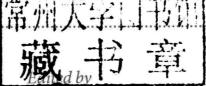


The Oxford Handbook of SOCIOLOGY, SOCIAL THEORY, & ORGANIZATION STUDIES

CONTEMPORARY CURRENTS

SOCIOLOGY, SOCIAL THEORY, AND ORGANIZATION STUDIES

Contemporary Currents



PAUL ADLER, PAUL DU GAY, GLENN MORGAN,

and

MIKE REED





Great Clarendon Street, Oxford, 0x2 6DP, United Kingdom

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Oxford University Press 2014

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First Edition published in 2014

Impression: 2

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Data available

Library of Congress Control Number: 2014938940

ISBN 978-0-19-967108-3

Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CRO 4YY

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SOCIOLOGY, SOCIAL THEORY, AND ORGANIZATION STUDIES

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: SOCIOLOGY, SOCIAL THEORY, AND ORGANIZATION STUDIES, CONTINUING ENTANGLEMENTS

PAUL ADLER, PAUL DU GAY, GLENN MORGAN, AND MIKE REED

Introduction

The present volume is the successor to an earlier collection entitled *The Oxford Handbook of Sociology and Organization Studies: Classical Foundations.* The Introduction to the latter was titled: 'A Social Science which Forgets Its Founders Is Lost' (Adler, 2009: 3–19). Whereas that volume aimed to renew awareness of the rich heritage bequeathed to organization studies by pre-1950 sociology, this second companion volume aims to strengthen ties between organization studies and contemporary sociological work. While the first volume sought to remedy our field's tendency to amnesia, this successor volume targets our increasing tendency to myopia.

Organization studies is an applied field at the intersection of several disciplines—most notably, sociology, psychology, economics, and political science. Of these, sociology has had by far the greatest and most enduring impact. However, our dialogue with sociology has tended to atrophy over time. For instance, in publications from within the field of organization studies references to work in sociology are increasingly rare (as shown by Augier, March, & Sullivan, 2005). In our graduate programmes, reading lists are increasingly populated by studies in the field's own journals. Professors encourage students to focus their research on gaps and issues already salient in this body of scholarship. It is increasingly rare therefore to require coursework in related social sciences.

On the one hand, this sense of self-reliance could be taken as a sign of healthy maturation within organization studies. On the other, however, the risks of sterility surely mount with so much inbreeding.

In this Introduction we describe why we believe this deeper engagement with the social sciences, and especially sociology, is important. Given that much mainstream sociology has been increasingly framed in relation to the concerns of social theory, we expand accordingly our field of view in this volume. We then discuss the selection criteria that we used to identify relevant theorists, schools, and concepts; the brief that authors were given; and our view of both the threats to and advantages of this more explicit recognition of the interconnectedness between organization studies and the work of sociology and social theory.

THE PERILS OF MYOPIA

As the companion volume showed, the roots of organization studies lie predominantly in sociological studies, going back to Weber, Durkheim, Simmel, and Veblen, and central figures in the mid-twentieth century such as Parsons, Merton, Gouldner, and Hughes. Bluntly stated, without sociology there would be no organization studies. Moreover, there has been a clear sociological inflection to much of the work within organization studies as the field has continued to develop in new directions (Scott, 2004; Meyer & Boxenbaum, 2010). Indeed, as Scott (2004: 7) has indicated, many of the developments within the field during the 1960s and 1970s that are often regarded as 'internal' to organization studies itself—such as network theory, organizational ecology, and institutional theory—were based on the work of sociologists. So, just as there is a danger that current professional preoccupations within the field of organization studies blind researchers to the value of the classics, so there is a parallel danger that we will ignore the value of relevant contemporary work in the field of sociology and social theory. This volume is therefore dedicated to showing how some key contemporary theorists, schools, and ideas in sociology and social theory have already enriched the study of organizations, and how a deeper engagement with these contemporary currents could further enhance the explanatory power and reach of work in our field.

The trend to myopia in organization studies has become more troubling as economic and political instability has intensified in recent decades. Our field's ability to address and engage with these matters of concern has been less than convincing, not least in a way that connects with wider publics outside the confines of the university. Not only do we risk ignoring the impact of this turbulence on the organizations we study, but we risk ignoring the role of these same organizations in generating this turbulence. Indeed, many taken-for-granted assumptions about the efficacy and effectiveness of contemporary management practices have been put into question in recent years. The theories, techniques, and ethos taught in business schools have not escaped unscathed from