



EDITED BY

PAUL
ADLER

PAUL
DU GAY

GLENN
MORGAN

MIKE
REED

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

CONTEMPORARY CURRENTS

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

**SOCIOLOGY,
SOCIAL
THEORY, AND
ORGANIZATION
STUDIES**

Contemporary Currents



PAUL ADLER, PAUL DU GAY,
GLENN MORGAN,

and

MIKE REED

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LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Peter Abell is Emeritus Professor, London School of Economics (Managerial Economics and Strategy Group). His interests include mathematical sociology and networks, formalizing qualitative methods (Bayesian narratives), the political economy of producer cooperatives in developing countries, and inter-disciplinary organization theory.

Mitchel Y. Abolafia is Professor in the Rockefeller College of Public Affairs and Policy, University at Albany/State University of New York. He has also taught at Sloan School of Management at MIT, Johnson School of Management at Cornell, and the School of Management, University of California at Davis. He is the author of *Making Markets: Opportunism and Restraint on Wall Street* (1997). He holds a BA in Sociology from Tufts University, and a PhD in Sociology from Stony Brook University.

Stephen Ackroyd is Professor Emeritus of Organizational Analysis at University of Lancaster and Honorary Professor at the University of Cardiff (where he now lives). He is perhaps best known for his work with Paul Thomson on organizational misbehaviour. His current research interests are in the reorganization of large British businesses.

Paul Adler is currently Harold Quinton Chair in Business Policy at the Marshall School of Business, University of Southern California. He began his education in Australia, and earned his PhD in France. He came to the US in 1981, and before joining USC was affiliated with Brookings Institution, Barnard College, Harvard Business School, and Stanford's School of Engineering. His research and teaching focuses on organization theory and design. He has published widely in academic journals and edited several books, most recently *The Firm as a Collaborative Community: Reconstructing Trust in the Knowledge Economy* (2006), and *The Oxford Handbook of Sociology and Organization Studies: Classical Foundations* (2009), and co-authored *Healing Together: The Labor-Management Partnership at Kaiser Permanente* (2009).

Edward Barratt teaches human resource management at Newcastle University, UK. His current research interests concern the history of the British civil service, British conservatism and public sector reform, the history of critical management studies, and the ethics of human resource management.

Gibson Burrell is Professor at the University of Leicester, UK. He is about to finish his 40-year stint as a full-time paid academic with some reluctance. He looks back upon a time when research-led indolence marked British academic life—and was the better

for it. He submitted his first academic article to a journal seven years into a Lectureship which is inconceivable today, even if more of us should remain silent for longer. And with that nostalgia possessed by the old, he says of his time that he wouldn't change a thing. How smugly Panglossian is that?

Marta B. Calás is Professor of Organization Studies and International Management in the Department of Management at the Isenberg School of Management, University of Massachusetts, Amherst and adjunct faculty in the Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Department at the same university. She received the SAGE Award for distinguished scholarly contribution from the Gender, Diversity and Organization division of the Academy of Management. With colleagues from the UK, she was part of the founding editorial team of the interdisciplinary journal *Organization*, serving in the capacity of editor for more than 15 years.

Franck Cochoy is Professor of Sociology at the University of Toulouse Jean-Jaurès and member of the CERTOP-CNRS, France. His past and present research is focused on the different mediations that frame the relation between supply and demand. His most recent articles in English appeared in *Theory, Culture and Society*, *Marketing Theory*, the *Journal of Cultural Economy*, and *Organization*. He has written several books among which is *On Curiosity: The Art of Market Seduction* (Mattering press, forthcoming).

Barbara Czarniawska is Professor of Management Studies at Gothenburg Research Institute, the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. She studies connections between popular culture and practice of management, and techniques of managing overflow in affluent societies—exploring techniques of fieldwork and the applications of narratology in social sciences. Recent books in English are *Cyberfactories: How News Agencies Produce News* (2011) and *Managing Overflow in Affluent Societies* (edited with Orvar Löfgren, 2012).

Karen Dale works in the Department of Organisation, Work and Technology at Lancaster University, UK. She has written about embodiment and organizations, most extensively in *Anatomising Embodiment and Organisation Theory* (2001) and about architecture, space and social materiality as related to organization studies, including *The Spaces of Organisation and the Organisation of Space: Power, Identity and Materiality at Work* with Gibson Burrell (2008).

Jennifer E. Dodge is Assistant Professor at the Rockefeller College of Public Affairs and Policy, University at Albany/State University of New York. She is also the Book Reviews Editor of *Critical Policy Studies*, and a Fellow at the Research Center for Leadership in Action at The Wagner School/New York University. She has published in *Policy & Society*, *Public Administration Review*, *Critical Policy Studies*, and contributed chapters to the *Handbook of Action Research and Constructive Discourse in Human Organization*. She earned a BA in sociology from Skidmore College, and a PhD in public administration from The Wagner School/New York University.

Paul du Gay is Globaliserings Professor in the Department of Organization (IOA) at Copenhagen Business School, and Academic Director of the CBS Business in Society Public–Private Platform. *New Spirits of Capitalism? Crises, Justifications and Dynamics* (ed. with Glenn Morgan) was recently published by OUP. He is currently working on a book for Routledge, *For State Service: Office as a Vocation*, and for OUP (with Signe Vikkelsø) *Re-Discovering Organization: the past in the future of Organization Theory*. At CBS he co-directs the Velux Foundation research programme ‘What Makes Organization? Resuscitating Organizational Theory/Re-Vitalising Organizational Life’ with Signe Vikkelsø.

Steve Fleetwood is Professor of Employment Relations and Human Resource Management at the University of the West of England. He has published extensively on critical realism and recently co-authored (with Ant Hesketh) *Explaining The Performance of Human Resource Management* (2010).

Nicolai J. Foss is a Professor of Strategy and Organization at the Copenhagen Business School where he also serves as department head. Foss also holds a professorship at the Norwegian School of Economics. His main research interests are the economics of the firm, strategic management, and Austrian economics. His work on these issues has been published in the leading management research journals. Foss is a member of the Academia Europaea and a panel member of the European Research Council.

Edward Granter is a Lecturer in organization and society at the University of Manchester, UK. His research focuses on Marxism and the sociology of work, and more specifically on how relationships between organization, culture, and society can be understood using Frankfurt School critical theory. He teaches courses on international business strategy, the financial crisis, and the sociology of organizations at Manchester Business School, and is the author of *Critical Social Theory and the End of Work* (2009).

Stephen K. Jackson is a doctoral student in the Rockefeller College of Public Affairs and Policy, University at Albany/State University of New York whose work focuses on non-profit-government relationships at the state and local level. He earned a BA in Theatre Arts from Ithaca College, and a MPA from Binghamton University.

Brayden King is Associate Professor of Management and Organizations at the Kellogg School of Management. His research focuses on how social movement activists influence corporate governance, organizational change, and legislative policymaking. He also studies the ways in which the organizational identities of social movement organizations and businesses emerge and transform in response to their institutional environments.

Peter G. Klein is Associate Professor of Applied Social Sciences at the University of Missouri. He also holds positions at the University of Missouri’s Truman School of Public Affairs and the Norwegian School of Economics. Klein’s research focuses on the economics of organization, entrepreneurship, and strategic management. He is author or editor of five books and over 75 articles, chapters, and reviews. He is an Associate Editor of the

Academy of Management Perspectives, an Associate Editor of the *Independent Review*, and sits on the editorial boards of seven other academic journals. He and Nicolai Foss co-founded the popular management blog *Organizations and Markets*.

Peer Hull Kristensen is Professor at the Department of Business and Politics, Copenhagen Business School. He has published in a variety of journals including *Organization Studies*, *Industrial Relations*, *Human Relations* and *Socio-Economic Review*. His most recent book is *Nordic Capitalisms and Globalization: New Forms of Economic Organization and Welfare Institutions* (2011, ed. with K. Lilja).

Timothy R. Kuhn is Associate Professor in the Department of Communication at the University of Colorado Boulder and Visiting Fellow in the School of Economics and Management at Lund University (Sweden). His research examines how knowledge, identities, objects, and ethics are constituted in the communicative process of organizing.

Nick Llewellyn is Professor of Organizational Behaviour at Warwick Business School. His research considers interaction and communication as people (managers, professionals, and front line staff) perform ordinary work tasks. The research draws on the allied fields of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis. He has published in a range of journals including *Organization Studies*, *Human Relations*, and the *British Journal of Sociology*. He recently published *Organisation, Interaction and Practice: Studies of Ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis* (2010, with J. Hindmarsh).

Peter K. Manning (PhD Duke, 1966; MA Oxon, 1982) holds the Elmer V. H. and Eileen M. Brooks Chair in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Northeastern University. The author and editor of some 22 books and numerous articles and chapters, his research interests include the transformation of policing in Ireland and Northern Ireland, democratic policing, uses of information technology, and qualitative methods. His recent books are *The Technology of Policing* (2008) and *Democratic Policing in a Changing World* (2010). A collection of his papers, entitled the *Police Mandate: Organizational Perspectives*, will be published in 2014 by Routledge.

Richard Marens is Professor of Management at Sacramento State University. He has published in a number of management and business ethics journals. His research interests include the financial activism of labour unions, the evolution of corporate social responsibility, and the rise and decline of middle management.

Liz McFall is Head of Sociology at the Open University. Her work explores how markets are made especially for dull products like insurance that people don't really want to buy. Her book *Devising Consumption: Cultural Economies of Insurance, Credit and Spending* (2014) argues that it takes all sorts of technical, material, artistic, and metaphysical know-how to make people buy in these circumstances—a claim that also informs the Charisma: Consumer Market Studies network she co-founded with Joe Deville. Liz is author of *Advertising: A Cultural Economy*, co-editor of *Conduct: Sociology and Social Worlds*, and co-editor of the *Journal of Cultural Economy*.

Andrea Mennicken is Associate Professor in accounting at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) and Deputy Director of the Centre for Analysis of Risk and Regulation (LSE). She received her doctorate from LSE in 2005 on a thesis entitled *Moving West: The Emergence, Reform and Standardisation of Audit Practices in Post-Soviet Russia*. She holds a Master (LSE) and German Diploma Degree (University of Bielefeld) in sociology. Her work has been published in the journals *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, *Financial Accountability and Management*, *Foucault Studies*, and different edited volumes. She has co-edited (with Hendrik Vollmer) *Zahlenwerk: Kalkulation, Organisation und Gesellschaft* [*Number Work: Calculation, Organisation and Society*] (2007). Her research interests include social studies of valuation and accounting, transnational governance regimes, processes of economization and marketization, standardization, and public sector reforms with a special focus on prisons.

Peter Miller is Professor of Management Accounting at the London School of Economics and Political Science, and an Associate of the Centre for Analysis of Risk and Regulation. He is an Editor of *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, and has published in a wide range of accounting, management, and sociology journals, including *The Academy of Management Annals*, *Accounting, Auditing and Accountability Journal*, *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, *British Journal of Sociology*, *Economy and Society*, *European Accounting Review*, *Financial Accountability & Management*, *Journal of Cultural Economy*, *Foucault Studies*, *Management Accounting Research*, and *Social Research*. He was an editor of *I&C* (previously *Ideology & Consciousness*), and co-editor of *The Foucault Effect* (1991). In 1987 he published *Domination and Power*, and in 1986 co-edited (with Nikolas Rose) *The Power of Psychiatry*. More recently, he has co-edited (with the late Anthony Hopwood) *Accounting as Social and Institutional Practice* (1994) and *Accounting, Organizations and Institutions* (2009). In 2008 he published (jointly with Nikolas Rose) *Governing the Present*.

Ali Mir is a Professor of Management in the College of Business at William Paterson University. He is currently working on issues related to migration/immigration and the international division of labour. He is on the board of directors of the Brecht Forum in New York City, and serves on the editorial board of the journal *Organization*.

Raza Mir is a Professor of Management in the College of Business at William Paterson University. His research mainly concerns the transfer of knowledge across national boundaries in multinational corporations, and issues relating to power and resistance in organizations. He currently serves as the Chair of the Critical Management Studies Division of the Academy of Management.

Glenn Morgan is Professor of International Management at Cardiff Business School. His research interests concern the impact of globalization on institutions, multinationals, and governance and how this relates to changes in the organization of capitalism as a global economic system. He has published in a range of international journals such as *Organization Studies*, *Journal of Management Studies*, *Human Relations*, *Economy and Society*, and *Organization*. Recent books include Paul du Gay and Glenn Morgan (eds)

(2013) *New Spirits of Capitalism? Crises, Justifications and Dynamics*, Glenn Morgan and Richard Whitley (eds) (2012) *Capitalisms and Capitalism in the Twenty First Century*, Glenn Morgan et al. (eds) (2010) *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Institutional Analysis*.

Hannah Mormann (MA, University of Bielefeld) is presently a Lecturer at the Department of Sociology at the University of Lucerne (Switzerland). She is completing her PhD at the Institute for World Society Studies at the University of Bielefeld (Germany). Her research interests include organizational sociology and technology studies, in particular the case of business software as a pattern of globalization.

Alistair Mutch is Professor of Information and Learning at Nottingham Trent University. He has published on organization theory, with particular emphasis on ideas drawn from critical realism, on information systems, and on the history of management. His most recent work has been on the impact of religion on the development of management, with special emphasis on governance practices. He is an associate editor of *Organization* and on the editorial board of *Organization Studies*.

José Ossandón is Assistant Professor in the Department of Organization, Copenhagen Business School, Associate Researcher in Instituto de Investigación en Ciencias Sociales, Universidad Diego Portales Chile, and received his PhD from Goldsmiths, University of London. His main areas of interest are the enactment of finance objects, how markets are organized, evaluated, and tamed, and broad contemporary social theory. His PhD thesis focused on the history of private health insurance in Chile and he is currently studying the consumer credit industry.

Pier Paolo Pasqualoni is a tenured Senior Lecturer at the University of Innsbruck currently holding the position of a Senior Scientist at the Department of Adult Education and Vocational Training/Institute of Educational Science and Research, Alpen-Adria-Universität Klagenfurt. He is specializing in adult and higher education and carried out research across a wide range of topics, including social movements, mobility, and migration. While regularly leaving Austria to teach at a number of universities abroad (Free University Bolzano, Italy; Ramkhamhaeng University and National Institute of Development Administration, Thailand; National Chung Cheng University; and National Chung Hsing University, Taiwan), he continues to offer courses on communication, conflict transformation, group dynamics, gender, and diversity for professionals.

Michael Power is Professor of Accounting and Director of the Centre for the Analysis of Risk and Regulation (CARR) at the London School of Economics. His research and teaching focuses on regulation, accounting, auditing, internal control, and risk management. His major work, *The Audit Society: Rituals of Verification* (1999) has been translated into Italian, Japanese, and French. *Organized Uncertainty: Designing a World of Risk Management* (2007) has been translated into Japanese. Power holds honorary doctorates from the University of St Gallen, Switzerland, and the University of Uppsala, Sweden.

Linda L. Putnam is Professor in the Department of Communication at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Her research interests include negotiation and organizational conflict, discourse analysis in organizations, and communication constitutes organization. She is the author of over 150 articles and book chapters and the co-editor of ten books, including *The SAGE Handbook of Organizational Communication* (3rd edition, in press).

Andreas Rasche is Professor Business in Society at Copenhagen Business School. He has published widely on corporations' role in transnational governance, especially from the perspective of critical theory. More information is available at <<http://www.arasche.com>>.

Mike Reed is Emeritus Professor of Organizational Analysis at Cardiff Business School, Cardiff University, Wales, UK. He is an Honorary/Visiting Professor in Lancaster University Management School, an Academician of the Academy of Social Sciences and a Fellow of the Learned Society of Wales. He is also one of the founding editors of the journal *Organization*. Having published extensively on power and control in work organizations—with particular reference to professional knowledge-intensive organizations and public services organizations—he is now working on a series of papers and publications focusing on the complex interplay between state power, elite agency, and public policy within political economies dominated by neo-liberal ideology and practice since the 1980s. This work draws extensively on critical realism, neo-Weberian historical/political sociology, and elite theory.

Andreas Georg Scherer is Professor at the University of Zurich (Switzerland). His research interests are in business ethics, critical theory, international management, organization theory, and philosophy of science. He has published nine books. His work has appeared in numerous journals and volumes.

Alan Scott is Professor of Sociology at the University of Innsbruck (Austria), Adjunct Professor at UNE (Australia), and Vice President (Humanities and Social Sciences) of the Austrian Science Fund (FWF). His research areas are political and organizational sociology and social theory. Recent publications include *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Political Sociology* (co-editor, 2012), 'Capitalism as Culture and Statecraft', *Journal of Classical Sociology* 13(3) (2013), and 'From "New Spirit" to New Steal-Hard Casing? Civil Society Actors, Capitalism and Crisis: The Case of Attac in Europe' in Paul du Gay and Glenn Morgan (eds) *New Spirits of Capitalism? On the Ethics of the Contemporary Capitalist Order* (co-author, 2013).

David Seidl is Professor at the University of Zurich, Switzerland, where he holds the Chair of Organization and Management, and is Research Associate at Cambridge University (UK). His research is focused on organization theory and strategy, in which he draws on a range of different theoretical perspectives including systems theory and practice theory. His work has been published in leading organization and management journals. He has (co-)produced eight books including *Niklas Luhmann*

and *Organization Studies* (2005). He is a Senior Editor of *Organization Studies* and an editorial board member of six other journals.

Linda Smircich is Professor of Organization Studies in the Department of Management at the Isenberg School of Management, University of Massachusetts, Amherst. She received the SAGE Award for distinguished scholarly contribution from the Gender, Diversity and Organization division of the Academy of Management. With colleagues from the UK, she was part of the founding editorial team of the interdisciplinary journal *Organization*, serving in the capacity of editor for more than 15 years.

Stephen Smith is Senior Lecturer at Brunel Business School with special interests in emotional labour. He was the founding editor of the *International Journal of Work Organisation and Emotions* and has published papers in several journals, including *Local Economy*, *Science and Public Policy*, *Sociological Review*, *Social Science and Medicine*, *Research Policy*, *Soundings*, *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, *The International Small Business Journal*, and *Philosophy of Management*.

André Spicer is Professor of Organizational Behaviour at Cass Business School, City University, London. He has published widely on power and politics in and around organizations. His books include *Unmasking the Entrepreneur* and *Contesting the Corporation*. Currently he is working on a project examining stupidity in organizations.

Barbara Townley is Chair of Management at University of St Andrews, Scotland, and has taught at Lancaster, Warwick, and Edinburgh in the UK and the University of Alberta, Canada. She has published widely in North American and European management and organization studies journals and held a number of ESRC and AHRC grants. Her current area of research is the mediation between artistic and commercial interests in the creative industries and the role of intellectual property in creative organizations.

Signe Vikkelso is Professor (MSO) in the Department of Organization at Copenhagen Business School and co-director of the Velux Foundation research programme, 'What Makes Organization? Resuscitating Organizational Theory/Re-Vitalising Organizational Life' with Paul du Gay. She has published two books in Danish, *Electronic Patient Records and Medical Practice* (2003) and *Daily Work and Organizing in Healthcare* (2004) (titles translated from Danish), and several international articles focusing upon organization and change processes in health care, organizational tools, and interventions methods, and the history of organization theory. She recently edited (with Peter Kjær) a comprehensive handbook, *Classic and Modern Organization Theory* (title translated from Danish) for the Danish publishing house Hans Reitzels Forlag.

Klaus Weber is an Associate Professor of Management and Organizations at the Kellogg School of Management. His research uses cultural and institutional analysis to understand the environmental movement, corporate social initiatives, and globalization. He is especially interested in contested technological and economic innovations.

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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