

Call for Papers:
Troubling/Transforming Working Lives: Judith Butler, Gender, Work and Organization

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2020 marked thirty years since the first publication of Judith Butler's (1990) ground-breaking book, *Gender Trouble*. The three decades since have witnessed Butler becoming one of the most widely cited and controversial figures in contemporary feminist thinking. Love her or loathe her, even her most vehement critics would find it hard to argue that Butler is one of the most influential feminist thinkers of our time. Butler's performative theory of gender has had a considerable impact on feminist thinking (Lloyd, 2007), and on management and organization studies. Her writing on bodies, on language, recognition, ethics, and most recently, on vulnerability, resistance and non-violence continues to influence research, practice and activism in work and organization studies, and in feminist thinking and politics more widely. She 'came along' when the field seemed to be resolutely dominated by male theoretical influences, perhaps most notably Foucault and Derrida, providing an ontological and theoretical reference point that has much wider resonance for organizational scholars, practitioners and activists.

While not an organization theorist per se, Butler can be understood as a theorist of organization whose work enables us to think critically about organizational phenomena and processes (Tyler, 2019). Of central concern is her critique of how our desire for recognition comes to be organised by and through governing norms that serve to constrain and exploit us. Her work also provides insight into the wider need to 'theorize the otherwise' (Nkomo, 1992) that other feminist writers have urged us to engage in. And it is through this lens that we approach Butler's writing in this special issue, as an opportunity to explore the possibilities but also the challenges of reading her in this way.

A growing body of scholars, practitioners and activists have drawn on and developed insights from Butler's work. This often involves re-framing her earlier writing through an organizational lens (Harding et al., 2017, 2021; Kenny, 2019; Milroy et al, 2019; Parker, 2002; Pullen and Knights, 2007; Riach et al, 2014; 2016; Rumens, 2018; Tyler, 2019; Varman and Al-Amoudi, 2016). As Butler's own interest in organizational lives and contexts continues to evolve, so too do the possibilities of her work speaking more directly to organizational scholarship, practice and activism. This special issue explores the opportunities this poses, as well as the range of challenges and limitations associated with applying Butler's thinking to understanding and transforming organizational life. It aims to review the impact that Butler's ideas have had on the analysis of gender, work and organization thus far, in order to evaluate avenues opened up as well as the dead ends it may have led us down. In doing so, it considers where the field might go in future, exploring possibilities for re-reading and re-engaging Butler in new ways.

Butler's work has seemed particularly resonant in the recent political and cultural landscape. Her critique of individualism and her argument that ethics and politics stem from the way in which we are fundamentally mutually interdependent, driven by the desire for recognition of ourselves as socially viable beings worthy of rights, responsibilities, and resources. Her work draws from and speaks to a range of empirical 'problems', philosophical and political, contemporary and historical, and engages a complex and rich variety of theoretical traditions. Her book, *The Force of Nonviolence* is subtitled 'an ethico-political bind', and this play on words emphasizes how the vulnerability

engendered by our mutual interdependency is both the ethical, political foundation of our recognition-based relationality, and (at the same time), a dilemma for us. When one 'does' violence to others, one does violence to oneself, and to the network of living beings on which we all depend. In this book, and in other recent writing, Butler reminds us that ethics emerges at the point when we become mutually self-conscious of our bodily interdependency and sense of reciprocal obligation, and that this displacement of an ego-logical ethics in favour of an ecological one is dependent upon us extending this awareness to a collective sense of obligation to sustain the world that makes our lives liveable (Butler, 2019). *The Force of Nonviolence* was published in February 2020, and with each successive wave of viral, racial, sexual and environmental violence that followed, her thesis seemed even more poignant; in these waves we recognized that 'violence assaults the living interdependency that is, or should be, our social world' (Butler, 2020: 25).

There are many emerging ideas in Butler's earlier and more recent work that have yet to be fully explored. Her writing continues to open up 'insightful and innovative ways of interpreting organizational life' (Harding et al, 2021: 4), but by no means unproblematically so. Further, her more recent work revives ideas and practices relating to collective and critical solidarity, which again has the potential to speak to renewed ideas surrounding advocacy, allyship and activism. At the same time, Butler's writing raises many provocations for us, not least in terms of her esoteric style (she is the notorious recipient of a bad writer award), lack of empirical application and/or direct relevance to the thematic analysis of work and organization, although the latter is changing in her most recent writing. Her work is methodologically challenging, raising the vexing question of how we 'do' Butlerian research.

With this in mind, the aims of this special issue are: (i) to review, critically and reflexively, the impact that Butler's ideas have had on the analysis of gender, work and organization thus far, considering its resonance with enduring as well as transforming interests of organizational scholars, practitioners and activists, (ii) to evaluate the avenues it has opened up as well as the dead ends it may have led us down, and (iii) to consider where the field might go in the future, in order to think about ways in which Butler's ideas might be mobilized, reinterpreted or challenged in transformative ways within and through organizational scholarship, activism and practice.

We would welcome submissions that connect the critical evaluation of Butler's work to contemporary organizational settings, relations and practice, reviewing the ways in which her writing has impacted on the field thus far in order to consider how it might do so in the future, drawing from and developing earlier contributions to *Gender, Work and Organization* (see Pullen and Knights, 2007). We would also encourage submissions that take their inspiration from insights and experiences across a wide range of geographical, experiential and disciplinary 'homes' to consider ways in which Butler's ideas might be mobilized, reinterpreted or challenged in transformative ways across international fields of organizational scholarship, activism and practice, and related disciplines. Papers orientated towards 'writing differently' (Gilmore et al, 2019) are welcome, as are submissions that are theoretically, conceptually, methodologically and/or empirically focused. Possible areas of interest might include, but are not limited to:

- Making trouble: Gender, performativity and parody, and 'beyond performativity'
- Organizational mattering: Bodies, work and organization
- Organizational hate, harm and injurious speech
- Undoing/redoing gender, work and organization
- Accounting for oneself in/at work
- Organizational/organized precarity and dispossession
- (Re)assembling difference – organizing and/as assembly
- Vulnerability in/as resistance
- Theory, practice and activism related to an ethics of non-violence
- Ecological politics, practice and activism

- Black Lives Matter, anti-racism, de-colonization
- Trans phobia, rights and recognition

Submission Instructions

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Deadline for Submission: 30 June 2022

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