Matters of dis/order and dis/organization

What is *ephemera: theory & politics in organization*?

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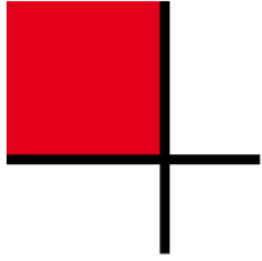
theory
ephemera encourages contributions that explicitly engage with theoretical and conceptual understandings of organizational issues, organizational processes and organizational life. This does not preclude empirical studies or commentaries on contemporary issues, but such contributions consider how theory and practice intersect in these cases. We especially publish articles that apply or develop theoretical insights that are not part of the established canon of organization studies. *ephemera* counters the current hegemonization of social theory and operates at the borders of organization studies in that it continuously seeks to question what organization studies is and what it can become.

politics
ephemera encourages the amplification of the political problematics of organization within academic debate, which today is being actively de-politized by the current organization of thought within and without universities and business schools. We welcome papers that engage the political in a variety of ways as required by the organizational forms being interrogated in a given instance.

organization
Articles published in *ephemera* are concerned with theoretical and political aspects of organizations, organization and organizing. We refrain from imposing a narrow definition of organization, which would unnecessarily halt debate. Eager to avoid the charge of 'anything goes' however, we do invite our authors to state how their contributions connect to questions of organization and organizing, both theoretical and practical.

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Mie Plotnikof, Consuelo Vásquez, Tim Kuhn and Dennis Mumby

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Towards a politics of dis/organization: Relations of dis/order in organization theory and practice

Mie Plotnikof, Consuelo Vásquez, Timothy Kuhn and Dennis Mumby

> [T]he work of organization is focused upon transforming an intrinsically ambiguous condition into one that is ordered so that organization as a process is constantly bound up with its contrary state of disorganization. (Cooper, 1986: 305)

> [T]he undecidable can only become decidable through the practice of power and 'violence' (Cooper, 1986: 324)

There is no organization without disorganization, Cooper (1986) famously proclaimed. All organization is an effort to order the disordered by framing, shaping and differentiating the organization/disorganization relationship in an ongoing dynamic process (Spoelstra, 2005; Vásquez and Kuhn, 2019). Thus, any organizing process is inherently entangled with and defined by disorganizing forces, making the emerging and multiple relations between order and disorder a critical, yet often understated aspect of organizational practice and theory (Cooper, 1986; Cooper, 2005). Cooper's important essay argues for an ontological shift from the foregrounding of order, boundary and substance – which has traditionally characterized organization and management studies – to the engagement with disorder, unboundedness and process, as correlated dimensions of the mode of existence of organization. This assumption has since inspired many critical scholars to develop new understandings of *how the ordering of intrinsic disorder and the disordering of*

order is constitutive of organization – how we may theorize and conceptualize it, and not least explore it empirically and analytically – including through scholarship published in this journal (see the special issue introduced by Böhm and Jones, 2001).

Munro (2001), for example, argued that the contemporary work of managing is an ongoing act of disorganizing the organizational lives and spaces it concerns by the way managers enable a multiplicity of orders hence co-creating chaos, instability and disruptions that call for more management, as a form of 'unmanaging' (see further discussion of this by Munro, this issue). Other studies of dis/organization include Thanem's (2001) and Spoelstra's (2005) explorations of organizational boundaries not as fixed but differentiating and transforming relationships that dis/organize (for further discussion of dis/organizing spaces see e.g. Knox et al. (2015) or Simonsen and Vikkelsø, this issue). Moreover, rooted in feminist theory, Thanem (2001) questions the corporeal aspects of dis/organization, exploring the body itself as a site of disorganization that may well disrupt the organizational processes of which it is part. For example, a pandemic disconnects bodies across social and organizational life, which then dis- and re-organize anew (Plotnikof et al., 2020); the material becoming of a baby's body disorders the very (masculine) order of the work day (Ollilainen, 2020) – both kinds of dis/order that have affected the writing of this very editorial.

Of course, critical organization and management studies have long discussed issues of dis/order, (non)control and power(-resistance) in multiple ways and with different inspirations in addition to Cooper – from Marx, Foucault, and Deleuze, to Law, Butler, Barad and many others (Grey and Willmott, 2005; Mumby and Plotnikof, 2019; Parker, 2016; Pullen et al., 2017). Nevertheless, as much of this work focuses on the power-infused and political functioning of dis/organization across discourses, materialities and affects, it also taps into and re-energizes the ontological challenge (i.e., the deconstruction of the idea that organization–and the theories that explore them–defaults to stability, structure, and order) that Cooper (1986: 331-332) posed to us:

> the statements of that discourse we call "organization theory" are supplementary, for they represent the "organization of organization," that is to say, that as texts *on* organization they are themselves organized according to normalized criteria (often called "scientific" and/or "academic") so that it

becomes impossible to disentangle the "content" of organization studies from the theory or methodology that frames it [...] the statement produces what it denotes.

Thus, in moving beyond order, control, and power as baseline assumptions of much organization theory, a shared concern is to embrace dis/organization by exploring how the entanglement of order and disorder performs in theory and practice; how it comes to mean and matter to the specific worldings (Barad, 2007; Harraway, 2016) that we recognize as organizational life and critical scholarship. In scholarship, this can take several forms, including (but clearly not limited to) examinations of how decisions occasion opposition, revision, and rejection in project-based organizations (Grothe-Hammer and Schoeneborn, 2019); how the ambiguity marking important organizational happenings at airports generates confusions that are impossible to resolve by human sensemaking (Knox et al., 2015); how an array of tensions and contradictions intertwine in situated practices making innovation management a precarious endeavor (Sheep et al., 2017); or how digital data infrastructures may be developed to organize connections between specific governance areas, but easily spiral out of control and disconnect or reconnect unintended areas and actors (Ratner and Plotnikof, 2021).

Although Cooper's original essay on organization/disorganization was published over 35 years ago, we think the time is ripe to return to what can be seen, researched, and done as dis/organization. Further, taking stock of dis/organization in the present and beyond is no coincidence; the last two years have seen a global health crisis turn our becoming worlds upside down; the political climate is boiling with a (re)turn to hateful, discriminatory and unequal agendas with little historical sensitivity; mis/management and mis/uses of the natural and social resources of our shared Earth are intensifying environmental problems and segregations amongst the un/privileged, rich/poor, global North and South. All of these politics and practices are exacerbating the current dis/organization and societal dis/orderings of, for example, class, gender, race, ethnicity, capability, and age (Butler, 2020; Özkazanç-Pan and Pullen, 2020). Indeed, these social constructs are often weaponized as 'floating signifiers' (Hall, 1997) that have dislocating and disordering effects. Witness, for example, the far Right's recent efforts in the US to demonize Critical Race Theory as a way to sow

division and undermine progressive, coalitional politics. Obviously, this begs further understanding of such organizational practices and politics – and their effects as relations of order and disorder – an agenda more important now than ever.

Yet, dis/organization is not the theme of this special issue because everything that is going on is bad *per se*, or because the world is burning up as we speak, or because we think foregrounding disorder at the cost of order is – or should be – the new black. Rather, we think that we need to explore dis/organization in *ephemera* (and elsewhere) in order to further sensitize us to the practices and politics of dis/order, not as something extra-ordinary or extreme, but as that which is already here, there, everywhere.

In short, we think we need to care (Haraway, 2016) even more for all that makes up organization, including mess, undecibility, misunderstanding, non-sense, nonconforming thoughts, bodies and practices and irrationality– basically all that disorganizes as we are busy trying to organize everything, and thereby co-constitute exactly that. Attending to those untidy, ugly, or even shameful parts of organizing (Plotnikof and Utoft, 2021) are all the more important as our world order shuffles in the wake of climate crisis, a pandemic and even warfare. But how may we rearticulate, revisualize, reanalyze and rework dis/organization theory, beyond what we think we already know?

In the rest of this introduction, we explore this question in three ways. First, we provide brief discussions of influential thinkers in the development of dis/organization theorizing. These include Robert Cooper, Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and John Law. Second, we introduce the contributions to this special issue and address their contributions to the ongoing movements of this field of study. Finally, we gesture towards a politics of dis/organization as a future agenda.

Encouraging understandings of dis/organization

Organization/disorganization as a play of difference

Thirty-five years have passed since Cooper's (1986) provocative piece on organization/disorganization; the organization studies field is still discussing

it and trying to wrap its mind around what exactly this means (see for example Burrell and Parker's 2016 edited book *For Robert Cooper*). Cooper offers a sophisticated conceptual apparatus for understanding the compound formation of organization/disorganization as a play of difference that characterizes the relationship between the signifier and the signified. Inspired by the work of Saussure, Derrida and Mauss, among others, Cooper notes that in language, the sign as meaning is always incomplete, as it is always deferred by the multiple and potential meanings of the signifier. Hence, any attempt to fix meaning implies a reduction, an oversimplification of the multiplicity of meanings.

Transposed to the ontology of dis/organization, the play of difference highlights the centrality of undecidability and multiplicities. Disorganization as the excess of meaning–or zero degree–is what calls for organization. Cooper thus inverts the dominant logic favoring organization and order by putting forth disorganization as the triggering for organizing. It follows that the reduction of meaning and the attempts to fix it correspond to organization. In Cooper's (1986: 328) words, 'organization is the appropriation of order out of disorder'. Organization is the process through which the undecidable is made decidable. Importantly, this transformation of undecidability to decidability is a question of control, mastering and authority. For Cooper (1986: 323), 'cleaning the undecidable' is an act of power, which is made possible by the management and control of language.

For example, the neoliberal reimagining of employees as 'human capital' rather than 'workers' or 'participants in organizing' is an act of power that restructures the employment relationship, destabilizing the erstwhile social contract and creating a new system of order under which all social actors– regardless of employment status–must think of themselves as 'enterprise selves'. Thus, the 'disorder' of a disintegrating socio-economic system (Fordist capitalism) is appropriated as a new form of order under neoliberalism.

Cooper's (1986: 304) invitation to shift our analytical focus from order and 'already formed' social entities to disorderly processes and the forcible suppression of undecidability has paved the way for critical and processual studies of organization (e.g., Burrell and Parker, 2016; Chia, 2004a; Chia,

2004b; Böhm & Jones, 2001). On the practical level his legacy has rather remained discreet (Winkler and Seiffert-Brockmann, 2019; for an exception see Abrahamson, 2002), and yet Cooper (2001) himself was a fierce promoter of the concrete political and social implications of paying attention to organization/disorganization.

Cooper is by no means the only one who has attuned us to dis/organization; indeed, he is one of many we may use as a stepping stone to generate new understandings of the emerging relations of dis/order in today's organizational life and theory.

Dis/ordering regimes of power/knowledge

Foucault is a key inspiration to destabilize the dominant modernist narrative of order and progress emerging out of chaos and disorder. His writings have been central in critical organization studies' efforts to deconstruct mainstream epistemological frameworks and explore the intimate connection between 'games of truth' and the organization of power. While early Foucauldian organization studies focused mainly on the disciplinary effects of workplace power regimes (and the resulting effects of those regimes on the worker subject), more recent work has explored organizing as forms of governmentality (Fleming, 2009; 2014; 2017; Mumby, 2016; Munro, 2012) through which neoliberal subjects figure out how to exercise freedom (as enterprising human capital) in the context of the competitive social relations of late capitalism. Foucault's (2008) later work on biopower and governmentality lends itself well to the study of dis/organization in that much of the subject's exercise of freedom within biopolitical systems is framed within systems of risk and precarity.

Indeed, one might argue that chaos and disorder are defining features of neoliberal capitalism insofar as they create fear and anxiety among social actors, who are constantly told that they must be flexible and adapt to changing economic environments. Look no further than Amazon boss Jeff Bezos' philosophy that it is always 'day one' at Amazon because 'Day 2' is stasis. Followed by irrelevance. Followed by excruciating, painful decline. 'Followed by death' (Del Rey, 2017: np). In other words, innovation and change is a permanent condition; disorder is the order of the day; chaos and

anxiety are good for business (as Amazon's increased profits during the Covid-19 pandemic attest).

The link between late capitalism and disorder is even clearer when we examine the discursive frame within which neoliberal subjects must govern themselves. Neoliberal capitalism both creates disorder and insecurity and provides the mediatory mechanisms through which to manage that disorder. For example, the brand strategy company Interbrand's report on the 100 most valuable corporate brands of 2020 (published at the height of the global pandemic) states the following: 'In conducting this year's study of the one hundred most valuable global brands, one question emerged as the keystone of our analysis: what is brand's role in an anxious [post-Covid] world?' (Interbrand, 2020: 9).

There is perhaps no clearer statement of the way 'communicative capitalism' (Dean, 2005; Dean, 2009; Mumby, 2018) monetizes disorder by providing – at a price – the discursive frame through which the individual, isolated, divided neoliberal subject can receive soothing balm for their anxiety. 'What is brand's role in an anxious world?' is an explicit expression of communicative capitalism's efforts to productively articulate together subjectivity, disorder, and economic value.

 Of course, Foucault stresses that power, in whatever form, only exists in relation to resistance. As such, capitalism's latest technologies of power are being resisted on numerous fronts including, for example, a widespread rejection of the notion that we must 'love' our work. As Jaffe (2021: 2) has stated recently, 'The labor of love … is a con'. 'Work, after all, has no feelings. Capitalism cannot love' (*ibid*: 12). In other words, people are increasingly recognizing that 'work won't love you back' and extracting themselves from an abusive, exploitative relationship that Covid-19 has brought into particularly sharp focus. At the same time as people are rejecting the 'love your work' capitalist mantra, they are also increasingly recognizing the economic value of their work and demanding adequate compensation. At the other end of the capital accumulation cycle, sharing economy movements are rejecting hyper-consumerism and developing structures for circumventing consumer capitalism (although here we are fully cognizant of platform

capitalism's ability to colonize sharing economies, as we have seen with Airbnb, Uber, Lyft, etc.).

Foucault therefore helps us to think about how order and disorder are mutually constitutive within the 'games of truth' that characterize particular power-knowledge regimes. Dis/organizing in late capitalism is, at least in part, a function of how freedom is practiced within these truth games.

Troubling performativity and politics of gender

Along with this line of thinking about the ordering and disordering capacities of power, Judith Butler provides inspiration through her questioning of the dis/ordering politics and performativity of gender, difference, and identity (Trethewey and Ashcraft, 2004; Pullen and Knight, 2007, see also Guschke and Sløk-Andersen, as well as Carreri, this issue). Drawing on anti-essentialist assumptions about discursive power and the subject argued by Foucault, and about performative utterances by Austin (1962), Butler (1990; 2004) suggests that we think of gender as performative and, more generally, view all identity work as political acts of doing and undoing subjectivities and bodies of difference. Instead of viewing gender and identity as biological, essential, or innate, Butler points to discourses and social norms functioning in everyday practices that performs gender(s) and thereby (re)produce and (dis)orders differences in identity categories with great normative effects on what, how, and whose behaviors and bodies are accepted in society. In stressing the political aspects of gender and identity performativity in everyday life, even the most intimate and private aspects of selfhood become matters of societal ordering (and potential disordering) through the discursive forces and material world enveloping and saturating us, e.g. via societal institutions such as hetero-normative family constructions, and educational, health care and work organizations.

Inspired by this along with related feminist/queer theory (see e.g. Ahmed, 2017; Barad, 2007; Crenshaw, 1991), critical organization scholars explore how those ideas enable insight into the gendered dis/organization of work life (see e.g. special issues introduced by Pullen and Knights, 2007, and Trethewey and Ashcraft, 2004), for example by approaching the dis/ordering of differences and identity categories (such as gender, sex, ethnicity, capability

etc.) as more or less professional, employable, resourceful, and powerful. Following this line of thinking, studies have unpacked how work identities, bodies, spaces and practices may be riddled with discursive and material forces and controlling efforts to retain certain organizational understandings and practices of orderliness that privilege some forms of living while oppressing others.

Pullen and Knights (2007), for example, discuss the fruitfulness of understanding the un/doing of gendering in work life as powers of dis/organization, emphasizing the ever-present political aspects in all kinds of organizations that legitimizes some behaviors, bodies, identities, ethnicities and capabilities (hence disorganizing and discriminating others) as an inherent dynamic of dis/order.

Recently, Ashcraft and Muhr (2018) showed how gendered conceptions of leadership not only saturate leadership practices and identities, but also order scholarship by organizing our understandings in gendered binaries of masculine vs feminine leadership models (hard vs soft, rational vs. emotional, etc.). Their study disrupts this binary by developing a 'promiscuous coding' approach that, via queer theory, promotes a 'productive confusion' that undermines the heteronormativity that typically frames coding practices in leadership studies. Their study of the Norwegian military–an organizational structure traditionally synonymous with masculine, command and control leadership models–revealed an inconsistency between the dominant military leadership metaphors and the on-the-ground practice of leadership that they encountered. In one interview an officer identified 'gender fluidity' and the development of 'soft' skills as a crucial competency for leadership and combat. Such insights challenged the authors' own gendered preconceptions about military leadership such that, 'Masculinity and femininity began to seem like unmoored notions..., washing out and blurring into each other, difficult to hold apart, much less in contrast' (ibid: 211). Ashcraft and Muhr's own (productive) confusion about this mismatch led them to the promiscuous approach to coding mentioned above, thus enabling them to escape the ordered binary thinking that underlies much leadership research and practice.

Messing with mess

A related line of thought comes from the British sociologist John Law, a thinker often associated with Actor-Network Theory, or ANT (see Law, 1999; Law, 2009; Law and Singleton, 2013). As might be expected with an ANT sensibility, Law's work generally seeks to understand the complex interconnections between that which we render as material and that which is considered symbolic, with an eye toward transcending conventional oppositions by showing the relationality between all participants in a living network. In collaboration with co-authors such as Annemarie Mol, Law's thinking suggests that the objects that fall under our scholarly gaze are always multiple, despite analysts' efforts to tell the stories of coherent and relatively stable objects.

For instance, Mol (2002; Mol and Law, 2004) shows how bodies escape any simple effort to code, define, or characterize them; as 'the body' is implicated in health care practices associated with particular slippery maladies such as atherosclerosis, and known through particular technologies for sensing, it *becomes* many different things. Sometimes practices eliminate the multiplicity by making the meanings of bodies coherent, and other times the excess of meanings prevents such a reduction. The heterogeneity of the body, like all objects, is a matter of toggling between its presences and its absences; how (or whether) it shows up in given practices. Indeed, Law aims to show 'that objects are not singular, indeed not self-identical. That in their heterogeneity they are instead fractional and can only be apprehended fractionally' (Law, 2002: 10). Thus, objects are not *objects*, and no object simply brings about order (or disorder).

Particularly interesting with respect to this special issue is Law's thinking on method(ology), which foregrounds *mess* as the basic condition of the technosocial world. Law's assertion of the status of mess not as a deviation from order but a foundational ontological characteristic of the world aligns closely with the thinkers on dis/organization presented above. His methodological move advises analysts to resist the urge to order a convoluted world, which stands in stark contrast to dominant methodological thinking, where the task is to produce a singular reality (think a variable to be operationalized or a straightforward ethnographic tale) from complex

phenomena. Reflecting on studies conducted with Vicky Singleton (e.g., Law and Singleton, 2005; Law and Singleton, 2013), Law recounts how their work on alcoholic liver disease led them to realize that

> maybe we were dealing with a slippery phenomenon, one that changed its shape, and was fuzzy around the edges. Maybe we were dealing with something that wasn't definite and didn't have a single form. Perhaps it was a fluid object, even one that was ephemeral in any given form, flipping from one configuration to another, dancing like a flame. (Law, 2007: 598-599)

Phenomena like this (or *these*) require researchers to honor multiplicity by rejecting the conventional approach to methodological representation and, instead, work toward unconventional forms of expression that follow the fractionalized object as it (dis)appears in practice (Law, 2002; Law 2004). Efforts to honor mess in organizing can be seen among those who explore the multiplicities of spaces (Knox et al., 2015; Kuhn and Burk, 2014; Simonsen and Vikkelsø, this volume), those studying democratic engagement and digital infrastructures (Porter and Jackson, 2019; Ratner and Plotnikof, 2021), and those examining the ontological excesses of objects (de Laet and Mol, 2000). And as this special issue indicates, there is a good deal of continuing interest in this line of thinking.

Staying in the mix

While this is in no way an exhaustive list, it nevertheless counts some of the major sources that have sparked current understandings of dis/order and dis/organization across the broader field of organization studies over the years. Importantly, these thinkers and work inspired by them highlight a specific attentiveness or concern within dis/organization studies that we want to emphasize, which is also running through several of the contributions of this special issue. Despite epistemological and ontological differences, all of these essays attend to the relationality of multiple agencies to understand questions about dis/order and dis/organization and their mutual constitutive processes, the latter dynamic highlighted by the slash (for further discussion see Vásquez and Kuhn, 2019; Vásquez et al., 2022).

Yet, understanding exactly *how* this plays out in theory and practice depends on the ways in which the inspirations are picked up to conceptualize and

methodologically approach the specific dis/organizing and dis/ordered phenomena at hand, as this special issue also demonstrates. Amongst the influences we have touched upon, an interest in some kind of relational multiplicity resonates. But as noted, relational multiplicity may refer to multiplex discourses, knowledges, things, bodies, etc., and their entanglements or assemblages, materializing in struggling efforts of ordering disorder or controlling disorganization and resistance (e.g., in studies inspired by Foucault, Butler, and Barad). Or it can be seen as multiple modes of ordering, co-existing in the effort to suppress excesses of meanings and differences and with these undecidability (e.g., in studies inspired by Cooper, Law, or Mol).

Therefore, instead of advocating for one definition or understanding, we want to emphasize these varied bodies of literature as a rich array of concepts that generate further inquiry into matters of dis/organization and relations of dis/order. They do not give one easy answer or a single model to follow, but rather invite us to critically scrutinize and develop analytics with which to explore, for example, how emerging relations of disorder and order interplay in times of crisis; or how mutually constitutive processes of dis/organizing (work) life function in powerful ways locally as we live with a pandemic; or which new types of self-governing forces are internalized as mis/managing working from home - become normalized in many places with uneven effects on the involved actors (see, for example, Özkazanç-Pan and Pullen, 2020; Plotnikof and Utoft, 2021).

These lines of thinking challenge us to continuously approach matters of dis/order and dis/organization in ever more nuanced ways, not necessarily as opposite poles, binary, or competing contradictions, which can be strategically 'employed' (e.g., organizing order when we need to work for certain goals, or disorganizing work relations when we need to create disruptive innovative collaborations). Rather, we are encouraged to rephrase questions, discuss and maybe even redefine how relations of dis/order, along with the very idea of what can be recognized as organization in relation to disorganization, are continually transforming, in both theory and in practice.

Contributions of the special issue

What becomes central to further this agenda, then, is to investigate how we can grapple with those unsettling constitutive dynamics, which is exactly what the contributions of this special issue do. Deploying different theoretical ideas, vocabularies and methods, and unpacking them in varying empirical contexts, these diverse articles, notes and reviews pose new questions and offer novel insights regarding relations of dis/order and dis/organization.

As mentioned, some dis/organization studies draw on Butler, a move that is on display in this issue. In advancing this line of thinking, Guschke and Sløk-Andersen, in their article 'Paying attention to tension: Towards a new understanding of the organizational mechanisms enabling sexual harassment', explore dis/organization as a matter of organizational contradictions that create tensions regarding sexism. They analyze how sexual harassment is reproduced through contradictory tensions that both organize and disorganize gender discriminatory practices in workplace contexts of military and higher education. The study gives empirical insight into how young professional subjects attempt to navigate local contradictions, e.g., when decoding norms expressed in sexist jokes and discriminating behaviors, while still adhering to the limits of local intelligibility. Thereby, the young professionals also reproduce sexist norms and orders to be recognized as intelligible subjects, simultaneously disorganizing any possibility of resistance. Thus, Guschke and Sløk-Andersen elucidate how the dis/organization of sexism can be understood in terms of contradictory tensions that feed gender-based harassment by self-sustaining discriminatory gender norms, which disorder any potential alternative.

A very distinct case is presented in Richards and Mollan's article, 'Organizational mythopoeia and the spectacle in postfascist (dis)organization,' which examines the efforts of a far-right organization to make political capital out of the purchase of a car once owned by Enoch Powell (a UK anti-immigrant politician who, in 1968, gave his infamous 'rivers of blood speech' warning of the 'dangers' of immigration to the UK). The case study provides interesting insight into what might be called the 'epistemological chaos' that surrounds fringe organizations' efforts to gain purchase in the politico-cultural landscape. While we are all familiar with

'QAnon'- type conspiracists and their hold over tens of millions of people, it is perhaps at the margins, with the conspiracy failures, that important lessons can be learned. As such, Richards and Mollan examine the purchase of Powell's car from the perspective of organizational mythopoeia (myth-making), exploring how the right-wing fringe group 'Generation Identity' attempts to project the car ideologically into public consciousness through its construction as spectacular (in Guy DeBord's sense). The group's efforts are a (spectacular?) failure, but its attempts via social media to harness disorder, nostalgia, and a particular aesthetic form speak to the ways that anti-democratic groups–however marginal–can gain legitimacy in a post-truth era where disorder is the order of the day.

With Simonsen and Vikkelsø's 'Organizational space as sites of contention: Unravelling relations of dis/order in a psychiatric hospital,' the special issue turns to the materiality of physical space. Their ethnographic study centers on a newly-built hospital in Denmark designed in line with the 'healing architecture' movement, which promises improved patient outcomes through spaces that balance community with privacy, create transparent lines of sight and visibility, and reduce rigid hierarchies (see Lawson, 2010). The space was intended to not only foster empowering relationships, but to also produce orderly behavior, by both patients and staff, in what is often a disordered site. Moreover, the nursing staff in the hospital sought to generate a sense of orderliness and routinization in their daily work through practices such as collecting and washing laundry, putting items in their proper storage locations, and monitoring social interaction. Drawing upon Mary Douglas's thinking on purity and danger, Simonsen and Vikkelsø show that what they call 'spaces of contention' are often indeterminate, such that action with and for patients becomes unpredictable. And that unpredictability is due to the very openness of the healing architecture. The practices of organizing in this particular space, then, generate tensions and augment dis/order because of the architecture's functional indeterminacy. Showing the connections between the symbolic and the material–and transcending the longstanding distinctions between these domains–is a key contribution of the article, made possible by foregrounding the complex workings of dis/organization.

Rolland Munro's article 'Order under erasure? Disorganisation and the disorganising of "unmanaging"' offers a novel engagement with Robert

Cooper. Munro debates Cooper's influences, predilections, and ambitions, with particular attention to the 'will to cleanse' Cooper associates with the drive for ordering. Yet Munro notes that, in equating power with cleansing, Cooper paid too little attention to the force of management as both practice and institution, largely ignoring the dis/organizing it generates. Armed with a novel reading of institutional theory, Munro shows how management has colonised organizational thought, aided by the increasing financialisation of organizational life (see also Munro, 2003). The route for the future, he holds, requires not merely an abstract recognition of institutional permeation, but an immersion in intellectual disciplines to both confront their distinctions and to grasp the (dis)connecting and boundary-making practices managers, along with management as an institutionalized force, produce in the world. Munro's article, therefore, challenges scholars to understand the commitments involved in Cooper's thinking and, in turn, interrogate the institutionalized force of management in dis/organized practice.

Following this, Pallesen and Bjergkilde's article 'Dis/continuity and dis/organizing effects: Exploring absent presences in educational change projects' draws on Barad's (2010) conceptual framework to empirically explore dis/organization in the context of an organizational change project they call Co-time. Central to this exploration is a commitment to a processual temporal perspective that acknowledges that 'time matters'; that is, time acts upon intended radical changes of practice in often unintended and spectral ways (Derrida, 1993). Focusing on how dis/continuities affect the course of Co-time and how in those disruptions and obstructions past and future are reworked and enfolded in to the present, the article shows that absent presences, initially in the shadows of the planned change, gain agency and create increasing disorganizing effects as the project progresses. This empirical ethnographic study conducted in a municipal school in Denmark sheds light on the unintended disorganizing effects of a change project in shaping the experiences, practices and engagement of those involved in it. Of interest is the authors' conclusion and practical implications regarding the importance for managers to account for the meaning-making processes, feelings and past experiences that emerge as important in the change process, that cannot be erased by a clear vision or explanation. This finding illustrates Cooper's argument concerning the play of difference that characterizes

organization/disorganization, as well as the importance of paying attention to undecidability. To this, Pallesen and Bjergkilde's study adds the importance of attending to feelings, as any change project (or organizational phenomenon) is first and foremost an embodied experience, which can intensify dis/organizing effects.

In the article, 'The stings of command', Sverre Spoelstra addresses the reciprocal relation of order and disorder by discussing popular and mainstream understandings of leadership, which have to a great extent contributed to this idealized version of leadership as having nothing to do with commanding, i.e. giving orders. Yet, quite paradoxically, as Spoelstra notes, leaders are positioned and envisioned as the ones who create order. His overall argument, built through a reading of Elias Canetti's 'Economy of the command,' is that the violence of the command (its 'sting', in Canetti's terms) can also make itself felt in seemingly benign models of leadership (transformational, collective, distributed leadership) that challenge various forms of authoritarianism – and this hiding of the sting is highly problematic. Hence, Spoeltra's suggestion to put the sting back into the 'stingless' leadership world by (a) giving up on the paradoxical idea that it is possible to create order without giving orders, (b) by re-articulating leading and commanding and (c) by unveiling the hidden stings of organization/disorganization.

In addition to these articles, the issue also includes two thought-provoking research notes. We begin with a rupturing piece that asks us not only to understand relations of order and disorder through offering a new vocabulary, but also to feel them anew. In her note 'Fantasy to evade order: Vicarious schadenfreude', Victoria Pagan pushes us to the limits of being comfortable, as she challenges us to consider and even evade what may be conceived of as orderly by disorderly emotions of fury and even schadenfreude nurtured by fantasy. In discussing her reading of Dante's *Inferno*, Pagan explores the affective energy of these disorderly emotions and facilitates through the use of fantasy a bypassing of the ordering idea(l)s for researcher positions through which we scholars typically approach topics and data. Pagan somersaults us beyond more controlled research practices, as she helps us imagine and examine how fury and schadenfreude evoked in fantasy may well equip us with new, although disorderly, modes of inquiry and understandings of

various organizational phenomena. As such, this note opens us up to how that which disorders us by discomfort, may indeed be exactly what we need to reach novel insights and unleash a new kind of disorganized serendipity.

In her note and accompanying video footage, 'Gender identity (dis)order in dual precarious worker couples: The 'Family Speaking Drawers' installation',' Anna Carreri invites us into the livelihoods of precariously hired academic subjectivities and the gendering relations of disorder and order enveloping them. Her invitation is facilitated by both her writing and an installation of video footage linked to in the note. With an intimate insight into the gendered practices and contexts of short term hired academics, we move beyond the idea of balanced work-life limits and drift along the blurry lines of various organizing and disorganizing practices bound up with each other in the mix of home life, work life, becoming a scholar, a parent, a partner, and a person recognizable to self and others as worthy. In her discussion, Carerri draws on feminist organization studies and debates about writing differently to unfold the gendered ordering and disordering that saturates and circumscribes the subjectification processes of the academics in the making. This depicts how contradictory tensions of, for example, fast and slow, experienced and newcomer, as well as productive and unproductive may at once denote a gendering order and disorder, that privilege some while suppressing others and the livelihoods organized thereby.

A last section includes three book reviews that concern dis/organization in distinct manners. Viviane Sergi offers a insightful reading of Alison Pullen, Jenny Helin and Nancy Harding's *Writing differently* published by Emerald Publishing Limited in 2020. As Sergi notes, *Writing differently* follows a series of workshops, conference activities, articles, book chapters and special issues on the topic of writing that have aimed at discussing writing as it takes place in management and organization studies, and opening spaces to experiment with writing. And this is exactly what Sergi does in her note by sprinkling her review with 'fragments' that offer a snapshot of the book, shares her reaction in reading it, taps into the mundane features of organizational life, and reflects on the constitutive force of texts and writing. At the core, both the book and Sergi's review interrogate academic writing (and more specifically in our field) and the central role intuition, reflexivity, surprise and affects play in knowledge construction. Sergi puts it nicely in her conclusion in the

following ways: 'Writing Differently can be read as a freeing demonstration that any form, any format, any approach, any tone, any style is possible because writing is, inherently, about creating – and in our field, in our research, about creating meaning and meaningfulness, for us and for others, in academia, in organizations, in society.'

In their review of Roberto Bolaño's book *Nazi literature in the Americas*, first published in Spanish in 1996, Thomas Burø and Christian De Cock unravel how this work disorganizes Nazi literature and in so doing reorganizes our understanding of it: 'But most of the literature is listed, ordered and described in an incoherent pattern as if mocking the very organizing force of the encyclopedic form'. We not only learn *of* Bolaño's work; Burø and De Cock also show us *how* it works by ordering (a) Nazi literature across explicit authors, (b) writings that communicate Nazi ideas, and (c) works that aestheticize specific political ideas. Through the review, the authors unfold the ways in which a book published in Spanish in 1996, translated to English in 2010, can be relevant to review in 2022; they interweave its insights across geo-political times and spaces spanning from the 1930s to the 2020s. Thereby, we are both inspired to read Bolaño's book and equipped to see how relations of order and disorder continuously intertwine in (dis)organizing fascist politics as they are picked up and aesthetically enact specific pasts, presents and futures.

As a perfectly imperfect ending, we find Sine Just's meta-reflective review of the book *Dis/organization as Communication,* edited by two of the guest editors of this special issue, Consuelo Vásquez and Tim Kuhn. In engaging deeply with both the overall idea of the book – to understand the communicative constitution of all kinds of dis/organization in theory and practice – and with each of the book's singular contributions, Just interacts, comments, and troubles the points being argued in the text. She does so by continuously throwing questions regarding dis/organization and relations of order and disorder into the mix time and again, just when we think the dust has settled. Her ongoing questioning of the idea to create order in the thoughts about disorder invites the reader into reflecting on the book's various contributions, as well as to self-reflect on how that may spur one's own understanding of dis/organization regarding various phenomena being discussed in the book, such as digital technology, branding, hoarding, project organizing and more.

A politics of dis/organization?

Standing on the shoulders of critical thinkers, and inspired by the contributions of this issue, we see the contours of future dis/organization studies as involving a bolder debate around *how* all research into relations of order/disorder also inherently involves a politics of dis/organization theory and practice. By this we mean that exploring dis/ordering relations involves an acuity for the political functioning of power production, a sensitivity to the performative forces in play that critically questions how they come to matter, how they become consequential, how they move and affect actors in dis/organizing local worldings (Ahmed, 2017; Barad, 2007; Cooper, 2001; Haraway, 2016). In effect, we believe, such endeavors can more explicitly unsettle theoretically and empirically how the insights they bring forward may at once trouble and co-create (or maybe even transgress?) certain modes of organizational normativity. It follows, of course, that this also involves a collective debate of ethical considerations, amongst us as scholars, and in our educational activities and collaborations with others.

Moreover, this also includes a shared effort to (self-)critically debate and reimagine methodologies for dis/organization. Thinking about and studying dis/organization and dis/order through non-representational premises, using relational, poststructural and posthuman approaches, calls for turning our destabilization of the taken-for-granted against ourselves too. Relations of dis/order are also manifested in our writing of theory and empirical studies, as Cooper (1986: 331-332) reminded us. So, while efforts to develop dis/organization as a field of study have sensitized us to new objects of analysis outside the organized, the orderly and planned, where disorganization and disorder are forefronted as constitutive, we most often continue to account for these objects of analysis in traditional ways.

In encouraging us to develop theorizing that relocate our focus beyond the organization, then, this returns to the challenge that Cooper originally called upon us: to question the theoretical discourses, vocabularies, and methods for studying dis/organization. As scholars, we take active part in the worldings that we study (Barad, 2007; Haraway, 2016; Mol, 2002) by the ways that we engage with, observe, and write about them. So, we have a great chance to more explicitly discuss and take part in the politics of what and who our

research co-perform. Such considerations motivate us to develop new empirical methods to 'see', 'observe', 'ask' and 'account' for disorganization as just as important as 'orderly' organizing processes (Dille and Plotnikof, 2020; Gilmore et al., 2019). Furthermore, it demands that we develop new vocabularies, images, ways of writing up and visualizing organizational worlds that put dis/organization at the center.

Importantly, then, extending our work of inventing and reconfiguring dis/organizational (research) communication in theory, method and practice is vital – potentially corresponding to similar movements in, for example, organizational process studies, and feminist organization studies of writing differently (Amrouche et al., 2018; Pullen et al., 2020), which is already manifesting in this issue (see, for example, contributions by Bjergkilde and Pallesen, or Sergi).

To this end, we look forward to engaging with much more dis/organization theory and practice in the years to come, starting with the puzzles of this special issue.

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Paying attention to tension: Towards a new understanding of the organizational mechanisms enabling sexual harrassment

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abstract

Research on sexual harassment in professional settings has enabled a conceptualization of transgressive behaviour by naming, defining, and mapping the phenomenon. Yet, the problem shows little sign of being eliminated. This article mobilizes a perspective of dis/organization to shed new light on the continuous (re)production of sexual harassment, suggesting that organizational contradictions create tension within which sexual harassment is enabled and (re)produced. The study employs a tension-centred research approach and draws on empirical data from two different professional settings in Denmark, namely academia and the military. Attending to the tension that arises in the organizing of these professional settings, the article identifies four contradictions that enable sexual harassment. Connecting these findings to the work of Butler, the article argues that navigating such contradictions is deeply entangled in the un/doing of professional subjects, thus making it a sensitive matter, not least for newcomers striving for intelligibility in a new professional setting. In addition to this contribution to the field of sexual harassment research, the article proposes the concept of un/doing as an analytical tool to critically examine tension and contradictions in the realm of dis/organization.

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[1] The authors are mentioned in alphabetical order. Both authors have contributed equally to the article.

Introduction

Recent events, including but not limited to the #MeToo movement, highlight that despite research efforts, legal and organizational prohibitions as well as feminist activism, sexual harassment in professional settings shows little sign of decreasing in its occurrence, let alone of being eliminated (Ahmed, 2015; 2017; FRA, 2015; McDonald, 2012; NIKK, 2020). In this article, we mobilize a perspective of dis/organization to shed new light on the continuous (re)production of sexual harassment. We suggest that organizational contradictions create tension within which sexual harassment is enabled and (re)produced. Moreover, we employ Butler's (2004) concept of un/doing as an analytical tool to critically examine contradictions and tension in the area of dis/organization.

In opposition to historically-dominant organization studies literature which focuses on certainty and order (see e.g. Thompson, 1967; Weick, 1979), critical organizational scholars have argued that disorganization and disorder are inherent elements of organizations (Böhm and Jones, 2001; Cooper, 1986; 2001; Hassard et al. 2008), thereby challenging the 'enduring myths of rationality and order that shape the prevalent logics of organizational theory and practice.' (Trethewey and Ashcraft, 2004: 81). Focused on revealing the complex ways in which disorganization takes part in shaping organizations, these scholars embrace rather than "sort out" contradictions and tensions that appear to cause disorder. Picking up on these claims, our ambition is to utilize an approach of tension-centred scholarship (Martin, 2004; Putnam et al., 2016; Trethewey and Ashcraft, 2004) in the field of sexual harassment.

Research from a variety of fields, including critical (feminist) organization studies, has addressed matters of sexual harassment in professional settings (Cortina and Berdahl, 2008; Fernando and Prasad, 2019; MacKinnon, 1979; McDonald, 2012; NIKK, 2020; Swedish Research Council, 2018), efforts that enabled a conceptualization of transgressive behaviour by naming it, defining it, and giving it political and organizational attention. We seek to extend this field of research by focusing on how sexual harassment is (re)produced, arguing that it is enabled within the tension created through organizational contradictions.

Data from two professional settings in Denmark, namely academia and the military, form the empirical foundation of this article. By bringing these two settings together in one analysis, we illuminate how sexual harassment is (re)produced in very similar ways even within quite different organizational contexts. Engaging with four empirically identified contradictions, we link the matter of sexual harassment to the challenge of becoming *intelligible* within a professional setting. Here, we draw on Butler's (2004) concept of *doing* and *undoing* as co-constitutive elements in the process of subjective becoming to introduce the risk of being undone as an explanatory factor for the persistence of sexual harassment.

In the sections that follow, we first elaborate on the problem of sexual harassment and its continuous (re)production in organizational settings. This is followed by a presentation of the dis/organization perspective which we utilize to examine the contradictions within which sexual harassment is enabled, suggesting the concept of un/doing as an analytical tool for this examination. We then outline our methodology before we present our empirical findings, discuss the article's analytical contributions, and conclude with implications for research and practice.

The problem of sexual harassment

In academia, discussions under the label of 'sexual harassment' started in the late 1970s, key conceptualizations of this phenomenon typically being ascribed to Till's (1980) empirical categorization and Fitzgerald et al.'s (1988) Sexual Experience Questionnaire, as well as Crenshaw's (1998) intersectional perspective. Commonly, studies following these conceptualizations differentiate between forms of verbal sexual harassment (e.g. inappropriate comments, jokes, or questions) and physical sexual harassment (e.g. unwelcome touching, hugging, or kissing) (McDonald, 2012; Swedish Research Council, 2018). Some studies also refer to non-verbal sexual harassment, such as inappropriate staring, and more recently digital sexual harassment (FRA, 2015). In our work, we recognize that the line between physical and verbal acts as well as the (in)appropriateness of these acts is blurry and constantly shifting. Conceptually, 'inappropriate touching' might be deemed sexual harassment, but finding agreement on what an

'inappropriate touch' entails is more difficult (Guschke et al., 2019; see also NIKK, 2020). For this article, we therefore follow the EU's official definition of sexual harassment as 'any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature [...] with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment' (EU, 2006). Importantly, however, we understand this as subjectively and relationally defined, so that determining an act as unwanted, violating, or intimidating becomes an issue of individual perspective as much as (gendered) social and organizational norms, as will be elaborated on in the following.

The (re)production of sexual harassment

Reviewing the academic debates that have unfolded since the initial studies in the 1970s, we identify two prominent streams of research in the field of sexual harassment. The first stream offers a variety of studies primarily aiming at determining the occurrence of sexual harassment in different settings (ESTHE, 2016; FRA, 2015; Loy and Stewart, 1984; Murrell, 1996) and its multiple, detrimental effects on individuals and organizations (Cortina and Berdahl, 2008; McLaughlin et al., 2017; Sojo et al., 2016; Willness et al., 2007; see also NIKK, 2020). While we acknowledge the importance of studies outlining the extent and effects of sexual harassment, this article seeks to add to the understanding of *how* sexual harassment is enabled and (re)produced in organizational settings, especially considering gendered norms and power structures.

The (re)production of sexual harassment is investigated in a second stream of research, which can be separated in two types of studies: those generally focusing on mistreatment in the working environment and those particularly highlighting gendered power structures. The former position sexual harassment within a broader frame of disrespect and uncivil behaviour (Berdahl and Raver, 2011; Perry et al., 2021; Robotham and Cortina, 2021), stressing the co-existence of sexual harassment with other forms of incivility, such as rudeness and condescension (Lim and Cortina, 2005) as well as arguing that a climate of intolerance and disrespect is a predictor for persistent sexual harassment (Cunningham et al., 2021; Hulin et al., 1996). The latter, often studies within the field of critical organization studies,

especially from feminist perspectives, explore how gendered organizational structures, norms, and workplace culture enable and support the occurrence of sexual harassment (Bell et al., 2019; Fernando and Prasad, 2019; Hlavka, 2014; Phipps and Young, 2015). These scholars identify cultures of (heteronormative) masculinity (Phipps and Young, 2015), a culture of reluctance to change (Fernando and Prasad, 2019), an interplay of informality, consistent competition, and gendered inequalities (Hennekam and Bennett, 2017; Ortlieb and Sieben, 2019) as well as the normalization of sexism (Ahmed, 2015; Calder-Dawe, 2015; Hlavka, 2014) as important factors supporting and enabling continuous sexual harassment. Likewise, studies examine the underreporting of cases of sexual harassment and a reluctance to speak up when one's boundaries are violated, suggesting insecurities about the legitimacy of the claims, distrust in support mechanisms, and the risk of being stigmatized as overly sensitive as the main underlying reasons for a consistent underreporting (Ahmed, 2017; Welsh et al., 2006; Wilson, 2000). In addition to this, an important contribution by Karam and Ghanem (2021) highlights how multilevel power dynamics that shape sexual harassment need to be understood within a contextual, situational, and geopolitical frame.

While sexual harassment has often been approached – if at all – as an HR matter, what connects these scholars is that they are conceptualizing sexual harassment in the context of management and organization, thus framing the issue not just as something that happens *between* and is caused *by* individuals, but as a problem closely tied to organizing and managing. With a starting point within organizational structures and the highlighting of gendered power differences in organizational settings, these scholars emphasize that sexual harassment is embedded in structural gender hierarchies rather than individual sexual interest (Leskinen et al., 2011).

Interestingly, contradictions seem to appear across these studies. This is for instance seen in Phipps and Young's (2015) study in which the inclusion of more women is shown to lead to the emergence of a culture of masculinity that works to exclude and demean women. The existing body of literature indicates that issues of sexual harassment might be caught up in contradictions and disorder rather than merely being exceptional behaviour within an otherwise rational and ordered setting. Seeking to build on these studies' indications and extend our understanding in this field, the current

article mobilizes a perspective of dis/organization to contribute new insights on how sexual harassment is (re)produced in organizational contexts.

Dis/organization, contradictions, and tension

Not least since Cooper's (1986) iconic work on 'Organization/Disorganization', critical organization scholars have argued that irrationalities, contradictions, and paradoxes are an integral part and routine features of organizations (Böhm and Jones, 2001; Cooper, 2001; Hassard et al., 2008; Putnam et al., 2016), a consequence of how 'organizations and their members are pulled or are purposefully moving in different, often competing directions' (Trethewey and Ashcraft, 2004: 81). These scholars suggest that the seemingly opposite phenomena of organization and disorganization are not only interconnected but mutually dependent and thus inseparable. According to Trethewey and Ashcraft (2004: 82-83) 'organizational tensions are not simply ruptures or anomalies' but rather 'routine features of organizational life that attest to the fundamental irrationality of organizing.'

This stands in stark contrast to much organization literature that has considered organizations to be rational enterprises within which tension has been framed as problematic and something to be eliminated (Cooper, 1986; Mumby & Putnam, 1992; Wendt, 1998). As presented by Knox et al. (2015), disorder has been understood as intimately related to the 'problem' of uncertainty with writers such as Thompson (1967: 159) identifying uncertainty as 'what "organization" is meant to overcome', and Weick (1979) describing 'organization' as the pursuit of certainty or, at least, reducing uncertainty. Yet, by acknowledging disorder and disorganization as integral to organization, uncertainty is allowed into the realm of what we study as part of organization studies. Contradictions and tension can from such an approach be investigated without an aim of overcoming or releasing them.

In this article, we build on such scholarly efforts by cultivating the concept of organizational contradictions. We examine how these enable sexual harassment in professional settings by foregrounding the tension these contradictions bring about, aiming for 'richer understandings of actual practice' (Trethewey and Ashcraft, 2004: 81-82). Homing in on the

perspective of dis/organization, we aim to add to the field of critical studies that highlights the lived experiences of those who find themselves caught in tension that comes from contradictory norms and expectations. Accounts have been offered as to how professionals in practice navigate such tension (Hall et al., 2007; Martin, 2004; Pilgeram, 2007; Tracy, 2004), highlighting the cautiousness needed to stay within recognizable patterns of social and organizational norms. To advance the studies in this field, we suggest Butler's (2004) concept of un/doing as a critical analytical tool for examining contradictions and tension in the area of dis/organization.

Subjective becoming as constant un/doing

Embracing contradictions as the core of our analysis, we turn to Judith Butler's (2004) conceptualization of subjective becoming as a seemingly contradictory process of un/doing and being un/done. Through a continuous and simultaneous process of *doing* and *undoing* of the self, Butler suggests, subjects are always in a process of becoming. This duality can be described as a subject producing its coherence in order to be recognized as intelligible, at the cost of 'undoing' its own complexity (Butler, 2004). The term 'undoing' here stresses the effort involved in continually striving for subjective coherence by maintaining semblance to the norm.

At the same time, the notion of undoing elucidates the constant threat that subjects face of 'being undone' by others, since subjectivity is understood to be the outcome of a process of 'social organization through which certain performative acts come to be recognized as viable subject positions, while others are disavowed' (Riach et al., 2016: 2074). As their recognition depends on others, subjects constantly risk losing their viability if not performing according to the social norms that govern intelligibility. A lack of recognition means the undoing of one's subjectivity and being 'forced to live a life that is not worth living' (Pullen and Knights, 2007: 506). This immanently threatening consequence calls for an analytical scrutinizing of the norms determining intelligibility within the specific empirical setting that researchers engage with. Translated to our research field, being recognizable within one's professional setting becomes a crucial matter; a matter sensitive

not least for newcomers who have yet to learn to navigate normative expectations.

While the existing body of literature on sexual harassment has connected workplace cultures, organizational structures, and social norms to the occurrences of sexual harassment (Ahmed, 2015; Fernando and Prasad, 2019; Hennekam and Bennett, 2017), the question of how these issues relate to (norm-governed) subjective becoming is still underexplored – not least because studies have typically *either* emphasized an individual *or* a structural perspective on sexual harassment. In this article, we explore the (re)production of sexual harassment in relation to Butler's concept of recognition-based subjective becoming understood as a process of constant un/doing. In highlighting in our analysis the contradictions enabling sexual harassment, we illuminate the difficulties and insecurities recruits and students face when dealing with experiences of harassment, and how these struggles can be related to the risk of being un/done.

Methodology and empirical foundation

Empirical setting(s)

In its empirical foundation, this article brings together data from two different research projects. One study is situated in the Danish military while the context of the other is a Danish university. Denmark, as part of the Nordics, is often seen as being at the forefront of gender equality, putting forth the post-feminist 'myth' that gender equality has been achieved and no further efforts against different forms of discrimination are required (Christensen and Muhr, 2019). However, as a recent systematic review of sexual harassment research from the Nordic countries emphasizes, 'sexual harassment is a major social problem in working life in the Nordic countries' (NIKK, 2020: 7). The conditions of denial arguably make it especially challenging to address problems of gendered power relations and relatedly sexual harassment. At the same time, they point towards an even bigger need to engage with these issues that otherwise risk being side-lined in public and academic discourse.

The military and academia can seem worlds apart; yet important similarities exist between these settings. Notably, higher education and the military

exhibit some of the highest rates of sexual harassment and assault (ESTHE, 2016; Fisher et al., 2000; Kovitz, 2018; NIKK, 2020; Øhrstrøm et al., 2003). In addition, newcomers entering the university or the military as an undergraduate or a recruit tend to share the following similarities: Newcomers are typically in their early adulthood, many of them coming straight from high school and moving out of their parents' home, hereby establishing themselves as independently 'out in the world.' In both settings, newcomers are subjected to a basic training that will enable them to become part of a specific profession. Yet, to become intelligible, they also need to obtain an understanding of the social and organizational norms within the professional setting they are entering. Following Butler (2004), they need to learn how to perform in ways recognizable within the prevailing norms.

Data generation across two cases

The decision to combine data from separate cases for the aim of this study emerged from discussing prior research that the two authors conducted in the field of the military (Sløk-Andersen, 2018) and academia (Guschke et al., 2019). Our curiosity was awakened by noticing an abundance of similarities in our findings despite the differences in organizational contexts as well as methodological approaches. We began to wonder what re-analysing our data through a shared lens would yield. While we are aware that our different methodological approaches create asynchronous datasets, we maintain and show that there is value in exploiting the variances in research methods when combining – not comparing – the two cases in this article.

Our first case stems from the first author's study at a Danish university which was carried out as part of a research project aimed at understanding, discussing, and tackling different forms of harassment in the student environment (Guschke et al., 2019). It consisted of an online survey which was sent to students at the university and resulted in a total of 429 participants completing the questionnaire. This was followed by three focus group interviews which Guschke conducted. The survey inquired about perceptions, experiences, and the normalization of sexual harassment, while the focus group discussions more specifically circled around questions of how to delineate sexual harassment, including 'grey areas,' and which factors to take into account when describing an experience as sexual harassment.

Our other case stems from the second author's ongoing research relationship with the Danish military profession. The majority of the data included in this article is from fieldwork among recruits doing military service in the army, which was motivated by an overall aim to explore what it means to be a good soldier and the entailed process of becoming recognizable as such (Sløk-Andersen, 2018). To gain an insight into the tacit knowledge and shared assumptions (Ehn and Löfgren, 2010; Löfgren, 2014) that such recognition requires, Sløk-Andersen joined a platoon of recruits through their four months of basic training. Besides 'performing the phenomenon' (Wacquant, 2006), the study included 36 interviews with recruits and commanders. Finally, this article will also draw on other snippets of fieldwork, such as observations from another army platoon and interviews carried out more recently with soldiers employed in other parts of the Danish military.

Data analysis

Following our curiosity towards apparent overlaps in our previous studies, we re-read the empirical material with a focus on how sexual harassment is (re)produced in the organizational contexts. We identified similarities between the cases but struggled with neatly 'ordering' or categorizing them. Becoming interested in tension-centred analytical approaches, we mobilized an 'attention to tension' as the analytical frame and re-coded the empirical material with a focus on inconsistencies, contradictions, and tension. In what Ashcraft and Muhr describe as an '"unfaithful" attitude towards analysis' (2018: 211), we tried to avoid jumping to any normative and fixed conclusions and instead sought to play with alternative, non-linear and tension-centred ways of understanding our data. From these codes we developed a list of 11 contradictions, which we took as a starting point for a phase of selective coding. We (I) sorted and re-grouped the empirical elements describing each contradiction, (II) identified overlaps between categories to merge corresponding ones, and (III) determined which of them were strongly represented in both cases. Through an iterative empirical coding process, we narrowed the analytical categories down to four contradictions which we identified as salient in both data sets. We present these not as a comprehensive list but important examples of the contradictions that create tension within which sexual harassment is enabled in organizational contexts.

Analysing tension through organizational contradictions

The four contradictions we empirically identified are formal/informal, fun/serious, whole/fragmented and cohesion/rupture. In the following, each contradiction will be unfolded and exemplified before turning to a discussion of how they relate to matters of un/doing in the final section of the article.

Formal/informal

The first contradiction locates tension between a formal and informal handling of experiences with sexual harassment. In the Danish military, there is a formal system for reporting cases of sexual harassment, within which any formal complaint will be investigated by the Military Prosecution Service and potentially raised as a legal matter. This is in line with the general tendency towards formality in the military, as noticed by the author doing observations in this setting. Here, a norm of formality was supported, for example by the formal tone in which soldiers are supposed to address anyone with a higher rank than themselves and an extensive use of written procedures and rules. As one sergeant noted, 'Trust is good, control is better' (Field notes, 2016).

Yet, despite a clear and formal system being in place to deal with sexual harassment, few cases are investigated (Military Prosecution Service, 2018). One reason why this formalized system is almost never used to tackle cases of sexual harassment seems to be the principle of sorting out problems 'at the lowest possible level' of the organization (Field notes, 2016); a principle recruits are introduced to during their basic training and which was equally echoed in interviews with more experienced soldiers. Reflecting on how soldiers rely on building close bonds with each other, one commander noted that if someone oversteps your boundaries, you should be able to just talk it through because filing a formal complaint will create 'a massive breach of trust' (Male commander, interview). Consequently, instances of having one's boundaries violated, for instance in cases of sexual harassment, should be handled informally; this is in itself an informal expectation as it contrasts formal procedures.

In the case of the university, similar formal systems are in place to deal with social misconduct and transgressive behaviour. Students who experience sexual harassment are supposed to approach one of three student counsellors

who will guide the student through a process that allows the individual to decide whether, and in what way, they want to take the claim forward and start a formal case. However, in cases of sexual harassment the formalized service is rarely picked up. As our data reveals, there seems to be a reluctance to report instances of sexual harassment due to an expectation to speak up informally rather than involve a formal third party. A common claim by the students was that 'people are capable of standing up for themselves' (Female, survey). One student highlighted that 'if you feel like a victim of sexual harassment, you have the obligation to say no to this behaviour' (Male, survey). Another student stressed that 'you should not impose any kind of the responsibility on other people. [...] I think the victims should speak up in general terms' (Male, focus group 1). There seems to be an understanding amongst students, that if you experience sexual harassment, you should (be able to) deal with it informally on your own. Seeking support through formal channels would be read as a lack of taking responsibility.

Numerous studies have shown the benefits of informality in organizations, ranging from better problem solving and sense making processes (De Cremer et al., 2008; Maitlis, 2005) to better overall performance (Gulati et al., 2000; Nohria and Ghoshal, 1994). One could thus assume it to be highly fruitful that both the military and academia accommodate informality amid their formal organizing. However, in the case of sexual harassment we see formality and informality tangled up in ways that lead to problematic contradictions because the expectations linked to collegial informality make following formal rules seem out of place. Consequently, filing a formal case of sexual harassment will be experienced as a breach to professional norms of informality, leaving young professionals caught between contradictory norms for how to tackle experiences of sexual harassment.

Fun/serious

Another significant contradiction that appeared across the two empirical settings relates to the expectations of fun and seriousness. In the academic setting, the labelling of verbal comments as jokes and humour or as sexual harassment was a reoccurring point of negotiation. Some argued that a comment which regards a person's gender or sexuality is 'just a joke' and thus never to be classified as harassment (Male, survey). Other students disagreed

fundamentally, stating that all comments on a person's gender or sexuality constitute sexual harassment, arguing that 'a sexist comment [...] is inappropriate in any setting. It mirrors a culture of sexism that we should work against' (Female, focus group 2).

Another line of argumentation illuminated indecision regarding the role of intent and effect of a comment or joke. Some argued that sexual harassment should be determined by the effect it has on the target independent of the intent of the actor. Reflecting about continuous sexist and misogynist joking in her study program, one female student described that 'these comments might sound funny and insignificant, but they really undermine our authority as girls and make it very hard for us to be taken seriously' (Female, survey). Yet, others reasoned that a well-meant joke should not be labelled harassment, a common statement being that, a 'joke about gender is not okay if it is with ill intent and trying to hurt other people, otherwise I think it is totally fine' (Male, survey). For some, the mere discussion of this issue seemed to trigger a threat of inscribing seriousness in the place of fun, one student for instance stating that 'if we worry too much about being offended, then no one will be able to say or do anything anymore' (Male, survey).

In the military, an otherwise serious tone and hierarchal system was complemented by an extensive use of humour, mocking, and practical jokes (Sløk-Andersen, 2019). A quite plain example of this tone unfolded while the recruits were maintaining their weapons one day. As a female recruit presented a small weapon part and asked her nearby peers 'Where does this go?', a male recruit reacted instantly by saying 'Stick it up your ass' and laughed (Field notes, 2016). Such sexualized jokes were rarely questioned or opposed. Even a recruit who was recurrently mocked by sergeants commented on the jokes by saying 'I think it's great that you get that relationship with the sergeants' (Male recruit, interview). Seemingly, the extensive use of humour appeared to make military service more 'fun' and helped building social relations.

But for some of the women, a specific comment or joke could make them think 'Ugh, that was a gross statement' (Female recruit, interview) or become 'the last straw' (Field notes, 2017) after months of listening to offensive jokes and sexualized comments. An example of this appeared after a group of female

recruits on a daily basis had been asked by male peers 'This guy could fuck you, right?' (Field notes, 2017). The women had gotten used to such questions, but as some of them were now also being "surprised" in the showers, the women had had enough and one of them complained to a sergeant. Yet, when they were encouraged to file these instances as cases of sexual harassment, they became very uncertain. The use of humour, it seemed, posed immense difficulties for addressing experiences of sexual harassment because this would transform the comments and jokes from an assumed matter of fun into very serious incidents.

While a humorous atmosphere was experienced to support bonding in both the military and academia, students as well as recruits found themselves having to balance between fun and seriousness when dealing with sexual harassment. In both settings, the use of humour seemed to make it difficult for the young professionals to trust their own judgement of when it was acceptable to feel harassed, something that studies have shown will lead to underreporting (Ahmed, 2017; Welsh et al., 2006; Wilson, 2000). Calling something out as harassment easily becomes a break with the norm of humorous interactions by inscribing seriousness in its place.

Whole/fragmented

A third contradiction located across the two empirical settings is the matter of whether the involved professionals are considered whole or fragmented; whether there is a distinction between, for instance, a personal and a professional self. For students, it was particularly difficult if not impossible to differentiate between a professional and a personal self in university-related social settings. Many of the students reflected upon this by speaking of experiences during so-called 'intro weeks.' These introductory weeks, organized by older students who function as intro guides, are supposed to familiarize new students with the university environment. In previous years it had been a common problem that male guides were making a competition out of how many female students they could sleep with during intro week. Experiences like the following were shared by the female students:

> A tutor from my programme slept at my place after an intro party. I had installed him at my couch, but after we went to bed, he came to my bedroom

and tried to have sex with me. I did not want to, but I did not manage to tell him off effectively. Consequently, we had sex (Female, survey).

As a consequence, a rule had been established that forbid intro guides to start any sexual interaction with new students. However, in the following year, new female students turned the contest around, competing on how many male guides they could sleep with. As one female student stated, 'it's fun to play a bit; [...] to know that there's a risk involved; you might be rejected or not. And you approach people in different ways, and you try different things' (Female, focus group 2). Relating to similar events, another female student shared that 'if they [women] are harassing men, women are still below them in the patriarchy. So, it doesn't hurt them as much, [...] they can still shake it off a bit more than a woman can' (Female, focus group 1). Nonetheless, male guides shared the discomfort and uncertainty about their own role in this new situation. They felt bound to their professional role as intro guides but were also supposed to be there as their authentic selves as fellow students. Most students said that they felt unsure how to react when they started feeling uncomfortable about the insistent advances, stating for instance that 'we have the problem that, here at [the university], [the social event] takes place in the school and now you have to distinguish if that event is part of school or not' (Male, focus group 1). Additionally, the situation of women sexually and sometimes aggressively approaching men, which did not fit the gendered stereotype of 'men harassing women', seemed to trouble their assessment. As professionals, they thought that they should have the situation under control but felt overwhelmed, while personally, they felt violated, confused, and uncomfortable, which contradicted heteronormative gendered expectations.

In the military, there is an explicit desire to recruit 'whole persons' (Male commander, interview) because they give a better foundation for making good soldiers. Once inside the profession, it can indeed be difficult to establish a clear distinction between a private and professional sphere, not least when soldiers live together at military bases or deploy to international missions with no private sphere to withdraw to. This is emphasized by the uniform which, as recruits were told during basic training, makes them 'representatives of the Danish Armed Forces' (Field notes, 2016) even when they were off duty. This expectation of recruits committing their whole person to the organization was presented alongside a narrative about the military

profession as being fundamentally different from a civilian "outside" (e.g. Male commander, interview). As was noted by an advisor during a presentation about the working environment, 'the tone can be rough every once in a while – we have a certain jargon here' (Field notes, 2016), indicating different boundaries and norms for what behaviour and social interactions might be considered acceptable in a military versus a civilian setting.

Consequently, some soldiers need to differentiate between who they are in and outside the military in order to endure and tolerate the norms in the military setting (e.g. Female recruit, interview), thus fragmenting themselves in a personal and professional self. Nonetheless, the commander dealing with the case of sexual harassment mentioned earlier re-invoked the idea of whole selves as he urged the female recruits to file a formal complaint by asking them to consider 'what you want to put up with as human beings' (Field notes, 2017). From being a matter of the military just having 'a certain jargon', the young women were now asked to connect their tackling of sexual harassment with their whole selves.

While several studies have analysed how people (try to) create somewhat separate professional and private selves (Costas and Fleming, 2009; Johnsen et al., 2009), a common claim is that work identities nonetheless are established to create a feeling of wholeness and authenticity (Fleming, 2009; van Knippenberg et al., 2004). The young professionals in our studies, we argue, are caught in the tension between contradicting expectations as they are supposed to be their whole and authentic selves, while concurrently a fragmenting of the self is implicitly demanded in order to endure experiences of sexual harassment. The latter requirement rests upon the assumption that one would be able to "cut off" parts of oneself, which we argue is an unfortunate, if not impossible, way to tackle sexual harassment.

Cohesion/rupture

The two professional settings we deal with in this analysis are often sought after with an expectation of or hope for social cohesion with other young professionals. It is essential for most recruits as well as students to build mutual trust and solidarity, hereby making military work and student life more enjoyable. As one recruit said, explaining why he had decided to serve,

'I think it's amazing, this feeling of being part of something. A greater collective' (Male recruit, interview). But in both our studies, speaking up against harassment was perceived as a breach to such cohesion. In the focus groups, one student shared:

> It [speaking up] has consequences for you. [...] There's some sort of relation at stake here. [...] It creates a scene in a way. And then people are gonna create their own opinions about what happened even though they didn't see it. [...] And these are the people you're gonna see every day for maybe two or three years or maybe longer (Female, focus group 2).

Speaking up is assumed to entail a risk of creating a scene or being perceived as overreacting. According to Ahmed, those who decide to speak up become *killjoys*, that is, someone who is 'not willing to laugh at jokes designed to cause offense' (2017: 261) and someone 'who gets in the way of the happiness of others' (2014a: 224). As such, *killjoy* defines that person who will not put up with injustice or wrongdoing but speaks up against it – even when this ruins the good mood. One student proclaimed that 'speaking up is even harder than being sexually harassed. Especially if it is a friend, a colleague. [...] Because what happens is that you break from that social relation' (Female, focus group 2). As expected by the student, becoming a *killjoy* does have social implications because being part of a group requires to be part of the same affective flow as the rest of the group (Ahmed 2014b). In this process of affective alignment, we are positioned 'not only as being with, but being with in a similar way' (Ahmed 2014b: 16), indicating that if we are 'not in the mood' this inevitably affects our possibilities for being part of the collective.

Illustrating how the fear of becoming a *killjoy* is not just an unfounded fear, the female recruits who complained about the behaviour of their male peers were met with a reaction from their platoon right away. As rumours about the case spread, the women were approached by other recruits hissing spiteful comments at them. Why did they have to make a big deal out of it, it had just been fun and games (Field notes, May 2017). Speaking up in the first place had already caused a rupture to the good mood. Reporting their experiences as a formal case of sexual harassment held an even greater threat of turning the female recruits into killjoys. Taking the jokes and actions from a context of fun and informality to a context of formality and seriousness, the women did not change the norms at the military camp. Rather they caused a rupture

which made clear that *they* were out of tune with the military profession and its (gendered) normative structures.

Students and recruits exposed to sexual harassment found themselves caught in the tension between desired cohesion and the risk of a rupture. In both settings, the urge for 'being with' seemed to interfere with the feeling of being harassed in such a way that it made students and recruits alike hesitant to address the problem. This reluctance was supported by the honouring of the fun and informal tone outlined earlier. As our analysis shows, the existence of contradictory organizational norms inhibits the use of formal channels to report sexual harassment but also implicitly discourages people from speaking up in the moment due to a fear that this will cause a rupture to the social cohesion and eventually delegitimize their own position within the profession. While Ahmed embraces the disruptive potential of being a feminist killjoy, heralding its 'political potential and energy' (2014b: 224), newcomers of both the military and the academic setting appeared reluctant to act as such.

Discussion: The un/doing of professional subjects

In the previous sections, we have illustrated how contradictory organizational norms create tension within which sexual harassment unfolds and how the young professionals of our studies attempt to navigate these contradictions in ways that keep them within the realm of the prevailing norms. Connecting these findings to Butler's understanding of subjectivity, we see these contradictions intertwining with the possibilities of becoming an intelligible subject.

Butler has argued that we are not just socially *mediated*, but socially *constituted* qua prevailing norms (2004: 32). Translating this claim to our empirical field, we argue that one's existence as a professional is dependent on one's adherence to the norms governing the specific professional context. As newcomers to academia and the military try to decode norms – for dealing with sexist jokes, unwelcomed touching, and other forms of transgressive behaviour – they must make sure to stay within the limits of intelligibility. But how can one stay within norms that are contradictory?

We suggest that organizational contradictions challenge the students' and recruits' intelligibility because they simply leave no viable way to deal with sexual harassment. Understanding subjective becoming as a process of doing and undoing of the self according to social norms, students and recruits who find themselves caught up between mutually exclusive norms for how to tackle sexual harassment face difficult choices. They may try to accept the transgressive behaviour as simply part of the profession, for example,e.g. by fragmenting their private from their professional selves. However, this comes at the cost of undoing their own complexity. Yet, the alternative of speaking up will most likely not be within subjectivity-governing norms either, as they then risk breaking with norms of informality and humour thus being undone by not being recognized. Ahmed's (2014a) figure of the killjoy emphasizes this ever-present risk of being undone; the killjoy represents a subject position that is recurrently disavowed because she causes ruptures and ruins the good mood for others. And as the empirical examples in the whole/fragmented section illustrate, a single act of opposition carries the risk of one's whole person being perceived to be a misfit and thus being undone – a very problematic situation to find oneself in when trying to become recognizable within a professional setting. The gravity of the threatening potential is echoed in Butler's (2004) assessment of the experience of norm breaking as violent, even a question of (social) survival.

Rephrasing Butler, we might say that being caught in organizational contradictions can make professional life unliveable, either because a (re)action challenges norms or because staying within the norms means having to discard those parts of oneself that "cause trouble." While the first option entails the threat of being undone within organizational norms, the second entails undoing one's own complexity. Either way, one faces the threat of 'becoming undone altogether' (Butler, 2004: 3).

Importantly, Butler's concept also enables us to attend to the entanglement of gendered power structures and organizational norms. The heteronormativity governing the intelligibility of gendered subjects links a hierarchal gender binary to the expected behaviours of men and women (Butler, 1990). This leads to certain forms of sexual harassment being normalized and makes speaking up against this normalized behaviour a breach with heteronormative gendered expectations of women as submissive

victims and men as aggressive harassers (see also Calder-Dawe, 2015; Hlavka, 2014). This is not to say that men cannot be victims of sexual harassment, as the example of female students competing to hook up with the male intro guides illustrated. Instead, it shows that on the one hand, subjects are governed by different intersections of gendered organizational norms, but on the other hand, either constellation of how these norms intersect makes it extremely difficult to speak up or act against harassment. Taking the example of the extensive use of sexist jokes in the military, the male and female recruits tend to be implicated differently by the norm of fun and humour between colleagues. Female recruits who break with this norm will likely either become killjoys, falling out of their gendered role as modest and compliant women, or be perceived as "too weak" for the military's rough jargon thereby subscribing to the idea of women not being fit for military careers. A male recruit on the other hand, who does not contribute to the sexist comments, easily becomes the target of jokes that describe him as "not man enough", the many jokes about 'babies' or 'fags' proclaiming a lack of aggressiveness or assertiveness in the men that fall out of their expected role. Either way, under a constant threat of being undone, those who dissent risk rendering themselves unintelligible within gendered organizational norms.

Conclusion

In summary, this article offers two relevant contributions. First, it extends current research on the (re)production of sexual harassment by suggesting that sexual harassment is enabled within tension created through organizational contradictions. We argue that these contradictions leave no viable way of dealing with or speaking up against sexual harassment. Aiming to adhere to the contradictory norms permeating organizations, professionals are caught between the threat of being undone within organizational norms and the need to undo their own complexity. The emerging tension, a constant threat of being undone, enables the (re)production of harassment. While we neither claim to make generalizable claims from our two case studies nor to produce a comprehensive list of contradictions that enable sexual harassment, we do reach beyond the fields of academia and the military by contributing to a new conceptualization of sexual harassment that engages with gendered organizational norms through the frame of dis/organization.

We encourage fellow organization scholars to examine how contradictions enable sexual harassment in other organizational contexts, particularly hoping for a variety in professional and geopolitical settings as well as studies taking an intersectional perspective to the problem of harassment.

Second, following scholars who proposed that dis/organization and dis/order should be acknowledged as an integral part of organizing (Cooper, 1986; Knox et al., 2015; Trethewey and Ashcraft, 2004), we suggest that acknowledging dis/organization also means paying critical attention to tension and contradictions as well as their complex consequences in organizational analyses. Scholars have argued that 'contradictions and conflicts, as ruptures in the current social fabric, function as opportunities to change prevailing practices' (Putnam, 1986: 153) and have suggested a *paradox mindset* which makes one 'accepting of and energized by tensions' (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018: 26). We maintain a more cautious and critical stance, having shown how, entangled in the process of recognition, contradictions can have negative consequences for the individuals who are caught in the tension they create. We argue that pinpointing problems that may arise from the co-existence of contradictory organizational norms is an essential element of an engaged and critical commitment to the idea of dis/organization. We suggest the use of Butler's concept of un/doing as an analytical tool in such critical analyses, in cases of sexual harassment as much as in other empirical fields, as it allows to examine how organizational contradictions and the tension that professional subjects find themselves in influence continuous subjective becoming.

Practical implications

In light of the severe consequences of leaving the individual to navigate organizational tension in cases of sexual harassment, we urge organizations to invest in becoming aware of, exposing, and addressing the contradictions that persist in their spheres of influence. As suggested by Tracy (2004: 119), we believe that it is up to organizations to 'create structures in which employees are more likely to make sense of organizational contradictions in healthy ways.' While changing norms is by no means something that organizations can easily do, we maintain a starting point will be to explicitly allow and initiate conversations about the prevailing gendered organizational

structures and related transgressive behaviour. Acknowledging the inevitable interplay of contradictory norms in a realm of dis/organization, these conversations would provide an avenue towards a critical and productive engagement with normative expectations, organizational tension, and complex consequences, without aiming at (the impossibility of) releasing this tension. As part of these efforts, feminist killjoys should explicitly be invited in and encouraged to participate in dis/organizing workplaces. Or better yet, they should not be given a reason to kill joy in the first place.

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Organizational mythopoeia and the spectacle in postfascist (dis)organization

Benjamin Richards and Simon Mollan

abstract

This article examines the process of organizational mythopoeia ('myth-making') undertaken as part of the repertoire of techniques used by the postfascist far-right to propagate and disseminate their ideology. The article examines the purchase of a car formerly owned by the now deceased right-wing British politician Enoch Powell, by a far-right group. What followed were a short series of events surrounding the purchase that saw attempts to transform the car's cultural, political and historical significance for their own benefit by attempting to project it ideologically into public consciousness, something that ultimately failed to occur. This is explored with reference to organizational mythopoeia and the spectacle. The central argument presented is that the postfascist far-right attempt to create their own reality through mythopoeia that is rooted in nostalgic visions of the past. This is undertaken to achieve cultural attrition, factual distortion, and a fundamental disordering of norms that opens the space for the communication of postfascism. Despite the seeming ephemerality of the events discussed here, we show how the inconsequential and often ignored can offer valuable insights into wider postfascist order/organization and disorder/disorganization.

Introduction

In May 2018, the far-right group Generation Identity announced via Twitter (#powellmobile) that they had bought a car formerly belonging to the deceased British politician Enoch Powell. What followed were a short series

of events surrounding the purchase that saw attempts to transform the car's cultural, political and historical significance for the benefit of the group by attempting to project it ideologically into public consciousness. These attempts ultimately failed and the event faded into obscurity. By analysing the story of the 'Powell mobile' this article examines the organizational disorder that emerged, paradoxically, through attempts to use the car and its story to create order. We explore both the mythopoeia (that is, the act of myth-making) and spectacle (the mediation of society by representation) that were at the core of the process of disordering within and by this postfascist organization. Postfascism here describes the phenomena whereby fascism has become transhistorical, existing as both a key part of historical consciousness and the contemporary political imaginary (Traverso, 2019). This article contributes to the critical study of organization within postfascist phenomena, building on work concerning populist victories such as Brexit and Trump (Kerr & Śliwa, 2020; Mollan & Geesin, 2020) as well as the wider success of far-right politics across Europe and the West (Mudde, 2019; Lennard, 2020). Given the entirely online presence of the *Powell mobile* spectacle, this article is also framed by the need to better understand the relationship between social media and postfascist organization(s) and organizing (Engesser et al., 2017; Gustafsson & Weinryb, 2020; Krämer, 2017).

We argue that it is in the realms of mythopoeia and the spectacle that postfascism has its organizational impact–one which disorders culture, and deracinates the past and objective truth, as part of its organizing process (Parker & Racz, 2020). We use the *Powell mobile* episode to identify, explore and critique the key elements of postfascist organization: the use of social media activism, the disordering of truth and intent through irony and mythopoeia, the use of a distinct aesthetic, the exploitation of nostalgia and an underlying message of ethno-nationalism and anti-immigration. We argue that although *Powell mobile* was ultimately a failure, it served as an attempted vehicle for communicating a message that within and throughout the wider far-right phenomenon is constitutive of the postfascist spectacle.

The first part of this article establishes organizational mythopoeia as a tool of organizational analysis and contextualises postfascism, spectacle and (dis)order/(dis)organization. The second part tells the story of *Powell mobile*,

detailing the sale of the car, the subsequent events and ultimate outcome. The third interprets the events as an act of mythopoeia and explores the meaning, significance and intention of the myth that was created. The fourth discusses the event in its relation to conceptions of the spectacle and its form in the postfascist spectacle. Through the framework of organizational mythopoeia, the article concludes how the *Powell mobile* episode serves as a mundane yet potent example of how the postfascist technique and effect of disorder can create a form of organizational and ideological order.

Organizational mythopoeia: Postfascist spectacle and organizing disorder

The *Powell mobile* episode allows us to examine far-right organizational mythopoeia, as an elemental part of the postfascist spectacle that creates order through disorder. Through the purchase of the car, Generation Identity attempted to create a spectacle around the enchantment of the car as an artefact, attempting to imbue it with mythopoeic legitimacy in order to mythologize both their ideology and themselves.

Mythopoeia (from the Greek 'mythos'/myth, and 'poiein'–to make) originated as a term for a narrative genre of creative myth-making within literary fiction, notably in the work of J.R.R Tolkien (see Tolkien, 1964). As a tool for analysis it has been widely applied in political studies, where exploring political myths is a long-established phenomenon (Flood, 2002; Tudor, 1972). What makes a myth political or not is dependent on its reception as much as its production. At an extreme, state mythopoeia, such as in totalitarian regimes, is employed for the ideological control of the people. However, in any political society, 'political myths represent the basic symbols of the political elite' (Bocarnea & Osula 2008: 198). For the far-right this is often seen in the transformation of the past to suit present needs. In this article, mythopoeia is an act and process of myth-making (Bocarnea & Osula, 2008) that seeks to provide significance to the ideological conditions and experiences of a social group (Bottici & Challand, 2006). The insidious deployment of mythopoeia within postfascism is achieved through its capacity to condense and convey myths through multiple and fragmentary references combined into a new formulation (Bottici & Challand, 2006). As a tool, or technique, organizational mythopoeia

is a form of self-representation in which organizations can elicit and legitimate their own ideological image for both internal and external consumption.

Debord's notion of *spectacle*, understood here to mean 'the dominant form in society where the real world is replaced and mediated by images that become regarded as the epitome of reality' (Debord 1967: 14) has been critically re-engaged for the age of information capitalism and digital labour. Spectacle 2.0, as it is known, is the 'historicized continuum of the Debordian spectacle that has transitioned through digital capitalism and new media' (Briziarelli & Armano 2017: 34). It differs, however, from its original conceptualisation in that the passive spectator who once only consumed the cultural products that constituted the spectacle is now the 'interactive subject who socialises through these new digital technologies' (Briziarelli & Armano 2017: 34). Spectacle 2.0 therefore creates an 'extended integration of both the production and consumption' of the images that mediate society through the digital labour that sees us produce the spectacle that we also consume (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010). The postfascist spectacle is made up of mythopoeia, commodity fetishism, the seeing of 'difference' and post-truth phenomena, all of which can be found in the organization of *Powell mobile*.

The spectacle in organization can be found in the 'spectacular' as well as the mundane creation of 'dramatized representations of reality' the production of which lies at the 'heart of which most organizations do and most organizing is about' (Flyverbom & Reinecke, 2017: 1626). This opens up the question of what it means when the process of organizing creates representations of reality that could constitute the spectacle (Flyverbom & Reinecke, 2017) and if 'organizational controls in an era dominated by the spectacle' can be resisted or in the case of *Powell mobile,* co-opted (Gabriel 2008: 311). Despite the failure of the event, the *Powell mobile* represents something interesting within the postfascist phenomenon. Through the fetishization of an arbitrary object the far-right reveal themselves as myth-makers and although this attempt resulted in disorder, it contributes to the wider postfascist spectacle, in which disorder becomes part of the organizational order itself.

Both order and disorder may arise through the process of organizing whereas organization itself may be seen as the 'appropriation of order out of disorder'

(Cooper, 1986: 328), but disorder can also result from the expectation of order (Munro, 2001). The result of this paradox is that order and disorder sometimes can be parasitical upon one another (Knox et al., 2015; Serres, 1982). In the *Powell mobile* story and event, this parasitical relationship becomes further distorted by the postfascist tendency to glide between distortion and mis-representation. As we shall see, the locus of disordering can be found here in the act (or event) of communication, through which meaning is subject to the ordering and disordering of interpretation and representation (Vasquez et al., 2016). In this case, the car itself became the 'vehicle' in which the organization of communication took place, creating a continuous form of the opening and closing of meaning through mythopoeia.

The Powell mobile story

Value is created and added through the movement of things, through their social lives (Appadurai, 1988). The monetary value of the asking price for the 1994 Honda Concerto purchased by Generation Identity was only slightly above an average asking price for a comparable car of the same age and model. In 2020, Auto Trader listed a 1994 Honda Concerto of the same registration year, 0.1 litre smaller engine, 20,000km lower mileage, but without a previous famous owner, for £1,495 (AutoTrader, 2020). Whereas the asking price for Powell's car was £1,600, albeit with higher mileage and a larger engine, the difference of £105 is hardly reflective of any significance of ownership or its assumed social life. Yet its social and perhaps political value was considered far greater by Generation Identity who attempted to engineer a manipulation of the car's value by re-defining its cultural significance in relation to that of its former owner. Enoch Powell himself remains one of the most divisive figures in British political history, perhaps most notably for his 'Rivers of Blood' speech made in opposition to the *Race Relations Act 1968*, in which, through violent imagery and rhetoric, he set out how he had come to perceive immigration as a threat to the foundations of British social and cultural life (Kenny and Pearce, 2019).

Powell's Honda was manufactured and purchased by him in 1994. The details of his purchase of the car are unknown; however, Powell was 82 at this time. Having been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease two years earlier, he was in

declining health, though he continued to speak out against Europe, writing in the Daily Mail 'Britain is waking from the nightmare of being part of the continental bloc, to rediscover that these offshore islands belong to the outside world and lie open to its oceans' (Heffer, 1998: 942). He was still politically involved at the time, speaking for Alan Sked of the anti-federalist league (soon to become UKIP) and later the Bruges Group campaigning against the Maastricht treaty. In 1993, Nigel Farage allegedly drove Powell to an early UKIP event as a speaker and later asked Powell to stand as an electoral candidate, as Alan Sked had before him, which he declined on both occasions (Hope, 2014). Powell continued with writing and speaking engagements until his death in 1998, at which point the ownership of his Honda Concerto passed to his wife.

It wasn't until 30th March 2017 that the car came back into public consciousness. The first reappearance of the car is in a tweet from the railway historian and presenter of BBC's *Trainspotting Live* Tim Dunn who posted 'Would you like to buy Enoch Powell's 1994 Honda Concerto? Yours for £1,600' (@MrTimDunn, 2018) and provided the link to carandclassic.co.uk, where the car was being sold. The tweet was retweeted eight times and received mostly sarcastic comments suggesting the car should be called 'Rovers of blood' and that it probably 'keeps veering to the right'. The Tweets however also contain a few warnings 'to be aware' this vehicle is on the market and forebodings that 'UKIP or BNP may snap it up'.

The car was presumably not sold through carandclassic.co.uk as on 25th May 2018 a twitter user provided the information and link to the car being sold on eBay – 'Enoch Powell's Cat C Honda Concerto is currently on eBay' (anonymous, 2018). Again, this was mostly met with posts about the irony of Powell owning a Japanese car, albeit one that was manufactured by the Honda-Rover joint venture in the UK in Longbridge, Birmingham (manufacturing came to an end in 1994 after sale to BMW) (Pilkington, 1996). On the 1st May 2018, the car was sold for the price of £1200 following 20 bids. The eBay advertisement tells us that the car was owned from new by Enoch Powell, his wife owned and used the car for some period after his death, and the owner at the time had the car for only two years. The rest is detail of the car's condition, mileage and so on; however, there is one line that speaks of the car's potential social value and meaning. The seller expressed the view

that they would like to see car 'go to a enthusiast as it's been well looked after' (ebay.co.uk, 2018). It is unclear whether the seller is seeking an enthusiast of old Hondas or of Enoch Powell himself. The information about the ownership, with documents to prove such, as well as the title of the sale 'Honda Concerto (Owned by Enoch Powell)' (ebay.co.uk, 2018) indicates the seller is aware that its previous owner may add some value to its exchange.

On the 20th May 2018 (then the active and named) Generation Identity UK & Ireland announced that they had bought the car:

> Some time ago, a supporter made us aware of a car being sold at auction. What was of particular interest was the car's former owner, #EnochPowell. So our activists chipped in the money, and we decided to buy it. May it serve us well as it served him. #PowellMobile. (GID_England, 2018)

Generation Identity UK were part of the wider pan-European youth movement collectively known as the Identitarian Movement. The movement is based on the supposed preservation and rights of culture and territory to those of white European descent, promoting 'white' ethno-pluralism at a Global level and ethno-nationalism at a European and local level. The movement are known for their media presence and adoption of stunts and events to draw attention to themselves. The UK branch's Tweet attracted 41 comments, 79 retweets and 341 likes, the post generated a spectrum of reaction, while the action gathered some support, mostly in the form of racist rhetoric and idolisation of Powell's anti-immigration position the post was also met with derision and parody. One Twitter user derided the potential purpose of the purchase: 'They bought Enoch Powell's old banger as if it's some magic chariot of bigotry' (anonymous, 2018).

The next day a YouTube video appeared on the group's website, titled *#PowellMobile*. This acted as a publicity piece to announce the car's purchase, with a recording of an excerpt of Powell's infamous 'Rivers of Blood' speech overlaying the soundtrack. The video was highly stylised and characteristic of the prevailing far-right aesthetic that borrows heavily from retrofuturism, an aesthetic mode and form of cultural production that uses previous iconic visions of the future that represent a nostalgic imagining for a present that never materialised, thus serving as a rhetorical and ideological tool for

creating visions of how things might have been and therefore might still be (Sharp, 2011).

This YouTube video acted as a piece of propaganda centred on both mythopoeia and aesthetic appeal. The short video (only 1:09) shows a neon grid landscape, with an ominous electro synth score from the far-right band Xurious's track 'Rivers of Blood'. This aesthetic is part of 'fashwave', a portmanteau of fascism and vaporwave. Fashwave forms a music and visual aesthetic (sometimes called 'art-right') that combines Classical motifs (Greek and Roman) with 'heavy layers of 1980's kitsch and digital synthetic gloss' (Hermansson, et al. 2020: 110) that has become a recognisable mimetic expression of the far-right for its blend of nostalgia and futuristic sound and imagery (Hann, 2016).

We see the car, parked in a nondescript suburban car park. Four Generation Identity members then appear from the left and approach the car in a blurred neon enhanced picture. An excerpt from Enoch Powell's 'rivers of blood' speech is narrated over as part of the music track. The four members enter the car, with the sound of the music, Powell and the gravel beneath them. The doors shut and as Powell's speech ends. The car begins to accelerate and the electronic beat crescendos into drums. As the car drives away, the camera pans into a clear blue sky where an image of Powell's face appears with the camera zooming in before fading to black. The stylised production of this video helps us to understand the desired identities and culture of Generation Identity. The video was an attempt to lend weight to their authenticity, as a cultural youth movement within the wider far-right spectrum while appealing to a young, modern, and educated political demographic within the UK. Their celebration of Powell and his infamous speech through the purchase of his car seeks to legitimise the speech itself as well as the vitriolic anti-immigration agenda behind it. Like the retro-futurist music and imagery of fashwave, Generation Identity themselves identify with those politics of the past while promoting themselves as the visionary movement and answer to the future. Here, mythopoeia is used to overlook the present and instead justify the actions of the future.

Five days later, through a piece on the group the *Daily Mail* mentioned the whereabouts of the car in an article called 'hipster fascists':

> Parked outside a block of flats in the leafy suburbs of North London yesterday was an old Honda Concerto. 'The former owner was Enoch Powell,' its new owner, Tom Dupré declared proudly after emerging from the building. (Bracchi, 2018)

YouTube comments and the attempted hashtag sensation *#PowellMobile*, quickly died down with the stunt fading into relative obscurity. In August 2018, the then co-leader of Generation Identity quit from his position and from the organization entirely. A *Guardian* interview states this was due to his realisation that individuals within the group had links to Neo-Nazis in Europe (Townsend, 2018). Information from the DVLA reveals that the car was subsequently not taxed when due, and that its MOT had expired by July 2018. It wasn't until the 23rd January 2019 that an image of the car being towed away was shared on Twitter by the group's former leader, having been in some minor collision. The nearside headlamp, nose panel and fender had been damaged and the passenger side door showed signs of heavy scraping. Covered in snow the vehicle was loaded onto a recovery tow truck. Its licence plate removed and with no comment or description, it is confirmed to a Twitter commenter that it is the *Powell mobile*. The *Powell mobile's* short revival as an object with supposed political significance had come to an end.

The UK branch (known as Generation Identity UK & Ireland) was disassociated with the wider European movement in July 2019 following an ignored request from the European leadership of Generation Identity not to invite an anti-Semitic conspiracy theorist to speak at an event. This led the European leaders to publicly denounce the UK leadership and demand its change of name and branding. From this, the UK activists for a short time re-branded and regrouped into the 'Identitarian Movement England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland'. In January 2020, the group formally dissolved, removing their online content including the #PowellMobile video, from YouTube.

Organizational mythopoeia

For postfascist phenomena–which are cultural and social, as well as political– myth becomes a means of invoking an entire ideology using a single image, gesture, symbol or in the case of *Powell mobile,* an old Honda. Postfascist organizational mythopoeia here resembles Barthes' understanding of *myth*

(Barthes, 1957). Barthes' *Mythologies* set to unmask the ideological impositions behind social stereotypes found in cultural objects and activities that are passed off and accepted as natural or normal. These ideological impositions were the 'myths' of modern society, which Barthes saw as delusions that needed to be exposed. *Powell mobile* is therefore an example of political and cultural mythopoeia, as the ideology of the far-right group is partially hidden within the cultural object: the stunt and its spectacle. Postfascism is highly networked. It disseminates ideology through its own cultural forms, producing its own art, literature and music. But also, in a wider conception of culture it has its own language, symbols, materials and forms of organization. It is mythopoetic in the myths it makes about itself, as well through the propagation of existing myths to provide significance to its political and social aims.

Organizational mythopoeia can provide an explanation of why Generation Identity paid £1200 for a car previously owned by Enoch Powell. The car itself held no significant value, it signified no prestige or inherent status, nor was the car connected to Powell during the height of his political fame. The car lacks both political and cultural relevance outside of the far-right's own mythopoeic construction. The purchase of the car by Generation Identity was an attempt to revise and revive the myths propagated by Powell while establishing new ones in order to legitimise themselves in the transhistorical order of postfascism through an event and an attempt at the 'spectacular'. This legitimisation is part of the wider postfascist phenomenon echoed in the European politics of far-right politicians, the rise of the 'alt-right', and Trumpism in the USA (Mollan and Geesin, 2020). The pervasive rhetoric of anti-immigration and 'taking back control' and persistent themes of national sovereignty, racially defined citizenship and anti-immigration narratives all appear within the *Powell mobile* through the invocation of Powell himself.

Although the 'rivers of blood' was a classical metaphor, it has become an iconic symbol of the meaning of the speech itself, isolated from the intellectual context from which Powell drew the phrase:

> As I look ahead, I am filled with foreboding. Like the Roman, I seem to see "the river Tiber foaming with much blood". (Powell, 1968)

Powell's apocalyptic vision resonates in the ideology and rhetoric of the contemporary far-right, where although the 'matter of this imagining is historical, the *form* is still that of myth' (Nairn, 1970: 11). The modern idolisation of Powell draws on the same currents of mythopoeia, a yearning for the past and the manipulation and co-option of ideology, religion, and fantasy into openly racist and ethno-nationalist messages. The politics of the far-right are wholly reliant on the nostalgic and homogenous concepts of 'nation' and 'ethnicity' as primary non-changing entities. This nostalgic and mythic form of nationalism has come, here, to be intellectually represented through Powell. The idolisation is subsequently mythologized through the *Powell mobile*.

The re-emergence or resurgence of anti-immigrant sentiment associated with Powell is exemplified by the social media hashtag *#Enochwasright*. Powell's rhetoric appeals to those who feel or claim that their culture, heritage and identity is under threat from high levels of immigration. The representation of Powell has provided succour to the neuroses of popular racism and white minoritisation, that has been justified with reference to nostalgic sentiments of English nationalism and patriotism (Kenny and Pearce, 2019). To Generation Identity, Powell offered a legitimacy to the 'alternative' voice in politics. Powell was, or is, an acceptable totem on the right, whose infamous speech that fuelled violent racist rhetoric forms a foundation for the contemporary rise of the far-right. It is clear to see how the purchase of the car was in itself political but it was also intended as a mythopoeic spectacle, where the car is nothing more than an ephemeral artefact that is intended to serve as a conduit channelling the ideological and rhetorical energy of Powell and his strain of ethno-nationalism back into popular consciousness (Gilroy, 2012). Here, the mundanity of an object is imbued with the symbolic and representative power of Powell's 'rivers of blood speech' that continues to cause controversy (Sweney, 2018). As Stuart Hall commented on the thirtieth anniversary of the speech:

> One of Powell's greatest gifts was a populist racist rhetoric which, in an era of pragmatism, spoke straight to the nation's fears, frustrations, to the national collective unconscious and its darkest hopes and fears. It was a torpedo delivered straight to the boiler-room of consensus politics. (1998: 15)

Generation Identity failed to deliver such a torpedo. The event lacked mainstream attraction, in social media terms it failed to go viral or pick up any cultural significance within the wider postfascist organization and, like Generation Identity, dissolved into insignificance. The car became an empty signifier and failed as a metonym for Powell. Yet, despite this, *Powell mobile* still somehow contributes to wider postfascist spectacle, and reveals something about it. Myth in itself is dis-organized, malleable and open to constant re-adaption, as are the stories that propagate dangerous myths. In some ways this disorder is part of the evolving tapestry and tactics of far-right mythopoeia, creating disorder using new forms of media manipulation, that paradoxically produces an ordered form of ideology. The myth of Powell's symbolic resurrection through the car potentially remains successful, as in the minds of its creators and followers is equated with both truth and as a successful version of their own reality (Bocarnea & Osula, 2008). Myths exist as narratives and stories that can replicate and reinforce themselves (Bottici & Challand, 2006). If enough people accept such a myth, then it can become ideology itself. Organizational mythopoeia can, then, be a process of ideology creation through the order and disordering of meaning. This then begs the question as to whether disorder and order are constituted by this same process in the context of postfascist spectacle. The next section addresses this paradox.

Postfascist spectacle

The concept of Spectacle 2.0 can be used to address the postfascist spectacle and the use of social media by the far-right as a form of ideological commodification and narrative that both colonises tropes of cultural hegemony but also competes amongst others for dominant hegemonic representation (Sutherland, 2012). The contemporary far-right have shifted to new forms of mass media to communicate to both themselves and the susceptible consumers of their ideology. Virtual means of communication allow for the avoidance of legal attention, encourage transnational solidarity and provide easily recognisable common identities within others (Caiani & Kröll, 2015). It also allows for the sharing of information and ideologies through a vast network of varying cells and factions. This fractured organizational network and ideology may in part have emerged through the

domain of cyberspace where the realisation and externalisation of extreme prejudices materialises in the un-subjectivised and anonymous fantasy of anonymous online avatars (Žižek, 1999). The postfascist spectacle thrives on the cultural images and narratives that construct differences among people. This not only reflects and reinforces existing prejudices, beliefs and power structures, but creates new ones (Kersten & Abbott, 2012).

These media and political spectacles that present events to disrupt the ordinary flows of information have become the main form of postfascist communication (Edelman, 1988; Kellner, 2016). While some proliferate, becoming viral, others (such as *Powell mobile*) fade away, yet both constitute the order of the postfascist spectacle. The purchase of the car, subsequent video and attempted social media sensation can be interpreted as an attempted media spectacle and as a method of organizational attention-seeking. Whereas the political spectacle can be found in news reporting and traditional media, social media, as a highly toxic and influential form of culture, has perhaps played the most significant role in the mutation of this phenomenon of political spectacle in recent years. Even as mainstream digital platforms increasingly reject, ban, and censor far-right groups and individuals, existing and new alterative versions proliferate at their borders (Zannettou, et al., 2018). This has inadvertently led the far-right to still exist in traditional political milieus while also broadcasting to an unknown invisible audience, existing as 'boundaryless' organizational forms (Flyverbom & Reinecke, 2017). It is here that the far-right have been able to exert their greatest influence.

Debord talked of the loss of quality at every level of spectacular language and how the commodity form reduces everything to quantitative equivalence (Debord, 1967). This too can be seen in the spectacle 2.0, where in abundance voices become meaningless; instead of a democratic and equal platform of expression the virtual world offers only the representation of thought. As a venue for expression of all ideas regardless of their content or quality, social media especially grants attention to both the sensational and the trivial (Rosenfeld, 2014). It is in this sense that the success of *Powell mobile* becomes hard to determine, blurring the sensational and trivial as one. This leads to a distorting effect in which meaning can be inconsequential and only the representation of ideas matters. The postfascist spectacle finds

organizational ground in the rejection of objective truth and the preference and acceptance of illusion over reality (Flyverbom & Reinecke, 2017). Here, postfascism finds its most potent sense of order, emerging from the seeming disorder of social media. This is a form of 'aesthetic capitalism' where the spectacle merges with social culture. Individual experience of reality is filtered by the media, and reduced to simple narratives (Codeluppi, 2017). The far-right have used social media for their own mythopoeia, where aesthetic and culture go hand in hand with political and social ideology. Within the spectacle 2.0, the far-right have steered through both the public and private digital worlds, 'from the deep net to the surface web' as well as mainstream and alternative social media (Fielitz & Thurston 2018: 7). Postfascism is parasitical of the order created through social media as an organizing mechanism. It both feeds off and disrupts it, so that the 'movement' of postfascism can remain independent of any one dominant social media platform or mode (Shukaitis, 2014).

The stunt, video and the attempted spectacle of *Powell mobile* itself serves as the commodity with social media as its market place. It serves not only as a form of organization and recruitment but also for education, socialization and cultural production and exchange (DeCook, 2018). The ideological message within *Powell mobile* cannot exist on its own, it must take form within the wider cacophony of other messages. This chaos and abundance of messages, signals, myth and social hallucinations, combined with consumer paranoia, schizophrenia, social tensions and reliance on the virtual and fantasy worlds reduces things *only* to their representational form.

The *Powell mobile* video serves as Generation Identity UK's epitaph. Few now will see the video, but its ephemeral existence serves as documentation of the group's attempt to mythologize and themselves be mythologized within the far-right spectacle. The *Powell mobile* episode provides a snapshot of the far-right phenomenon that combines all the identifiable elements of the far-right and postfascism; organization through social media, irony and self-distancing, the capturing and use of a distinct aesthetic, mythic nationalist nostalgia and an underlying message of ethno-nationalism and anti-immigration. As a connective episode in the *longue durée* of fascism, this form of commodity fetishism was dominated by intangibility than the tangibility of the car, which became a vehicle for communicating a message. In itself, the

stunt was a failure; however, its existence was an attempt to produce cultural attrition, in which the innumerable messages of the far-right spectrum constitute the spectacle.

As Debord wrote [of commodity fetishism] it:

> attains its ultimate fulfilment in the spectacle, where the real world is replaced by a selection of images which are projected above it, yet which at the same time succeed in making themselves regarded as the epitome of reality. (1967: 14)

So too does Enoch Powell's head, as it emerges projected above the sunroof in the video and image of the *Powell mobile* (https://images.app.goo.gl/sfXALNgKtP78jgjt5). The fetishization of this commodity as the signifier shows a factitious passion for the object (Baudrillard, 1981). Both the tangible vehicle and its intangible representation shows a delusion of spectacle, organized to serve as the epitome of their reality (Debord, 1967). For the *Powell mobile*, its self-referentiality and mythopoeic narrative are attempts to create authority and a representation of 'truth' (Falasca-Zamponi, 1997), as well as mythopoeic legitimacy and the 'hypernormalisation' of their ethno-nationalist and fascist ideology (Curtis, 2016). The *Powell mobile* was an organizational attempt at an illusionary representation of reality, and the creation of value through visibility (Flyverbom & Reinecke, 2017). Although arguably not achieving any significant impact, *Powell mobile* shows a concerted attempt to profit from the spectacle, by transforming an image and an event into something 'spectacularised'. *Powell mobile* therefore exemplifies a component of postfascist organizing, the ability to communicate an ideological order from the spectacle and the disorder it creates.

Conclusion

This article has discussed a mundane yet critical phenomenon–the use of mythopoeia by the far-right to attempt to construct and (to some extent, in this case) resurrect a voice, to organize, order, and convey legitimacy. As such, we have framed the *Powell mobile* as an episode of commodity fetishization, where value is perceived through imagined political and cultural significance.

We have interpreted *Powell mobile* as a media and political spectacle, that aimed to deracinate objective truth to create a new postfascist reality. This article therefore considers *Powell mobile* to be an example of organizational mythopoeia. It was an aesthetic propaganda exercise, designed to instil nostalgic sentiment and nationalist fervour as part of an organizational spectacle. However, Generation Identity instead organized a 'non-event', that failed to effervesce. The profound mundanity of *Powell mobile*—it's lack of impact, and its crassness–were followed by the eventual disbandment of Generation Identity UK. The literal and metaphorical 'crash' indicate disorderly organization, and an organization that was disordered.

Nonetheless, this reveals how far-right organizations such as Generation Identity attempt to achieve cultural attrition through the construction of a political and media spectacle. Their aim is to subvert and subsume culture to create a maelstrom of distraction and obfuscation within which the postfascist ideological core of the organization (and the event) can be disseminated and propagated. The mythopoeic invocation of Powell's anti-immigration politics–not uncommon in the British far-right–provides the supposed cause célèbre and the historic anchor to the nostalgic aspects of the wider postfascist spectacle. *Powell mobile* is therefore only inconsequential in and of itself, but not to the wider spectacle it draws from and feeds into. In this way, action that both appears and is inconsequential can be used to gather attention, and then dismissed as being without consequence when it *is* inconsequential. This routine technique of action, ephemerality, and inconsequentiality, is part of the repertoire of post-truth, where the past can be distorted, co-opted, misused, and then discarded, since the specific choice of what is, was––after all––without meaning. This technique allows the far-right to glide between misrepresentation and distortion, and then to disavow, dismiss and discredit the stunt or to minimise its importance–having benefited in-between from the spectacle. In this way the far-right manipulate the past and avoid accountability for their interpretations and their implications in the present. Through mythopoeia, the far-right can further benefit from this as myth remains also inconsequential, incontestable and irrelevant to objective truths. The far-right attempt to create their own reality through this technique of mythopoeic communication, and seemingly create order out of disorder, by constructing meaning that is both fluid, malleable

and open but also having the appearance of being fixed and immutable. By looking at these events and the use of mythopoeia by the far-right, we show how the inconsequential and often ignored can offer valuable insights into wider postfascist order/organization and disorder/disorganization.

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