Check for updates

Editorial

Post-capitalistic politics in the making: The imaginary and praxis of alternative economies

Organization
2017, Vol. 24(5) 575–588
© The Author(s) 2017
Reprints and permissions:
sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/1350508417713219
journals.sagepub.com/home/org
SAGE

Patrizia Zanoni
Hasselt University, Belgium and KU Leuven, Belgium

Alessia Contu
University of Massachusetts Boston, USA

Stephen Healy
Western Sydney University, Australia

Raza Mir
William Paterson University, USA

In June 2015, we launched the call for articles for this special issue in an attempt to catalyze the rising awareness, both within the critically oriented and the broader organization studies community, that we are today witnessing epochal changes, which are fundamentally redefining the social, economic, political, and environmental realities we live in in unforeseen and unimaginable ways. For many of us, the financial crisis of 2008 had crystallized the notion that capitalism in its very nature is in continuous crisis, as shown by four decades of persistent decline in economic growth rate and rise in overall indebtedness and economic inequality (Streeck, 2014, 2016). Yet the political debacle of party politics in the United Kingdom and the United States together with the rampant populism in various European countries have highlighted that this is not just another installment of a crisis-prone economic system. These ‘electoral mutinies’ suggest that what is under crisis is the governance system of neoliberalism itself (Fraser, 2017). The responses to this crisis have been proved severely wanting, leading to the weakening of all social and political institutions that offer a semblance of protection to the vulnerable (Wahl, 2017).

Corresponding author:
Patrizia Zanoni, SEIN—Identity, Diversity & Inequality Research, Hasselt University, Martelarenlaan 42, Hasselt 3500, Belgium.
Email: Patrizia.Zanoni@uhasselt.be

Crisis is often considered a negative term: multiple conflicts and antagonisms come in full sight; anger and fears abound. What we know is changing and giving way to something new; what shape that new formation may take is not apparent yet. It is emergent, contested, and contingent to the struggle of forces at hand. The resulting social formation could take a very long time to surface. In a pessimistic scenario, we should rightly fear that this will merely solidify the existing order and could look like the enactment of a reactionary fantasy formation whose defining feature is precisely its lack of imagination (Žižek, 2009). Yet this does not need to be the case. As a moment of dislocation, in which signification reaches its limits (Laclau, 1990), crisis also bears potentiality for new social imaginaries and new subjectivities to emerge (Castoriadis, 1987). It is at once full of promise and hope for prefiguring autonomous, non-hierarchical, and emancipatory organizational practices (Dinerstein, 2015), centered on new desires and inspiring the possibility of being less anxious and more capacious toward others (Gibson-Graham, 2006).

The record number of submissions we received in February 2016, apart from posing a major editorial challenge, confirmed our original intuition that a forum on the organization of alternative economies is timely. With this special issue, we would like to contribute to the current conversation on alternative economies, which is taking place in this journal (e.g. Bretos and Errasti, 2017; Cheney et al., 2014; Gibson-Graham, 1996b; Safri, 2015) and the broader organization studies community (e.g. Barin Cruz et al., 2015; Garmann Johnsen et al., 2017; Parker et al., 2014), with particular attention to what it would mean for us to redress our own privileging of critique and what that might entail for our own subjectivity and practice as critical scholars (Esper et al., this volume; Gibson-Graham, 1996b, 2008).

The remainder of this introduction is organized as follows. First, we situate the crisis of hegemony of neoliberal capitalism as a backdrop and rationale for the political significance and urgency of post-capitalist politics that re-socialize the economy (Gibson-Graham, 2006). We then situate the debate on diverse/alternative economies by delineating key concepts that have informed it, such as social imagination, autonomy, prefiguration and hope, and subjectivity and desire. We thus advance Derrida's (1995) notion of the *archive* as a useful way to think the politics of performativity of alternative economies. We conclude with a reflection on our own critical scholarship as a fundamentally ethical praxis, assuming our individual and collective responsibility for performing alternatives. This is a radical historical responsibility of identifying as agents who participate in making the social anew, by self-reflexively investing ourselves in novel desires, scholarly praxis, and a language of potentiality, next to one of critique (Contu, 2017; Gibson-Graham, 2008).

The crisis of neoliberalism

The financial crisis of 2008 merely emphasized a reality that many of us had already begun to grapple with, that we are witnessing a crisis of the hegemony of neoliberalism, of the legitimacy of leading shared values, systems, and beliefs of the entire dominant socio-historical paradigm it represented (Jessop, 2016). Deepening the penetration of capitalism into political and social institutions as well as cultural consciousness itself, neoliberalism elevates capitalism as a mode of production into an ethic, a set of political imperatives, and a cultural logic (Harvey, 2005). The central tenet of neoliberalism, that market exchange is an ethic that should guide all human activity, has provided the ideological base for a comprehensive redefinition of society.

This is reflected first and foremost in the exponential growth of global financial markets and their solid grip on all institutions. Guided by (short-term) shareholder maximization, financialization has colonized not only productive activities but also individual and households attempting to sustain consumption levels despite falling real wages and contracting welfare states (Soederberg, 2014), and public expenditures (Streeck, 2014), feeding a financial bulimia of rising public debt

and austerity. The label 'casino capitalism' advanced by Susan Strange (1986) as early as the mid-1980s was an inauspicious omen of the financial collapse to come. Second, neoliberalization has taken the form of labor market deregulation, weakening the position of workers to the advantage of the capitalist classes—a transnational elite of wealthy financiers, top executives, and board directors. The casualization of employment law and the decline in workers' collective representation by trade unions have gone hand in hand with increasingly individualized work relations, precarity, loss of protections, and wage repression for most. In the new 'spirit of capitalism' (Boltansky and Chiapello, 2009), work has become the outcome of one's employability and responsibility to be self-entrepreneurial, creative, and 'free' to constantly learn, innovate, and optimize one's competences (e.g. Contu et al., 2003). This type of individualization also manifests itself in the emergence of new subjectivities centered on consumerist ethics as a form of personal power to solve social problems, ahead of any collective identity and replacing political engagement (Altintzoglou, 2016).). These new subjectivities are enacted by highlighting the aspects of capitalism that dazzle (e.g. society of spectacle) instead of the ones that coerce (e.g. the degrading conditions in which products are produced). In this 'bohemian' and 'permissive' capitalism, social transformation occurs at the hands of charismatic captains of industry—for example, the philanthropy of Bill Gates or the Zen capitalism of Steve Jobs—rather than through collective struggle (McGoey, 2015).

Finally, neoliberalism rests on the retrenchment of the state from society and the broader hollowing of the democratic polity. The current political conjuncture sadly reveals the fragility of political institutions, hostage of plutocracies of various kinds (e.g. Brown, 2015; Gilens and Page, 2014). The state has long abdicated its redistributive function through the welfare state (Starke, 2006) and the protection of the environment (Castree, 2008), facilitating the accelerated depletion of natural resources and massive dispossession of communities in the pursuit of profit (Banerjee, 2008b; Moore, 2015; Shiva, 2005).

The systemic contradictions within neoliberal capitalism, in all its varieties, have however also increasingly undermined its alleged solidity, unity, and legitimacy. The illusionary nature of the promise to deliver prosperity and security has become visible especially since the 'mother of all crisis' (Harvey, 2010: 6). The happy marriage between neoliberalism and liberal progressive values—for example, meritocracy, empowerment, diversity (Fraser, 2017)—has come to a tragic end, leaving behind the impoverishment of all except the 1% (Oxfam, 2014; OECD, 2015). Reactions to this crisis of hegemony have taken and are still taking heterogeneous forms, showing the difficulty of its recomposition.

Traditionally, contradictions within capitalism have been mitigated precisely through the co-optation of 'progressive concepts' such as business ethics, empowerment, diversity and inclusion, corporate social responsibility, philanthropy, sustainability, and shared value models (e.g. Crane et al., 2008; Kandola and Fullerton, 1994). Business schools have played a key role in the formulation and theorization of practices and programs of more 'ethical', 'human', and 'inclusive' capitalism. In the face of the mounting failures of firms and markets, however, questions about the efficacy of these strategies to stimulate change beyond lip-service become more pressing. While such initiatives might produce positive transformation for some, they do not fundamentally question the exploitative nature of capitalist accumulation nor the social relations on which it rests, running a real risk of legitimating this mode of surplus extraction and distribution (Banerjee, 2008a; Hanlon, 2008).

At the other end, the spectrum of possible engagements with neoliberal capitalism has been the formulation of critiques that draw from traditions of thought ranging from Marxism(s) to post-structuralism, psychoanalysis, feminism, anti-imperialism, and anti-racism. While the development of incisive critique has been at the core of our endeavor as a scholarly community since its

very beginning (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992; Knights and Willmott, 1989), including in this journal, it has today acquired a renewed relevance. Not only have the dark side of capitalism and its implications for citizens and societies become much more obvious to a broader public, but so have its ramifications into the functioning of democratic institutions. Whereas discussions on inequalities and oppressions had hitherto been the focus of a conversation largely among critically oriented scholars, inequalities and oppressions are today at the very center of public debates across the globe, including in the sphere of organization studies.

Arguably, this is due to their increasingly successful recuperation by populist, ultra-reactionary politics of a sort that we thought we had left behind us. As Gramsci (1971) reminds us, 'the ruling classes, with their numerous trained cadre, change men [sic] and programs to reabsorb the control (and legitimacy) that is slipping from its grasp' (p. 201; see also Morgan, 2015). Yet recuperation is clearly not the only game in town. Multiple social forces have mobilized increasing numbers of citizens and named neoliberalism's exploitation of people and planet, denounced inequality, and built areas for radical transformation. They include social movements such as the World Social Forum and the Occupy movement, political movements such as Podemos and the Arab Spring, and religious leaders such as Pope Francis and the Dalai Lama. They also count prominent scholars calling for transformative action, ranging from correcting capitalism through increasing market regulation (Piketty, 2014; Reich, 2011), to more radical post-capitalist solutions, such as workers' self-directed enterprises (Wolff, 2012) and de-growth (Fournier, 2008; Latouche, 2007), among several others.

Against the backdrop of the crisis, with different accents in different national conjunctures yet globally characterized by growing economic, social, and political polarization, the contingency and openness of the social becomes most apparent. As the etymology of the word crisis in the Greek *krinein*—separate, judge—reminds us, a crisis carries with it and demands a decision and a judgment, a call to decide where we stand and how we respond to the opening that such crisis engenders. It is at this historical moment that we issue a plea for a better balance between 'subjecting the present to critique and imagining human communities that do not yet exist' (Dinerstein, 2015: 16). We argue that to do so we should, as a scholarly community, at once remain 'anti-performative, de-naturalizing and reflexive' of capitalism(s) (Fournier and Grey, 2000) to keep developing sophisticated critique that fosters antagonism and become more proactively performative of alternatives supporting more forcefully, *and* visibly non-capitalist organizing (Gibson-Graham, 2003, 2006). We argue that these two modalities of resistance—through antagonism and social imagination, respectively—should not be regarded as standing in a relation of inherent contradiction, but rather as complementary, and mutually reinforcing each other.

Post-capitalism in the making: queering neoliberal capitalism

In 'Queer(y)ing Capitalist Organization', which appeared in *Organization* 20 years ago, Katherine Gibson and Julie Graham (Gibson-Graham, 1996a) alerted us that, as critical scholars, we play a key role in the reproduction of capitalism. Despite our ambition to foster social change, we continuously produce representations of capitalism stressing its monolithic, all-encompassing character, which paradoxically contribute to its continued hegemony. Reflecting on a conference they had just attended where regulation, household activity, the state, and even 'resistance' to capitalism were presented as all implicated in its reproduction, Gibson and Graham argued that critical theory was locked into a project of describing how the social totality lined up and became synonymous with capitalism. Following Eve Sedgwick, they named this a 'Christmas effect' whereby

> things tend to line up with each other and speak with one voice (the univocality of a dominant or hegemonic formation). Just as the family is often claimed by heterosexuality (and a heterosexuality is presumed), so

> society is often claimed by capitalism. Images of a *capitalist society* are produced, including a capitalist state, a capitalist economy, a capitalist reproduction and subjective identities as workers and consumers in a capitalist social space. (Gibson-Graham, 1996a: 542)

Starting from a reflection on their own scholarly practice, they then moved to plea for a collective project of discursive destabilization, the 'queering' of 'familiar representations of capitalism—as the hegemonic form of economy, as necessarily and naturally dominant' (Gibson-Graham, 1996a: 543). Queer theory comes to hand as it helps question 'the very idea of norms and normality, calling attention to the violence entailed by normalizing impulses, including [our own] impulse [as critical scholars] to theorize a social site as subsumed to a hegemonic order' (Gibson-Graham, 1996a: 544).

This argument is more extensively developed elsewhere drawing on feminist theory. Namely, 'capitalocentrism' discursively constitutes capitalism as the economic standard against which all other economic forms are assessed, in the same way as a phallocentric symbolic order posits man as the standard of humanity, to which woman is inferior, complementary, and within which she is contained (Cameron and Gibson-Graham, 2003; Gibson-Graham, 1996b). The analogy is particularly pregnant, as the economies in which women play a prominent role, such as the household, informal, voluntary, and subsistence economies, both conceptually and in accountancy terms, largely remain unacknowledged in 'the (capitalist) economy', despite their key role in the reproduction of labor and capital accumulation (Federici, 2012; Gibson-Graham, 1996b).

If this is the case, then the first task is to transform our shared understanding of the economy by naming, acknowledging, documenting, and theorizing. To undermine capitalism's dominance we are called to systematically engage with the diversity of non-capitalist practices, desires, and subjectivities that, like sexual difference, exist—in the unruly, incoherent spaces of the economic-real. Only by making these alternatives fully visible can transformation occur (Cameron and Gibson-Graham, 2003). The hegemony of capitalism can be deconstructed by producing a language of economic difference (a politics of language), cultivating subjects who can desire and inhabit non-capitalist economic spaces (a politics of the subject), and building community economies (a politics of collective action; Gibson-Graham, 1996b).

A politics of language (Gibson-Graham, 2006) refers not only to alternative modes of representation and calculation, but also to the possibility of producing alternatives by inserting itself in dislocation (Laclau, 1990), in 'a space of nonbeing' (Gibson-Graham, 2006: xxxiii). It is those spaces full of 'absences' that 'have become core elements in our political imaginary' (Gibson-Graham, 2006: xxxiii). Ontologically, a politics of language rests on a radically anti-essentialist stance that sees the economy as contingent relationships, dynamic, and negotiable rather than as deterministically shaped by invariant logics (Gibson-Graham, 2006).

Along similar lines, Dinerstein (2015) has recently elaborated on the notion of autonomy in Latin American movements, as a utopian force firmly rooted in the present, where it prefigures alternative realities. Drawing on Gramsci's (1968) concept of prefiguration as an initially subterraneous unfolding of the revolutionary that will become fully observable only in a later stage of development, she argues that prefiguration is a process of learning hope. Autonomy represents a hypothesis of resistance encompassing 'the delineation of new horizons beyond the given truth' (Dinerstein, 2015: 2). In their search for a dignified life, 'hope movements' 'confront the state and capital, challenge existing matrices of power and socio-political horizons, fill spaces and/or render alternative forms of cooperative and dignified work, democracy, land, indigenous autonomy, education, relation with nature and politics' (Dinerstein, 2015: 2). Indeed, as Castoriadis (2010) reminds us,

> the revolutionary project, the project of individual and collective autonomy (the two are inseparable) is not a utopia, but a socio-historical project susceptible of being achieved, and which has never been shown to

> be impossible. Its achievement depends only on the lucid activity of individuals and peoples, their understanding, their determination and imagination. (p. 3)

Imagination is here the capacity to envision 'things to come', something beyond, and other than what is already instituted (Castoriadis, 1987). Rather than locating utopia in the future, prefiguration accordingly is 'a practice through which movements actors create a conflation of their ends with their means. It is an enactment of the ultimate values of an ideal society within the very means of struggle for that society' (Maeckelbergh, 2009: 2).

A language of economic difference needs to offer new subject positions and prompt novel identifications, enabling a politics of the subject. This is by no means an easy task, as capitalism is not a mere signifier but rather involves specific libidinal investments (Madra and Özselçuk, 2014). Alternatives therefore rest on the ability to cultivate and develop subjectivities other than employee, business owner, consumer, property owner, and investor (cf. Gibson-Graham et al., 2013) in a process of 'resubjectivation' through the transformation of desires. The key to many alternative economic movements is resubjectivation by means of resocializing economic relations in ways that acknowledge and emphasize our interdependent relations in 'community economies' (Gibson-Graham, 2006). A politics of collective action is thus an ethical project based on relationships and connections, rather than on activating generic logics. Community economy articulates concepts and practices of economic interdependence in the context of enterprise organization, exchange, the management of common resources, and means by which we invest in a collective future.

Expanding the archive of the social imaginary

The political valence of documenting alternatives as a knowledge production and political work can be reconnected to Derrida's (1995) notion of the *archive*. Derrida suggested that the democratization process is linked with 'the participation in and access to the archive, its constitution and its interpretation' (Derrida, 1995: 11). We want to recuperate the metaphor of the archive because of its political power. Archivization always performs specific realities in the present that are working to bring about a specific future. This is obtained, for example, by means of distribution, circulation, repetitions, and learning that archivization involves. This is even more so today, at this specific historic juncture since the assurgency of fake news and the manipulation of nonhuman agents like bots, among other changes, are showing dramatically how the control of the archive is important for democracy. We recognize and underline the 'institutive' aspect of the archive; the authority and legitimacy (and yes also a certain violence) that is involved in producing, collecting, and consigning the artifacts of humanity, in this case artifacts related to diverse economies.

The democratizing power of the archive is in the justice it enacts in two ways. The first is that doing critical work as part of the archive means to bear witness to oppressive and exploitative power relations and their historical articulation and pain, but also to the desires for joy, for solidarity, recognition, equality, and self-determination that go beyond the stale ego-centric and egoistic meritocracy and success offered and demanded by neoliberalism. This delivers and reproduces real alternatives in the present; as such, this is part of a post-capitalist politics in the making since such experiments, practices, subjectivities, and contradiction are active participant in building the future. 'The archive', as Derrida (1995) put it, 'is a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow' (p. 36).

The second aspect involves the justice of memory, of bearing witness (Derrida, 1995: 76). Archiving is then also a way to inscribe the complexity, multiplicity of activism, and diverse economic practices and forms of organizing of the present. This imagines and preconizes for example by making possible and favoring, theorizing, suggesting, advocating, legitimizing, and building

specific visions, interpretations, linkages, articulations, agencies, and artifacts that participate in the co-constitution of an emergent new world. It is indeed about becoming ethical agents who assume our historical responsibility for the decisions we take in our scholarly praxis everyday thereby bearing responsibility for the future that is coming. We have no control, yet we are collectively co-constituting it in the myriads of decisions we take every day.

While Derrida does not explain what democratization means for him, for us democratization is facilitated by the pluralization of voices and alternative ways of life. The spaces and practices discussed in the articles included here advance ways of organizing life other than the neoliberal one that reduces every activity to its monetary success and subjects to egomaniacs. Democratization, then, is pursued through the diversification of the archive to document the heterogeneity of the economy. By considering the power and politics of the archive as a key part of democratization, this special issue builds on the initial archival effort that has emerged in organization and management studies over the past few years, in dialogue with other disciplines (e.g. Atzeni, 2012; Safri, 2015). The articles all reconnect to key aspects of the current debate on alternative economies, expanding the archive by further theorizing, engaging with, and advocating for emancipatory and justice-oriented alternatives.

Of the vast number of sumbissions we received, we present five in this volume to rejoin our collective, inter-disciplinary archive. [1]In the first contribution, Alexis Bryson vividly shows the potential of feminist theory to help think through alternatives. Investigating the communal processing and reselling of used children's goods, the author shows how unwaged, entrepreneurial reproductive labor represents a terrain of political struggle, countering one-sided interpretations highlighting its colonization by the market. Seasonal consignment sales (SCS) subverts capitalism by granting public recognition to the shared, collective value of women's reproductive labor. Specifically, the mix of barter, paid, volunteer, and alternative reproductive labor taking place in a variety of locations from private households to public spaces interrupts the neoliberal reflex of valuing expended labor through market mechanisms. SCS is thus theorized as a vital space of cooperation, coalition, and community potentially constituting a 'point zero' (Federici, 2012), where wage relations are contested and collective interests advanced in the shared work of the reproduction of society.

Valuation mechanisms are also the focus of Wessel Reijers' article on hospitality exchange through digital platforms such as BeWelcome and Couchsurfing. Drawing on Simmel's theory of money, his analysis is less positive, unmasking the illusion of a sharing economy by unveiling the explicit and implicit pricing mechanisms. In this virtual 'economy of regard', reviews measure one's degree of trustworthiness, enacting exclusionary dynamics, magnifying differences between the haves and have-nots. Although the digital commons promise an alternative to global capitalism, the illusion of the sharing economy gives rise to cynicism, as a contemporary form of false consciousness. Borrowing from Marcuse and Sloterdijk, Reijers argues that cynicism results from the arbitrary fixation of reality in this technological environment. The values involved in concrete, situated practices of 'commoning' are reduced to homogeneous, formal, and quantifiable rules and measurements through simplifications, codifications, and objectifications rooted and reproducing one-dimensional thought.

Marek Hudon and Camille Meyer's article examines the commons established through five community currencies (CCs) across the globe as locally embedded attempts to resist the rising enclosure and privatization of shared resources. Theoretically building on Ostrom's (1990) classical work on the commons and Fournier's (2013) recent critical conceptualization of commoning, the authors read CCs as organizing *in* common, *of* the common, and *for* the common. Their nuanced analysis reveals that CCs organize *in* common in that they are usually issued by social and solidarity economic organizations with a participative governance structure. Moreover, they organize the

common as they strengthen communities by creating a shared identity around solidarity and social cohesion, outside capitalist relations and not for capital accumulation. At the same time, the authors also point to the limits of CCs: they are not *for* the commons, as they are largely spent individually and they do not redistribute resources more equally within the community, as they might reproduce the unequal valuation of diverse types of labor in the market.

Ursula Plesner and Emil Husted's article speaks to the literature on digital platforms to develop alternative spaces for political deliberation. The Danish radical party *The Alternative*, which uses open-source technology to build its program bottom–up, is used as an illustrative case to theorize political spaces enabling citizens to 'supply' rather than 'consume' politics, despite their institutionalization from social movement into party. The authors analyze a three-phased political process leading to the party program, arguing that each phase affords distinct political practices which oscillate between imagination/openness and affirmation/closure. This dialectic facilitates the bridging of the universal—the claim of representation of the larger community, society in its whole, through an empty signifier—and the particular—the filling of that signifier to narrow down the political project to political interests around which specific social groups are structured. Different from Reijer's, this article is more hopeful of the potential of digital platforms to the redefine democratic processes in ways that foster inclusion. The article shows the critical role played by organizational processes in creating alternative politics, at a time of crisis of representative democratic institutions.

In the last article, Susana Esper, Laure Cabantous, Luciano Barin Cruz, and Jean-Pascal Gond examine the role of academics in the (re)production of alternative organizations. Empirically, they study how academics involved in the extension program Facultad Abierta have supported worker recuperated enterprises (WREs). Taken over and self-managed by workers after bankruptcy and abandonment, WREs emerged during the 2001 collapse of the Argentinian economy as a consequence of structural reforms imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) through the 1990s. Theoretically building on the extant literature on WREs and the current debate on 'critical performativity' in critical management studies, their analysis focuses on the historical process of producing new subjectivities, constituting new organizational models, and the bridging of these models to current social movements.

Conclusion: critical scholarship between an antagonistic and an imaginative praxis

In this last section, we reflect to how the literature on alternative economies speaks to us as critically oriented academics and to our ambition to be 'performative' in a way that goes beyond the formulation of critique grounded in non-mainstream knowledge bases. This reflection reconnects our quest for alternative economies to the current performativity debate in organization studies, which echoes the sense of dissatisfaction with (their own prior, left) critique expressed by Gibson-Graham in the 1996 article, with which we opened (Gibson-Graham, 1996a). Amidst the crisis of the economy as well as democratic institutions, we are fundamentally interrogating ourselves on how our scholarship can be made more relevant (e.g. Cabantous et al., 2016; Fleming and Banerjee, 2016; Fournier and Grey, 2000; Gond and Cabantous, 2015; King and Learmonth, 2015; Learmonth et al., 2016; Schaefer and Wickert, 2016; Spicer et al., 2009; Willmott, 2008). We believe that the study of alternative economies is not merely one of the ways through which we can become more performative—although it certainly is (King and Learmonth, 2015)—but rather, that it offers alternative paradigm for 'other' critical research, from which we can start becoming 'other' critical scholars. Hereunder, we deal with few core distinctive aspects of this body of literature, which we take home from this editorial process and which could inform a broader self-reflection on critical organizational research.

A first aspect has to do with the emphasis of alternative economies literature on re-signification as emerging from collective practices and processes, which scholars witness or in which they partake, rather than on critique mainly as an individual scholar's intellectual exercise in dialogue with specific bodies of theory. This distinct focus is underpinned by a radical understanding of knowledge as produced bottom–up, inductively, as poignantly shown by the insistence on the emergence of alternatives out of workers' (material) necessity, rather than out of pre-existing, ideologically informed plans (Bittencourt Meira, 2014; Vieta, 2012, 2014), as well as the rejection of an ontology of alternatives as mere instantiations—exemplars, is it were—of overall laws (Healy, 2009).

Again drawing from Sedgwick's work, Gibson and Graham (2006: 7–8 referring to Sedgwick, 2003) advocate 'weak theory', theory that remains close to the phenomenon under study, to do as little violence as possible to its richness and complexity and, most importantly, not to foreclose (the imagination of) any future. Rather than gauging concrete experiences of non-capitalist organizations against ideal-typical criteria, such as cooperative production, worker self-management, and solidarity inevitably leading to a focus on their deficiencies (Bittencourt Meira, 2014), weak theory should be seen as a strategy to become more appreciative of potentialities. 'Weak theory can be undertaken with a reparative motive that welcomes surprise, entertains hope, makes connection, tolerates coexistence and offers care for the new' (Gibson-Graham, 2006: 8). It is a practice of making room for the other in non-normative ways, at a time in history in which the problem is not so much the inconsistency of economic concepts, it is argued, but rather their scarcity, and that the politics of recognition is 'already also a politics of redistribution' (Gibson-Graham, 2006: 8). Clearly, we are not advocating here the abandonment of theory-informed knowledge for practice-based knowledge—the two do not stand in a zero-sum game. Rather, we are advocating for redressing the historically and somewhat discipline specific unequal relationship between them, whereby the latter is systematically cast functionally, to develop the former, a mundane opportunity to explain something larger, higher, more abstract, and thus more important, visible and intellectually more gratifying.

Operating from this paradigm would require a fundamental shift in our praxis as academics. Whereas today our praxis fosters strong forms of (strong) accountability to academic peers and superiors, the engagement with collective practices of re-signification on their own terms requires opening ourselves more to the multiple others involved in such practices. Esper and colleagues' study in this collection gives an enlightening example of how academics, at a moment of deep crisis of society, have put themselves at the service of alternative economies to ensure their survival. Obviously, the modalities of many others' engagement are unlikely to be as all-encompassing and radical. They remain highly context-specific, depending on larger historical and societal contexts in which one is embedded, in the phase of one's professional and personal trajectory and one's own inclinations.

Yet, this example shows well how performativity starts with alternative praxis (King and Learmonth, 2015; Learmonth and Humphreys, 2012; Learmonth et al., 2012), and one that makes us accountable toward other types of subjects and collectivities (cf. Butler, 2005). Outside praxis, there is only a simulacrum of performativity, an intellectual debate without 'doing the doing', to paraphrase Ahmed (2007). We need to be more often in 'strong' relations within which we are more likely posed an ethical and political demand to produce knowledge that can sustain the imagination of different economies, their practices, and subjectivities. Even in the awareness that one can never fully appreciate, and does not own, or fully control, the consequences of one's act (Butler, 2005), the fundamental uncertainty of the decision we take heightens and focalizes our response as an ethical act: the responsibility to care for others, for the planet, and for ourselves become ever more significant. One becomes a scholar through a wide variety of daily social relations to multiple

audiences, with which we act and jointly produce distinct types of knowledge (Gillies, 2014). Envisioning novel, enhanced, more effective modes of performativity requires accounting for our current diverse, heterogeneous praxis, a praxis that can in no way be reduced to publishing research for an academic audience. Much of this praxis remains today largely unacknowledged, as the academic 'dirty work' whose naming entails the risk of being excluded from the category of 'real' academics (cf. Alvesson, 2012).

Indeed, engaging with collective processes of re-signification also requires questioning this selective understanding of the scholar and cultivating different types of scholarly subjectivity, less subordinate to a desire to prove one's ability to engage with a master theory for intellectual recognition (Hill Collins, 2012). We need to become more invested and capable to engage with the imperfections of lived life, without fear for condemnation by a critical audience—as reality typically does not live up to our expectations and surely never to theoretical ones—or political recuperation by the mainstream, something that might become more likely the moment we choose for 'weak theory' and less normative recipes. More fundamentally, we need to be more at ease with being 'wrong', the realization that after all the future turned out differently than we had hoped and our assessment of the emancipatory potential of a certain experience was overly optimistic. Only cutting ourselves some slack (to fail) will leave the room for positive surprises to emerge and us to notice them.

We are of course not naive about the contemporary political economy of academia, and the mechanisms of one's valuation as an academic. Yet we would like to stress here how we partake in its reproduction. Our own representations of scholars as cogs within the publication machinery end up obscuring embodied, moral, relational academic subjects and are thus likely to contribute to discouraging alternative practices trajectories and to implicitly legitimize publishing as defining the academic subject. We could be much more radical in fostering recognition of scholarly engagement in more heterogeneous ways, cultivating the heterogeneity of practices, and contesting the hierarchization of the many roles that are at the heart of academia. If we take seriously that all social representations of the world are performative, the avowal of disharmony, incoherence, and contradiction amidst ourselves is a necessary first step to prefigure non-capitalistic difference, change, and the potential for successful political interventions. Our capacity to uncover difference rests in the first place on our ability to cultivate difference *within*.

This is a time where the necessity of the social is scattered to the winds and individual and collective responsibility in creating and re-creating the social order comes powerfully to the fore (Harvey, 2014). As management and organizational scholars, the specific political economy of our knowledge and occupational logic have been 'organic', as Gramsci would put it, to the reproduction of capitalism in general, and specifically in the past 30 years to neoliberalism (Mintzberg, 2005). Recognizing our historico-political implication in the reproduction of the social heightens our responsibility in the concrete praxis of critical scholarship. At the same time, the resurgent right-wing populist politics of nostalgia, with its simplistic, crude, and cruel response to the failings of the global economy, alert us to the consequences of not shouldering this responsibility. We invite our readers to reconsider and rebalance our individual and collective engagement between theorizing and denouncing the multiple ways capitalism denies economic, social, and epistemic justice on one hand, and non-capitalist experiences redress economic, social, and epistemic justice on the other. And then to act in service of these latter.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Note

1. Few articles originally submitted for publication in this special issue will be published as regular articles in *Organization* later this year.

References

Ahmed, S. (2007) 'You End up Doing the Document Rather than Doing the Doing: Diversity, Race Equality and the Politics of Documentation', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30(4): 590–609.

Altintzoglou, E. (2016) *Deflowered Revolution: An Ethical Examination of Neo-Liberal Tactics of Pacification*. Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press.

Alvesson, M. (2012) 'Do We Have Something to Say? From Re-Search to Roi-Search and Back Again', *Organization*, 20(1): 79–90.

Alvesson, M. and Willmott, H. (1992) *Critical Management Studies*. London: Sage.

Atzeni, M. (2012) 'An Introduction to Theoretical Issues', in M. Atzeni (ed.) *Alternative Work Organizations*, pp. 1–24. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Banerjee, S. B. (2008b) 'Corporate Social Responsibility: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly', *Critical Sociology* 34(1): 51–79.

Banerjee, S. B. (2008a) 'Necrocapitalism', *Organization Studies* 29(12): 1541–63.

Barin Cruz, L., Aquino Alves, M. and Delbrige, R. (2015) 'Organizing Alternatives to Capitalism Call for Papers Special Issue of *M@nagement*'. Retrieved May 22, 2017, from https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/50eb/46f49b8bdd6095ffd93c276520ffeebb35d7.pdf

Bittencourt Meira, F. (2014) 'Liminal Organization: Organizational Emergence within Solidary Economy in Brazil', *Organization* 21(5): 713–29.

Boltansky, L. and Chiapello, E. (2009) *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. London: Verso.

Bretos, I. and Errasti, A. (2017) 'Challenges and Opportunities for the Regeneration of Multinational Worker Cooperatives: Lessons from the Mondragon Corporation—A Case Study of the Fagor Ederlan Group', *Organization* 24(2): 154–73.

Brown, W. (2015) *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*. New York: Zone Books.

Butler, J. (2005) *Giving an Account of Oneself*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Cabantous, L., Gond, J.-P., Harding, N. and Learmonth, M. (2016) 'Critical Essay: Reconsidering Critical Performativity', *Human Relations* 69(2): 197–213.

Cameron, J. and Gibson-Graham, J. K. (2003) 'Feminising the Economy: Metaphors, Strategies, Politics', *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 10(2): 145–57.

Castoriadis, C. (1987) *The Imaginary Institution of Society: Creativity and Autonomy in the Social-Historical World*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Castoriadis, C. (2010) *A Society Adrift: Interviews and Debates 1974–1997*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Castree, N. (2008) 'Neoliberalising Nature: The Logics of Deregulation and Reregulation', *Environment and Planning A* 40: 131–52.

Cheney, G., Santa Cruz, I., Peredo, A. M., et al. (2014) 'Worker Cooperatives as an Organizational Alternative: Challenges, Achievements and Promise in Business Governance and Ownership', *Organization* 21(5): 591–603.

Contu, A. (2017) 'Let's up the Ante: A Call for Intellectual Activism in Business Schools'. Retrieved May 23, 2017, from https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2928841

Contu, A., Grey, C. and Örtenblad, A. (2003) 'Against Learning', *Human Relations* 56(8): 931–52.

Crane, A., Matten, D., McWilliams, A., et al. (eds) (2008) *The Oxford Handbook of Corporate Social Responsibility*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Derrida, J. (1995) 'Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression', *Diacritics* 25(2): 9–63.

Dinerstein, A. C. (2015) *The Politics of Autonomy in Latin America: The Art of Organising Hope*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Esper, S., Cabantous, L., Barin-Cruz, L., et al. (2017) 'Supporting alternative organizations? Exploring scholars' involvement in the performativity of worker-recuperated enterprises', *Organization* 24(5): 671–699.

Federici, S. (2012) *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction and Feminist Struggle*. Oakland, CA: PM Press.

Fleming, P. and Banerjee, S. B. (2016) 'When Performativity Fails: Implications for Critical Management Studies', *Human Relations* 69(2): 257–276.

Fournier, V. (2008) 'Escaping from the Economy: The Politics of Degrowth', *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 28(11–12): 528–45.

Fournier, V. and Grey, C. (2000) 'At the critical moment: Conditions and prospects for critical management studies', *Human Relations* 53: 7–32.

Fraser, N. (2017) 'The End of Progressive Neoliberalism', *Dissent*. Retrieved April 2, 2017, from https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/progressive-neoliberalism-reactionary-populism-nancy-fraser

Garmann Johnsen, C., Nelund, M., Olaison, L., et al. (2017) 'Organizing for the Post-Growth Economy', *Ephemera* 17(1): 1–21.

Gibson-Graham, J. K. (1996a) 'Queer(y)ing Capitalist Organization', *Organization* 3(4): 541–5.

Gibson-Graham, J. K. (1996b) *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It): A Feminist Critique of Political Economy*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Gibson-Graham, J. K. (2003) 'Enabling Ethical Economies: Cooperativism and Class', *Critical Sociology* 29(2): 123–61.

Gibson-Graham, J. K. (2006) *Postcapitalist Politics*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Gibson-Graham, J. K. (2008) 'Diverse Economies: Performative Practices for "Other Worlds"', *Progress in Human Geography* 32(5): 613–32.

Gibson-Graham, J. K., Cameron, J. and Healy, S. (2013) *Take Back the Economy: An Ethical Guide for Transforming Our Communities*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Gilens, M. and Page, B. I. (2014) 'Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens', *Perspectives on Politics* 12(3): 564–81.

Gillies, D. (2014) 'Knowledge Activism: Bridging the Research/Policy Divide', *Critical Studies in Education* 55(3): 272–88.

Gond, J. P. and Cabantous, L. (2015) Performativity: Towards a Performative Turn in Organization Studies. in R. Mir, H. Willmott and Greenwood M (eds) *Routledge Companion to Philosophy in Organization Studies*. pp. 508–516. London: Routledge.

Gramsci, A. (1968) 'Soviets in Italy (Writings from 1919 and 1920)', *New Left Review* 51: 28–58.

Gramsci, A. (1971) *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. London: Lawrence & Wishart.

Hanlon, G. (2008) 'Rethinking Corporate Social Responsibility and the Role of the Firm—On the Denial of Politics', in A. Crane, D. Matten, A. McWilliams, et al. (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Corporate Social Responsibility*, pp. 56–172. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Harvey, D. (2005) *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Harvey, D. (2010) *The Enigma of Capital and the Crises of Capitalism*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Harvey, D. (2014) *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism*. New York: Profile Books.

Healy, S. (2009) 'Economies, Alternative', in R. Kitchin and N. Thrift (eds) *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, vol. 3, pp. 338–44. Oxford: Elsevier.

Hill Collins, P. (2012) *On Intellectual Activism*. Philadelphia:Temple University Press

Jessop, B. (2016) 'The Organic Crisis of the British State: Putting Brexit in Its Place', *Globalizations* 14: 133–41.

Kandola, R. and Fullerton, J. (1994) *Managing the Mosaic: Diversity in Action*. Wiltshire: Cromwell Press.

King, D. and Learmonth, M. (2015) 'Can Critical Management Studies Ever Be "Practical"? A Case Study in Engaged Scholarship', *Human Relations* 68(3): 353–75.

Knights, D. and Willmott, H. (1989). 'Power and Subjectivity At Work: From Degradation to Subjugation in Social Relations', *Sociology* 23(4): 535–58.

Laclau, E. (1990) *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*. London: Verso.

Latouche, S. (2007) *Petit traité de la décroissance sereine* (Small Treaty of Placid De-Growth). Paris: Mille et Une Nuits.

Learmonth, M. and Humphreys, M. (2012) 'Autoethnography and Academic Identity: Glimpsing Business School Doppelgängers', *Organization* 19(1): 99–117.

Learmonth, M., Lockett, A. and Dowd, K. (2012) 'Towards Scholarship That Matters: The Usefulness of Useless Research and the Uselessness of Useful Research', *British Journal of Management* 23(1): 35–44.

McGoey, L. (2015) *No Such Thing as a Free Gift: The Gates Foundation and the Price of Philanthropy*. New York: Verso Books.

Madra, Y. M. and Özselçuk, C. (2014) 'Affective Economies: Lacan's Four Discourses against the Historicism of Capitalist Abstraction', in S. Žižek, F. Vighi and H. Feldner (eds) *States of Crisis and Post-Capitalist Scenarios*, pp. 141–66. Farnham: Ashgate.

Maeckelbergh, M. (2009) *The Will of the Many: How the Alterglobalisation Movement Is Changing the Face of Democracy*. London: Pluto Press.

Mintzberg, H. (2005) 'Developing Theory about the Development of Theory', in K. G. Smith and M. A. Hitt (eds) *Great Minds in Management: The Process of Theory Development* pp. 355–72. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Moore, J. W. (2015) *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital*. London: Verso.

Morgan, G. (2015) 'Elites, Varieties of Capitalism and the Crisis of Neo-liberalism', *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* 43: 55–80.

OECD (2015) In It Together: Why Less Inequality Benefits All. Retrieved April 21, 2017, from http://www.oecd.org/social/in-it-together-why-less-inequality-benefits-all-9789264235120-en.htm

Ostrom, E. (1990) *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Oxfam (2014) Working For The Few: Political Capture and Economic Inequality. *178 Oxfam Briefing Paper* Retrieved April 21, 2017, from www.oxfam.org

Parker, M., Cheney, G., Fournier, V., et al. (2014) *Routledge Companion to Alternative Organizations*. London: Routledge.

Piketty, T. (2014) *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Reich, R. B. (2011) *Aftershock: The Next Economy and America's Future*. New York: Vintage.

Safri, M. (2015) 'Mapping Noncapitalist Supply Chains: Toward an Alternate Conception of Value Creation and Distribution', *Organization* 22(6): 924–41.

Schaefer, S. M. and Wickert, C. (2016) 'On the Potential of Progressive Performativity: Definitional Purity, Re-Engagement and Empirical Points of Departure,' *Human Relations* 69(2) 215–224.

Sedgwick, E. K. (2003) *Touching, Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity.* Durham: Duke University Press.

Shiva, V. (2005) *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability, and Peace*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books.

Soederberg, S. (2014) *Debtfare States and the Poverty Industry: Money, Discipline and the Surplus Population*. London: Routledge.

Spicer, A., Alvesson, M. and Kärreman, D. (2009) 'Critical Performativity: The Unfinished Business of Critical Management Studies', *Human Relations* 62: 537–60.

Starke, P. (2006) 'The Politics of Welfare State Retrenchment: A Literature Review', *Social Policy & Administration* 40(1): 104–20.

Strange, S. (1986) *Casino Capitalism*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Streeck, W. (2014) 'How Capitalism Will End', *New Left Review* 87(May–June): 35–64.

Streeck, W. (2016) *How Will Capitalism End?* London: Verso.

Vieta, M. (2012) 'From Managed Employees to Self-managed Workers: The Transformation of Labour at Argentina's Worker-recuperated Enterprises', in M. Atzeni (ed.) *Alternative Work Organizations*, pp. 129–56. London: Macmillan Palgrave.

Vieta, M. (2014) 'Learning in Struggle: Argentina's New Worker Cooperatives as Transformative Learning Organizations', *Relations Industrielles/Industrial Relations* 69(1): 186–218.

Wahl, A. (2017) 'Reactionary Working Class?', *Social Europe*. Retrieved April 2, 2017, from https://www.socialeurope.eu/2017/03/reactionary-working-class/

Willmott, H. (2008) 'Critical Management and Global Justice', *Organization* 15(6): 927–31.

Wolff, R. (2012) *Democracy at Work: A Cure for Capitalism*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.

Žižek, S. (2009) *In Defense of Lost Causes*. London: Verso.

Author biographies

Patrizia Zanoni is a professor at the Faculty of Business Economics at Hasselt University, where she leads the research center SEIN—Identity, Diversity & Inequality Research. She studied international economics and anthropology and holds a PhD in business from KULeuven. Drawing on critical discourse analysis and Marxist theory, her research investigates the relation between diversity—gender, ethnicity, disability, and age—and organizing, control and resistance, work-related identities, and inequality. Her work has appeared in international organization studies and educational journals. She is involved in policy-relevant research and education projects with companies, trade unions as well as public sector and non-profit organizations.

Alessia Contu is the chair of the Management Department at the University of Massachusetts Boston. She was a Reader at Warwick Business School, UK, until December 2013. Prior to that she worked at Lancaster University Management School (from 2001 to 2006). Alessia is a psychologist by training. Her work draws upon different strands of political theory, psychoanalysis, political philosophy, and ethics to question and understand contemporary organizational, managerial, and working practices. Much of her research has focused on organizational politics and specifically organizational resistance and control in MNCs, SMEs, and NGOs; the role of hegemonic management discourses such as the 'learning' discourse or the 'partnership' discourse in reproducing work relations and stable identities; and that of innovation, knowledge creation, and sharing in communities of practice. Her single and co-authored articles have been published in a variety of journals including *Organization Science*, *Ephemera*, *Human Relations*, *Management Communication Quarterly*, and *Organization Studies*. Her current work includes the project of intellectual activism to renew the practices of business schools and a project on sustainable social entrepreneurship practices in low-income countries. Alessia is also working on a team-project on recuperated firms and the conditions for their flourishing.

Stephen Healy is a senior research fellow at the Institute for Culture and Society, Western Sydney University. His work deploys geographic analysis, Marxian, feminist, and psychoanalytic theory to understand processes of both economic subjectivization and transformation. He is a founding member of the Community Economies Research Network and an associate editor of the Diverse Economies Livable Worlds Book Series from University of Minnesota Press. With J.K. Gibson-Graham and Jenny Cameron, he is the co-author of *Take Back the Economy*, and *Ethical Guide to Transforming Our Communities* (2013) from UMP, recently translated into Korean, Spanish, and Finnish.

Raza Mir is a professor of Management at William Paterson University. His research mainly concerns global capitalism, multinational corporations, and issues relating to power and resistance in organizations. He is the co-editor of the *Routledge Companion to Philosophy in Organization Studies* (Routledge, 2016) and the *Routledge Companion to Qualitative Research in Organization Studies* (Routledge, 2018). He is also interested in Urdu literature and is the author of *The Taste of Words: An Introduction to Urdu Poetry* (Penguin, 2014). He recently served as the Chair of the Critical Management Studies Division of the Academy of Management.