i] Our aspiration revolves around disclosing how proponents of contrary political stances coalesce around an anti-Statist and anti-bureaucratic agenda, and in the process of so doing deploy remarkably similar rhetorical tropes in order to further their very different – indeed, even oppositional – political agendas. By attending to the components inherent in the anti-bureaucratic vocabulary, we aim to show how this mode of problematization is entering into new configurations today that should challenge critical organization scholars to revisit and reconsider how to undertake critique, especially if their aim is to counter populist sources of political mobilization. Unsurprisingly, and in accordance with the 'Speaking Out paper'-format, our argument may seem provocative and polemical. However, underlying this is a deep concern with whether and to what extent the vocabulary of 'bureau-critique' informing much critical organizational analysis prevents the development of an adequate response to the current populist moment, and therefore also counters the commitment to criticize 'on the move' (Fournier and Grey, 2000: 19) that nourishes critical organizational theorizing.

In regard to our analysis, on the one hand we will restrict ourselves to exploring the Trump administration (sic) as an example of a populist regime which uses anti-

bureaucratic tropes, while on the other hand drawing on a wider group of exponents within critical organizational theorizing, with a primary emphasis on those associated with Critical Management Studies (CMS), broadly understood. Since CMS is a diverse and growing field – with only partly overlapping agendas (Fournier and Grey, 2000; Clegg et al, 2006; Willmott 2006; Adler et al., 2007; Keleman and Rumens, 2008; Grey, 2009; Spicer et al. 2009), we do not claim that all critical organization scholars use the anti-bureaucratic vocabulary at all times, or indeed that it is the key signature of all work within CMS. What we do state, though, is that this vocabulary is often a notable point of departure that frequently if certainly not ubiquitously evidences a widely diffused stance against bureaucracy. To underscore the widespread recourse to anti-bureaucratic vocabulary within critical organizational theorizing, we rely on highly cited texts (written by scholars who identity with or are sympathetic towards CMS) that present authoritative overviews of the development and key characteristics of CMS.

Components of the anti-bureaucratic vocabulary

1. The anti-bureaucracy component: Object of critique

The vocabulary finds its principal object of contempt in bureaucracy. It is nurtured by a deep suspicion of bureaucratic principles and modes of organization, and especially towards the alleged 'neutral' workings of these. However, while there is agreement concerning the fact that bureaucratic institutions are a source of injustice and abrogate 'freedom' in some way or another, there are somewhat different emphases concerning the kinds of bureaucratic institutions that are targeted. Thus, while Trump's suspicion is primarily directed against the 'Administrative State' and the workings of the public

bureaucracy, the suspicions voiced by certain critical scholars targets bureaucratic structures more generally in the form of all kinds of naturalized hierarchies, asymmetrical power relations, and forms of (illegitimate) authority (Cooper; 1986; Iedema, 2003; Maravelias, 2003; De Cock and Böhm, 2007; Parker, 2009; Graeber, 2015).

Trump's anti-bureaucratic stance is continually invoked in his domestic agenda and actions. For instance, when, immediately after taking office, Trump issued an executive order that for every single regulation adopted, an agency must drop two (Lam: 2017); but also in the President's responses to public officials and career bureaucrats when in undertaking the instituted duties and obligations associated with their official roles they appear to challenge his political agenda. Thus, from the Twitter-ridicule directed at the 'so-called judge' who temporarily blocked Trump's travel ban (Pengelly and Helmore, 2017) to the firing of FBI Director James Comey (Zegart, 2017), it is evident that failure to comply with the president's convictions, or express personal loyalty to him, is taken as a sign of insubordination that should be met with humiliation or punishment. While Trump has repeatedly expressed his anti-bureaucratic beliefs, the most direct and forcible expression of these was delivered by his former chief strategist, Steve Bannon: 'I am a Leninist. (…) Lenin wanted to destroy the state and that's my goal too (…). I want to bring everything crashing down and destroy all of today's establishment' (Bannon quoted in Sebestyen, 2017). And this State and bureaucracy-bashing rhetorical stance has also been guiding appointments to key official positions in the Trump-administration, where the 'handful of career politicians' heading the core 'agencies seem to have been selected either because they do not believe in the agency's core mission, or do not think the

agency should exist at all' (Klein 2017: 3). As Bannon explained: '[I]f you look at these Cabinet nominees, they were selected for a reason, and that is deconstruction' (ibid.; see also Snyder, 2018; Kakutani, 2018: 127, 136).

If we turn to critical organizational analysis, it is striking how anti-bureaucratic and anti-establishment impulses have been a consistent point of departure for much work in the field (Cooper, 1986; Cooper & Burrell, 1988; Adler et al. 2007, Parker, 2009). As Adler et al. (2007: 124, 131) has indicated, for instance, early critiques of bureaucracy not only provided an important basis, but also make up a continued source of stimulus for the ongoing critiques conducted within CMS (see also Parker, 2009). This is unsurprising given the fact that several of the theorists and philosophers mobilized within CMS have a rather critical stance towards the State and bureaucracy. Thus, from Marx and Engels ([1888] 2002) and Lenin ([1918] 1992) through Braverman (1974: 284) up to and including various forms of post-structuralist analysis (e.g. Deleuze & Guattari, 2002, especially chapter 12), the State and bureaucracy are regularly represented as repressive institutions. And this general suspicion towards the State and bureaucracy manifests itself in a number of different ways. For instance, in their influential book, Burrell and Morgan (1979) argued that, from the perspective of *Radical Organization Theory*, the State is viewed as 'the center of an octopus-like structure, whose bureaucratic tentacles stretch out and invade all areas of social activity' (Burrell and Morgan, p. 371). This suspicion can also be evidenced in the first editorial of *Organization* when, in setting out the journal's parameters and 'mission', the editors quoted Bauman on the problems pertaining to '"the typically modern, technological-bureaucratic patterns of action and the mentality they institutionalize, generate, sustain and reproduce". 'Indeed', they continued, 'the story of the organization of the Holocaust could be made into a

textbook of Scientific management' (Burrell et al., 1994: 10)[ii]. Much of the criticism conducted within CMS therefore 'resonates with – and radicalizes – a long tradition of humanistic critique of the depersonalized and alienating nature of modern bureaucracies' (Adler et al. 2007: 126). As Parker (2009: 88) writes, while 'the word "bureaucracy" does not mean the same as the word "management"' they 'are certainly very overlapping concepts'. It is therefore also unsurprising that bureaucracy shows up in three of the first four forms of 'discontent' towards management/managerialism that Parker (2009) highlights, while remaining an implicit target in the last one on 'anti-authoritarian critiques', such as anarchism, for instance. The bureau-critique is therefore wide-spread, and has been so for a long time.[iii] Indeed, as Perrow (1979:5) argued in the first edition of his classic *Complex Organizations*, it is 'echoed' by both 'the radical right, the radical left…and the counter-culture'.

2. The ideology component: Ruling illusions and conspiracy

If there is something politically and morally suspect about bureaucracy, however, it is necessary to explain how 'bureaucratic principles' have come to extend 'to every aspect of our lives' (Graeber, 2015: 27), and how proponents of bureaucracy continue to legitimate its existence. This brings us to the second component in the anti-bureaucratic vocabulary, namely the implicit (indeed, often explicit) insinuation of illusion and conspiracy that, allegedly, preserves the status quo. We'll call this the *ideology component*. And just as the substantive anti-bureaucratic component can be made to fit any number of political positions, so too can the ideology component. We shall first outline its Trumpist variant, and then move on to its critical organizational theory-variant.

Both in his election campaign and in his Presidency, Trump has repeatedly embraced a number of conspiracy theories (Tani, 2017). In relation to his anti-bureaucratic stance, famous slogans such as 'drain the swamp' are to be seen in conjunction with a all-encompassing allegation concerning the existence of a 'deep State' (Trump quoted in Wolf, 2017) that is working to undermine the President's radical agenda. The President and his supporters use this concept to refer to 'the idea that an entrenched bureaucracy is working to delegitimize' Trump (Wolf, 2017). As Remnick (2017) explains, the notion of a deep State 'comes from the Turkish *derin devlet*, a clandestine network including military and intelligence officers (…) whose mission was to protect the secular order established, in 1923, by (…) Atatürk'. This Turkish deep State, however, was 'willing to use violence to achieve its ends, and held close ties to organized crime' (Graham, 2017). In deploying this concept, Trump and his supporters therefore summon up the image of a bureaucratic 'subterranean web of common and nefarious purpose' (Remnick, 2017) that on the one hand comes in useful in explaining the Trump-administration's perceived incompetence, and on the other can be utilized to justify the repeated attacks on bureaucratic institutions and officials. Even if bureaucratic institutions – at a surface level – appear democratically legitimate, Trump and his supporters, in using the notion of a Deep State, effectively claim that there is 'something going on behind the scenes that allows corrupt elites to continue to betray the people' (Müller, 2016: 32). As Müller puts it, such conspiracy theories 'are thus not a curious addition to populist rhetoric; they are rooted in and emerge from the very logic of populism itself' (Müller, 2016: 32).

If we turn to CMS, a number of authors make a surprisingly similar rhetorical move. Building on works informed by the great 'masters of suspicion', as Ricoeur (2008:

33) called Marx and others of his ilk, much critical theorizing has represented bureaucracy as masking something that needs to be revealed (Cooper and Burrell, 1988: 106). Here, we also see the invocation of something sinister at work, something which imposes a rosy but distorted image that helps cover up and legitimize a much harsher reality, something which – in essence – has 'to be seen as … a process of *technological normalization* motivated by a therapy of power' (Cooper, 1986: 330). In Fournier and Grey's (2000: 18) formulation, one of the key-characteristics of CMS is exactly that it is concerned with disclosing such 'ruling illusions', and with the proposition that 'things may not be as they appear' (Fournier & Grey, 2000: 18). Indeed, as Fournier & Grey (2000: 24) argue, some critical scholars even seem to 'assume that "management" is united in a conspiracy against the "managed"'. This is, for instance, a move that David Graeber has recently made in arguing that while all of us would prefer a world where everybody plays by the (bureaucratic) rules, the 'illusion' that bureaucracies work this way serves a completely different purpose: 'bureaucracy has been the primary means by which a tiny percentage of the population extracts wealth from the rest of us'; 'the pursuit of freedom from arbitrary power simply ends up producing more arbitrary power, and as a result, regulations choke existence, armed guards and surveillance cameras appear everywhere, science and creativity are smothered, and all of us end up finding increasing percentages of our day taken up in the filling out of forms' (Graeber, 2015: 205). For these reasons, a lot of work within critical organizational theorizing – even those that differ on a number of substantial matters – have railed against the ideology of 'bureaumania' (Parker, 2009: 89, 90, 92), and set 'out to attack' the 'vast libraries of propaganda that masquerade as necessary common sense' (Parker, 2002: 10). Just as Trump's dissemination of conspiracy theories, such as the postulation of the existence of a

Deep State, serve to delegitimize his (many) opponents, so too the accusations of the propagandist nature of 'bureaucratic ideology' serve to delegitimize bureaucracies and their exponents by pointing out that what really is at stake is the legitimation of injustices, if not an even more sinister conspiratorial plotting against the repressed.

3. The emancipatory aspiration-component: Emancipation of / giving voice to the repressed

This brings us to the third characteristic, namely what we'll call the emancipatory aspiration-component of the anti-bureaucratic vocabulary. The effectiveness of this move depends on the successful accomplishment of the two previous ones. If these are achieved, this leaves the floor open for the righteous cause - the demand that the repressed should be liberated from bureaucracy and its apparatchiks. Again, this rhetorical move can be used to further any number of political positions. Whatever its political direction, however, it adds an emancipatory, utopian or developmental dimension to the anti-bureaucratic vocabulary by making a case for the way in which current injustices can be countered or completely reversed.

In the Trumpist variant, we see this component deployed in conjunction with the reactionary call to 'Make America Great Again'. There is a slumbering potential in America, and especially in the American people, that has been crushed by a corrupt system. Trump therefore, in accordance with a general populist move, pits 'the pure, innocent, always hardworking people against a corrupt elite who do not really work (other than to further their self-interest)' (Müller, 2016: 23). What's important here is not so much who falls on either side of this distinction, but rather the fact that Trump, as populists of all stripes do, separates 'the world into those warring camps in the first

place' (Friedman, 2017). Thus, when this distinction has been established, it also becomes clear that in speaking their mind, and casting their votes for Trump, the otherwise 'silent majority' (the 'real people') rise up against the Deep State.

In the CMS-variant of the emancipatory aspirational-component, this move not made in accordance with freeing 'the people', but rather with the aim of emancipating some marginalized or repressed group, and/or or giving voice to an anti-bureaucratic mode of organizing (such as the commons, worker co-operatives, hacker communities, etc.). Again, as with the Trumpist, populist variant, the importance is not who – exactly – falls on either side of this distinction, but rather *that* a distinction is drawn, and that this distinction carries moral and political weight. As a central criterion, Fournier and Grey (2000: 17) argue that CMS is non-performative: this means opposing knowledge that is directed towards the attainment of efficiency and effectiveness – values that have been closely associated with bureaucratic organization. Rather than succumbing to such values, critical scholars are encouraged to pursue 'emancipatory forms of research' (Keleman and Rumens, 2008: 19). And while such forms of emancipation might involve substantive agendas, such as the promotion of feminism or environmentalism (Adler et al., 2007: 142-5), they might at other times be tied together with more fuzzy ones such as promoting 'resistance' in and of itself without much explanation as to what – precisely – is to be resisted and for what reasons (Alvesson, 2012: 80-1).

4. The parrhesiastic component: Speaking truth to power
Finally, this leads us to the question of the position from which these claims and rhetorical operations can be mobilized. If bureaucracy, hierarchy, and 'the

establishment' have proliferated, and distorted social relationships; if this is covered up in ruling illusions and ideology; and if there is a people, group, or alternative organizational principle which is unduly repressed and in need of emancipation, there is obviously someone or something who/which has to take on the responsibility to call all this out. This brings us to the fourth and final characteristic of the anti-bureaucratic vocabulary, namely what we'll call the *parrhesiastic component*, that is, the capacity to 'speak truth to power' (Foucault, 2001).

While Trump's critics have pointed out that he continually lies and has shifted position on almost all substantive political issues, one of the main attractions for his supporters is the assumption that he 'tells it like it is' (Shebaya, 2017), and that this *parrhesia* is what makes him stand out as a truth-teller in an otherwise corrupt system (Markovits, 2016). His anti-establishment views, his criticism of the mainstream press, and his refusal to play the role of the professional politician makes him appear a courageous man who casts aside the rules of the game in order to speak plainly and directly. The successful projection of this self-image is, allegedly, also what qualifies him to 'drain the swamp', because he hasn't been corrupted by the Deep State (unlike 'Crooked Hillary', for instance).

Given the fact that critical organizational scholars have a sustained and ongoing allergy to notions of authority and a marked preference for autonomy (Parker, 2009), the role of parrhesiastes is played out there in a different way than in the populist, Trumpist version. And although parrhesia has been discussed quite extensively within CMS (Barratt, 2004; Bridgman and Stevens, 2008)[iv] what is important for our purposes, however, is less whether and to what extent the critical organization scholar

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really incarnates this position, or should aim to do so; rather it is that *the argumentative style* deployed in some critical organizational theorizing implicitly places the scholar in a position where s/he appears as someone who speaks truth to (bureaucratic) power, discloses ruling illusions, and takes a risk in standing up and speaking out for some repressed group or principle. In being radical in this way, the critical scholar should carry the parrhesiastic function to the point of risking their own ostensibly privileged position. As Parker (2002: 132) explains: 'When the B-Schools become empty, when their corridors contain dead leaves and the roof leaks, then (…) CMS will have done its job'.

Discussion and concluding remarks

In outlining the components of the anti-bureaucratic vocabulary we have aimed to shed light on the commonalities between the Trumpist- and the critical organizational scholar's anti-bureaucratic stances and rhetorical moves, while simultaneously indicating their differences. And while the latter obviously are very important, such differences are nevertheless nourished by a shared vocabulary, and a shared mode of problematization, that can be utilized in the promotion of radically different substantive ends. And what is perhaps most noteworthy here is the way this mode of problematizing has shifted from a somewhat marginal and oppositional language to a very prevalent and powerful one. In light of our focus on how bureaucracy is problematized today, and what the implications of this are (especially for critical organizational theorizing), the question therefore arises as to whether and to what extent the anti-bureaucratic vocabulary is of much use in speaking truth to power today? Does it carry critical potential when its central tropes are disseminated via President Trump's Twitter-account on a daily basis? Is it of much strategic and

practical use in fighting against injustice and oppression? In this final section we suggest a few reasons as to why this might not be the case. We shall do so primarily by pointing to one of the most forceful oppositions made to President Trump's anti-bureaucratic stance comes from the responsible operations of constitutionally sanctioned bureaucratic governance itself.

One of the most forceful examples of opposition to Trump's anti-bureaucratic way of governing is found in the intricacies surrounding the firing of FBI Director James Comey in May 2017. While the President stated that Comey was sacked for being unable 'to effectively lead the bureau' (Shear and Apuzzo, 2017), there seems little doubt, not least after Comey's testimony before the Senate Intelligence Committee, that he was fired for failing to comply with Trump's *informal request* to let national security adviser Michael Flynn off the hook in the Russia Investigation. In abstaining from following Trump's request, what Comey did, in essence, was to act within the confines of his bureaucratic role and duty. In this context it is significant to remark that FBI Directors usually serve a ten year-term, and that only one Director before Comey has been fired, namely William Sessions who was dismissed for, among other things, using his office for personal gain. 'Comey, by contrast, was fired by President Trump for doing his job. Big difference. One was miscarrying justice and abusing power; the other was carrying out justice and speaking truth to power' (Zegart, 2017: 2).[v]

Since the Russia Investigation is still ongoing, it is difficult to predict what the outcome will be. What seems likely, though, is that Comey's action in accordance with constitutionally sanctioned bureaucratic principles and duties – and Special

Counsel Muller's even more ascetic, stoic, and official bureaucratic comportment –
has more forcefully troubled Trump than any combination of anti-bureaucratic
critiques and popular protests has so far been able to. And maybe this holds an
important lesson for critical organizational scholars and others who wish to
effectively criticize populists today? Maybe this ought to be the turning point at which
it became worthwhile to drop the anti-statist preference for flat, horizontal movements
and anarchist organizations, and instead come to the realization that institutions such
as bureaucracies can serve as highly effective bulwarks against the arbitrary use of
power, and the potential slide into tyranny (Snyder, 2017a; see also Caplan, 1989; du
Gay and Lopdrup-Hjorth, 2016)?

This, at least, is the conclusion Thomas Frank (2012) arrived at after reflecting on the
organizational romanticism of the *Occupy Wall Street* movement, its similarities to
the Tea Party movement, and the practical political worthlessness of high theorizing.
While sharing the protesters disgust at 'outrageous financial misbehavior', 'the
political power of money', and 'runaway' corporate 'compensation practices', Frank
states that you do not 'require poststructuralism-leading-through-anarchism to
understand how to reverse these developments. You do it by rebuilding a powerful
and competent regulatory state. (…) *You do it with bureaucracy*' (Frank, 2012: 7-8).
And if this is true for combatting the deregulatory, entrepreneurial cultural excesses of
the last three decades, it just might be true, too, for containing and countering the
damage done by a President who acts like a 'Mob Boss' (Comey, 2018) and appears
to want regime change in the United States (Snyder, 2017b). At least some seem
hopeful in this regard: 'Ever since the election of Donald Trump to the presidency of
the United States, bureaucracy has had a strange reversal of fortunes. It has gone from

being a thorn in the side of democracy to being its saving grace' (Zacka, 2017: 3). One doesn't have to love bureaucracy to view it with more equanimity than either populists or critical scholars are wont to do. Carl Friedrich, no great fan of bureaucracy himself, observed nonetheless in his classic *Constitutional Government and Democracy* (1950), that any realistic study of modern government has to begin with an appreciation of bureaucracy, 'because no government can function without it. The popular antithesis between bureaucracy and democracy is an oratorical slogan that endangers the future of democracy' (ibid.57). It is perhaps time to end the sloganeering and to begin to pay adequate attention to bureaucracy as a potential public good in itself.

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[i] Indeed, by utilizing only some elements of Foucault's problematization analysis, our ambition is not to be truthful to Foucault (whatever that might imply). Our problems today are not the same as Foucault's problems. This does not preclude, however, that there are elements of Foucault's problematization analysis that can be utilized and adapted to other contexts than those in which they originally were utilized (see Lopdrup-Hjorth, 2013: 28).

[ii] For a through renunciation of Bauman's claims about the role of 'Bureaucracy' in Nazi Germany, see for instance du Gay (2000) and more generally Caplan (1988).

[iii] At the same time it is important to stress that even within works that are critical towards several of the characteristics associated with bureaucracy (such as, hierarchy, explicit rules, 'dehumanization', etc.), there are, at times, an emphasis concerning some of bureaucracies' merits. One notable example of this is Parker (2002).

[iv] Besides being utilized in discussions about anarchist hackers, such as Julian Assange (e.g. Munro, 2017), and in analysis of organic farming communities (Skinner, 2011), for instance, parrhesia has been explicitly discussed as an ideal to be pursued by the critical organizational theorist (Bridgman and Stephens, 2008; see also Jack, 2004; Barratt 2004, 2008; Huckaby, 2007).

[v] Our intention here is not to put the person James Comey up on a pedestal, or defend everything he has done throughout his entire career. Rather, we merely wish to highlight how Comey *in this example* lived up to the duties of his office in spite of overwhelming pressure to do otherwise.