

## Toward an Agenda of Radical Organizing: Introduction to the Special Issue\*

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Ce document présente et contextualise la collection d'articles du numéro spécial sur les crises organisationnelles. En contradiction avec les notions ayant cours sur les crises organisationnelles comme changement qui menace l'existence, la croissance ou le rendement d'une organisation, le terme est ici défini comme l'existence générale des processus organisationnels qui reproduisent de façon routinière les pratiques ethnocentriques, à caractère sexuel, et anti-humaines recréant continuellement des environnements organisationnels comme des sites (socio) psychologiquement préjudiciables de l'interaction humaine. Soulignant la persistance des réalités organisationnelles et l'absence relative de théories alternatives de l'organisation, l'article trace les contours d'une théorie radicale de l'organisation.

This paper introduces and contextualises the collection of papers that constitute the special issue on organizational crisis. In contradiction to mainstream notions of organizational crisis as a change that threatens the existence, growth or profitability of an organization, the term is here defined as the widespread existence of organizational processes that routinely reproduce ethnocentric, gendered, and other anti-human practices that continually recreate organizational environments as (social) psychologically damaging sites of human interaction. Pointing to the persistence of organizational realities and the relative absence of alternative theories of organizing, the paper outlines the contours of a radical theory of organization.

SINCE THE ADVENT OF THE MODERN ORGANIZATION, and particularly throughout most of the twentieth century, organizational and management scholars have sought ways to improve organizational efficiency. In the process a number of disciplinary areas have developed—including Organization Theory (OT), Organizational Behaviour (OB), Management, and Human Resources Management (HRM)—which have as a focus a search for ways to co-ordinate and control the activities of employees to achieve greater levels of efficiency. Although the “human

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factor" (Roethlisberger and Dickson, 1939) was not overlooked, people in organizations were ultimately viewed as means to an end, the end being efficiency and profitability.

Within these disciplinary areas some concern with the impact of organizational arrangements (e.g., systems of communication, decision-making processes, hierarchical structure) on people managed to surface from time to time but, until recently the fundamental principles of organizing have rarely been questioned. Robert Merton (1940), for example, raised concerns about the impact of bureaucratic structuring on personality and the dysfunctional consequences of the resultant "overconformity." In the context of a developing science of organizational efficiency, Merton's concern with psychological disturbance was overshadowed by his ultimate concern with organizational efficiency. Two decades later Christopher Argyris (1957) argued that the structure of modern organizations—with its emphasis on hierarchical control—can have deleterious effects on psychological growth and development by restricting the ability of employees to think and make decisions about their own work activities. Argyris's solution—"participative decision-making"—was easily incorporated into a growing discipline of Organizational Behaviour focussed on finding ways to "improve" the behaviour of employees for management defined ends (e.g., efficiency, organizational growth, profitability, etc.).<sup>1</sup>

Since the 1960s debates within Management, OB, OT, and, to a lesser extent, HRM, have become a more complex blending of organizational and psychological concerns, a more subtle blending of concerns with management defined ends and with employee well-being. The current debate on "diversity management," for example, often times reveals a genuine concern with the eradication of discrimination against women and people of color that is coupled with the argument that "diversity" is "good for business," but, in the process, the role of existing principles of organization in the development of discriminatory images is often overlooked (Prasad and Mills, 1997).

Within the existing framework of organizational and managerial studies—variously referred to as functionalist (Burrell and Morgan, 1979), malestream (Ferguson, 1984) ethnocentric (Nkomo, 1992) and/or managerialist (Mills and Simmons, 1998)—the notion of organizational crisis has come to refer to a breakdown, or change, in organizational arrangements that threatens the continued operation, existence or growth of a given organization. Steven Fink, for example, defines an organizational crisis as "any unstable state of affairs in which a decisive change is imminent," arguing that

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1. It is not difficult to see how "participation," as an *aspect* of a decision-making process whose terms are predetermined by those who manage and/or control the organization, does not pose a threat to existing structures of organizational power and authority.

a crisis is any prodromal (i.e., pre-crisis) situation which runs the risk of: 1. escalating in intensity, 2. falling under media attention (or government review), 3. interfering with normal business operations, 4. jeopardizing the corporate public image, or 5. damaging the company's bottom line (cited in Markham, 1990: 123).

Fink's notion of organizational crisis and of crisis management, focussed as they are on managerial rather than human concerns, arose, ironically, out of his involvement as a marketing and communications administrator assigned to the Governor's crisis team in the wake of the *Three Mile Island* nuclear accident in Pennsylvania in 1979. It is Fink's contention that organizational crisis can be avoided if management prepare by learning how to recognize and deal with the warning signs.

Over the last twenty-five years a number of critical approaches to organizing have emerged and challenged the dominant assumptions within the managerialist approach. These critical approaches, which include radical, feminist, racio-ethnicity and post-modernist ways of viewing organizational reality (Mills and Simmons, 1998), share a common concern with the impact of organizational arrangements on people; seeking to understand such things as the relationship between organizational arrangements and "de-skilling" (Braverman, 1974), a sense of failure (Illich, 1981), the suppression of women's voice (Ferguson, 1984), the "organizational construction of discriminatory notions of sexuality" (Hearn and Parkin, 1987), antagonism toward homosexual orientation (Hall, 1989), the social construction of negative images of black women (Bell and Nkomo, 1992) and men (Nkomo and Cox, 1989), the devaluing of non-white cultures and values (Prasad, 1997), accidents and fatalities (Shrivastava, 1987), and the social construction of images of the "ideal" employee that simultaneously controls those who fit the image while disempowering those who do not (Townley, 1994).

When we focus on organizational arrangements as social psychological processes (Weick, 1979) that have profound implications for the identities, social worth, and lives of people a different light is cast on the idea of organizational crisis. From this perspective it is not breakdowns and changes in organizational arrangements that are primarily the problem (although this can be seen as an important factor in those cases that lead to accidents and fatalities) but the *mundane* reproduction of ethnocentric and gendered practices that continually recreate organizational environments as (social) psychologically damaging sites of human interaction.

For this special issue a broad approach to the notion of organizational crisis was taken. Papers were invited that addressed the causes of negative organizational outcomes in which organizational crisis was viewed as either an outcome of organizational breakdown—the catalyst for a series of negative outcomes (e.g., accidents, strikes, negative publicity, etc.), or a characterization of a widespread malaise of organizing (i.e.,

a crisis of organizing) in which negative outcomes are routinely re/produced.<sup>2</sup>

In the first paper, David Collinson examines the impact of “time-space pressures” of offshore work in the North Sea oil industry on the home and work lives of employees, and reveals how the structure of forms of work can have a powerful impact on the home life of those involved, resulting in “financial, psychological and emotional tensions at home . . . [that] feed back into the workplace because problems are not resolved in the time available onshore.”

The second paper in the collection turns our attention to the gendered character of organizational structure and processes and its role in the Challenger shuttle disaster of 1986. Focussing specifically on the operation of “multiple masculinities,” Mark Maier and James Messerschmidt explore the different ways that masculinity is constructed in organizational settings and how the subsequent commonalities and contradictions contribute to organizational decisions and outcomes. Contending that a “dominant masculinist managerial mindset” pervaded the organizations involved in the Challenger launch, and that “‘normal’ organizational behaviour is in fact gendered (‘masculine’) and . . . can be debilitating to individual and organizational effectiveness,” Maier and Messerschmidt go on to argue for the “feminization” of organizations as a contribution to industrial crisis management.

The third paper examines the role of culture and leadership in the recent crisis in the Canadian army. Focussing on the “regimental system” of organizing and its impact on “good order and discipline,” Donna Winslow examines the causes of a breakdown of discipline during two peacekeeping operations in Somalia and Bacovici (in the former Yugoslavia) in 1993. Winslow argues that the roots of the recent crisis can be traced to the “corporate nature” of the army’s culture which fosters inclusiveness and forms of bonding that encourage inappropriate group norms, including disrespect for authority outside of the group. Concluding that “strong group identification can be offset by discipline and leadership,” Winslow contends that “the cultivation of in group (regimental) identity needs to be balanced with respect for military authority and the rule of law” and that the role of leadership is crucial for the establishment of appropriate role norms.

In the tradition of Goffman (1984a; 1984b), the fourth paper examines the way that acts of compliance and resistance can contribute either to the long-term benefit or detriment of the organization. David Wicks argues against the tendency to draw a sharp distinction between compliance as beneficial and resistance as detrimental to “the organization in the

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2. The issue attracted widespread interest among organizational scholars from Canada, the US, Britain, Norway, Finland, Hong Kong, Australia and the Netherlands who acted either as peer reviewers (see Appendix ) or as contributors. In this latter group most, with one or two exceptions, sent in papers that represented a critical approach to organization, crisis and negative outcomes.

aggregate.” He contends that some forms of compliance and of resistance can be similar in their outcomes, and he draws the distinction between, on the one hand, compliance behaviour that is intended to benefit the organization (“responsive-beneficial”) and compliance behaviour which is undertaken for motives other than the organization’s benefit (“responsive-detrimental”) and, on the other hand, resistance behaviour that is intended to benefit the organization (“formative-beneficial”) and resistance behaviour that is motivated by interests other than those of the organization (“formative-detrimental”). The analysis leads Wicks to conclude that not only should resistance be included (alongside compliance) as a central focus of organizational study but that it should be encouraged as an option.

In the final paper, Vappu Tyyskä explores aspects of the problematic of feminist (and “woman-centred”) organization by way of a comparative study of “women’s organizations” in Finland and Canada. Through a focus on “organizational effectiveness,” Tyyskä grapples with the issue of whether “women’s organizations” can best attain their aims through involvement with (“insider strategy”) or resistance to (“outside strategy”) malestream organizations; in the process she raises numerous questions about the age-old problem of whether (modern) organizational forms are more likely to corrupt ideals than to achieve them (see Ferguson, 1984; Kropotkin, 1914; Malcolm X, 1969; Michels, 1949). Tyyskä concludes that in terms of achieving long-term policy objectives it may, under certain conditions, be more effective for women’s organizations to adopt an insider strategy: in stark contradiction to a number of recent feminist critiques of the state (see Grant and Tancred), Tyyskä contends that “it is counter-productive to perceive state bureaucracy merely as a tool of patriarchal capitalism to be avoided at all costs.”

### **What Is to Be Done? Effectiveness versus Co-Option**

Tyyskä’s paper presents a valuable starting point for consideration of the underlying tensions within critical approaches to organizations. Repelled by the development of disciplines designed to manipulate humankind in the name of organizational efficiency and profitability (i.e., Management, OB, OT, HRM), critical theorists have developed critiques of the malestream (Ferguson, 1984), hierarchical and anti-democratic (Clegg and Dunkerley, 1980), racist (Nkomo, 1992), sexist (Hearn and Parkin, 1987), mind-numbing (Leonard, 1984), environmentally unfriendly (Dickson, 1977) and dangerous (Shrivastava, 1987) character of existing forms of organization. Critiques, however, suggest not only alternative visions of organizing (whether implicitly or explicitly stated) but, often enough, organized ways of resisting. Therein lies the dilemma, namely whether it is possible to resist and overcome existing discriminatory forms of organizations without replacing them with new forms of discriminatory organization. For example, as we can see in Vappu Tyyskä’s paper, the women’s movement in Canada faces the dilemma of whether to engage in, or with,

mainstream organizations to attain policy changes and risk being co-opted in ways that further demean the role of women in society or to focus on building new (feminist) forms of organizing and risk minimizing potential broad-based policy gains.

The angst that many radical organizational scholars share about the corrupting potential of modern organization is well founded: from Michels' (1949) classic study of the tendency of "democratic" organizations to develop into oligarchies to the numerous studies of the problems associated with communist organization, the twentieth century has witnessed numerous failures of radical organization.<sup>3</sup> It is an angst that, in the latter half of the twentieth century, led many radicals to drop out of mainstream organizing—seeking less hierarchical forms of organization (e.g., some "New Left" collectives and feminist organizations), engaging in small, relatively "unorganized," forms of organizing (e.g., small communes or worker cooperatives) and/or, more recently, looking to non-organizational critiques of organization (i.e., post-modernism). With the fall of the Berlin Wall, the exposure of the disastrous outcomes of state communist organization alongside the continued problems of capitalist organization appear to have reinforced, what I would call, the retreat from organization on the part of radical organizational scholars.

The retreat from organization is a grand irony because it appears at the very point when, confronted on a large scale with the negative outcomes of organizing, radical scholars appear to offer little in the way of alternatives;<sup>4</sup> we certainly "know" what is wrong with the current predominant ways of organizing but we know far less about the strengths and weaknesses of alternative ways of organizing. Nor do we appear to have much to say about the relative or potential benefits of existing forms of

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3. Some might wish to argue that, for a time at least, the development of worker managed industry ("self management") in the former Yugoslavia was an important example of the success of non-capitalist organization (Singleton and Topham, 1963). Even then those sympathetic to the model have anguished over the limitations of self-management in Yugoslavia (Coats, 1981). The break-up of Yugoslavia and the fierce fighting along ethnic lines has revealed the fragile nature, although not necessarily the organizational weaknesses, of the self-management experiment. Likewise worker cooperative experiments such as the Mondragon movement in Spain have been applauded as genuine successes in their ability to combine economic success with humanist concern (Mills, 1982; Oakshott, 1978) but they too have experienced critical angst for their inability to overcome deeply rooted gendered practices (Hacker, 1989).
  4. Since 1989 the radical left has further fragmented and is currently engaged in serious soul searching to find new ways to conceptualize and develop a radical agenda. This has been reflected in the relative absence of the type of radical theories of organization that made some headway in the 1970s and 1980s (e.g., Allen, 1975; Althusser, 1971; Benson, 1977; Braverman, 1974; Burrell, and Morgan, 1979; Clegg, 1981; Clegg, and Dunkerley, 1980; Ferguson, 1984; Hydebrand, 1977; Rinehart, 1986). By the 1990s, the structuralism of Althusser (1971) had given way to the post-structuralism of Foucault (1975; 1979; 1980) as radical theorists turned away from "the logic" of organizing to organizing as a form of logic (or discourse). In the event, the notion of organization has been reduced to a series of language, or truth, games to be exposed and pitied.
  5. For example, the fact that we are sometimes frustrated by bureaucratic "red tape" should not blind us to the fact that in many ways we can benefit from the speed and cheapness of standardization; the fact that we are sometimes treated impersonally by organizational members should not blind us to the fact that impersonality can also shield us from favoritism, nepotism and unfair treatment; and the fact that we may feel controlled by rules and regulations should not blind us to the fact that such rules and regulations may also help us to understand the organization and our place within it.

organization.<sup>5</sup> Yet, post-modernist claims to the contrary, the organizational mind persists in modern society and our worlds continue to be dominated by organizational forms. For the foreseeable future we will need to deal with organizational realities (for work, health, community, modes of resistance, and blueprints for future changes). Critique is a valuable way of exposing the negative outcomes of organizations but of itself it will not lead to change; radical scholars of organization need to renew their efforts to develop alternative ways of organizing by incorporating insights gained from mainstream organizational analysis. To paraphrase Marx, radical organizational scholars have only described the world, the point is to change it.

### From Utopianism toward Radical Organizational Theory

A great weakness in the radical organization literature to date has been an underlying utopianism—an implicit referencing of a future state of communism, democracy, gender equity, or multi-culturalism where many of the existing problems of organization are eradicated. In the one hundred and fifty years since the publication of Marx and Engles' *Manifesto of the Communist Party*,<sup>6</sup> radical organizational theorists have been condemning capitalist forms of organization and anticipating a future that transcends not only exploitation but organizational forms as we know them, what Marx called, "the withering away of the state" (Draper, 1970). Maier and Messersmidt's excellent critique of the masculinity of organization in this collection, for example, appears to reference a far off state of "feminized" organizing where organizational disasters will be less likely to occur.<sup>7</sup> To be sure, the failures of the Soviet Union under Stalinist domination (Elleinstein, 1976; Mandel, 1978; Miliband, 1970) and the struggle of self-managed enterprises in Yugoslavia (Coats, 1981; Coats and Topham, 1970) generated a number of debates about the organization of resistance in capitalist society and the organization of economy in non-capitalist

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6. Published in 1848, *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* provided a stinging critique of the character of capitalist organization yet manifestly failed to address the organizational complexities of organized dissent and the organization of the socialist alternative. In regard to the latter issue it was considered utopian and unscientific to speculate—the specific details were to be left to an unfolding of history in which the working class would work through the issues. In regard to the former issue, Marx and Engels compounded the problem by advocating a new class of organizational (and political) elites—the communists:

The communists . . . are on the one hand, practically, the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties of every country, that section which pushes forward all others; on the other hand, theoretically, they have over all the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement (Marx and Engels, 1967: p. 95).

And, despite their observation that "differences of age and sex have no longer any distinctive validity for the working class," Marx and Engels ended their polemic with the appeal "working men of all countries unite!" (my emphasis, AJM). One hundred and fifty years later we are still working through the negative organizational outcomes that flowed from that type of thinking!

7. More so my own work suffers from implicit references to future states of non-hierarchical, non-gendered organizational realities (see Mills, 1988; Mills and Chiaramonte, 1991).

societies. Yet, if we are to develop new forms of organizing, we need to develop a more detailed, intricate knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of particular organizational arrangements—capitalist and non-capitalist alike.

What would a radical theory of organizing look like? What are the contours of such an approach? First, let me begin by making it clear that, as I stated above, there already exists several radical approaches to organization. I am not here proposing yet another radical approach. What I am arguing is that, at heart, radical approaches share 1) a common concern with emancipation, that 2) is rooted in critiques of dominant forms (capitalist, bureaucratic socialist, malestream, racist) of organization. What is needed is not only a synthesis of radical approaches (capable of simultaneously accounting for the gendered, class, and racist aspect of organizational arrangements and for the nature of organization as metaphor, negotiated reality and discursive practice) but also of an approach that is capable of both critiquing existing practice while informing future organizational arrangements. I am, here, making a distinction between a focus on how to address/cope with the problems of structure (organizing) and a focus on how to co-operate and co-ordinate activities to achieve something (organizing) that does not necessarily assume an organizational form (as we know it); between a focus on a critique of existing forms of organization and a focus on how to develop new ways of organizing. In other words, what is needed is a radical theory of how to organize.

Second, I would make it clear that in attempting an outline of such a radical theory I want to avoid the notion of the establishment of a “party line” in which I am interpreted as attempting to construct *the* radical theory of organizations in contradiction to other theories. I am, in fact, attempting to encourage further debate on radicalism and organizing. That said, let me return to the task.

### *Radical Theories of Organization or Anti-Organization Theory?*

A key aspect, perhaps the soul, of radical organizational analysis is the issue of whether organizing *per se* is oppressive. From anarchist thought (see Kropotkin, 1914), through aspects of Marxist thought (cf. Easton and Guddat, 1967) to present-day post-modernism (see Foucault, 1975; 1979), doubts have been raised about the possibility of transforming organizational arrangements into anything other than systems of alienation and oppression. It has to be conceded that the task of attempting to develop new forms of organization may, in the end, be a dubious project; nothing short of an attempt to establish new forms of “truth” that empower a few at the expense of many. David Collinson’s work (this collection; see also Collinson, 1988; 1992; Collinson and Collinson, 1997; Collinson and

Hearn, 1994; 1996; Collinson, Knights and Collinson, 1990) is very much in this vein.<sup>8</sup>

In view of the history of organizing to date this is a very compelling argument and suggests that the role of the radical organization theorist should be centrally about critique—continuous critique. On the other hand, it can be argued that while the discourse of organizing is a language game that is maintained by a series of discursive practices it is, nonetheless, the only game in town. In other words, can we ever—in the foreseeable future—avoid involvement in organizing and, if not, shouldn't we try to find better (e.g., less discriminatory) alternatives? In advocating this latter viewpoint I would argue that it should, nonetheless, be rooted in a philosophy of positive ambiguity; that is, a commitment to the development of new organizational forms that continues to question the possibility of non-oppressive organization and searches for non-organizational solutions.<sup>9</sup> This approach shares much in common with anti-organization theory in its focus on organizing (as opposed to organization) but is more skeptical of our ability to avoid something approaching the adoption of forms of structuring and co-ordination.

### *Critique as Continuous Process*

The most compelling insight to be drawn from the post-modernist perspective is that power and identity are integrally linked to knowledge, that how we understand ourselves and others is mediated through a series of “truth claims” embedded within discursive practices. To extend this logic, organizational arrangements can be seen as the outcome of particular ways of thinking that seek organizational solutions (i.e., the need to establish organizations) and specific organizational solutions (e.g., bureaucracy) to problems (Morgan, 1996). In the process, such arrangements impose a logic on relationships that distributes power and identity according to how different actors fit in with the underlying understandings embedded in those arrangements. This insight should not be taken as a call to inaction—an avoidance of anything that smacks of the establishment of a new “truth claim” (Ferguson, 1984), but it should remind us that one of the few ways that we have of resisting oppression is to constantly question and bring to awareness the problem of knowledge construction: David Wicks' (this collection; see also Bradshaw and Wicks, 1997) insight into resistance suggests that we not only have much to learn about resisting and encour-

8. It should be made clear that this issue was not constructed around contributions from radical organizational theorists but rather around the theme of organizational crisis and the negative outcomes of organizations. Thus, the contributions should not be judged according to how well they sit with a radical approach. I have attempted to show how each article, in its own way, contributes to a broad understanding of the problems of organizing.

9. I will further concede that the radical organizing project, rooted in “second wave” thinking, may be outmoded in the face of the potential fragmentation of organization predicted by Alvin Toffler (1981), or the development of the so-called “virtual organization” of the future (Field, 1998). Indeed some feminist scholars have expressed guarded optimism about the potential of new organizational forms and new technologies to break down former oppressive barriers (see Spender, 1995), others are less convinced (see Mirchandani, 1998).

aging resistance but also about compliance and the encouragement of compliance. In other words, critique becomes more, not less, important in the development of radically different ways of organizing: what, in a somewhat different vein, Trotsky referred to as “a theory of permanent revolution” (Deutscher, 1959).

### *Turning Critique into Alternative Organizational Arrangements*

Decades of radical organizational critique has identified a number of ways that organizational arrangements contribute to power disparities, racism, and sexual discrimination. We “know,” for example, that hierarchical arrangements favour an elite group at the expense of many (Ferguson, 1984), that bureaucratic arrangements can have a negative influence on the way that people think (Merton, 1940) and feel (Kets de Vries, 1989) about themselves and others, and that bureaucracy can be discriminatory against women (Morgan, 1988) and people of colour (Bell, 1989). We need to translate the knowledge from critique into recipes for alternative organizational arrangements. I do not mean that glibly; clearly such a translation involves more than just the assessment of a single dimension, it involves a complex process of matching numerous insights together. To take the example of bureaucracy, it would appear that a non-hierarchical set of arrangements is suggested as an alternative but that alone does not deal with such issues as equitable distribution of membership according to age, race, gender, etc., the development of non-discriminatory symbols and artefacts, and the existence of inclusive cultural values, let alone the multifarious problems of unravelling what it means to be non-hierarchical. As long as we do not get carried away with models or take ourselves too seriously then radical organizational scholarship can play an important role in the processes of change by developing research that identifies alternative ways of organizing and discusses the various strengths and weaknesses involved. Clearly the work of Maier and Messerschmidt (this collection; see also Maier, 1991; 1993; 1997; Messerschmidt, 1995), on the notion of the feminization of organization, takes us in the direction of considering radical alternative forms of organization.

### *Studying Alternative Organizational Arrangements*

It is often said that the left save their major criticism for each other yet this is not the case at all within radical organization theory; if anything there are far too few critiques of such things as worker co-operatives, socialist organizations, feminist groups, anti-racist collectives, etc. Vappu Tyyskä's work (this collection; see also 1998) is a rare example within the broad organizational analysis literature.<sup>10</sup> Such critiques have generally occurred elsewhere and with different motivations. Beginning with existing

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10. See also Robert Michels' (1949) study of trade unions and left political parties, Sally Hacker's (1989) feminist study of the Mondragon movement, and Patricia Yancey Martin's (1990) study of feminist organization.

(non-organizational) literature<sup>11</sup> and moving to new empirical studies, radical organizational theorizing could gain tremendous insights from the study of alternative organizations. There is an extensive and useful literature, for example, on the problems involved in trying to reconcile the organization of local and regional needs (in the former Yugoslavia): thus, while the self-managed firm may meet the particular needs of the workers involved it may not produce enough or the right types of goods and service for the broader community and this raises questions of the broader context in which organizations exist (see Coats, 1981; Coats and Topham, 1970; Singleton and Topham, 1963). There is much to be gained by studying the problems (i.e., both strengths and weaknesses) of alternative forms of organization in action.

### *Utilizing Mainstream Organizational Analysis*

Mainstream organizational analysis has contributed a vast store of “knowledge” on organizational structure, process and practice. The fact that this literature was often motivated by managerial concerns (Mills and Simmons, 1998) and has come to constitute and maintain a powerful discourse of managerialism (Clegg, 1981; Helms Hatfield and Mills, 1997) should not blind us to the fact we can learn much from the vast wealth of mainstream studies of management and organization. The work of Donna Winslow (this collection) and of David Wicks (this collection) indicate the range of insights that can be gained by (non-managerialist) analysis of change within existing organizational arrangements in the short and long term. Similarly, Institutional theory (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991; Zucker, 1988) reveals the processes whereby organizational forms are (conservatively) reproduced and can help us to understand how to overcome conservatism in organizational development. The organizational culture debate (Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Schein, 1985) indicates the need to explore the multi-faceted aspects of an organizations symbolism, artefacts, values, beliefs, etc., if we are to address discriminatory practices (see Mills, 1988). The literature on motivation at work (Herzberg, 1968; Maslow, 1943) has much to offer on helping us to understand what practices and processes are better able to address fundamental human needs while contributing to the collective effort of producing a good or service. Studies of structure, particularly recent discussions on “flat structures” (Field, 1998) and empowerment (Conger and Kanungo, 1988) but also older studies on the problems of co-ordination (Pugh and Hickson, 1976), can help the radical theorist to identify some of the problems of developing non-hierarchical organization. I could continue in this vein through the literature on perception, communication, conflict and negotiation, decision making, leadership, and even management;<sup>12</sup> the point is that there is a wealth of “knowledge” that can

11. Including the numerous studies of the failure of the USSR and other Eastern bloc communist states.

12. Yes, even alternative organizations have to deal with the issue of managing if not management per se. Several years ago I had the opportunity to study this problem in new worker co-operatives in Britain and found that managing and administering the co-operative were among the more difficult questions that the worker-owners had to deal with. In one case it was dealt with by appointing a manager but on a rotation basis—with a new manager elected every two years or so, at least that was the initial plan. In another case the workforce brought in a “professional manager” to run the business for them (see Mills, 1982).

be recontextualized in the service of alternative organizational development.

### *Recontextualizing Theories of Organization*

The final step takes us, in part, back to critique and suggests that analysis of studies of organization needs to take into account the context in which those studies occurred. That means that the radical theorist needs to take into account the socio-political context in which the studied organization was operating in and the ideological context under which the study was conducted. For example, worker co-operatives in the former Yugoslavia operated in a very different socio-political context from the operation of worker co-operatives in Canada and Britain during the same period and thus the context must be taken into account when drawing conclusions. Likewise studies of organizational effectiveness will differ depending on whether it is undertaken from feminist concerns (e.g., Martin, 1990; Tyyskä, this collection) or managerialist concerns (Hammer and Champy, 1993). Recontextualizing means first of all taking into account socio-political differences and second, ideological differences, with a view to aligning organizational studies with the purposes of alternative organization (i.e., non-hierarchical, non-discriminatory, etc.). For example, Lenin's adoption of Taylorism (Bendix, 1974; Rose, 1978) unreflectively introduced into Soviet factories a practice that had been developed to maximize efficiency through, among other things, treating the workers as mere instruments of production: Taylorism, thus, reinforced domination by elites and contributed to an ideology of political and industrial domination. A new radical approach would be to attempt to match the insights of scientific management (e.g., more efficient ways of saving energy) with, for example, human needs of dignity and achievement.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

This paper set out to achieve three things: 1) to introduce the collection of papers that constitute the special issue on organizational crisis; 2) to suggest that the notion of organizational crisis needs to be broadened to focus on organizations as crisis-bearing arrangements—mundanely reproducing threats to the psychological health and welfare of people in the form of discriminatory practices, environmental pollution, and/or outcomes that threaten the existence of communities and the lives of employees, customers and broader social entities; and 3) to outline an agenda for the development of radical theories of organizing that may not only deal with the negative aspects of existing organizations but outline new, alternative ways of organizing to improve the way we live.

For much of this century organizational analysis has taken place (been embedded) within the context of a broad discourse of the Cold War (Mills and Helms Hatfield, 1998). Too often that discourse polarized

debate, suggesting few alternatives in the search for organizational improvements. Proponents of a “third way” (i.e., those who rejected state bureaucracy and capitalism alike) often felt like they were fighting a lost cause. Within the context of Cold War thinking it was difficult to unravel organizational analysis for the central political discourses of the time.

The Cold War has ended and had left us with a void in radical organizational debate but it has also opened up the possibility of theorizing that is unfettered by the old (malestream) discourses of communism, socialism, and capitalism. It is, I would argue, more possible today to develop new theories of organizing that are free of the old pressures of modernist discourse. Capitalist forms of organizing are still prevalent but under question—now more than ever do we need a flourishing of radical theories of organizing.

### Appendix

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<b>Jo Brewis</b>	University of Portsmouth, England
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