Call for papers for an *ephemera* special issue on:

**Reopening the field: Reading/writing Robert Cooper today**

**Issue editors:** Simon Lilley, Lena Olaison, Martin Parker and Sverre Spoelstra

Can unpublished papers from decades ago help us think about contemporary critical theories of organization? In this call for papers, and subsequent special issue, we are publishing six previously unpublished papers by the social philosopher, organization theorist and poet Robert Cooper, who died in 2013 (you will find the link to the texts below). We are looking for people to respond to them and explore how and what they could mean for organization studies today. Beyond re-engaging with Cooper’s work, the special issue is aimed at entangling the past and the present to understand something more about how both are constructed, or how they are opened and closed.

Cooper is known in organization studies for his work on organization/disorganization and, together with Gibson Burrell, for introducing postmodernism and poststructuralism to the study of organizations in the late 1980s (e.g. Cooper, 1986; Cooper, 1989; Cooper and Burrell, 1988). The broad impact he has had on critical organization studies is evidenced by *ephemera*’s early special issue ‘Responding: To
Cooper’ (Böhm and Jones, 2001), in two books edited by Robert Chia (1998a; 1998b), and a collection of seminal papers (Burrell and Parker, 2016). The matter of Cooper’s work is also interesting in relation to its dense and poetic style of writing which defies contemporary expectations of what a typical journal article ought to look like. Indeed, much of his work was never formally published, and many of his papers seem to circulate only within a small circle of aficionados who share their photocopies of seminar presentations or conference papers.

In this special issue of *ephemera*, we bring together six papers that were hitherto unavailable and encourage a re-engagement with Cooper’s thought, and reflection on what these papers could illuminate today. Much has happened since these pieces were written, in the world, in thought and in the conditions of the modern university system. There is, no doubt, something antique about this work; something in style and approach that may appear foreign to many of us now. We want to bring these elements into a dialogue with contemporary organization studies. This is where this call for papers comes in: we invite ideas for commentary pieces that discuss Cooper’s unpublished papers and relate them to present day thought and action.

Potential topics include:

- Does organization theory still reflect the influence of the French poststructuralism that Cooper was so engaged with?
- What can we learn from the relationship between writing style and content in Cooper’s work?
- What is the relationship between Cooper’s mostly male, white, northern European theory and the current emphasis on positionality?
- Have Cooper’s concepts travelled to other places, disciplines and times?
- Has the rise of the business school narrowed the possibilities for producing the sort of ‘social philosophy’ that Cooper was so interested in?
• Is there something (a concept, a thought) in the selected papers that helps shedding light on contemporary issues?
• What can we see, using Cooper? What can we not see?

Contributions

The process is somewhat different from most of *ephemera*'s special issue calls. We invite short proposals of approximately 500 words that use at least one of the papers, which will be published in the issue, as a point of departure. The six papers that will be included in this issue are the following (download them here):


We will not only select on the basis of quality but also on the basis of their fit with the issue as a whole. We are particularly keen to encourage contributions from authors who have not been represented in the two decades of commentary on Cooper so far. As well, we encourage contributions in a variety of formats such as articles, notes, interviews, book reviews, photo essays and other experimental modes of representation. Information about some of these formats and *ephemera*'s submission guidelines can be found at: www.ephemerajournal.org/how-submit.
Deadline for submissions

The deadline for proposals is April 15, 2022, and you are very welcome to get in touch with any of the editors with any questions.

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The deadline for full papers is October 31, 2022. The full papers will be reviewed by the editorial team of this special issue and by members of the editorial collective of ephemera.

references