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## **Organization Studies:**

### **A space for ideas, identities and agonies**

It is always tempting to view an academic journal as an object. Authors often seem to regard it as a trophy to be targeted and conquered. Editors and editorial boards may view it as their protégé for whom they have dreams, plans and strategies. Publishers may look at it as a valuable or lacklustre brand, a milk cow, an ugly duckling or simply an asset in their portfolios. Others may approach an academic journal as a resource to be exploited, cited, copied or criticized, or indeed as a badge offered to some and denied to others. Such ways of thinking about journals are deeply entrenched and routinely rehearsed in conversations among academics, researchers and others, whenever they meet on their campuses or their conferences. “I am targeting journal X with my paper, but will settle for journal Y, if I get rejected” says author A; “It is time we gave journal X a facelift” says publisher B; “I plan to grow journal X and increase its impact factor” says editor C. Editors-in-chief are thus recast in the mould of CEOs or, maybe even, as commanders-in-chief ready for battle, reviewing, planning and strategizing. Publishers would then be the war offices responsible for supplies, while authors become the foot soldiers endlessly caught up in the slings and arrows of fortune. As for reviewers, they are maybe the petty officers, determined to keep discipline and order.

It is telling how readily academic journals become objects of such discourses of management, strategy and tactics, in short performativity, even among scholars who normally critique or eschew anything remotely related to performance. It is as if a journal can be managed, grown and raised to the top of various journal hierarchies, league tables and rankings by an all-controlling team of editors aided and abetted by various others. In this paper, I would like to develop a different perspective, one that approaches a journal, not as an object, but as a place where things happen or fail to happen. In particular, I want to look at journals as places where ideas arrive, settle and meet each other, sometimes fight it out, or, more often than not decide to coexist in a civilized and polite way. In such spaces, newcomers are sometimes vigorously questioned or enter unobtrusively and create little niches for themselves. Ideas may nod politely at each other, gang up against each other or, quite commonly, take little notice of each other, co-existing, like people do in large metropolitan spaces, in their cloistered enclosures.

The paper starts by engaging with the editorial visions of the previous and the current editorial teams of Organization Studies. I argue that such proclamations have only a modest impact on the way that editors, reviewers, authors and readers engage with the journal. The journal, I suggest, is embedded in a network of institutional practices, including the peer review procedure, the politics of academic tenure and the economics of publishing which substantially limit its freedom of action. What gets published is far more likely to reflect such practices than the editors' vision of what they would like to see published in their journals. It is for this reason that I turn to these practices, in the second part of my article;

specifically, I focus on the effects of the peer review process, noting certain current trends for increasingly laborious progression of manuscripts and highlighting the acute anxieties that this generates. The purpose of this part is to highlight some of the anxieties that are fostered by the ethos of criticism that underpins the review process. In the final part of the paper, I broaden the discussion of the anxieties by stretching the analogy of the journal as an urban space. I argue that, like the spaces of large cities, journals too become spaces crucial for the formation of individual and group identities, something that is accompanied by much agonizing about quality, acceptance, purity, contamination and even annihilation. I conclude the paper with some reflections on the ethic of rational critique, at once the bedrock of academic discourse but also capable of inflicting much damage and of prematurely closing promising lines of inquiry; in particular, I argue that this ethic must be complemented by an ethic of care which stems from a recognition of fallibility and limits to our rationality. An ethic of care, I will argue, must inform not only the interactions among a journal's different stakeholders but may spread to an attitude of stakeholders towards the journal, an attitude that approaches the journal as a valued intellectual space to be nurtured and cared for.

In the case of Organization Studies the manner in which the journal is embedded in institutional practices are even more complex and far-reaching. Here is a journal that pioneers and promotes particular discourses of organization. Yet, the journal is also an organizational output and, maybe, an organization in its own right. Organization Studies is a journal that represents specific management

traditions and, yet, something that must itself be managed, a journal that debates different scholarly practices and yet is itself the result of such practices. It is fronted by an editorial team which, in line with current management and publishing practices, must proclaim a vision. These visions certainly reflect the priorities and values of the editorial team – however, I would like to argue that, however noble or well-intentioned, cannot evade institutional practices in which the journal is embedded and only have a moderate influence on what gets published.

The journal's previous editorial team struggled to articulate a vision for the journal, concerned that "intellectually open-minded, high-impact academic journals are not loose associations of academics who publish anything that takes their fancy, but knowledge-validating systems which need to maintain variety and conflict in order to keep intellectual life alive, while, at the same time, being animated by a broader 'commanding vision'" (Tsoukas, Garud, & Hardy, 2003: 1006).

Tsoukas and his colleagues started from the premise that a vision for the journal must be animated by a vision of organizations and a vision of organizations must be animated by a vision of an organizational society. They then criticized "the commanding vision of a rationally organised society superior to local rationalities, consisting of rationally guided individuals working within organizations that strive to optimize certain variables so that they maximize the chances of surviving in a market economy, itself seen as invariant across space and time" (Tsoukas,

Garud, & Hardy, 2003: 1006). Such a ‘Newtonian ideal’, argued Tsoukas and his colleagues, was no longer tenable for two fundamental reasons. First, it approached societies, organizations and individuals from a rather ‘limited view of rationality’ and, second, it underestimated the complexity of processes, context and time, in a social world that is highly interconnected, interactive and unpredictable, full of interlinked institutions with different visions and interests. Tsoukas and his team dismissed as sociologically naïve a view of the journal as “just a tabula rasa waiting for papers to fill in its blank space”, proposing instead an ‘ecological style’ for the journal “animated by the vision of a new ‘cosmopolis’ – a new underlying order of nature and society based on a more inclusive as well as humble conception of reason – as the animating vision of intellectual life” (Tsoukas, Garud, & Hardy, 2003: 1007).

It is instructive to contrast the editors’ vision in 2003 with that of the current editorial team. In a recent editorial, they set out their own vision for the journal which revolves around two themes: “(1) Building on the shoulders of giants, and (2) Being read, being listened” (Courpasson, Arellano-Gault, Brown, & Lounsbury, 2008: 1384). At first sight, the ambitions of this statement are more limited than that of its predecessor and more pragmatic – the editors explicitly view the journal as participating in a highly competitive game of high stakes where impact factors, citation indexes and the like matter, a game they are determined to play well. To succeed in this game, they argue that the journal must be a ‘look-out’ point “capable of giving some directions about topics of interest which are crucial for the organizational world and the people who inhabit it”

(Courpasson et al., 2008: 1385) and proceed to encourage scholars to reengage “with big questions through leading an ‘academic movement’ striving to bring society back to center stage, enriching our conceptions of politics and societal struggles” (p. 1386, emphasis in the original). This is where ‘the giants’ of the past enter the vision of the current editorial team – it is Weber, Tönnies, Durkheim, Tocqueville, the founders of the great sociological tradition, who established “the broad organizational thematics that we believe provide useful focal points for OS scholarship.” (p. 1384) It will be noted that whereas Tsoukas et al proceeded from the belief that society and organizations had moved irreversibly beyond the thematics of modernity, rationality, community, patriarchy, and so forth, Courpasson and his team want to emphasize continuity and use the ‘giants’ of the past as a way of inspiring their current contributors and readers to reengage with the big questions. They insist that

it is of utmost importance that Organization Studies lead the way by re-investigating the links existing between organizations, policies and politics. In other words, how organizations ... are interpenetrated with society and generate specific patterns of how we live in societies, as well as how those societies are actually governed and shaped. ... [W]e believe that a more sustained engagement with such ‘big’ questions might provide a useful focal point for more cosmopolitan and engaged conversations across different research communities. (Courpasson et al., 2008: 1386)

While the emphasis on big questions is certainly one to be welcomed, it seems to me that the earlier editorial wisely cautions against identifying the big questions of today with those of the past. In bravely arguing that their vision of the journal as a ‘look out’ from which to address the big issues of our times, the questions of organization, democracy and policy, do the editors undermine their own premise that Organization Studies is itself part of a moving polity, part of society, an organization in its own right? Far from representing an Archimedean point (or a Newtonian ideal) from where we can cast our imperious and impervious glance onto an unchanging world, should we not, more realistically, approach the journal as part of complex networks of relations, institutions and discourses?

Consider for example, the way that ‘big questions’ get defined as each age articulates its concerns and anxieties. Yesterday’s ‘big question’ often becomes tomorrow’s parochial concern, just as today’s idiosyncratic questioning may soon become part of the mainstream. Consider how the business scandals and financial crisis of the recent past have prompted ‘big questions’ about the moral failure of individuals and the role of business schools in inculcating an ideology of untrammelled market hegemony rather than questioning the untrammelled market hegemony itself. Or consider, how questions of gender, race and ethnicity turned from peripheral concerns of minority groups into ‘big issues’ for everyone in a matter of three or four decades. And is it not conceivable that today’s concerns with language and discourse may one day come to be viewed as part of the kind of introspective narcissism characteristic of societies and discourses in decay?



Big questions come from being able to critique and undermine big assumptions, while introducing big assumptions of their own; neither big assumptions nor questions stay firm. They both change in line with wider social dynamics and anxieties mirroring what Tsoukas et al referred to as the “complexity of processes, context and time” (Tsoukas, Garud, & Hardy, 2003: 1006). It seems to me then that far from being a sovereign entity capable of deciding its own direction, mission and values, a journal is engaged in a wide range of practices which reflect the organizational and social realities in which it operates: the academics’ struggles for tenure, promotions and status, the business schools’ ruthless competition for rankings, the publishers’ changing preoccupations (from circulation to impact factors), the established conventions of anonymous reviews and so forth. It is tempting then to paraphrase John Donne’s famous poem “No journal is an island, entire in itself; each journal is a piece of a continent” – and, as we now know, but often ignore at our perils, continents are not stable, they move.

Of course, editors would not be doing their job if they did not from time to time write editorials articulating their visions. Editorials are established scholarly practices, the prerogatives and obligations of newly arrived editorial teams. As historical documents, editorials can offer insights into the concerns, horizons and blind spots of specific moments and, as I hope the preceding discussion has shown, can be usefully treated as objects of study in their own right. Yet, with few exceptions (mostly special issue editorials), editorials do not get very often cited and, if information given by publishers on ‘most read articles’ is to be believed,

they are not much downloaded either. The current editors of Organization Studies may staunchly “believe that journals need to be much clearer about what work they aim to publish. We have to define our conceptual boundaries much more clearly, beyond the willingness to foster interdisciplinary debates and conversations” (Courpasson et al., 2008: 1387) – in truth, however, such exhortations rarely influence the work of authors, reviewers, and, I suspect, even editors themselves in their daily practices of reviewing, rejecting and editing articles. It is to the writing, reviewing and editing of papers that I now turn my attention, since it seems to me that they, in the last resort, determine what gets published and (to use the current editors’ concerns) whether and how what gets published is “being read and being listened”.

### **Academic publishing: Some observations**

Journals are not, as Tsoukas and his team rightly recognized, empty spaces waiting for papers to fill them. But neither are they carefully compiled texts, rationally assembled in line with the concerns expressed in editorials the way that encyclopaedias, dictionaries or even anthologies are. They are places where theories, arguments, concepts and other ideas enter, following well-rehearsed practices of anonymous academic reviews, commissioned special issues and nominated spaces for particular types of features. These are both bureaucratic practices, in that they follow, highly predictable and routinized trajectories and political practices in that what gets published and what rejected, as well as the vicissitudes it undergoes before getting published or rejected are barely concealed

exercises in power and resistance. The process of academic peer reviews has attracted considerable attention in recent years (Bedeian, 2003; Bedeian, Van Fleet, & Hyman, 2009a; Gilliland & Cortina, 1997; Raelin, 2008; Starbuck, 2003; Trevino, 2008; Tsang & Frey, 2007; Tsui & Hollenbeck, 2009). In fact, it seems virtually self-evident that, along with procedures for promotion and tenure with which publishing is intimately intertwined (Baruch & Hall, 2004), what gets published is one of the most political processes in which most of today's academics will ever become involved.

As a long-standing reader, writer, reviewer and editor, I have noticed certain trends in the way academic journals function that mark both continuities with and discontinuities from the past. First, it is incontestable that there is a vast growth of academic publishing and a proliferation of research publications. This is undoubtedly related to the rapid growth of business schools internationally, the growth in numbers of active management academics and the continuous pressures to evaluate and rank academic institutions, whether universities, schools, journals or individuals. The British Association of Business Schools, in its current list, evaluates over 800 academic (rather than practitioner) business journals on a scale of 1-4 (See <http://www.the-abs.org.uk/?id=257>) . Such evaluations are highly political practices that make editors of today far more sensitive to their journal's rankings in citation indexes, impact factors and the like.

The rise in publishing activity requires huge amounts of unpaid academic time (to write, revise, read, review and reject). This is encouraged by publishers for whom

journals represent relatively little risk and, in these times of electronic publishing, small financial outlay. Another major factor behind the proliferation of academic journals are research assessment reviews in the UK and, increasingly other countries, which mean that academics are now expected to publish on a continuous basis until their retirement. It is worth noting that the proliferation of journal activity has taken place, partly, at the expense of the research monograph which has become increasingly rare in the areas of management and organizational theory. A recent visit to London's largest historical bookshop, revealed a mere four short shelves of books on organizational theory (rather less than the shelf space in sociology occupied by authors between Bauman and Bourdieu), nearly all textbooks. Instead of writing or reading books, there are now more academics, seeking to publish more papers each in a larger number of journals. Not surprisingly this poses new challenges for the researcher as reader who is confronted with huge numbers of articles from which to choose what to consult.

The electronic availability of most academic articles means that researchers rarely visit their libraries to get hold of hard copies of journals and read articles of interest to them. Faced with a huge proliferation of published material (and even more material available on the web), it seems to me that most academics pick up articles that they see cited in others or which surface in electronic searches. Conversations with colleagues indicate that the majority of them read mostly the abstracts and spend relatively little time carefully assimilating detailed arguments, which suggests to me that, for many, reading (with the notable exception of

reading for the purpose of writing a peer review) has become a less important activity than writing. Academics often tell one another about what they are writing and relatively seldom about what they have read. At the risk of exaggerating, I would venture to say that the majority of academics may imagine themselves to be writing for an audience of readers, when in fact they are writing for an audience of fellow-writers – scholars who will predominantly cast their eyes on whatever promotes their own writing agendas.

Let us now turn more carefully to the review process itself, a long established set of academic practices aimed at ensuring the quality of what gets published through the golden standard of anonymous refereeing by experts in the field.

Criticism lies at the heart of the review process, where ideally a discussion takes place between authors and reviewers, with the mediation of the editor, through which research findings, arguments and theories are tested, rejected, qualified, extended and refined. This clearly distinguishes academic journal publishing from other forms of publishing that are dictated by different considerations.

Undoubtedly, when peer review functions well it results in carefully considered papers which have been cleaned of inaccuracies and infelicities. Thus, Rynes (2001) reports that award-winning authors of the Academy of Management Journal acknowledged that their papers had greatly improved as a result of the review process, while 74% of authors who had published in the Academy of Management Review and the Academy of Management Journal between 1999 and 2001 agreed or strongly agreed with the view that their papers had improved

enough as a result of the review process to warrant the extra work and the delays in publication.

Yet, the aim of criticism is not only to help authors enhance their work – an equally important purpose is to explain, justify and legitimize rejection of articles. With prestigious journals rejecting 95% or more of submitted articles, fine and nuanced judgements are required to determine what gets through different stages of reviews. These can be especially thorny if numerous different associate editors are involved in making such judgements and if the articles being submitted are highly diverse in content, methodology and form. However objective reviewers and editors seek to be, criticism can never be entirely objective. Thus Starbuck (2003), a highly experienced editor of the Administrative Science Quarterly, has provided strong evidence that agreement between different reviewers of an article is very rare and criticizes reviewers and editors for automatically assuming that they have greater competence than authors. Reservations about the review procedures are even more wide-spread among authors; Bedeian (2003) notes that very substantial numbers of authors whose manuscripts were eventually published regarded the revision requests as biased, arbitrary or idiosyncratic; Bedeian and colleagues (2009b) question, on the basis of a comparison with editorial practices in other disciplines, whether the reviewers of leading management journals are better qualified than the authors whose work they review; and Raelin (2008), having considered carefully, different criticisms of the peer review process gives serious consideration to radical alternatives – for example, the eventual disclosure of the reviewers' names to authors (McCutchen, 1991), or, more drastically,

Tsang and Frey's (2007) proposals that academic reviews should lead to a rejection or acceptance of a paper 'as is', rather than lead to a long sequence of revisions with questionable outcomes. He concludes that the merits of such measures are outweighed by their drawbacks and urges editors to exercise proper editorial screens in checking cronyism, nepotism and attendant abuses of power.

My personal experience as contributor, reviewer and editor, suggests that today's review practices are harsher and more forbidding than those in the past. I often hear colleagues 'bracing themselves' prior to submitting an article to an 'elite' journal. I have received reviews and seen reviews sent to other authors that go beyond any boundary of collegiality and civility, and, maybe, more depressingly, I have seen many numbers of nit-picking and pedantic reviews that are enough to discourage and depress most sensitive people. It is rare to read a review as author, editor or fellow reviewer, that suggests any genuine enthusiasm, generosity of gratitude on the part of the reviewer, and it is very common to encounter reviews that, as Starbuck (2003: 345) puts it, have the reviewer or the editor thinking "I could say this better", "I see a more interesting problem" and "I could design a better study". Criticism, in these circumstances, can easily degenerate into destructive denigration whose perceived purpose is to justify rejection.

The result of all this is that submitting to a 'quality' journal these days appears to have become virtually a trial by ordeal, leaving some losers devastated and even many winners badly bruised. Publishing is now a long process, involving numerous revisions, citing authors one does not care for, engaging with arguments

one is not interested in and seeking to satisfy different harsh masters, often with conflicting or incompatible demands, while staying within a strict word limit. Most authors will go through these tribulations and the drudgery of copious revisions, accepting virtually any criticism and any recommendation with scarcely any complaint, all in the interest of getting published. The entire process, from first submission to possible rejection or several rounds of revisions, provokes deep anxieties in authors since they find themselves in a very exposed position where they have to put up with constant criticism of their work, and sometimes their scholarship and identity.

Recognition of the positive powers of criticism goes back to the Greeks who developed a systematic questioning of what appeared as self-evident truths, but also of systems of government, education and so forth. Criticism can be positive or negative – at its most basic it involves a judgement of quality. Negative criticism entails a dissatisfaction with something and a decision to challenge it in some way. At its simplest, it states “X is not good” where X can be a work of art, a person, a theory, a government or virtually anything else. At a different level, criticism states “X is not what it seems – look deeper”. Criticism may be driven by fashion, taste, habit, tradition, envy and many other things, but in the review process, it is rightly assumed to be driven by a quest for a certain type of knowledge. This knowledge is governed by certain regimes of truth, where statements and arguments are scrutinized and critiqued if unsubstantiated, arbitrary, inconsistent or unoriginal (See, Gabriel, 2008b: 63-4). The word ‘rational’ has itself become the target of serious critique, but it would make sense



to say that rational (rather than other types of) criticism represents the fundamental value of the review process. Such criticism is meant to eliminate poor papers, improve flawed ones and recognize excellent ones.

Yet, it seems to me that the value of criticism is itself sometimes accepted uncritically. Is there a downside to criticism? Criticism, even ‘rational’ criticism, can be destructive, especially when levelled at a theory, a process or a person in their early stages of development. Many a good idea has been killed by criticism and some promising scholars are discouraged or devastated by harsh criticism by reviewers. The harmful potential of criticism is most evident when what is criticized is dear to us, and few things are more dear to scholars than the paper, their ‘baby’, on which they have toiled for months or years. Few things are more important for their self-esteem or identity as researchers. And few things hurt as much or engender such deep anxieties as negative criticism of their work, especially when it is seen as driven by misunderstanding, envy or arrogance.

In this part of the paper, I am not seeking to apportion blame or to bemoan the practices of academic review. What I am doing is offer evidence that these practices create intense anxieties in authors, some of whom are left with deep scars. Some of these anxieties not regularly recognized or their implications are not adequately appreciated. Authors themselves may be partly to blame for some of the harshness of current review practices – I suspect that some reviewers find themselves exasperated with papers that are distinctly unfinished, incomplete or fundamentally flawed. Some of them may contain the germ of an interesting

theme or idea, but are far from ready to undergo the rigours of a proper review. The fact that far too many experimental, poorly argued papers are currently being submitted is undoubtedly linked to pressures on academics to publish, the ease of electronic submissions but may also, possibly, be encouraged by journals themselves that see such papers as boosting the ‘rejection rates’, irrespective of the wasted effort they entail and the disappointment in which they result.

In summary it seems to me that, if as Courpasson and his co-editors argue, academic publishing is a game (Courpasson et al., 2008: 1385) – a metaphor I personally neither like nor endorse – it is so not only for editors and publishers but equally for authors and reviewers. It is a game that provokes extensive anxieties in all participants. Authors, as we have seen, find themselves in a highly exposed situation against editors and reviewers. Editors find themselves worrying about their journal’s profile in citation indices and lists of rankings, about finding suitable reviewers (e.g. Trevino, 2008; Tsui & Hollenbeck, 2009) and about alienating academics whose work they reject. Reviewers find themselves stretched by extensive demands on their time, frequently having to review what they regard as inferior manuscripts. If the editor and his/her team are players in the big game (conducted at the level of publishers, ranking agencies and so forth), they are referees in the smaller games being played within their own journal, which, like the bigger game, are highly political ones. As referees, they have some influence but no overall control on the quality of the game being conducted on their premises (not least for the benefit of the spectators), even if the players may view them as commanding and powerful figures.

## **Organization Studies: Identities and agonies**

What then of the material that eventually gets past the critical eye of academic reviewing? Some articles, to be sure, emerge considerably improved, better argued and better articulated. Some become over-extended with all kinds of redundant tangents and superfluous references present predominantly to satisfy reviewers. Yet others appear in print with life sucked out of them, as their authors sought to please several harsh masters at once, trying to double-guess the nature of their reservations and seeking to incorporate as many of the reviewers' personal (and sometimes idiosyncratic) tastes as possible. Given the idiosyncrasies of this process, it is not surprising that some good papers which fail the review procedures of a journal do eventually get published in another and often not inferior one. I am aware of numerous excellent and well-cited papers that started as rejects (and even desk-rejects) in other journals.

As a reader, I am happy to read a journal on a regular basis, provided I can find one or two articles to arouse my interest or my enthusiasm in each issue, something that currently happens with six or seven academic journals. I consider myself a member of the regular constituency of Organization Studies not because I am a member of EGOS (there are many scholars in EGOS for whom Organization Studies does not seem the natural reading or publishing home), but because it meets consistently this test. All the same, what I encounter in each issue

comes as a surprise and does not follow any consistent pattern. In recent issues of the journal, I have read a fascinating article on the increasing detachment of the concerns of academic researchers from those of practising managers and its implications for Turkey (Usdiken & Wasti, 2009); an insightful analysis of public policy as a mode for effecting discourse transformations and its ramifications for organizational legitimacy (Motion & Leitch, 2009); an outstanding attempt to bring Lacanian and psychoanalytic theory to address issues of identity as lack (Driver, 2009); a path-opening article on the importance of visual representations for knowledge work (Ewenstein & Whyte, 2009); a thought-provoking, if at times puzzling, article on reflexivity (Rhodes, 2009); a potentially very useful article on how metaphors can be used to conceptualize key theoretical concepts with special reference to the controversial concept of social capital (Andriessen & Gubbins, 2009); and what seems to me as the most thought-provoking article on leadership that I have read for some considerable time (Grint, 2010). I have seen special issues on organizations and risk in late modernity, organization studies as a science for design, on the metamorphosis of (the theory of) the firm, and on recent developments in communication theory. In the near future, I look forward to reading special issues on psychoanalytic perspectives, on climate change and the emergence of new organizational landscapes and on the dark side of organization.

Contemplating these riches, I must say that they represent a huge diversity of perspectives, approaches and topics, but scarcely the products of a single unifying vision or strategy, like those I examined in the earlier part of the article. They are not parts of the same discourse, but different discourses that find themselves in the

same locale. They reflect the wide range of interests of numerous loose communities of scholars, whose work may be read in many other journals as well. They publish in Organization Studies because of the journal's reputation and quality rather than because they see themselves participating in a discourse for which Organization Studies is the natural home. The journal may not be an open space for all-comers, but it is certainly a wide terrain in which many different theories and ideas co-exist. Of course, this terrain is not open. It has boundaries, as we have seen, which are vigilantly patrolled by editors and reviewers. Some enter the terrain following rigorous inspections and fairly strict procedures, on the first or subsequent attempt, a few make it following less severe checks and to many entry is denied. Maybe, like illegal migrants, a few articles enter journals clandestinely by using some clever ruse or other or through their authors' sheer persistence.

Within the space of Organization Studies it is rather rare to encounter direct conflict or clash of such ideas and, when it happens, it is usually cast as a polemic – a genre that permits direct refutation and even denunciation of specific approaches. Most of the time, however, once the dust of the review process has settled and the papers have appeared in print, they give the impression of coexisting in a tolerant and civilized way, nodding politely at each other or taking little notice of each other. Quantitative research coexists with qualitative, empiricism with post-structuralism, psychoanalysis with positivism, institutional theory with Actor Network Theory and so forth. In a recent article, This may well be linked with McKinley's (2010) interesting argument that in the last thirty years

or so, theory development has displaced the struggle for validation, replication and scholarly consensus as the goal of organizational studies; he contrasts the current proliferation of voices and approaches with a far more intimately interwoven discourse of argument, agreement and disagreement that followed the publication of the Aston group research in the 1960s, suggesting that a Kuhnian 'normal science' of the 1960s has been replaced by a proliferation of theories and a multiplicity of voices that can be incomprehensible to each other and irrelevant or confusing to practitioners.

A different way of describing the situation would be to argue that a village square type of academic discourse of organizations has been replaced by a large urban space where ideas, like people, live together in close proximity, but going about their individual business hardly noticing most of the others. Along with theorists of modernity, I find it instructive to juxtapose urban co-existence to village life, without idealizing or vilifying either. Both have their attractions and their tensions. Village life may sometimes be shrouded in nostalgia for cohesive communities but even superficial acquaintance suggests a variety of anxieties resulting from interpersonal rivalries, petty jealousies and long-standing feuds. The emergence of the modern metropolis freed people from such anxieties creating a potentially exciting place where, from time to time, different trends and currents meet and new currents and trends emerge. But as Simmel recognized at the rise of modernity, urban spaces create serious anxieties of their own, namely those over individuality and identity. Surrounded by countless unknowns, being a face in the crowd, a number on a register is not easy:

The deepest problems of modern life derive from the claim of the individual to preserve the autonomy and individuality of his existence in the face of overwhelming social forces, of historical heritage, of external culture, and of the technique of life. (Simmel, 1903)

Had Simmel lived for another 100 years to observe the vast dislocations of people brought about by the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, the rise of multicultural societies and the emergence of identity politics, he would have had no difficulty in extending his diagnosis of ‘deepest problems’ to group identities, linked to fears of being contaminated, swamped or marginalized. These are not very different from the anxieties and concerns that are regularly rehearsed in editorial meetings of Organization Studies and other journals; in particular, concerns about colonization by different ideas and practices regularly surface and lead to repeated questioning about the journal’s identity, its true mission and its role in society, in short those issues that are periodically addressed in editorials. In the case of Organization Studies, concerns range from whether the study of organizations constitutes a sovereign field, entitled to its own institutions and spaces or, conversely, whether it is ultimately derivative and transient. One only has to reflect on the rise and decline of the fields of administration and industrial relations in the last forty years to appreciate the reasons for concerns that ‘organization studies’ may decline or even disappear altogether as a recognizable signifier, absorbed perhaps

by leadership studies or communication studies. In such circumstances, might groups of organization studies (European and other), departments of organizational studies, doctorates in organizational studies and even publications in journals called Organization Studies not seem rather anachronistic and faded? And what about identities revolving around the signifier of organization studies? We could then usefully apply the insights of scholars who have theorized organizational identity (e.g. Brown & Starkey, 2000; Cornelissen, 2002; Humphreys & Brown, 2002) to the field of organization studies itself in order to identify some of the fissures and tensions that it encompasses as well as some of the anxieties precipitated by identity transitions and crises (Craib, 1998). It could well be that such anxieties parallel unconscious anxieties associated with fragmentation and decomposition, noted by theorists like Lacan (2006) and Klein (1987), which occur in early infancy (the pre-mirror stage) when a child's sense of self has not yet consolidated into a unified entity and it may well be that they remain unconscious for much of the time.

Fragmentation and decomposition are linked to two other types of anxiety – those of parasitism/provincialism and practical irrelevance. It is surely remarkable how one-sided the flow of concepts, theories and ideas from other disciplines to organizational theory has been. Organizational scholars have consistently borrowed, translated and 'imported' concepts, theories and ideas from other disciplines, whereas hardly any ideas from organizational scholarship have filtered out to the exporting disciplines. It would be unthinkable for any scholar of organizations not to have heard of Max Weber, Michel Foucault, Herbert Simon



or Anthony Giddens; yet, there are remarkably few psychologists, sociologists or economists who have ever heard of the likes of Henry Mintzberg, Karl Weick or Gareth Morgan, or sought to make use their theories. Furthermore, as a spate of recent angst-ridden publications suggest (see, for example, Bennis & O'Toole, 2005; Ghoshal, 2005; Pfeffer, 2005; Rynes, Bartunek, & Daft, 2001), there is an acute sense among scholars of organizations, especially those working in business schools, that their work is irrelevant or even deleterious to practicing managers and professionals. With very few exceptions (of which the Harvard Business Review must be the most notable), publishing in high impact journals has become virtually tantamount to having low or no impact on anyone outside academia.

If such identity anxieties over the survival of organization studies as a discipline, its provincial and parasitical status and its practical irrelevance were not enough, they are compounded by anxieties over its true identity, the legacies from which it draws its legitimacy and the ways through which it may increase its influence. If we needed further confirmation that the journal is not an island but an embedded institution of society, we only have to reflect on current concerns by European scholarship about being dominated or colonized by academic practices and institutions from across the Atlantic. While American journals and universities, in general, have long welcomed those from other cultures who are willing to play by their rules, some European journals and academic institutions appear deeply troubled by what they view as the prospect of their Americanization. This directly mirrors the deep European unease following the collapse of the communist world and the emergence of the United States as the world's uncontested superpower. Its

subsequent uses and abuses of this power in different parts of the globe, the continuing hegemony of American cultural and life-style products, have led to an 'othering' of America in many European institutions which has a parallel in academic life.

While most Americans seem unconcerned whether McDonald's, Disney or The Sopranos are embraced or rejected by other cultures, many Europeans view American culture, no less than American military power, as a threat to their institutions, their practices and indeed their identity. The ubiquity of the English language, its adoption in numerous international events and the gradual accommodation of English terms in other languages has often made Britain, in the eyes of Europeans, appear as little more than America's fifth column, a view unfortunately reinforced by the recent British government's unquestioning following of American foreign and military policies. It is possible to observe an 'othering' of America, its politics, economics and culture in numerous different forums, including academic ones, where it is the product of imaginary fears about erosion of identity, about silencing of important cultural traditions and about intellectual identity. American scholarship then is seen as standing for quantity against quality, for academic fashion against tradition, for technique against wisdom, for uniformity against variety. As with every type of othering, much of this is the product of various anxieties which led to various attempts to defend European identity and practices against their colonization from across the Atlantic.

## Conclusions

In this paper, I have argued that Organization Studies, like other academic journals, is a space where theories, arguments and perspectives arrive, following a review process which is meant to expose them to critical scrutiny. They settle and meet each other, occasionally disagreeing but more often coexisting without engaging with each other. Using the analogy of people living together in large metropolitan spaces, I suggested that journals too are crucial for individual and group identities, something that generates numerous anxieties. In particular, I singled out anxieties related to the legitimacy, identity and future of the discipline of organization studies, anxieties resulting from the competitive pressures of impact factors and citation indexes as well as anxieties about the journal's European ethos and its potential encroachment and contamination by American academic practices and institutions. Furthermore, I underlined some of the anxieties that inevitably afflict contributors to the journals, as a result of current reviewing practices, harsh critiques, numerous revisions and regular rejections. In short, the argument has led to a recognition that Organization Studies is a place associated with considerable angst. This is not a critique of the journal but the outcome of current academic practices and the institutional context in which journals operate. Even at a time where performance of individuals and organizations is constantly monitored and measured (Boyle, 2000; Power, 1997), I doubt that there are many professions whose members are so relentlessly subjected to measurement, criticism and rejection as academics, exposing them to

deep insecurities regarding their worth, their identity and their standing. Vision statements, as expounded in editorials, may not so much represent realistic aspirations or objectives pursued by the journal's leadership, as wish-fulfilling affirmations and attempts to cope with different anxieties (Thomas, 1993), especially those regarding legitimacy, identity and impact. Editors, I suggested, have moderate influence over the journal's content and direction, arguing that the journal is part of a wide web of social and political relations and institutions, from which it cannot detach itself.

I would like now to conclude by arguing that, while editors can exercise modest control over what gets published in the journal, they can influence the way the journal conducts its business and good editors can, in fact, make a difference, even if this takes patience and time. Some of it, lies in good management practices – prompt responses, skilful selection of reviewers, helpful facilitation of discussions between reviewers and authors and occasional over-ruling of reviewers. Good editors do not merely encourage new talent to their journal, but they can spot trends and anticipate developments – they can 'read' the times and make adjustments ensuring that their journal stays ahead of the game (for constructive suggestions of some of the things that can enhance the quality of editorial work, see, for example Raelin, 2008; Starbuck, 2003; Trevino, 2008). In short, good editors exercise a wide range of skills and judgements, some tacit, some explicit, which over a period of time have a bearing on their journals' reputation and standing. Equally, poor editors may have a negative influence on their journals through a myriad of actions and decisions.

Beyond good management and editorial work, however, it seems to me that good editors, like effective leaders and effective educators, are those who can successfully manage the emotions, including the anxieties, in the midst of which they, their authors and their reviewers, find themselves. The management of emotion and, closely related, the management of meaning are now being increasingly recognized as vital functions of leadership (see, for example, Gabriel, 2002; George, 2000); this is only partly accounted for by the current popularity of the concept of emotional intelligence (see, for example, collection in Mayer et al., 2004). More generally, the containment and defusion of potentially toxic emotions is recognized as instrumental for the effective functioning of organizations (Frost & Robinson, 1999; Stein, 2007). It seems to me that journal editors must perform a very similar function, not least because toxic emotions, including the anxieties that we identified earlier, professional envy (Fineman, 2000; Stein, 2000; Vidaillet, 2008), guilt, shame, to say nothing of narcissistic arrogance and pride can proliferate.

It is for this reason that I would like to conclude this article by advocating that journal editors should seek to balance the ethic of criticism that I noted earlier with an ethic of care which treats people with respect and consideration, as individuals rather than as players or pawns. Since it was first articulated by Carol Gilligan in connection with the moral development of young girls (1982), the ethics of care discourse has generated many insights in diverse fields ranging from international relations to psychology and moral philosophy (see, for example,

Held, 2006). In the field of organizational studies, however, it has been substantially ignored (for a couple of exceptions, see Gabriel, 2008a; Tyler & Taylor, 2001). Ethics of care approaches caring as a vital dimension of most human interactions and as the foundation of a particular type of morality. In contrast to the 'ethics of justice', ethics of care does not rely on claims of universality, absolute judgements of right and wrong, and perfect virtues. Instead, it is a morality that grows out of a recognition that all people are embedded in different webs of social relations, being dependent on others for their survival and well-being and capable of supporting others in their moments of need and helplessness.

A large part of this debate concerns the gendered nature of care, whether in other words, women are more disposed by nature, culture or other factors for caring than men and how this affects power relations between the genders (Held, 2006; Kittay, 1999; Kittay & Feder, 2002; Noddings, 1986; Tronto, 1993). What seems likely is that while both women and men can act in caring ways, at least in Western cultures, caring is associated with the feminine principle as against the ethic of impersonal objectivity, criticism and judgement which represent a masculine or even patriarchal order. Being cared for is what every newborn child requires and caring is attending to the needs of others with whom we feel close and for whom we are prepared to take personal responsibility. Caring is not a scripted emotional performance and cannot be reduced to emotional labor. Caring involves some of the qualities that are currently and fashionably grouped under the title of emotional intelligence, yet, unlike emotional intelligence, it entails no

suggestion of emotional manipulation or deception. Instead, caring involves sensitivity to the emotional needs of the other person and an ability to guide and influence these emotions through a wide range of actions, utterances and expressions. It requires a constant state of watchfulness, an ability to anticipate the needs and vulnerabilities of the cared for. And, in spite of all this, it is a profound mistake to view an ethic of care as some kind of agapistic principle of universal love or as a 'touchy-feely' ethic of intimacy. An ethic of care may sometimes dictate taking difficult, hard and unpleasant actions in support of a person, an institution or even a thing one cares for.

Without implying that the ethic of care can resolve the anxieties I indicated earlier or offer a guarantee of sustained success, I would like to emphasize its importance in two different ways. First, an ethic of care offers a counter-balance to the ethic of criticism. As Raelin (2008), Wellington and Nixon (2005) and Trevino (2008) have argued, caring is a vital quality of effective editors and reviewers, keen to nurture new talent and foster new perspectives and discourses in their early and fragile stages. Without compromising the commitment to rational discourse and rigorous knowledge, an ethic of care ensures that criticism is exercised in a responsible, collegiate manner, a manner that tolerates disagreement and encourages learning. Within an ethic of care, criticism never degenerates to nitpicking, the compulsive pointing out of even trivial flaws with the aim of justifying rejection. On the contrary, the caring critic acknowledges his/her own fallibility and the possibility that, in judging an argument or a paper as a whole, he/she has made an error. An ethic of care does not function as a universal warm

blanket of unconditional positive regard. Far from it – it can involve hard decisions, disappointing news and the management of disillusionment and pain without recourse to comforting untruths and false hopes.

There are two pressing reasons why journal editors must promote and defend an ethic of care through their decisions and actions – the anonymity of reviews and the increasing fragmentation of academic discourses which I sought to capture through the metaphor of the urban metropolis, both of which fundamentally conspire against this ethic. Nearly every theorist writing about ethics of care is in agreement that, following Levinas {, 1969 #3477}, face to face contact is vital for building and sustaining caring relations. Reviewers and authors are kept apart from each under the cloak of review anonymity, something that, when properly exercised, ensures objectivity and impartiality, but may easily lapse into finicky and arrogant criticism. Equally, the fragmentation of academic discourses represented in journals like Organization Studies makes it very likely that at least some of the reviewers selected for a particular piece will represent approaches and traditions hostile to those of the author. In such circumstances, it is natural to privilege one's own perspective over the one represented by the author and discovering all kinds of fault in an argument that is, in effect, proffered in a language different from the reviewer's own. It is for these reasons, that I would argue that editors' actions and decisions must be informed by an ethic of care. This is not an article in which I will detail how an ethic of care translates into editorial work – many journals seek to promote such an ethic already through practices, such as requiring reviewers to address their reviews to the authors in the



second person and asking them to refrain from damaging criticisms. Much more can be done, including offering authors a systematic right of reply. Above all, an ethic of care treats individuals with respect, seeks to moderate conflicts, acknowledges fallibility, and does not seek to justify rejection in quasi-objective and nitpicking criticisms.

Equally importantly, an ethic of care can be extended to the journal itself, as a valued space, one that enhances learning and discussion rather than egos and reputations, one that is cherished by those who work for it, read it or write for it. In a memorable piece inspired by the children's story of the velveteen rabbit, David Sims (2004) has argued that it is love that turns organizations into valued spaces in which people's actions 'come alive'. The velveteen rabbit is a children's toy that, in the story, comes to life or becomes 'real' only when the child that owns it develops a caring relation with it. The story's theme that love 'animates' what it touches is one that has been rehearsed endlessly by poets and storytellers, but Sims argues that it may also apply to organizations, some of which generate extraordinary amounts of loyalty and affection among their members whereas others remain objects of instrumental usefulness and emotional indifference. An ethic of care would counteract some of the widely commented cynicism (Bedeian, 2003; Raelin, 2008; Rynes, 2006a, b) that can so easily afflict those involved in academic publishing.

It would be naïve and sentimental to view an ethic of care as a panacea for all the challenges and difficulties that confront the journal. Nor does an ethic of care

eliminate the numerous anxieties that I explored earlier or ensure a trouble-free forging of organizational and individual identities. It does, however, promote a climate in which anxieties can be contained, identities can be fashioned by turning disappointments into accomplishments, and criticism can be sustained as a force towards the advancement of knowledge.

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