Politics in Organization Studies: Multi-disciplinary traditions and interstitial positions

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Politics in Organization Studies:
Multi-disciplinary traditions and interstitial positions

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Abstract

This Perspectives article delves into the archives of *Organization Studies* covering the period 1986-2010 to advance and develop our thinking of politics and political thinking in organization studies. In our Benjamin-inflected reading (Benjamin, 2002), we look for the revolutionary energies that reside in what may at first appear as perhaps 'outmoded' articles in an intellectual environment where the obsolescence of ideas and concepts seems to increase at pace. The purpose of the excavation of our six chosen texts is to build a constellation of what we call 'interstitial positions' that reside within and outside the analytical contours of these texts. In this way we bring these texts into a critical condition in the hope that their constellation can act as a real force in the present and help illuminate our contemporary situation. We might then renew our sense of possibility and choice about the organizational worlds we inhabit and to open future avenues for thinking politics informed by the distinctive disciplinary traditions of organization studies.

Introduction

There can be very few scholars in organization studies today who would profess to have no interest in politics. Most political theorists hold the view that civil war ensues in the absence or breakdown of 'politics' (Runciman, 2014). To have no interest in politics might be a confession that violence and war is a preferable mode of conduct allowing life to return to a war of all against all (*Bellum omnium contra omnes*) in a life 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short', as Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) famously argued in his *Leviathan*. The Leviathan is for many the first statement of modern political theory and shows that politics is both an art of diplomacy – building consensus and the reaching of agreement by way of reason and debate, but also a practice that must subordinate itself to state and national interest. For Hobbes, this is not strictly a subordination but something he calls a 'covenant' of representation that both affirms and is secured by the somewhat fantastical existence ('artificial' or 'fictitious' personhood) of the Leviathan (Runciman, 2000; Skinner, 1999). In more recent definitions, politics is often thought to be about 'who gets what, when, how', as articulated in the pithy statement of political scientist Harold Laswell (1958). Faced with these perennial questions, it is difficult to see how anything resembling 'society' is possible without a commitment to politics and a political participation in shaping the social and collective affairs of the community and wider society in which one lives.

It follows that abstention from politics is unlikely to be a successful strategy. The same might be said of specialists in organization studies who try to claim an avoidance of politics in their theoretical and methodological practices. However, the idea that management or organization science can be free from politics or value-judgements has less and less adherents in the scholarly community today. For those who do recognise and seek to deal with politics from within the various schools of management, organization studies, or organizational behaviour, politics is typically conceived to exist in both a micro and macro realm (Alvesson & Willmott, 1996; Buchanan & Badham, 2020; Clegg, Boreham, & Dow, 1986; Vigoda-Gadot & Drory, 2019). 'Micro' politics takes place amongst managers competing for resources, between 'management and worker' and allied employment relations, and within relations between worker and worker. What is called 'macro' politics are those politics, for example, waged at the societal level and within the formal institutions of state and government. We might also conceive this macro as including the state-backed system of formal education and allied institutionalised knowledge systems that discipline the way we think (and understand politics) and into which we have all been recruited and enrolled (Contu, Grey, & Örtenblad, 2003). Indeed, one's very own conditions of life, experiences, and life chances, are going to be determined by a wide array of forces shaped

and enacted through politics – and if these can be said to shape and inform the kind of organization studies you pursue, then our discipline is always-already inescapably entangled in politics. In this respect we do well to remember Thucydides' reflection (often quoted by Lenin): 'Just because you do not take an interest in politics doesn't mean politics won't take an interest in you' – as recited from Pericles' famous funeral oration (Thucydides, Book 2, pp. 34–46: see Mynott, 2013).

We offer here a curated collection of six papers from *Organization Studies* that are made available in the journal's accompanying virtual special issue and where we think the rudiments of a distinctive approach to addressing politics can be found. We selected these articles because they exemplify crucial vectors in the development of politics in organization studies. They all have a strong interdisciplinary bent and foreshadow key concerns and preoccupations in our present historical moment. The papers range across different 'levels' of analysis, from what some might see as the small 'p' politics that exist in written texts (Calás & Smircich, 1991), including those texts we as academics in organization studies produce in relation to historical conditions of possibility (March, 2007), to the micro-interactions of role-holders occupying positions of political responsibility in local government (Czarniawska-Joerges & Jacobsson, 1995), up to the capital 'P' politics pursued at state-level through the institutions of political lobbying (Barley, 2010) and the construction of public policy by trade unions, political parties and other representative bodies (Anders & Anders, 1986; Clegg & Higgins, 1987). These papers move us towards what we call a series of interstices that cut across epistemological and ontological differences and commitments that divide our discipline and out of which we believe our thinking about politics might be revitalised and extended.

We have ordered the papers chronologically – with one exception – and the reader must be aware of course that the further we travel back in time, the more we must allow for inflections from what was a slightly different historical context. Anders and Anders' (1986) paper points to a first vector outlining a clash of western with non-modern forms of indigenous knowledge and speaks to the capacity of organization to support different forms of community value. The concerns they address, located in the interstices between modern and pre-modern forms of knowledge, have if anything increased in magnitude as we are coming to terms with the severity of the climate crisis. The second vector concerns the emergence of critical management studies and a political economy of organization through the critical sociology of Clegg and Higgins (1987) in which radical new forms of governance and political economy are imagined. They work an interstice

between utopian and pragmatic thinking, between idealism and the compromises necessary in democratic politics. A third important vector concerns gender and moves us towards more embodied and affective forms of studying politics and engaging in political struggle in organization. This approach is exemplified in Calás and Smircich's 1991 paper where they develop a feminist and 'queer theory' deconstruction of the practices that normalise and reproduce male hegemonic order. Early feminist literature, of which this paper is emblematic, teaches us that 'the personal is political', and so we should expect that politics seeps into our unconscious in ways that require careful deciphering. Their paper draws subtly on elements of psychoanalysis and in ways that are suggestive of the possibility that our very thinking and sense of subject-hood is imbued with gender and its political struggles.

Czarniawska-Joerges and Jacobsson (1995) tackle politics as theatre in our fourth paper and introduce a highly productive sensitivity to the contribution that 'dramaturgy' can make to our understanding of the organization and practice of political machinations in government. Their paper develops an important literary vector useful to the understanding of the way politics operates in an interstice between fact and fiction. In so doing they reveal how organization is inevitably entangled in a series of theatrical dynamics, which might have become even more pertinent in our digital age of media 'spectacle'. Barley's ethnographic study of political lobbying (Barley, 2010) reveals a fifth vector that draws out the interstices of macro and micro and formal and informal organization where political activity is stitched together by multiple actors engaged in complex and often difficult to decipher strategies and intentions. Building on the traditions of institutional theory he identifies this as an 'institutional field' that also works in the interstices of structure and action and the public and private. We conclude our overview with a piece by March (2007) which examines the social and political conditions that shaped the emergence of organization studies as a discipline. His paper helps us see how our thinking and theorising is informed by extant historical conditions of possibility and thereby compels us to think of ways that allow us to work on the interstices between history and our 'objects of concern' (Latour, 2005).

From these six papers we draw out a range of what we call 'interstitial positions' for thinking politics in organization. This extends the work of those who have proposed the 'interstitial' as a useful empirical description of the space in which organization happens (Kornberger & Clegg, 2003; Furnari, 2014), and those who have sought to deploy the interstitial as an analytical device in which to think or practice organization studies (O'Doherty, De Cock, Rehn, & Ashcraft, 2013).

In his study of 'the politics of the everyday', Courpasson (2017) captures some of the promise of this interstitial showing how it draws attention to 'an anarchic composition of secret and interstitial activities of daily invention' (p. 846) which impart a degree of chance and contingency to politics that might otherwise be treated in over-determined and schematic ways. We add to these contributions by showing how the interstitial is a more potent resource for thinking politics and organization because it helps us find ways of holding in tension more fundamental ontological and epistemological differences in our discipline. Thinking begins anew when it returns to and confronts the undecidability of realities composed by and giving rise to different value-interests. From these six papers we draw a constellation of positions located in the tension between indigenous and modern forms of knowledge (Anders and Anders), pragmatic and utopian ambitions for political activity (Clegg and Higgins), reason and affect (Calás and Smircich), fact and fiction (Czarniawska and Jacobsson), the dualism of micro and macro (Barley), and the historical conditions of possibility and the production of knowledge (March). We argue this constellation adumbrates a possible new resource for thinking politics that helps make organization studies distinctive in its contribution inviting new combinations, associations, and differences across otherwise divided paradigms of expertise (cf. Willmott, 1993). Drawing from this constellation we make our own political contribution by posing the following question: What are the politics at stake in organization studies and how can we help *politicise* the objects of our concern and the conditions of possibility for that politicisation in ways that can extend the sense of possibility and choice about the worlds we inhabit?

Non-Western Forms of Knowledge and Being in the World

Our first paper by Anders and Anders (1986) focuses on the subjugation of the 'first nation' indigenous peoples of Canada by the imposition of the modern 'corporate form'. The authors explore the events that unfolded following the 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA). With this Act the US government sought both to reimburse indigenous Indian communities for the loss of native lands and to bring into existence an alternative form of semi-autonomous political and economic control of land and its resources, replacing the existing governance regime managed by the US Bureau of Indian Affairs. Under this agreement each member of the community born before 1971 was entitled to 100 shares in the stock capital of these newly formed corporations. Former reservations were incorporated into 12 regional corporations into which some of the larger and more important local villages secured representation rights, electing members to executive decision-making boards. What is remarkable is the apparent simplicity with which Anders and Anders describe and study the complex events

and affairs of political and legal machinations surrounding the implementation of this scheme. It is almost a-theoretical, but this simplicity is achieved by cutting across conventional academic expertise and its specialisations avoiding theory-dense discourse and any obvious prejudicial theoretical commitments.

Anders and Anders show how indigenous ways of knowing the world and ways of being-in-the-world helped cultivate biodiversity and respect for the planet in ways that, we might say, gave a 'political' voice to more-than-human forms of life. In these ways the paper seems highly prescient and may well be a lost classic for scholars who are increasingly turning to non-western forms of knowledge as possible solutions and insights into mitigation of, and adaptation to, the climate emergency (Bastien, Coraiola, & Foster, 2023). In part, the politics of Anders and Anders can be found in the analytical commitment to test the capacity of organization to support radically different forms of community, values, and interest group ambition. We do not have to assume that organization should be a universalizable blueprint that can help secure the most rational and efficient form of administration and coordination of work to serve shareholder value in capitalist forms of economy. This may prove to bring about as much disorganization as it does organization. Anders and Anders find that formal organization, at least in its form as a private corporation, could not deliver for indigenous communities nor support their very different ways of being in the world. The implications follow that we might realise greater sustainability with organizations that restrict economic 'rationalisation' and encourage or accommodate multiple and diverging value-systems.

In these ways Anders and Anders avoid a simple story that could be told of US corporate greed, expropriation and environmental degradation. There is no bombastic grandstanding of political condemnation or righteousness. Nor is there any 'cosmetic indigenization' for which our field has been criticised (Bastien et al., 2023). Instead, what is elicited through their analysis is the appreciation of a very complicated and finely balanced set of social, political and economic relations. In between the lines of this complexity, we can make out the manoeuvring of mining interests, logging, and fishing industries, whose ownership and control is contested between abstract international and multinational capital and more local and indigenous land claims. Hence, the paper is broad in scope and rich in description. Avoiding the appeal of ready-made explanations that draw on heavily abstracted and theorised forms of knowledge, the analysis is subtle and nuanced showing how politics happens in and around, or in the interstices we might say, of formal organization.

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Crucially, in this paper organization is shown to constitute and change the terms within which political activities and its allied discourses are conducted. Anders and Anders (1986) reveal how the corporate form acts as a kind of poisoned chalice that promises much to indigenous communities. However, lacking the requisite training, education and expertise members are unable to run these corporations in ways that can generate jobs and income for their shareholders and communities whilst also upholding traditional native values. Values and community forged out of 'harsh Arctic survival' that foster and depend upon close personal relationships, co-operation, and sharing, they write, are seen to be incompatible with 'the implicit values of a nonpersonal bureaucratic organizational structure based upon market economy ideology' (p. 226). Anders and Anders trace the corruptibility of the corporate form but in ways that retain an ambiguity as to whether the founding ideals upon which the scheme was designed and sold were either naïve or cynical. And it is this suspension of a priori judgement that stimulates political thinking. Anders and Anders (1986) provoke in the reader a sense of uncertainty about how to proceed politically and allow us to see that 'the indigenous community' is also split and factional with multiple and complicated 'interests'. Not having an easy answer avoids an over-reified understandings of politics that reduces politics to the observance of procedures and the practices of existing political institutions.

Dating back to 1986, their paper anticipates much more recent preoccupation in organization studies with post-colonialism, indigeneity and identity politics, environmental spoliation, and the legacies of the 'Anthropocene' (Banerjee, 2000; Whiteman, 2009; Whiteman & Cooper, 2000). Anders and Anders stimulate us to think about what forms of organization might support and help realise *plural* forms of existence. This question can be amplified to embrace Latour's concern as to how radically different value systems might share the same planet (Latour, 2013), especially one limited by resource and carbon constraints in a time of runaway global warming. What forms of organization might help realise this pluralism or help ensure human survival in the aftermath of the era of the Anthropocene? We are still asking whether the corporate entity can observe the checks and balances of accountability that are embedded in the ideal of formal bureaucracy (see also Meyer, Leixnering, & Veldman, 2022) and which might help realise these objectives. Is the corporation not better seen as an entity designed precisely to escape formal regulation and oversight?

8

Anders and Anders (1986) help organization studies pose these questions, yet their analysis provides no easy answers. As our field slowly pivots towards the pressing problem of the climate crisis, the politics at stake are complex, and working out the organizational conditions for new social imaginaries is more pressing than ever (Wright, Nyberg, De Cock, & Whiteman, 2013). They show an acute sensitivity to how the tensions and incompatibilities between modern, western forms of being and non-modern or 'indigenous' worlds of being, and how these differences are organized and made possible by different institutions and practices. They are able to hold these differences together and in tension, because they speak from an interstice – suspended between the virtues of modern, rational organization, and those enjoyed by non-modern, indigenous forms of organization. In the energies stimulated by this suspension we might find the creativity and political imagination required to conceive new forms of organizations able to support or encourage difference, multiplicity and diversity.

The Political Economy of Organization

In our second paper, Clegg and Higgins (1987) explicitly address 'the interpenetration of organizational analysis and political theory' (p. 217) in an effort to find ways of balancing competing interests and values. They draw upon the model of the Swedish 'wage earners fund' to explore ways of improving economic efficiency whilst advancing an explicit political commitment to extend and realise demands for greater egalitarian participation and involvement. Clegg and Higgins argue that the benefits of market-disciplined competition can only be fully realised if there are greater levels of democratic inclusion in decision-making and the strategic planning of national economies. This aspiration could be understood as a response to those 'societal grand challenges' to which organization studies has recently turned (Gümüsay, Marti, Trittin-Ulbrich, & Wickert, 2022). Clegg and Higgins build on a stream of work in the sociology of work to insist on the centrality of *political economy*. We must navigate political economy if we are to understand important forces and agencies that management and workers mediate or reproduce in formal organization, but problematically so and often with surprising results and unintended consequences.

Clegg had previously written an important contribution to this agenda in his 1980 volume *Organization, Class and Control* (Clegg & Dunkerley, 1980) which offered a broad conception of the factors at work in formal organization, drawing on his long-standing interest in the way power relations mediate what was distinguished as the 'macro' and 'micro' realms of society. He showed how the concerns of management and workers in the employment relation were informed

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by wider society-wide struggles and contestation in work that was much cited by those developing labour process analysis in the late 1980s and 1990s (Thompson, 1989; Willmott & Knights, 1990). His formative work also bears fruit when considered in relation to strands of contemporary institutional theory where issues of power and struggle across different value spheres or logics is deemed to require some grasp of how the macro and micro interact (Friedland & Alford, 1991).

With meticulous attention to the particular organizational principles that can build enduring societal wide institutional systems of planning and governance, Clegg and Higgins trace links between industrial democracy, regional political assemblies, and central legislative assembly. Whilst exploring this agenda they note how it 'is difficult to couple critical organization theory to a political project which generates a confrontation with capitalism based on criteria of socio-economic re-organization, in which mutually dependent criteria of democracy and efficiency are operative' (p. 201). One is stuck by the scale and ambition of this analytical framework, placing organization studies right at the centre of forces that must be studied to understand the formation and reproduction of political institutions and the existing competitive and capitalist political economy.

In many ways the paper anticipates the work of Critical Management Studies (CMS) which is often considered one of the most explicit 'political' genres of organization study (Prasad, Prasad, Mills, & Mills, 2016). However, published in 1987 the wider political circumstances could hardly have been propitious for a proposal that calls for collectivist or 'corporatist' forms of economic governance and political economy. The government of Margaret Thatcher was just about to be re-elected for a third time, Reagan was at the peak of his powers as the influence of Monetarism, and deregulated free-market neo-liberal economics was becoming global and hegemonic. Europe was soon to follow suit as the liberalisation of markets and the dismantling of corporatist political infrastructure gathered pace, undoing a series of post-war settlements reached between different economic class interests whether in the form of the 'Scandinavian model', the Austrian social partnership model, or the institutions of national economic governance and planning in France and Germany.

Their paper also resonates with the current turn to performative or critical performative management and organization studies, whose research is explicitly allied to activist and other forms of intervention designed to practically realise political ideals (King & Land, 2018; Spicer,

Alvesson, & Kärreman, 2009). However, there is an attention to nuance and intricacy in Clegg and Higgins that challenges the promulgation of much idealist and radical-sounding utopias in critical organization studies that aspire to help bring about and realise egalitarian, co-operative or anarchic forms of organization. These lofty ideals typically ignore the hard work of practical organization and also tend to reduce capitalism to a 'caricature' of domination and control. The specific target of Clegg and Higgins was the contemporary work of Ramsay and colleagues (Ramsay 1977, 1983a, 1983b; Ramsay & Raworth, 1984) who, it was argued, could only conceive of liberty and freedom once hierarchy and the specialisation of labour have been erased from organization. In place of this idealistic and romantic anti-bureaucratic or anti-organization impulse, Clegg and Higgins explore how a 'mixture of collective leadership and democratic management' might compromise some of these ideals but help maintain levels of economic well-being and comfort, to which we have become accustomed, whilst also building democracy and political citizenship.

With Clegg and Higgins (1987) we find the rudiments of another form of interstitial at work in their analysis which could be emphasized and further developed for the purposes of advancing politics in organization studies. This interstitial marks a gap between the diagnosis of a current state of affairs and a yet-to-be-realised imagined future; one might say there is an ideal or aspiration that has been imagined and against which a current state of affairs is found wanting. Whilst the Swedish wage earners fund has been tried and tested in one context, adopting it in other economies with different traditions of political governance and regulation will demand keen attention to the intricacies and concatenation (the organization) of interlocking institutions that make up the distinctive textures of different nation states. To occupy this interstitial space between ideal and reality is widely recognised as the starting point for the Socratic tradition of philosophy and for critical thinking in the modern social sciences (Blum, 1974). However, with its accompanying demand and necessity to 'slow down' thinking, the work on this interstice is in danger of being lost in the neoliberal higher education system where scholars have become increasingly preoccupied with rapid journal publication at the expense of wider intellectual participation in the kind of grand societal challenges that Clegg and Higgins envision.

Feminist Deconstructions of Organization Studies

One grand societal challenge we continue to face in organization studies is the ongoing inequality between men and women and the continuing violence and persistent denigration of women perpetuated by men. Many remain blind to the norms and conventions of everyday life in which

this inequality and violence is silently reproduced – through what are now popularly called 'micro-aggressions' and 'unconscious bias'. The importation of strands of feminist theory in organization studies has helped illuminate and politicise these everyday experiences of women at work. Taken up in Calás and Smircich's (1991) seminal paper we see how organizations are shot through with taken-for-granted masculine (and homosocial) assumptions and practices that help normalise and reproduce a male hegemonic order. Their paper digs deeper to show how the reproduction of gender inequalities reflects deep-seated frustrations and repressions that are reproduced in the very stylistic and grammatical norms of masculinised managerial discourse and writing.

The power of this paper and its contribution to the advance of political sophistication in organization studies lies in its deconstructive theorising and methodologies – although to call it a theory or a method would be to make epistemological formalisations and distinctions that are made problematic by the research and writing strategies from which this paper draws (i.e. Derrida, Irigaray). It even makes our own commentary and précis a fraught exercise as the male authors of this piece become increasingly self-conscious and not a little paralysed by the hidden or taken-for-granted assumptions of masculinity that may be presumed and reproduced in our own reading and writing! In these ways the politics of this paper are subversive and subtle, playful even, but for us what is most radical and contemporary in this text are the discomforting transgressions it invites and stimulates in the reader, but which are recuperative or generative of energies that might otherwise be squandered in an all too masculinised managerialism.

It is still not widely understood that we live in a homosocial world made up of a predatory masculinity that seduces its followers with narcissistic impulses and pathologies that are otherwise disguised (dressed up) in the exercise and strictures of Truth and Reason. To show how this state of affairs is produced and reproduced in organizations, Calás and Smircich explore the power infused nature of our taken-for-granted linguistic practices and norms that privilege a series of masculinised values rooted in control, order, and rationality. However, the masculine homosocial order this seeks to maintain and reproduce is undermined by the fact that there is always a semantic excess in language that carries meaning and motivation above and beyond the intentions of its authors and readers/listeners – or above and beyond those intentions that can be recognised and acknowledged. We just need to learn how to unpack this excess and its latent energies.

Whilst on a very superficial reading Calás and Smircich might appear to be playing mere parlour games with texts, they are in fact seeking to stimulate profound social and political change. They do this by engaging with management and its texts in terms of the *pleasures* it can produce despite the best efforts of managerial discourse to deny those 'reading effects'. Offering a politics of pleasure, then, drawing obviously on Barthes (1975), but also deconstructing the opposition between the intimate worlds deemed private and the public realm, their paper has effected considerable social change since its publication. By virtue of its circulation and readership alone, the paper has galvanized feminist studies of organization and changed the way we see our own institutions and practices of management. In this sense it is a political intervention, at one and the same time an academic article and a form of political writing. However, it is a politics that proceeds without those manifestos in which academics with their blueprints for designing social order assume to know 'better' than those to whom this politics is done. Instead, it is a politics that is productive and generative of imagination and even of (im)possible new social orders – impossible in the sense that there is no final order that will bring organization and politics into settlement, but instead a need for on-going and continual struggles with power and its exclusions.

To make these moves Calás and Smircich draw on queer theory in ways that still remain years ahead of many colleagues working in mainstream organization studies for whom the relevance of queer theory might still not be immediately evident. Who could guess, for example, that leadership is as much about repressed or displaced homosexual desire as it is about leading organizations into greater productiveness and efficiency? That we are organized and repressed by a dominant 'homosocial' order that inhibits our politics and limits our capacity for action and imagination? Calás and Smircich show this by reading four widely regarded 'classics' in management and leadership studies (Barnard, McGregor, Mintzberg, Peters & Waterman).

Their reading and explications disclose how these texts attempt to disguise and displace the disavowed strategies of seduction in favour of Reason and its claims to serve and pursue objectivity and Truth. Leadership (Reason, the mind) is shown to both require the repression and disavowal of seduction (Sexuality, the body), but also, paradoxically, to rely upon the same seductions. These repressions always return to unsettle the leader (and author, as leader) and in surprising and often shocking ways. Calás and Smircich show that we can make more or better sense of Barnard and his writing on leadership when we carefully attend to his own economy of seduction, which is evident in the abundant use he makes of a key set of linguistic terms including 'vitality', 'desire', 'creation', 'catalyst', 'cooperation', 'conviction', and 'adherence'.

Calás and Smircich reveal this closet or 'hidden' agenda in Barnard by reading his text 'intertextually' alongside Exner's (1932) contemporaneous *The Sexual Side of Marriage*. With this juxtaposition Calás and Smircich suggest that what Barnard might be carrying and conveying through his text is the idea that 'Leadership is the absolutely necessary creation of desire, a longing, wishing, craving – the creation of sexual attraction that promises to be satisfied through faithful attachment' (p. 575). Exploiting the polysemous – or rather, as they explain – the *disseminating* effects of words and textual semantics, Calás and Smircich, put to work a range of deconstructive reading practices – 'inter-textualizations in parallel and interweaving forms, marginal conversations, iterations, and mimicry' (p. 570) – that produce a whole new repertoire of concepts and understandings to see how politics is always at work (and play) in organization.

The paper is as fresh and astonishing to read today as it was when it was first published, and it takes our appreciation of where political struggle is being waged in organization into silenced and hitherto unimaginable dimensions of management practice. Its status as a key text for studying politics in organization will perhaps not be immediately obvious, but the power of its thesis and the vast number of articles it has inspired in organization studies speaks of its capability as a transformative resource for thinking or doing politics by organizational scholars (Benschop & Dooreward, 1998; Elliot & Stead, 2018; Fotaki, 2013; Knights, 1997; Sinclair, 2000; Vachhani, 2012). It is notable that the paper has also attracted considerable interest and citations even in the more traditional journals of our subject discipline, including the *Academy of Management Review* (Mumby & Putnam, 1992; Schultz & Hatch, 1996). To add to this work, we draw attention to an interstitial between affect (including pleasure) and reason that we find at work in this 1991 paper. Calás and Smircich think with their bodies and its affects. Neither reason nor affect, we might characterise this as the practice of 'reasoned-affect' or an 'affective-reason'. However, this synthesis or hybrid terminology might too quickly erase the interstitial and the energies mobilised by the oscillation that plays in the dualism or opposition of reason and affect. To think politics in organization with this interstice offers exciting opportunities to extend and intensify dimensions of organization life that are currently deemed non-political – and there is now a burgeoning conversation amongst researchers developing affective methodologies to this effect (Fotaki, Kenny, & Vachhani, 2017; Harris & Ashcraft, 2023; Pullen, Rhodes, & Thanem, 2017).

The Drama of Politics and Organization

Czarniawska-Joerges and Jacobsson's (1995) paper is also stylistically innovative and offers, quite literally, another dramatic contribution to our understanding of politics in organization

studies. Respectfully cited in our field, its full significance and influence is perhaps still to come, for reasons no doubt related to the demands it places on our literary skills. These are skills that have been neglected and woefully underdeveloped in research training and doctoral studies programs in management and organization studies (Steyaert, Beyes, & Parker, 2016). Increasingly narrow and technocratic in orientation in recent years, driven by an impatient and instrumental agenda led by the 'marketisation' of higher education, these programs seek to rush junior colleagues into publication rather than to help cultivate their intellectual curiosity.

Written, in part, in the form of a scripted *commedia dell'arte* play, Czarniawska and Jacobsson's paper takes the writing of organization studies into uncharted territory. They do this with a creative verve, but one complemented with exacting rigour and attention to detail. The idea that politics is theatre, and theatre politics, especially in the context of media spectacle and new visual technologies, is easily graspable. However, Czarniawska and Jacobsson do much more than draw an analogy. As they explain, the dramatic form of theatre allows us to explore and convey the complexity, paradoxes, nuances, and subtleties of political action that conventional forms of academic writing, exposition, analysis, and explanation struggle to achieve: 'An ambiguous phenomenon requires' they write 'an ambiguous metaphor' (p. 377).

In developing their approach Czarniawska and Jacobsson draw from a strand of organization studies that found full expression through the movement associated with the Standing Conference on Organizational Symbolism (SCOS), at one time the biggest conference in the field with its own dedicated publication and professional association. Their thinking comes out of conversation within this network of scholars, in particular the work of Iain Mangham and Michael Overington, who pioneered the still somewhat underground classic 'Organizations as theatre: A social psychology of dramatic appearances' (Mangham & Overington, 1987). Building on this, Czarniawska and Jacobsson return to the work of Sigmund Freud, George Herbert Mead, and Erving Goffman where they find the intellectual resources needed to develop an attention and analytical rigour to the 'theatre' of everyday life. Of signal importance to this paper is the use they make of American literary theorist Kenneth Burke (1945/1969) who studied people and their cultures as symbol mediating 'makers', 'users', and 'misusers'. Symbols were not merely superficial, representational, or aesthetic decoration but were productive, action-bearing, and consequential. With these resources, Czarniawska and Jacobsson invite us to consider the subtle and complex ontology at work in the organization of politics; one shrouded in feint and disguise where any certainty or definition of events, motives and interests remains elusive.

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The ostensible object of their study is the politics of public administration organizations in Sweden. They tell us that public administration is an 'ugly duckling' in our discipline insofar as we do not like to admit that much of our disciplinary inheritance comes from a lowly empirical field, one that perhaps lacks the grandeur and status of which other older-standing disciplines in the academy can boast. There are in fact two ugly ducklings in organization studies; the other is politics. Politics is an ugly duckling because of the difficulty many still have in accepting that there are politics in organizations. In popular and more behavioural versions of our discipline – with one or two exceptions aside (Buchanan & Badham, 2020) – politics is often seen as a deviation from the operation of more rational systems of management, administration, and organization. Even in the studies of Buchanan and his collaborators, where politics is recognised as an inextricable element in all organization, the preoccupation with politics as a practical or 'behavioural' skill deployed by individuals restricts our appreciation of the more social and institutional dimensions of politics that play out and mediate work organization. There is, amongst some, an intrinsic difficulty acknowledging politics because it does not easily submit to strict logic or rationalistic methods of enquiry. This often provokes simplistic accusations made of politics and politicians: they lie, mislead, talk with forked tongues, do nothing but speak, etc. However, following Czarniawska and Jacobsson, these accusations are simply ill-considered and imprecise. Anticipating Latour's (2013) more recent proposal that politics forms and occupies its own mode of existence in European modernity, we should instead understand the distinctive ways in which truth is understood and established in politics. What is reasonable in politics is not recognised as reason in laboratory science, nor is it commensurate with what is reason in law. Where science has its methods and procedures for the testing and verification of truth or reason, there are different modes of verification in law, religion, art, or politics. Truth in politics is necessarily complicated, shrouded in a drama of smoke and mirrors, or, more accurately, dependent on the interstices of fact and fiction.

With this in mind Czarniawska-Joerges and Jacobsson (1995) seek to explore the theatrical nature of organizational politics whilst exploiting through subversion the inevitable 'theatre' of academic writing and the journal article form. The assumption that a clear line must exist between truth and lie is revealed as a crude instrument of analysis. We need a more subtle diagnosis when dealing with politics, one that is capable of revealing a more complex and unreliable ontological reality. Czarniawska and Jacobsson deploy this interstice between fact and fiction in their very method of analysis and representation and from within its ambiguity or

undecidability (and tolerance of ambiguity) find productive ways of thinking about politics in organization studies. The agnostic quality of this position (between fact and fiction, without deciding) helps the authors avoid the temptation to over-hasty explanation or to translate and explain politics as an expression of underlying organization theory or set of master principles to which the organizational analyst retains exclusive expertise. Hence, we can understand for example that there are 'roles' which the participants of politics and organization must occupy, but this does not necessarily mean that there is an underlying script that acts to determine what politics can do. Nor should we simply distrust politicians because the performance of a role required of politicians implies some lack of authenticity. These roles have to be renewed moment-by-moment, improvised and re-scripted in the Commedia dell'arte – and this demands individual invention and creativity. In these ways their Commedia dell'arte teaches us how to judge the relative strengths not only of professional politicians but also those who must take up political roles and exercise politics in economic and other formal organizations outside the sphere of political institutions.

Corporate Political Action and the Complex Games of Politics

The paper by Barley (2010) included in our selection is an exceptionally careful piece of what Czarniawska (2016) might label 'detective' work. Informed by political science, historical analysis, and studies of corporate political influence, Barley sets out to sketch a preliminary map of the processes and organizations that 'corral' and persuade the US government to serve the interests of private sector corporations. His thinking comes from a very different tradition to Czarniawska and Jacobsson, advancing a form of institutional theory or organizational institutionalism. From these traditions Barley maps out the shady world of political lobbying made up of corporate appointed public relations and management consultancies, public affairs offices, political action committees (PACs), professional lobbyists, journalists, research foundations, think-tanks, political party managers and politicians.

To map this shape shifting and capricious world requires a good grasp of political science, sociology, economics, law, and all the 'skills of a historian and a taste for the longue durée' (Barley, 2010, p. 779). Patterns that resemble something we would recognize as organization are complex and take time to distil and grasp. Barley traces, for example, the historical formation of a number of 'peak organizations' that represent and coordinate the interests of corporate America and examines the way enabling legislation and the creative mobilisation of extant law helps legitimise and bring these organizations into being. He also 'follows' the money to track the

funding of these organizations. The paper reports findings that shed light on the nature of their hiring and appointment and explores the channels through which their lobbying gets exercised. Barley pursues data that reveal how information is shared and coordinated within this corporate sponsored lobby industry and measures their influence on government by an assessment of time-series data on the volume of testimony they provide to commissions and public enquiries. He also tracks down data that reveal how much money gets invested in media advertising designed to shape public opinion or to mobilise local 'grassroots' activism to take actions in support or opposition of particular policies and proposals.

It is a world we know little about as organizational analysts, but Barley provides a useful entrée that begins to delineate some of its *organizational* properties. Drawing from institutional theory he is able to identify these organizational properties in the form of an 'institutional field'. According to many, an 'institutional field' is 'the central construct' (Wooten & Hoffman, 2017, p. 130) in institutional theory and has been defined as 'the mechanisms of social coordination by which embedded actors interact with one another in predictable ways' (Zietsma, Groenewegen, Logue, & Hinings, 2017, p. 392). The diagram he produces to summarise the key actors, agencies, and organizations (Barley, 2010, p. 794) offers a dense and complicated set of relations and interconnectivities that characterise this embedding, and in this case shows how the field spans and mediates between the macro formal institutions of government and the micro, private world of corporations and their shareholders.

An institutional field is not a bureaucracy with a single apex and source of formal authority, but a form of collective or orchestrated organization made up of multiple actors and organizations of different sizes and shapes, partial and overlapping in activity and jurisdiction, composing networks and relations in ever-shifting patterns of alliance, division, conflict, and division. It also embodies properties of 'organization' itself that is potentially both noun and verb, or process. Neither structure nor agency, within the terms posed by traditional sociological dualisms, an institutional field is often assumed to operate according to the principles of 'structuration' as laid out in Giddens' (1984) highly influential sociology. Thinking with this 'institutional field', Barley opens up another important interstitial space of organization, but one made more intransigent to academic study by virtue of its very furtive and clandestine nature. Here we must think of politics as an ongoing struggle of organization in an interstitial world, conducted by political organizations that are themselves in the interstice of public and private, on behalf of the

political interests of corporate organizations that may shift and change according to calculations and compromise not entirely clear to the unwary observer.

Barley notes that his schemata call for additional work from organization studies. Population ecology, for example, can explore the conditions of possibility that help explain the birth of new organizations, which are born at the same time as the emergence of a wider ecology of enabling organizations, environments, and other conditions of possibilities. He also thinks more network analysis is required because 'Beneath the highly schematic network that I have constructed lie multiple networks of dyadic relations waiting to be documented' (p. 798). Ethnographic work is particularly well-suited to the study of the intricate and inchoate nature of these dyadic relations, much of the activity and work being conducted here designed precisely to avoid public scrutiny. The complexity and multiplicity of this shadowy interstitial world also prompts us to reflect on the limits of our methods and reach as formally and publicly accountable researchers. How to engage key informants, those who occupy for example the role of a 'deep throat' in revealing information about the world they occupy (Bernstein & Woodward, 1974), might be expected to prove challenging. We will also need to re-think how we theorise and explain a world that is enmeshed with the practices of a 'deep state' (Skowronek, Dearborn, & King, 2021). We enter here a world of bluff and counterbluff, a world super-reflexive about itself (Melley, 2017), and a world in which we should expect its participants to be highly educated and likely aware of the academic theories which purport to explain them. The work of foundations and funding bodies identified in this paper are also likely contributing funders to academic theory and research in the social sciences that might corrupt presumed scholarly freedoms.

Historical and Political Conditions in the Rise of Organization Studies
The final paper we include in our selection by Jim March (2007) provides a useful historical analysis of the relation between organization studies and its political and historical conditions of possibility. March charts the changing social and political conditions across Europe and North America since 1945 and shows the intimacy with which different forms of knowledge are bound up with these wider politics. Writing on the cusp of retirement after a long career March speaks with elegance and authority and helps us see how wider politics and geopolitics have had a significant influence on shaping both research priorities and the kind of knowledge which is considered legitimate or illegitimate. March (2007) notes specifically how 'significant features of the field of organization studies were moulded by three critical events in 20th-century history: (1)

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the Second World War, (2) the social and political protest movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s, and (3) the collapse of the Soviet Empire and the triumph of markets' (p. 12).

His paper reminds us that organization studies in North America was first established out of a combination of political science and studies of group behaviour that sought to fill out the black-box of conventional economic theories of the firm. March himself was trained in political science and together with Herbert Simon set out to discover how things like decision-making, resource allocation, administration, and work organization, added complexity that was not recognised in standard microeconomics and economic theories of the firm. In an early paper, March (1962) argued that the business firm was better understood as a 'political coalition' rather than an arena in which rational economic calculation was deployed. The idea of a 'coalition' might not satisfy everyone of course and this is where critical management studies might help explore the complex systems that maintain and occlude power and inequality through a combination of control, repression, and subjugation (Alvesson & Willmott, 1996; Prasad et al., 2016; Pullen, Harding, & Phillips, 2017). In contrast to the extensions to politics encouraged by these critical scholars, there is a fairly conventional understanding of 'politics' at work in March's 2007 paper. March is interested in the practices and institutions associated with government and offices of 'high' politics, which offers a useful counterpoint to the preoccupation with politics of the 'workplace' or the 'local' politics of managerial power struggles over resources and career (Mintzberg, 1973).

March does not quite seem ready to make the break with these conventional dualisms but does offer an effective check-and-balance to the Clegg and Higgins' paper where there was a very clear politically interested prognosis and proposal. Indeed, March concludes with a very interesting provocation to those who seek to promote partisan political values and commitments through their scholarship and returns us to those preoccupations Weber (1946) advanced in his 1909 '*Science as Vocation*' essay. 'In a real sense', March writes, 'the fact that the intellectual future will be at the mercy of historical happenings over which we have little control is not relevant to those of us who are practicing scholars. Our task is not to discern the future in order to join it; nor even to shape it. Our task is to make small pieces of scholarship beautiful through rigor, persistence, competence, elegance and grace, so as to avoid the plague of mediocrity that threatens often to overcome us' (p. 18). That is a statement with its own political commitments of course and with its dedication to beauty, elegance and grace could be cited to endorse a plurality of aesthetics in the study of politics and organization, including those of Calás and Smircich, and Czarniawska and Jacobsson.

With these commitments March (2007) paves a way for how we might become aware of these political, social, and historical conditions of possibility that shape what it is possible for us to think about organizations. Knowledge is both cause and effect of these historical conditions of possibility whether thought in Kantian, Marxist or Foucauldian terms, and existent political and geopolitical realities are often silent 'authors' influencing what it is we can think and speak. This awareness might provide the first step into practices and opportunities through which we might experiment with changing those circumstances. March might have assumed an ideal of personal transcendence in writing his piece, for his essay poses the inevitably reflexive one: What are the historical conditions for March seeing the things he does and writing this particular essay? Is it not better to see all texts like his as potentially transformative of historical conditions, or in struggle with them?

In this way we might be enjoined to work on an interstice ourselves, an interstice between the object of our research and the conditions of possibility that both make it a political object of concern and provide the intellectual resources upon which we can extend our understanding of politics. To avoid the trap of an ahistorical circularity we should also exploit this interstice in ways that illuminate the dynamic forces of history as part of a media and outcome of our modes of knowledge (Carr, 1961). Certain strands of the recent 'historical turn' in organization studies drawing on the genealogical methods of Foucault seem promising in this respect and may prove effective in unsettling and reanimating political struggles around objects not yet seen or deemed 'political' (Rennison, 2007; Wallace, 2022).

Towards the Interstitial: New Objects and Subjects of Political Controversy
These papers in the archives of *Organization Studies* exemplify six different vectors that move us towards a series of interstices that we argue can be highly productive for the future study of politics in our discipline. We first opened up an interstice between modern and non-modern ways of thinking (Anders and Anders), and then between utopian and other ideals that motivate critical inquiry (Clegg and Higgins). Interstitial forms of thinking that relate affect and reason were explored in Calás and Smircich, and we then followed Czarniawska and Jacobsson into a dramaturgical ontology that weaves an interstice between fact and fiction. We saw how Barley opens up an interstice between macro and micro where formal and informal organization create an 'institutional field' that also occupies a space between structure and agent and the public and private, whilst March helped us think our reflexive entanglement in the historical conditions of

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possibility for thinking or acting politically. Care and attention to these interstices can hold open multi-disciplinary and multi-paradigm enquiry whilst also helping to cultivate tolerance and mutual understanding of each other's position, all helpful in realising greater reflexivity and circumspection. We think these are all important resources that organization studies can draw from in our current historical moment to help improve political thinking and negotiations over who gets what, when and how.

Made up of a legacy of modern science and social science, but also the arts and humanities, organization studies is, itself, constitutively an interstitial space. This crossroads allows us to think of politics in a most capacious way. Workplace studies and the sociology of work helps study the various micro-politics of organization: the inter-personal rivalries and jealousies of management and executives (Mintzberg, 1973), for example, to the politics of the 'wage-effort' bargain conducted between management and worker (Batstone, 1984). We can think of the 'political' skill enjoyed by the successful entrepreneur, or the charismatic charm of political leader, but we can also ask what forms of social organization make particular personalities charismatic and attractive. With its roots partly in political science, our discipline also studies the various constitutional and institutional arrangements that form a 'macro' organizational realm where political representation and state administration meet. In tacking this, Clegg and Higgins find an interstice between political ideals and their realization where the practical activities of institution building are informed by expertise and scholarship in organization studies and critical social science. Their paper also helped us think about the interstitial links between the micro and the macro, showing how national political institutions of economic governance could be forged from the ground-up, rooted some would argue in workers struggle in the labour process. We might think of this interstice as a 'meso' level that has been used in organization studies for a variety of different spaces that transgress the separation of macro and micro.

The 'institutional field' of political lobbying explored by Barley occupies a similar meso level in terms of this macro and micro, but it is the interstice between formal and informal organizations and that between structure and action where we think future studies organization might stretch existing theory to think politics in new and exciting ways. It is in these interstices where we find a very fertile space in which primitive and novel experiments in organization may be emerging helping to facilitate or obstruct the realisation of new political imaginaries. A space of contingency, chance and creativity not bound by the measurable or predictable interactions of macro structuring forces and micro-orderings (Garfinkel, 1967), there are likely to be forms of

organization here that remain unfamiliar and for which we have little conceptual vocabulary. Something happens in these interstices prior to the separation of structure and agency, or the division of politics into a macro and micro realm, sometimes conceived in terms of the power of 'the establishment' at a macro level and grassroots activism or resistance in the micro. Falling in the gaps between our analytical categories and distinctions, we don't know if something is large or small, significant, or insignificant (within organizational terms). Hence, what might have been deemed small or marginal can proliferate and extend through channels of organization that make it suddenly become large and more of a 'political' presence. The concept of a 'capillary function' of power as sketched by Foucault in various places (i.e. Foucault, 2001, pp. 86–87) would seem *prima facie* useful in developing these ideas.

With this in mind, think of the politics made recently out of plastics and insulation, or the 'politics in a sausage' to which Latour (2013, p. 481) humorously drew our attention in an effort to show how seemingly small and trivial things can become new 'objects of concern' (Latour, 2005). They become objects of concern through acts of 'translation' that may entail the mobilisation of large-scale collective actions, protest movements and even widespread civil disobedience. Think of the politics made out of the modern contraception pill, especially in terms of gender relations and feminist theories of emancipation, none of which was intended, predictable or designed into the object or material artefact by its laboratory pioneers (see here De Vries, 2007; Latour, 2007; cf. Winner, 1980). Think of the recent explosion of politics around the object or figure of 'the motorist' in UK political discourse, or the volatility that forms around what Marres (2012) calls more generally 'issue politics'.

Marres' work leans heavily on US pragmatist philosophy and especially the thinking of John Dewey (esp. Dewey, 1927) to study this interstice between structure and agency, but one that she would argue needs to be studied in the absence of these traditional sociological dualisms that bookend this interstice. Without the anchoring provided by these dualisms we might face an unpredictable and unruly chaos in the making of politics, but it might also open up a domain of enquiry in which we can explore those organizational features that help explain how current 'populist' forms of politics come to power. We can imagine that this volatility will be exacerbated by an emerging media infrastructure composed of digital communications and AI technologies that will likely demand specialists in organization studies will need to re-imagine the existing repertoire of organizational forms (Husted & Plesner, 2016; Just, De Cock, & Schaeffer, 2021).

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Working with this interstice between structure and agent also renders problematic the idea of a macro and micro as stable and clearly demarcated 'levels' of organization and helps recover what is lively and inchoate in things lying dormant and in potential. Organization studies has made progress in finding ways of avoiding the reification of this scalar opposition and sidestepping its closed dualism, whether through versions of practice theory (Seidl & Whittington, 2014), actor-network theory (Czarniawska, 2016) or the 'communication as constitutive of organization' (CCO) approach (Cooren, Kuhn, Cornelissen, & Clark, 2011). With this more 'flattened ontology' as some call it after the work of DeLanda (1997), we are invited to consider a world more dynamic, contingent, and relational. Here we might trace something like the 'origins' of politics in organization. This can help us understand how quite literally anything can become political, mobilising energies around new 'objects of concern' that we should expect will stimulate sudden outbursts of outrage or popular enthusiasm shifting things from the small-scale to the large and from the marginal to the mainstream.

The interstice between fact and fiction that Czarniawska-Joerges and Jacobsson (1995) identify might also aggravate some of these instabilities and associated volatility. Their work on the dramaturgy of politics poses a fundamental ontological challenge to research in organization studies. Conventional methods of data collection and verification can work to uncover a presumed reality behind the disguise of smoke and mirrors, but they struggle to admit or recognise a world made entirely of smoke and mirrors, especially if they are asked to consider their own complicity in the making of worlds fantastic and obscure. When the map of the territory or schemas of things like institutional fields become known and acted-upon by those we are putatively mapping, we have to admit a further complication: namely our own co-implication in a reflexivity that amplifies self-consciousness amongst practitioners and agents in the practical world of organization (Callon, 1998; MacKenzie, Muniesa, & Siu, 2007). Here, no simple realism can be presumed to exist. As sociology has long known, and in various ways (Garfinkel, 1967; Giddens, 1976; Gouldner, 1970; McHugh, Raffel, Foss, & Blum, 1974), there is a reflexive loop between subject/theory/representation and its object, one that can threaten to dissolve reality into a fuzzy landscape requiring what some have called constant ontological 'gerrymandering' (Woolgar & Pawluch, 1985). There is another politics here to which organization studies has begun to contribute, often associated with citations to the important work of Annemarie Mol (2002) and her development of an 'ontological politics'. This politics demands reflexivity and asks specialists in organization studies to consider the kind of reality to which they are

performatively committed with their theory and methods (Meyer & Quattrone, 2021). If all knowledge is enrolled in political struggles and controversy, we must ask: Who gains and who loses from our interventions and representations?

In making these assessments we need to know the type and form of organization that facilitate politicisation and which forms of organization we are wittingly or unwittingly reproducing in our research by virtue of our position in those wider historical forces, to advance the thesis outlined in March (2007). The history we thought we knew is also increasingly being questioned by the politics of gender, diversity and inclusion, identity politics, race and postcolonial struggles. We can anticipate these politics are going to become increasingly mainstream in organization studies, but we should also be mindful of the effects these movements will have on our conception of methods, epistemology, and ontology. Calás and Smircich (1991) deserve careful study in this respect. Their innovative methods also provide an interesting challenge to the potential trap of reflexivity we argued might disable March – namely his speaking from within the confines of historical conditions whilst presuming to be outside their control. New methods are also needed to bring voice to that which has been silenced – human and more-than-human. Following Calás and Smircich, we might learn to work on the interstices between affect and reason to register these voices.

In this vein many in organization studies have turned to subaltern studies and queer theory (see also Riach, Rumens, & Tyler, 2014; Rumens, de Souza, & Brewis, 2019). Others have experimented with alternative forms of writing (Ericson & Kostera, 2020; Gilmore, Harding, Helin, & Pullen, 2019) including what is called 'affective writing' (Ashcraft, 2017; Gherardi, 2019), '*écriture féminine*' (Vachhani, 2019), and 'dirty writing' (Pullen & Rhodes, 2008). These are not mere adornments or stylistic flourishes, but like Calás and Smircich's (1991) efforts, integral to the specific way in which each method and writing practice helps politicise gender relations and other marginalised identities in organization. They show how these relations are organized and reproduced (but also subverted) in the very writing conventions of the academic article, which are particularly egregious in 'seminal' male authored texts that have helped train generations of students in the techniques and exercise of management. With this in mind, it might be politic to move towards our conclusions.

Conclusions

In setting out this contribution to politics and organization we posed a question that asked: what are the politics at stake in organization studies and how can we help *politicise* the objects of our concern and the conditions of possibility for that politicisation in way that can extend the sense of possibility and choice about the worlds we inhabit? In returning to this question, we might first note that there is no shortage of politics in this historical moment to which organization studies can contribute. There are issues forming around black lives matter, decolonization, no platforming, cancel culture, and transgender rights, to name just a few. These have provoked new controversies and revitalised the university campus and wider society making claims for resources, representation, justice and historical reparation whilst also changing the terms within which this conventional language of politics is framed. There are many other objects and subjects of enquiry being created and brought into purview for organization studies both from within and outside the discipline. Drawing on the writings of Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben, recent 'biopolitical' thinking and 'economic theology' for example is helping broaden our understanding of the terrain in which politics operates and must be studied (Raffnsøe, Mennicken, & Miller, 2019; Sørensen, Spoelstra, Höpfl, & Critchley, 2012). And yet, despite this apparent proliferation of politics, we seem to face a crisis in politics today, at least in the quality and efficacy of representation achieved thought the established institutions of western liberal democracies. Some talk of an era of the 'post-political' with respect to these issues (Wilson & Swyngedouw, 2014), and others more apocalyptically about the end (or ends) of liberal democracy (see Crouch, 2004; Runciman, 2018).

The papers collected here help establish a variety of interstitial spaces of enquiry through which we might now extend the practice of organization studies in ways that will encourage us to think politics in new ways and even to imagine new forms of politics adequate to the challenges we face today. Through the constellation we have formed through these papers we also seek to acknowledge the politics in our own practice as scholars of organization whilst providing resources with which we could address some of the most pressing political issues of our time: the rise of populism, the crisis of liberal democracy, the persistence of poverty and inequality in the richest economies of the world, the inadequate response to the climate crisis from within the institutions of established political representation, or the threats to liberties and employment posed by generative AI and new digital surveillance technologies.

By way of conclusion let us make the provocation that these papers contain signs of something new that moves towards, and perhaps in some ways beyond, the ends of modern social science.

As Foucault (1970), Bauman (1989), and others have shown, our modern social sciences were designed to help engineer or discipline subjectivities and to make them useful to the 'Leviathan' of the modern nation state. We are perhaps now in an interstitial period of history where that Leviathan might be finding its limits. The rise of China, Islam in the Middle-East, and the eclipse of US-backed liberal democracies, are beginning to expose the limits of modern western conceptions of politics and society. Climate change and impeding ecological catastrophe seems inevitable and marks another dimension of these challenges to state-centric thinking given the difficulties of resolving these problems within the existing competitive system of modern nation states. This is also a period of time in which centuries old humanism (Davies, 2008) is rapidly ceding ground to an AI accelerated post-humanism such that our notions of citizenship might have to extend to include hybrid forms of human/more-than-human entities.

If wider historical and political conditions shape our agendas as March (2007) writes, we are given opportunity by this very insight to think our way in and outside these conditions. One way of doing this might be to find ways of exploring that interstice between modern and indigenous knowledges as we saw in Anders and Anders (1986). Recent research shows that some of these pre-modern or 'indigenous' forms of knowledge held societies together for some 60,000 years (Pascoe, 2018). This is proving immensely attractive to many as a way of reimagining new social and political realities and there are signs that some in organization studies are beginning to think politically and to think of politics with these resources (Banerjee & Linstead, 2004; Bastien et al., 2023; Cutcher & Dale, 2023; Whiteman & Cooper, 2000). The scale of these political ambitions may appear to pose a considerable challenge to our discipline, but in many ways they echo the founding work of Weber (1946) whose diagnoses of modernity showed how politics was shaped by a tension between a 'politics of conviction' and an 'ethics of responsibility'. With this dualism, Weber recognised the impossibility of finding a secure or transcendent point of observation and evaluation by which to adjudicate between different values. We are still struggling with this dilemma, but we might find hope in the traditions of diversity and multi-paradigmatic research in our discipline where differences are encouraged and negotiated by way of reason and conversation (and, perhaps, increasingly by way of an 'affectivity'). In these ways we might just escape that *bellum omnium contra omnes* which we like to think of as other to politics.

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