## *Culture and Organization*

## Editorial

## Ghosts in the organization

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Readers of *Culture and Organization* may sometimes be driven by the feeling that more is occurring just out of sight, beyond the corner of our eye, or thinly veiled by surface appearances of organizations. Are these feelings revealing of ghostly presences? Are they reminding us of the voices of people we have known in the past, or unresolved matters, for example the spectres of supposedly long dead problems? The ghostly presences of organizing make sudden and sometimes unwelcome appearances. Ghosts emerge in the ‘traces, fragments, fleeting moments, gaps, absences, submerged narratives, and displaced actors and agencies that register affectively’ (Blackman 2015, 26), entangled in “a ghostly sense of dis/continuity” (Barad 2010, 240). Ghosts may be ambivalent; others bring caution or even madness. Some appear fully formed, as the embodied walking dead; while others are disembodied and take substance through our neurosis (see Gilman 1892). From such beginnings emerge organizational ghosts that serve several purposes. They can teleport you in a sudden way to the past as they reconfigure time (Pors 2016). They may bring enlightenment in our thinking, open fresh possibilities for the future for us to consider or enable us to draw on the experience of the past to circumscribe over ambitious plans.

We can learn much from the array of cultural references to ghosts that permeate our collective understandings: from to ghostly themes in books, films and social media to the pseudoscience of ghost hunting, ghost tours, and haunted houses. Annual festivals like Hallowe’en offer opportunities, or even the obligation, for consumers to play with ghosts. The organizing of these spaces and practices hold interesting parallels for other work settings. Similarly, cultural references enable us to bring a different perspective to the social psychology of working. For example, memories can shape and undermine us, much as in the novel where the deceased Rebecca undermined the second Mrs. de Winter through her 'presence' (du Maurier 1938). Just as Manderley could not be separated from the traces of Rebecca, the context in which we remember ghosts impacts us and our impressions of the ghosting. Although there has been important recent work on ghostly presences, there remains much to discover for culture and organization, especially in symbolic resonances.

Exploring the symbolism of ghosts pushes us to look beyond rational explanations of organizations to attune better to emotive, affective, and aesthetic sensory experiences of the uncanny (Beyes and Steyaert 2013). Ghosts play on the spiritual, not simply in a religious sense, but also as a form of enchantment, wonder and imagination which persists in modern life (Bennett 2001). Are we being haunted by these ghosts; do they revisit again and again (Blackman 2015; Vaaben and Bjerg 2019)? Ghosts do have a habit of reappearing and in doing so they offer those cracks in our thoughts and feelings where the abject seeps in, where the uncanny arises, even seriously frighten us. Previous authors in organization studies have highlighted the pervasiveness of discourses from the past in the present, for example Muhr and Salem (2013) demonstrate how the spectre of colonialist thinking shapes disadvantage in contemporary organizations long after the colonies won independence and equalities legislation was enacted. Favourite, and not so favourite, theorists haunt organization scholars, entangling us in repeated rounds of engagement with their ideas, sometimes creating new ghosts to haunt us (De Cock et al. 2013). Ghosts of managers can haunt organizations long after they have retired through affecting organizational change (MacAulay et al. 2010; Pors 2016). Such valuable work has explored how ghosts can linger and persist through organizational metaphors and symbols: ghosts in the machine in technology studies; in traces and impressions of corruption; in spirituality, superstition, intuition and gut feelings in decision making; and of invisibility and powerlessness when Othered (especially in relation to gender, sexuality and race among other identities – see for example Baxter and Hughes 2004; Baxter and Ritchie 2013; Christensen and Muhr 2019; Kociatkiewicz and Kostera 2019; Riad and Jack 2020). Ghostly encounters can sometimes be expressed as a tingle on the back of the neck or the sense of deja vu. Massumi (2005) describes affect as the intersubjective experiences of crossing thresholds in becoming. Ghostly affect can be the uncanny feeling that reappears in the interconnectedness of bodies, both ‘real’ and imagined. The reappearance of ghosts may create associations and patterns of affect through their ghostly traces that may have rhythmic qualities of repetition and difference (Lefebvre 2004). Ghostly affect shapes us and organizations in our encounters with them, they continue to surprise us with their sudden reappearance. These apparitions bring together our material understanding of the world with the imaginary. How can we speak with these ghosts, hauntings and ghostly spaces? As researchers how do we engage with them?

In this special issue, we add to the growing scholarship on ghostly presences by considering a range of organizational ghosts that reveal aspects both dark and light, fleeting or repetitive, veiled or heavily signaled of ghostly forms of immaterial materiality (Orr, 2014). We want to extend our understanding of the ways in which organizations, in their processes, practices, materiality and temporality, are haunted by ghostly matters (Gordon, 1997) and are part of the organization of the ghostly. Haunting provides instances where repressed violence emerges, those ‘singular yet repetitive instances where home becomes unfamiliar, where your bearings on the world lose direction, where the over-and-done-with comes alive, when what's in your blind spot comes into view’ (Gordon, 1997, xvi). As Orr notes (2014) the immaterial is far from immaterial. Drawing on (im)materialities and spatialities of these processes, haunting connects that which is present with that which lingers, moving beyond representation. It connects bodies which are both alive and past, objects which are both present and phantasmic and spaces which contain place, atmosphere and temporality. Ghostliness can be tied to space, ambiance and atmosphere, ‘a surrounding influence which does not quite generate its own form’ (Ahmed 2010, 40; see also Anderson 2009) but where we still 'pick up' feelings. Ghosts permeate our collective memory of buildings and locations as places and spaces become known as haunted. The type of ghosts which haunt the pages of our special issue fall into three broad themes. In the first theme we consider ghosts as symbolic signifiers which appear in organizational life: symbols which can disrupt but which also call organizational members into action through their haunting. Secondly, we explore ghosts in the materiality, spatiality and temporality of organizational life. Ghosts present a distinct opportunity to explore space and time in ways that blur the distinctions between past, present, physical and imaginary. Finally, by exploring ghostly encounters we can highlight the entanglement of affect and hauntings which may suddenly emerge in organizations. The articles in this special issue evoke accounts of being moved by ghostly encounters, and in doing so shift our relationships with organizations.

The first article in this special issue deals specifically with ghosts as experienced by organizational members. Through an affective narrative on conducting research on ghostly encounters, Pors (2021) examines how the boundaries of what is seen as ‘real’ and ‘imaginary’ are more porous and liminal than in many existing organizational accounts. The article opens up questions for organization scholars about who is able to feel at ‘home’ in organizations, of disrupting the assumed linear temporality of organizations and exploring organization encounters through socio-material-temporal affects. By attuning our research to ghosts, Pors (2021: 11) argues that we can avoid silencing investigation of organization ‘tensions, uncertainty and controversy’ which may raise their own ethical concerns.

The second article by Pagan (2021) draws out violent actions from organizations using non-disclosure agreements, examining the impact on ‘victims’ as symbolic acts of murder in organizations. In Pagan’s account, these victims are haunted by the NDA but also continue to haunt the organization, indicating how traces of the murder continue to impact long after the event. Through examining ghosts and haunting, the article explores agency within the violence of the agreements, often imposed on the ‘victims’ who give their accounts at public hearings. By naming the violent act, the NDA’s also have a lingering, haunting affect, exposing the act despite the silencing which was intended. Pagan’s reflections on haunting illuminates inequalities, power relations and violence within organizational acts of silencing, while also providing a meaningful account of how silencing is never complete or final.

But sometimes we might benefit from silencing the ghosts. How might we rid ourselves of demonic ghosts that tie us to past in unhelpful ways? In Stephen Town’s article in the collection (Town, 2021), he explores organizational demons which emerged in the context of University leadership. Stephen served for many years as the Head of the Library, then Information Services on the university senior management team. Using three vignettes of change, where disagreements threatened to stall the process, the article explores how demons from the past introjected in thinking and needed addressing. The paper argues ghosts emerge from such liminal spaces of change. He shows how others called upon him as a leader to exorcise different ghosts. Using phronesis or practical wisdom, Town developed processes to foster a participative approach to exorcising the demonic ghosts. This enabled people to reach joint ethical decisions so that different parties could move forward.

Turning to the final article, Peters (2021) connects ghosts, film and organizations in his reading of the TV series *Twin Peaks*. The series follows a plotline of a special agent investigating a murder in a small town. Each episode unfolds in a surreal dream-like manner where everything is not as innocent as it originally appears. Using the concept of the Doppelgänger and Serres’ the ‘third’ or ‘Other’ (Serres, 1997), Peters explores the in-betweenness of bodies and space, especially organizational members and space which is key to the mystery and uncanny atmosphere of the series. His analysis of Twin Peaks demonstrates both the real Doppelgänger of the characters and the symbolic Doppelgänger of organizational spaces, all driven by the ‘Other’. The concept of the Doppelgänger presents an alternative understanding of how ghosts shape organizational life and spaces, where the delineation between good and bad blurs. The imaginary world of Twin Peaks, Peters concludes, could be anywhere and thus draws our attention to the ambiguity and unpredictability of organizational life.

As a collection, these articles highlight a range of real and symbolic ghosts that haunted organizational life. In doing so, they enable us to develop further our thinking on immaterial materialities in organizing (Orr, 2014). Specifically, they deepen our understanding of the ways in which ghosts act as symbolic signifiers; how ghosts manifest in the materiality, spatiality and temporality of organizational life and ethical practices that might resolve them; and the entanglement of affect and hauntings add a new dimension to our thinking on the relationship between the real and the imaginary. We encourage others to build on the study of ghostly affective flows (Pors, 2021), and compare the different ways that the attempt to end the voicing of suffering was handled in Pagan (2021) and Town (2021)’s articles. Finally, we think there is much to be gained through considering what the concept of Doppelgänger has to offer many concepts in organizing (Peters, 2021), such as leadership, change and space. What areas of organizational life are often made abject and yet ghostly traces remain? The articles demonstrate these areas often leave us feeling uncomfortable, they are rarely neat and tidy explanations of organizational events. They also ask us to consider different ethical questions of organizations and their members, recognizing that acts, sometimes violent and sometimes benevolent, continue to have lingering, repetitive impacts. These accounts push our understanding of space and temporality of organizations, where the focus shifts to that which is just out of sight or out of synchronization with ordered organizational practice. The ghosts within the four articles together present a different perspective on agency, one that is beyond the body or specific objects, more connected to a shared haunting affect.

Finally, we would like to thank the authors and the reviewers for their contribution to this ghostly special issue. The review process has its own ghostliness, where academic articles are not individual pursuits but develop in conversation between many mostly invisible and hidden persons, leaving traces which we hope others will pick up in future conversations.

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