Clegg, Stewart; Grothe-Hammer, Michael; Velarde, Kathia Serrano

Book Part

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Reference: In: Sociological Thinking in Contemporary Organizational Scholarship (2024). Emerald Publishing Limited, S. 1 - 16.
https://doi.org/10.1108/S0733-558X20240000090001.
doi:10.1108/S0733-558X20240000090001.

SOCIOLOGICAL THINKING IN CONTEMPORARY ORGANIZATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP

Stewart Clegg[a], Michael Grothe-Hammer[b] and Kathia Serrano Velarde[c]

[a]*The University of Sydney, Australia*
[b]*Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Norway*
[c]*Heidelberg University, Germany*

1. INTRODUCTION

The past few years have seen a plethora of debates regarding the nature of theorizing in organization research and the position of sociological theory therein (Besio et al., 2020). Organization studies are nowadays considered an inter- or multidisciplinary research field with organizational sociology being one of the original parent disciplines (Scott, 2020). However, the contemporary role of organizational sociology is increasingly unclear. Organization studies' intellectual lineage drew on a diversity of sources, including sociology; how could it not, with Weber (1978) as a foundational source? However, the divide between organization studies and sociology has widened considerably (Adler et al., 2014; Clegg, 2002; Clegg & Cuhna, 2019; King, 2017; Powell & DiMaggio, 2023). Even though many of the dominant paradigms of organization theory – for example, neo-institutionalism, population ecology, network theory, and resource dependency – originated in sociology (Grothe-Hammer & Kohl, 2020), sociology is no longer a constitutive part of organization studies. The institutional politics and economics of knowledge production have seen a relative decline in the

Sociological Thinking in Contemporary Organizational Scholarship
Research in the Sociology of Organizations, Volume 90, 1–16

ISSN: 0733-558X/doi:10.1108/S0733-558X20240000090001

vibrantly youthful sociological scene of the 1960s, not only as its progenitors aged but also as investments in higher education social science became increasingly focused on economic pursuits, with the ascendancy of business schools marking this shift from the 1980s onward (Augier et al., 2005). Young scholars gravitate to where the jobs are, and increasingly, they were not in sociology but in business schools, booming in neo-liberal times. The once lively dialogue between sociology and organization studies on the social nature, characteristics, and consequences of organizing and organization seemed to come to a halt (Barley, 2010; Clegg, 2002; Davis, 2015; Hinings & Greenwood, 2002). "Organizational sociology" has become a part of the genealogy of organization studies, a classic blast from the past – an occasional reminder that organizational scholarship has "history" (Scott, 2020). The label "organizational sociology" does not mirror the rich and varied scholarship we witness among today's organization scholars. For many, if not most, what the "sociological" is supposed to be or mean in organization studies has become unclear.

If we turn our gaze away from organization studies and toward sociology, we can observe that – as a sociological subfield – organizational sociology seems to be alive and kicking (King, 2024, this volume). This is not particularly surprising, given how modern times are so highly organized (Bromley & Meyer, 2015; Perrow, 1991). Researchers are constantly confronted with organizations in their daily work, whether these are schools, hospitals, universities, social movements, corporations, sports associations, militaries, nongovernmental and public sector bodies, as well as a myriad of organized cultural pursuits. Faced with organizations as a fundament of modern life, manifold works on organizations must be acknowledged as important contributions to sociology (Grothe-Hammer & Jungmann, 2023). For decades, organization-related works have been highly evident in leading sociology journals (Grothe-Hammer & Kohl, 2020). Active communities of organizational sociologists around the globe showcase this with representations in the International Sociological Association, regional networks such as the Ibero-American Association of Research in Sociology of Organizations and Communication (AISOC), or communities in the national sociology associations as, for example, in the United States, Germany, France, and Spain. The book series this piece is published in – *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* – and the newly established *Journal of Organizational Sociology* also underline organizational sociology's continuing relevance to the discipline of sociology. Irrespective of contemporary epistemic debates, as well as the classic canon, we use this volume to provide clues to answering a key question: *what is "organizational sociology" today?*

Our volume seeks to explore the new boundaries of organizational sociology. It sets out to map a community of scholars that transcends disciplinary limitations by following one simple epistemic logic: society happens in, between, across, and around organizations (Powell & Brandtner, 2016). We thereby work with the assumption that dialogue on the social nature of organizing and organization has not vanished but instead shifted its shape to become an integral yet tacit part of the research agenda of organization studies, on the one hand, and sociology, on the other hand (Scott, 2004). Following Grothe-Hammer and Jungmann (2023)

in their inaugural editorial for the new *Journal of Organizational Sociology*, we consider organizational sociology today as consisting of "anyone doing sociology with a focus on organization(s)." For while sociological questions and themes are broadly present in the field of organization studies, many organization scholars do not identify as authors of sociological works (Adler et al., 2014). We hope to revitalize the dialogue about future avenues of sociologically minded organization research. We do so by identifying, discussing, and challenging genuinely sociological contributions to and of organization studies.

2. WHAT IS "ORGANIZATIONAL SOCIOLOGY" TODAY?

Organizational sociology is obviously concerned with the study of organizations, but it is more than a synonym for organization studies. The "sociology" makes the difference. As a sub-discipline of sociology, organizational sociology can be defined simply as sociological studies of organizing and organization(s). Hence, to define the boundaries of organizational sociology, we need to determine what characterizes the sociological stance in the study of organizations. The papers we have collected in this volume have allowed us to extract some positions that we see as central to the sociological standpoint in organization studies. Specifically, we identify three positions that differentiate particularly "sociological" works from other works in organization studies.

First, sociologically minded work values the social phenomena under investigation. Organization and management studies are well-known for their "theory fetish" (Hambrick, 2007). The common conviction in this broad field is that the generalizability of findings outranks empirical novelty. The phenomena under study are treated as "cases of" (Langley, 2021). That is, whatever phenomenon is studied, it should only be seen as a case of some larger theoretical concept that is usually of applied relevance for business and management purposes. The result is a publication culture that Tourish (2020) described as follows: "if you use an existing theory to explain an interesting phenomenon, your work will be rejected."

In his empirical analysis of publications in top-tier journals, King (2024, this volume) shows how sociologists often work the opposite way. In contrast to treating empirical phenomena only as cases of a bigger theoretical picture, sociological studies identify interesting and relevant phenomena and value their unique social configuration. The object of investigation, that may or may not include organizations, is of value because the social affordances it exhibits are of a consequence to people. Sociologists then use theory as a tool to understand and explain such phenomena – not the other way around. The paper by Croidieu and Powell (2024, this volume) is a good example of this approach. Their primary analytical focus is to understand the emergence of the cork aristocracy in the Bordeaux wine field in the 19th century. Class and status theories are used to understand and explain the phenomenon, and while the authors make intriguing new theoretical claims, their first objective is to unfold the workings of class struggle in a specific case.

Second, sociologists care about society, both conceptually and empirically. Organization and management studies' preference for middle range theories (Merton, 1949) certainly connects organizations to social undercurrents. Yet, there seems to be a reluctance to connect with larger, macro-theoretical frameworks. When embedding their research in generalist social theory such as "practice theory," "network theory," or "institutionalism," the perspective is – first and foremost – organizational. For organization and management scholars, society becomes visible through the lens of the organization, thus bypassing the possibility of contributing to the explanation and theorization of society.

The "institutional logics" perspective (Lounsbury et al., 2021), for instance, started with the aspiration of "bringing society back in." Friedland and Alford (1991) developed a theory of society-level institutional logics and how these relate to organizations. In spite of notable exceptions such as Gümüsay et al. (2020), this aspiration was quickly abandoned in favor of mapping meso-level dynamics and the identification of yet another logic (cf. Cai & Mountford, 2022), thereby fulfilling the demand of producing "novel" theory (for accounts of this demand, see Bort & Schiller-Merkens, 2011; Tourish, 2020).

It is noteworthy that much research in organization and management studies strives to achieve "societal impact" or solve "societal grand challenges" but shies away from theorizing at a more macro-level. Studies might be interested in inequality or the effects of certain societal domains like politics on organizations; they might even mention terms like "class" and "stratification" (e.g., Amis et al., 2020). Yet, they fall short of leveraging society-level theories of domain-specific differentiation (e.g., Abrutyn & Turner, 2011; Luhmann, 1977; Padgett & Powell, 2012), class distinction and stratification (Bourdieu, 1986; Savage, 2000), or center–periphery dynamics (Knudsen, 2018; Vik et al., 2022) to this end. "Flat ontologies" (Mountford & Cai, 2023; Seidl & Whittington, 2014) are celebrated whereas the macro-level of society is little more than context (cf. Apelt et al., 2017; Sales et al., 2022; Sydow & Windeler, 2020).

Sociology concerns the social construction of social facts, those values, cultural norms and social practices, and structuration that transcend and frame the individual person and organization. It just so happens that, in some cases, social facts are deeply ingrained in organizational fabrics. The order of relevance is thus reversed in the sense that organizations are perceived through the lens of society and take an active part in shaping it. They are the building blocks that mediate between the macrolevel and the microlevel of social life (Alexander, 1992). While organizations are socially constructed, they have an impact not only on individual destinies but also on social life at large (Schirmer, 2024, this volume). To care about society means accounting for the social consequences of organized action. For instance, when Laryea and Brandter (2024, this volume) set out to analyze the human resources (HR) strategies of nonprofits located in Silicon Valley, it is not only to map the reproduction of social inequalities within seemingly communitarian organizations but also to assess their potential to further or hinder social change and inclusion.

Third, while reflexivity is a methodological and normative concern for both disciplines, there is a specific sociological stance to it. Sociological concerns with

reflexivity are anchored in broader methodological concerns regarding the level of engagement with the object of study (Holmes, 2010). Being sociological signifies both an act of self-reference and an awareness that leads to rethink one's position as a researcher in and commitment to a researched community as a matter of truly ontological dimensions. Reflexivity becomes the means through which one deploys "sociological imagination" (Mills, 1959) differently, thereby uncovering methodological and social assumptions in the way we apprehend social reality. For instance, current work on "postcolonial" sociology (Go, 2017) or the "decentering" of social theory (Benzecry et al., 2017) calls for a recalibration of theoretical models (Krause, 2022). It is of great interest to observe that several papers in this volume connect issues of reflexivity to emotions. The emotional undercurrent of organizations is described by Schirmer (2024, this volume) as well as Americo and co-authors (2024, this volume), as an additional layer of social meaning that operates within, across, and around organizations. It is as if embracing the emotional reality of organized life would allow us to develop a more comprehensive picture of social action and a possibility to rethink existing theories and social imaginaries (Taylor, 2004) in more abstract terms.

These three characteristics – valuing the social phenomena; caring about society; reflexivity – capture what for this volume is the gist of the sociological contribution to the study of organizations.

3. WHAT DOES THE COMMUNITY OF ORGANIZATIONAL SOCIOLOGISTS LOOK LIKE TODAY?

We tried to mobilize organizational scholarship that takes a specific sociological "stance" (du Gay, 2020), regardless of the disciplinary affiliation of the authors. To this end, we approached established and young scholars that walk the line between disciplines – that is doing sociology in organization and management studies and/or researching organizations in the discipline of sociology. We talked with them about our project to map the community of researchers that understands themselves as sociologically minded organization scholars or organizational sociologists and encouraged them to share their thoughts on the nature of their research. Furthermore, we also organized an open call for papers at the 2022 EGOS colloquium in Vienna under the label "Doing Sociology in Organization Studies" with the hope of detecting new trends originating in this moving target of a research community. Were common themes evident? What might be the relevance of a sociological take on organization for organization and management scholars?

We locate the nature of the sociological contribution to organizational scholarship in a sociological imagination, for which, as Karl Marx wrote in a flamboyant letter to the German philosopher Arnold Ruge, the primary mission is "the ruthless criticism of everything existing." He further elaborated by writing that "the criticism must not be afraid of its own conclusions, nor of conflict with the powers that be" (Marx, 1843/1978). A similar logic has subsequently driven much

sociological work, perhaps most notably C. Wright Mills' (1959) "sociological imagination." The question that a sociological imagination implies for organizational scholarship is to ask what constitutes a critical stance, given the following conditions of contemporary sociology's existence? In this volume, this question took the following three main forms:

(i) In a world in which much of recent scholarship is in business schools, with an inherent mobilization of bias toward normative issues posed by and for business, what is the place and role of a critical sociological imagination?
(ii) What are the various sociological understandings of the "social" and "society," in a world of "modern organizations" (Clegg, 1990)? We are interested in all kinds of sociological notions of society in relation to organizations ranging from macro-theories to the micro-level (Abrutyn & Turner, 2011; Ahrne, 2015; Bauman, 2013; Friedland, 2014; Luhmann, 1994).
(iii) How do organizations contribute to the production and reproduction of social inequalities? When social scientists do situate inequality in a social space, it is too often myopically focused on national markets and cultural processes, thereby ignoring the workings of organizations and their frequently global network implications (Tomaskovic-Devey & Avent-Holt, 2019). We encouraged organization and management scholars to think about society and the natures of social relations and invite sociologists to think more about the organizational consequences of social action.

4. ABOUT THE PAPERS

We present papers from a range of theoretical and methodological approaches that investigate the sociological dimensions of organization and organization studies. Not only do we believe that theoretical and methodological pluralism is a necessary condition to develop an interdisciplinary research agenda – it also prevents this debate from being too tightly linked to a specific community of scholars, a school, or a research niche. Contributions are of three sorts: First, there are papers that unravel and critically discuss the existing (or missing) sociological dimension of contemporary organization research from a theoretical perspective. Second, we included empirical contributions that explicate their sociological stance toward organizational scholarship and provide new avenues for thinking about the interrelation of organization and society. Finally, there are papers that revisit classic sociology and propose new avenues for research on organizational phenomena.

Part 1: The Place of Sociology in Organizational Scholarship

The first part of this volume deals with Organizational Sociology and its place both within sociology and organization and management studies. The authors of these papers adopt different starting points to discuss the epistemic dynamics behind the making of organization and management studies and the supposed unmaking of "family resemblances" (Wittgenstein, 1953) with sociology. By

comparing disciplines across time in their practices of theory building (King, 2024, this volume), identity crises (Ringel, 2024, this volume), and critique (Lopdrup-Hjorth & du Gay, 2024, this volume), these authors develop different historical accounts that feature organizations as the boundary objects of scientific pursuits.

In his contribution, King (2024, this volume) claims that contemporary papers on organizations written in sociological high-impact journals fall into two categories: "Organizations within society" papers approach organizations as basic building blocks of social structure. While accomplishing a social purpose, organizations also reproduce basic social inequalities within society. The papers that fall into the "society within organization" category usually analyze organizations as spaces that host social dynamics, thereby reproducing structural inequalities of the macro-order within their boundaries. Drawing on a content analysis of papers published in the *American Journal of Sociology, American Sociological Review*, and *the European Sociological Review*, King argues that current Organizational Sociology has emancipated itself from a narrow understanding of theory building and adopts a distinctively empirical perspective on organizations in its stead. Organizations are, first and foremost, the analytical lens through which sociologists perceive, name, and explain social problems. It is sociology's larger problem-orientation that makes newer organizational sociology irrelevant to business and management scholars, driven by the necessity to frame a distinctive contribution to organizational theory building. Nevertheless, the breadth of sociological analysis and its capacity to grasp the novel, the tragic and the unseen makes it also the perfect starting ground for the identification of future research avenues in organization and management studies.

Adopting a different analytical strategy, Ringel's (2024, this volume) paper explores overlaps and boundaries between organization (and management) studies and organizational sociology. Making use of Abbott's sociology of profession and Eyal's theory of expertise, the author traces epistemic shifts that have taken place in and between these disciplines over time. Starting from the assumption that both organization studies and organizational sociology have a propensity for self-diagnosed crises, Ringel focuses on the factors that sustain these discursive configurations. In the case of organizational sociology, his study argues that although important conceptual tools and analytical perspectives have been developed in what we may call the "golden era" of the decades after World War II, the sub-discipline never managed to stabilize its hold over the intellectual turf that is organization. Rather, organizational sociology has remained a "broad church" (Scott, 2020) and continues to act as an "unintentional donor" whose output contributes to knowledge created in other academic domains. It transpired that organization studies has particularly profited from these "donations:" Increasingly criticized for their practice orientation in the 1950s, business schools sought respectability in the academic pantheon by embracing scientization. Borrowing from established disciplines (especially economics, psychology, and sociology), organization studies was assembled as a scholarly field of practice during the 1970s and 1980s, soon possessing its own social identity, credential system (and control thereof), publication outlets, and institutional arrangements. As a result, business school faculty have effectively built a strongly oligopolistic redoubt concerning the academic study of

organizations. Yet, at the same time, the epistemic configuration of organization studies propels an excess of "borrowing" from other disciplines, something that appears to haunt and taunt business school faculty who continue to worry about their ability to engage in basic research.

Lopdrup-Hjorth and du Gay (2024, this volume) share in critically diagnosing organization and management studies as a field. Their paper on the "sense of reality" in organization studies advocates a critical stance, a new type of reflexivity. The field of organization and management studies, they argue, has lost touch with political and social realities that hold few certainties. Driven by a strong economic logic and a fetish for metrics, managers are not taught to deal with the "situation at hand," which is one of recurrent and all-encompassing crises. They forget to exercise their own judgment in situations, relying instead on quantifiable figures and metrics that gloss over the ambiguities of organizational life, lulling them into a false sense of security. To counter these tendencies, the authors propose returning to classic organization theory that predates the professionalization turn so aptly described by Ringel. It is in the work of Max Weber, Philipp Selznick, Chester Bernard, and Isaiah Berlin that an alternative vision of a manager's duty may be found. By educating managers in "statesmanship," they might develop a heightened awareness of the social affordances (and responsibilities) of organizational decision-making. Highlighting the manager's original mission as being to manage a situation based on a sense of reality in regard to which they exercise cautious judgment about what to do and when, du Gay and Lopdrup-Hjorth call for more professional discretion and displays of managerial judgment.

Part 2: Social Stratification in and Through Organizations

A second set of papers is concerned with the organizational dynamics of social stratification, the processes of closure and marginalization in and through organizations. These papers present current work focusing on the intersection between organizational life and society. They describe organizations both as structuring society through the dissemination of social norms of elitism (Croidieu & Powell, 2024, this volume), leadership (Piggott et al., 2024, this volume), professionalism (Layrea & Brandtner, 2024, this volume), and worth (Arnold & Foureault, 2024, this volume), as well as being a social space in which society "happens."

Organizations Within Society: Organizational Perspectives on Status and Distinction

In their contribution on the food waste sector in Switzerland, Arnold and Foureault (2024, this volume) observe how a heterogeneous set of organizations, comprising charities and businesses, plants and tech companies, alternative producers and distributors, as well as public organizations and interest groups, have come to see each other as part of a common endeavor to find a solution for a global problem. Through the combination of a survey and qualitative interviews, the authors mapped an emerging field of organizations dealing with the problem of food waste through a diverse set of strategies. Drawing on this first set of data, they investigated the advisory relations in the field through the means of a quantitative network analysis. By contrasting the findings of the network analysis

with qualitative insights into the evaluation of these organizations by food waste charities and government bodies, Arnold and Foureault point to status inconsistencies in the field. While evaluating agencies attribute higher (evaluative) status to those organizations that commercialize food waste, the advisory network of organizations favors expert bodies (such as an interest group or a public research institute). The losers of both status competitions seem to be alternative producers and tech companies. In addition, food waste charities have an unexpectedly low status. The local reinterpretation of a global problem furthers the economic valorization of waste, thereby marginalizing alternative strategies aimed at reallocating what has come to be understood as a resource. In this intriguing piece that sheds light on a new phenomenon, the readers will find traces of a Weberian definition of organizations as drivers of modernity and "green" capitalism.

The contribution by Croidieu and Powell (2024, this volume) expands on that argument and draws on classic works from the Marxian and Weberian traditions to reinterpret the power of organizing. In their historical ethnography of the wine estates of Bordeaux, the authors uncover a covert class struggle. By tracking ownership structures between 1850 and 1929, Croidieu and Powell examine how merchants, financiers, and industrialists competed by entering a status tournament with landed aristocrats, introducing new techniques and managerial practices in their wake. Yet, instead of challenging existing social arrangements, this transformation in ownership proved to be highly conservative. The new elite borrowed its cultural codes from the higher-status aristocratic pedigree of the former owners to expand prestige – both for themselves and their wines. The authors argue that "the transposition of aristocratic trappings into the wine world initially served no practical purpose other than making status claims under the disguise of mimicry. This emulation created a symbolic order that, as it spread, acquired a high-status patina" (Croidieu & Powell, 2024, this volume). Combining Marxian and Weberian analyses, the authors depict wine estates' material and symbolic transformations and the intricate dynamics of social closure. During this 79-year period, the prime vineyards of Bordeaux became a nexus for technical, economic, and social transformation, while expanding their elite status in the wine world. Organizations were the site and vehicle of elite class struggles through status and closure dynamics.

Both papers resonate with the burgeoning literature on rankings and (e)valuation as they elaborate analytical accounts of how the institutional affordances of valorizing food waste and wine develop over time. Studying organizations through the status lens means defining them as nested in social hierarchies that seep into the organizational fabric, the habitus of the owners and members, as well as the handling of the product. It is the porosity of organizations that characterizes the papers in this part, their permeability (Ringel et al., 2018) to the social context they feel part of, whether the context is local (Arnold & Foureault, 2024, this volume; Croidieu & Powell, 2024, this volume), global (Piggott et al., 2024, this volume), or both (Laryea & Brandtner, 2024, this volume). While the first two papers are concerned with social closure and distinction, Laryea and Brandtner, as well as Piggott and co-authors, focus on issues of marginalization and exclusion. The papers address a different type of organizational "nestedness" as they target the multilevel dynamics of social inequality.

Society Within Organizations: Organizational Perspectives on Social Integration and Marginalization

Laryea and Brandtner (2024, this volume) are interested in how nonprofit organizations cope with the challenge of serving a local community while addressing norms of professionalism promoted at the societal level. The paper marshals the insights of a survey of nonprofit organizations operating in the San Francisco Bay Area to identify organizations that combine "social" (*Vergemeinschaftung*) and "systemic" (*Vergesellschaftung*) integration objectives. The study shows that these nonprofits use knowledge about the local community to refine how they implement services and connect to institutions. The authors interviewed leaders and staff to understand how dual integration is managed through organizational practices in day-to-day life. The findings reveal two main organizational strategies that help navigate the gap between communitarian norms and professional rationalization (Hwang & Powell, 2009) that epitomize meso-level processes that reproduce (or not) social inequalities in nonprofits. Many organizations pursuing dual integration adopt a "loose demographic coupling" strategy. While frontline workers are recruited from these nonprofits' communities, the managerial staff mainly comprises White or Asian professional men. These organizations split their activities and hierarchies, making it impossible for frontline workers to advance to higher career levels. Nevertheless, a smaller sample of organizations exhibit a different strategy (community anchoring) that resists systemic pull and creates a continuous career path for frontline workers to be able to move into the organization's upper echelons. Laryea and Brandtner confer a distinctive social function to nonprofits by defining them as "third spaces" fostering community and connecting individuals to complex social systems. Recognizing the meso-level workings of social inequality in a setting that is meant to transcend differences and create cohesion (Clemens, 2006) qualifies this study as an extreme case for the "persistence of inequalities" in and through organizations (Amis et al., 2020).

Much in the same vein, Piggott and co-authors (2024, this volume) identify sports organizations as a special case for the reproduction of binary gender norms and stereotypes. Because of their geographical and social spread that bonds nations, regions, and local societies across divides of class, gender, and race, sport organizations possess ideological power to influence how gender is "done, undone and redone." This integrative function of sport organizations contrasts with a performance norm that equals the male body with leadership, strength, and resilience. The sport organization then becomes a symbolic place in which gendered body norms are mirrored both in formal and informal organizational practices of hiring, promoting, role allocation, and task assignments. The authors discuss existing literature on gender reproduction in sports organizations by tracing the origins of unequal career opportunities to differences in physical performances in a binary sport system. The weakness of the female body is mirrored by organizational structures that marginalize women in hierarchy, culture, and routines. The linkage between sport and constructions of desirable masculinity may also infiltrate conceptualizations of desirable leaders in non-sport organizations and shape gender ratios in positions of leadership in these organizations. Attention, therefore, needs to be paid to the extent to which the gendered sport

binary may shape managerial practices in both sport and non-sport organizations. Piggott and co-authors (2024, this volume) make a compelling case to further investigate the symbolic power of sport organizations in societies and call for a "queering" of the binary structuration of sports.

The papers claim that organizations have integrative as well as disintegrative capacities in the sense that they shape social spaces beyond their organizational boundaries. Whether these capacities further societal integration and cohesion depends on the way the organization processes its environment and embodies it in routines of social consequence.

Part 3: Rediscovering Sociological Classics for Organization Studies

The last part is twofold. While the first two papers introduce sociological concepts for organizational analysis, the papers by Schirmer and Czarniawska rediscover classic social theory for organizational analysis.

Reflexivity and Control

The paper by Americo and co-authors (2024, this volume), as well as Sundberg's (2024, this volume) contribution, scrutinize the boundaries between organizational and private life. Both papers deal with issues of reflexivity – but they do so by coming from opposing perspectives.

Americo and co-authors (2024, this volume) advocate the necessity to account for the latent emotional undercurrent of organizational life. Borrowing on the sociology of emotion and the concept of "emotional reflexivity," they picture emotions as relating people to others, to themselves, and – in a surprising posthuman turn of the argument – to "nondiscursive entities." Organizations are then defined as an interrelational space that opens possibilities to become aware of, name, and talk about emotions. By challenging a dominant idea in organization studies that any type of reflexivity is grounded in cognition, the authors sketch the contours of an interesting research agenda that blends emotional sociology, organizational learning, and subjectivity studies for the analysis of organizations. To corroborate their point, Americo and co-authors use narrative fiction and depict the learning path of a young hearing-impaired student in Brazil, who, through membership in an inclusive school that taught him sign language, as well as his adoption of two hearing-impaired dogs, managed to develop a consistent vision about himself, his relation to others and his place in society. In this narrative fiction based on empirically researched materials, the school is an organization that allows Pedro, the young student, to enter a dialogic framework, to develop communicative skills, and finally voice feelings that never surfaced before. The paper explores the emotional landscape of organizations as a hidden layer of meaning behind communication and behavior. It questions our notion that emotions and meanings may only arise from human interaction and calls for a comprehensive view of organizations beyond notions of cognition, discourse, and speech.

Sundberg (2024, this volume) shares the assumption that organizations actively shape the boundaries of what may be said, by whom and to whom – thereby regulating the way emotions may or may not emerge. However, where Americo

and co-authors are interested in the opportunities provided by organizations to harness emotions for reflexivity and agency, Sundberg looks at obedience, silence, and subversion. Sundberg's contribution revisits Goffman's concept of "total institution," that is, walled-in-units where people live and work 24/7, such as prisons or asylums. As total institutions contain the "totality" of their resident's lives, they also retain an extraordinary amount of control over them. Whereas organization research mostly equates total institutions with the (de)construction of selves through an organization's role and routines, Sundberg focuses on the maintenance of authority relations and obedience. Following Goffman, she highlights the difference between coercive institutions such as prisons and voluntary total institutions such as oil rigs, the army, or cloistered religious communities. The latter, she argues, make a compelling case for the analysis of authority and obedience since their members actively choose to endorse the organization's goals and values. Their choice comes with a pledge of obedience to communitarian rules, which in the two ethnographic cases presented in the papers – the French Foreign Legion and the French Order of Cistercian monks and nuns – translates into the strict interdiction on talking back to superior officers (even when treated unfairly) or engaging in private conversation with the brothers and sisters of the monastery. Yet, illicit behavior occurs. Soldiers will disappear at night, even without having a formal permission to do so. Sisters and brothers will find discreet confidants among their community. What matters in this case is that the rule of obedience is not breached. Rather, the persons invested in illicit behavior know that they are operating in the grey zones of indifference and that their actions do not represent an open act of subversion calling into question the moral code of their organization or their adherence to it. Soldiers and Cistercians will retain a degree of agency by keeping quiet without falling silent.

Organizing and Organization

The last two papers of this special issue draw attention to a sociological debate that is as old as organizational sociology: the difference between organizing and organization.

In her paper on the relevance of Simmel and Tarde's work for the sociology of organizing, Czarniawska (2024, this volume) points to one of sociology's founding principles: that society is the product of human interaction and that the actual puzzle to solve is why people are drawn together, how they define the unit they feel part of, and how they act with and upon it. The paper draws on Czarniawska's biographical experience of being a sociologically minded organization scholar and challenges perceptions of what classic sociological theory is. By showing the usefulness of Tarde and Simmel's work on fashions, otherness, identity, and the power of innovation for her own research, the author calls for a type of organizational scholarship that is mindful of the social forces behind collective action. For what is organizing if not "the knotting together of people, things, actions?"

In another attempt to comprehend the boundaries of the organizational phenomenon, Schirmer (2024, this volume) proposes a multilevel analysis of organizations in their societal environments borrowing on Luhmann's systems theory. Arguing that organizations are the place where social systems meet agency,

Schirmer defines organization as a bounded unit with clear membership rules and (hierarchical) decision-making structure. As organizations are in more than one social system at any given time, they actively manage societal tensions, thereby producing, reproducing, and innovating society at large. Schirmer delineates a research agenda that bridges with current debates on institutional complexity. By calling attention to the emotional and affective interactional dynamics within organizations, the author also points to future avenues of investigation that link all four papers of this concluding section.

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