



In Times, in and as Global Conflict

ephemera collective

In this issue of *ephemera* we publish a range of papers that engage with theory and politics in the organisation of global conflicts. Across these works, time – the time of their objects, and the time of their objects’ having been thought as such – are rendered salient. Here, conflict – as itself a site of object and of subject – theory, episteme, practical life – is revealed, intimately, emergent *as the organisation* of these. To point to *the global* of conflict, then, harks as much to the schizoid and conflictual singularities of the present of historical thought thinking its own objects – its possibilities and its pasts – as it harks to singularities in the geographies and scalings of its present.

Some might ask: What has this issue of *ephemera* to do with organisation? What has the analysis of global conflicts as such to do with organisation theory? Surely, organisation theory is first of all concerned with what is going on with and inside organisations. While this might be true, we also think that today’s organisation theory cannot and should not restrict itself to a narrow and restricted conception of organisation as a functionalist and managerialist enterprise. For us, organisations are inevitably embedded in global, political processes of social organisation, which automatically connects organisation theory to a wide-ranging multi-disciplinary project of theorising that radically redraws the borders of what is conceived as ‘organisation’.

In fact, this project of calling the boundaries of organisation into question has been going on for some time within the realms of organisation theory. What, however, has sometimes been missing is the realisation that the questioning of boundaries and borders of organisation has astute and very real implications and applications in the world of global politics – meaning politics in the broad sense of being the process of articulating and organising the social in a particular sphere of power relations.

In the first, special guest section edited by Luca Guzzetti and Jussi Vähämäki, we present four papers from the *Conflitti Globali* editorial collective. Based in Genoa, Italy, *Conflitti Globali* seeks to fill a gap in contemporary socio-political sciences by publishing multi-disciplinary analyses of the different – social, political, cultural, ideological, military – aspects of the conflicts that are now involving a very large part of the world and that are synthesised in the on-going war in Iraq. Members of its editorial board believe that the ‘new conflicts’ cannot be comprehended on the basis of traditional conceptual schemes compartmented into specialised disciplines: international relations, strategic studies, sociology, anthropology, organisation studies, cultural

studies and so on. Furthermore, they think that the scientific and objectivistic approaches that, by and large, dominate the field of conflict studies have become an obstacle to understanding. *Conflitti Globali* seeks to explore and explain today's global conflicts through a lens of a radical multi-disciplinarity where traditional boundaries and borders of the sciences not only become questioned but transcended by way of a new ontological politics. This involves not only an analysis of global conflicts – the task is to overcome them, to show beyond them. Therefore, *Conflitti Globali* seeks to develop a position of radical opposition to the present organisation of world governance.

With the term 'conflicts' *Conflitti Globali* mean not only wars, although they definitely have a crucial role in the contemporary world; they also mean conceptual oppositions that are running across the global spaces and that are inevitably influenced by war: the opposition between freedom of movement and control on migrations, between freedom of action and all sorts of controls, between global economic policies and local resistances, etc. The editorial project of *Conflitti Globali* is therefore not politically neutral, although they seek space for as many different voices, analyses and contributions as possible.

The *ephemera* collective is committed to publishing new perspectives both on political processes of organising and on processes of theorising organisation. And in light of our appreciation of the variety of forms, instances and domains of organising practices, we gladly support the work of *Conflitti Globali*. We have been working to build connections – among our members, our editorial projects, and our shared political concerns. In the spirit of that collaboration, this special section on global conflicts brings to English speaking audiences four papers created by writers associated with the *Conflitti Globali* collective. We thank *Conflitti Globali* for this privilege, and hope that it will contribute to ongoing international efforts to build critical and political research and writing about organising practices in and of global conflict.

In supporting the translation and circulation these *Conflitti* papers, *ephemera* seeks to alter and expand views of organisation, to make new, partial and multiple connections, and to crack open new horizons that are not normally seen within organisation theory. In this vein, we offer alongside the *Conflitti* papers a collection of other works which, while reflecting alternative traditions of concern and conceptualization, contribute oblique and relevant crossings with respect to theory and politics in the organisation of global conflict.

Stefan Skrimshire's *Note* 'In Defence of Political Faith' contributes a timely reflection on the dynamics of religious violence that is associated with contemporary encounters between so-called Muslim extremists and their rational Muslim and non-Muslim interlocutors. In a manner reminiscent of Marx's¹ critical interrogation of socialists' conceptualisation of the emancipation of the Jews, Skrimshire notes "...if...liberal society is in shock at the resurfacing of 'political religion' this is perhaps due as much as anything to a naiveté towards the notion of religion...that it ceases to be a 'public'

1 Marx, K. (1844) 'On the Jewish Question', in *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, ed. A. Ruge and K. Marx. Paris.

problem if it is simply banished to the private sphere.” A compelling connection stressed in this *Note* is that between the (Liberal/Christian) presumption of religion-as-private, and possibilities for orienting to the spectre of political struggle religiously conceived.

The following interview with Antonio Negri pursues this theme of connections between conceptualization and political struggle. The interview – whose explicit subject-matter is method and politics in the work of Michel Foucault – was conducted by the Fédération Syndicale Unitaire. It originally appeared in French in the journal *Nouveaux Regards* 26 (August 2004). *ephemera* is fortunate to be able to publish a superb, new English translation of this interview, which has been contributed by the sociologist Alberto Toscano. In this dialogue, Negri emphasises how crucial a consideration of Foucault’s method is to an understanding both of his thought and of the meaning of the forms of political practice with which it dealt. Poignantly, Negri suggests that “to assume a Foucauldian perspective is...to put a style of thought...in contact with a given historical situation.” The point provides an opening through which to clarify multiple considerations relevant for intellectual practice within the contemporary conjunctures of global conflict – not least of which are the historical meanings of the varieties of Marxian and bio-political struggles that confront us as possibilities today.

In this issue *ephemera* is also enthusiastic to publish three book reviews, which offer in their own right substantive contributions to questions of theory and politics in organisation. Scott Taylor’s *Review* of Jones and O’Doherty’s *Manifestos for the Business School of Tomorrow* focuses on what he finds to be the structuring suggestion of the collection – that intensified bureaucratisation and disciplinarity in higher education represent a crisis in contemporary business schools – business schools, which, implicitly, might otherwise become sites of critical inquiry and practical conflict. While Scott agrees with such a diagnosis, he questions the *Manifestos* implicit orientation to the cure. Is the political impotence of such intellectual formations as Critical Management Studies to be countered by the distancing of properly critical intellectuals and students from the bureaucratized business school by way of writerly finesse? At the site of the fully employed university business-school teacher, could such a strategy be seriously conceived as viable and non-contradictory? Bitterly, the present continues to pose difficult questions. Questions of the possibilities for democratic subjects – notwithstanding their imbrications in the business schools *of today* – to emerge.

The next review by Peter Scott draws our attention to a new book – *Participation and Democracy at Work: Essays in Honour of Harvie Ramsay* – whose topic is the legacy of a writer who devoted his career to understanding the multiple forms and meanings of working democratic practice. Of the many substantive contributions collected in *Participation*, Scott notes the clarity it offers overall with respect to distinctions between the meanings that categories like ‘participation’ and ‘democracy’ come to bear in different traditions of work-organisation practice and scholarship. Namely, the meanings of these terms in the hands of the industrial democracy movements of the 1970s differ significantly from their meanings in the hands of the American human resource management movement of the 1980s. Ramsay confronted head-on the substance and implications of these movements; we continue to learn from his work.

And we continue to learn from the event of witches. Indeed, the final, provocative review by Angela Mitropoulos explicates for us some difficult lessons...lessons about theory and politics in the organisation of the present phase of globalisation that might be gleaned from Silvia Federici's history *Caliban and the Witch*. According to Mitropoulos, Federici reveals the integral forces of the witch-hunts and anti-heresy campaigns in the transition to what Marx will have termed 'primitive accumulation' as the historical precondition of capitalism. In tandem with other, well-charted Rationalist practices, the witch-hunts might be understood as a process through which the female body was mechanised, consigned "into the hands of the state and the medical profession", and made amenable to patriarchal wage dynamics. The point asks to be remembered, particularly in our times – times in which manifestations of witchery mutate. Mitropoulos' treatment of Federico's frightening *Caliban* emphasises for us today the contingency of the violence and abstraction in and as capital(ised) subjects

Certainly, some will question whether the papers collected here *as connections* do not connect strictly enough to the tradition of organisation theory. But if we allow the gestalt of their differences and reciprocities to emerge as an event – an event that does not claim to reproduce the conventions and traditions of a field that has come to be known as organisation theory – then we might well be able to see and to make organisation – indeed life! – differently. While the talk of the day is that 'there is no outside', perhaps we must not abandon an idea of an 'outside' – an outside both of times and of spaces – and actively seek to connect to and inhabit it as such. Perhaps connection through the event in time will enable us to see beyond contemporary regimes, contemporary times, and contemporary territories of organisation.