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All far from quiet on the workplace front

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Book reviewed: Stephen Ackroyd and Paul Thompson, 2020, *Organisational Misbehaviour*, 2nd Edition, London, Sage.

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Back in the year 2000 I was an eager first-year Ph.D. student, and an owner of the first edition (i.e., Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999), setting out to contribute to the emergent and increasingly debated notion of “organisational misbehaviour” (e.g., see Richards, 2006; Richards, 2008). I chose to research misbehaviour principally because my largely unionised employment experiences so far (16 years at that point) had been strike free, but far from free of the many micro-forms of resistance, conflict and misbehaviour, covered in the first version. As such, I was pleased to be asked to review the second version. I am also heartened to be “reunited” with an area of organisation studies that reminds me why I became an academic.

So, what can I say about the book in general terms, but conjuring up key points for those acquainted and not so acquainted with *Organisational Misbehaviour*? First, the book is divided into four parts. The basis for understanding misbehaviour is set out in the first part, a part divided into two chapters, one considering the very long historical and industrial interest in such acts, and one considering the many approaches to misbehaviour developed over a century or so. At this stage there is a new and particular mention of a similarly emergent and perhaps more rapidly expanding organisational behaviour (OB) approach to misbehaviour, paradigmatically different to Ackroyd and Thompson’s industrial sociological approach (see e.g., Sagie et al., 2003; Vardi and Weitz, 2004). From this point onwards the OB approach, insightful as it is, is left behind as it is evidently incongruent with Ackroyd and Thompson’s approach, i.e., the OB approach is based on an individual’s intention to misbehave, contrasting with the author’s view of misbehaviour as a by-product of organisational activities and imperatives. While it was probably beyond the scope of the book to unite the two competing approaches, there was potential to further compare approaches as the book progressed.

Crucially, in the second part, misbehaviour is further theorised, Firstly, at the micro-level, as per the previous edition, on the basis of “self-organisation” or “work groups” (Chapter 3), with work groups and their quest for autonomy argued to be the main infrastructure for such acts to emerge. Further section chapters set out a broader, or meso/macro and evolving context, for updating and taking forward contemporary understandings of misbehaviour, i.e., management regimes (e.g., Fordism, Taylorism, and their contemporary equivalents), and “financialisation” and “market restructuring” (Chapter 4), and how “corporate management” (Chapter 5) provides pressure that filters down organisational hierarchies leading to a need or opportunity to misbehave. This part of the book allows earlier and new/revised ideas surrounding misbehaviour to emerge. However, this part appeared quite hard going and perhaps the least accessible, but this was probably due to my lack of acquaintance with literature not published when I last researched misbehaviour. That said, I stuck at it and the second part paved a way to the next and perhaps most important part of the book.

In the third part the focus is “developments in worker misbehaviour”. The section has four parts – joking/humour (updated on earlier edition – Chapter 6), social media (new to this edition – Chapter 7), sexual and gender-related misbehaviour (updated on earlier edition – Chapter 8), and bullying (new

to this edition – Chapter 9). I found this to be the most interesting, insightful and engaging part of the book, but as per the previous section, some parts appeared stronger than others. For example, there seems little doubt the rise of the Internet and social media since the first edition represents new developments in misbehaviour, and decisive as such acts are linked to, but largely external and separate to the physical workplace. Further, certain types of sexual misbehaviour have gone into decline and the dynamics of such acts continue to change, and bullying and sexual misbehaviour have become centre stage as organisational problems. However, as per first edition, linking sex and gender-based misbehaviour to the labour process, remains problematic. Further, parts of the discussion of humour appeared dated and questions arise surrounding its appeal to the latest generation of students and researchers of misbehaviour.

The final section (Chapter 10) acts as a conclusion, or revisiting the main aim and impetus of the book, and revisiting, revising and updating key arguments that were the basis for the first version, i.e., how mainstream OB approaches do not give an accurate or complete account of organisational behaviour, as well as questioning the potency of management control. Ironically, OB approaches have clearly at least attempted in the past 20 years to offer more complete accounts of what goes on in organisations, evidenced by the proliferation of OB articles on such matters, although serious questions remain over the extent to which such accounts accurately explain misbehaviour, as well as other questions arise over the evident to which mainstream OB recognises the “darker side” of organisations. Subsequently, the focus returns to the wider industrial sociological debates misbehaviour is located in this book, that of resistance and how misbehaviour, if it can be seen as one thing only, is credible evidence for supporting the view of labour remaining an active agent in contemporary labour processes.

Before summarising, it is probably helpful to consider how the book fits with *Organization*. Well, misbehaviour per se is by no means a regular feature, but it certainly features from time to time, sometime after the release of the first version, and therefore of relevance to the journal. Crucially, contributors engage substantially more with Ackroyd and Thompson’s take on misbehaviour over the competing OB approach. Unsurprisingly, such work is key to a continued need to advance understanding of resistance and resistance-like behaviour (McCabe, 2019), or “micro emancipation” at work (Sementelli, 2020). Such research includes, for instance, the many and often hidden ways by which employees can respond to organisational control (Mastracci and Sementelli, 2022). As specifically per Chapter 7 on social media, such acts also play into the notion of “empty labour” or theorising “private activities at work” (Paulsen, 2015). Importantly and with the international audience of *Organization* specifically in mind, the book is and does not try to hide from the fact that it is researched and written on a UK-centric basis. As such, the geo-political confines of the book may limit its relevance and appeal, but such confines may also encourage research surrounding misbehaviour and the labour process conducted in, for example, Global South settings. However, while many contributors to *Organization* may not or variously subscribe to the theoretical basis of the book, it seems likely it will contain important detail useful to building, defending or even heavily criticising arguments and key labour process debates surrounding employee resistance and management control. More generally, the book has wider appeal than for readers and contributors to *Organization*, as such issues and debates, remain very much relevant to journals across the fullness of organisation and employment-related studies.

Overall, the book is very good and has been worth the wait. The book may have its limitations, but is useful and valuable in many ways. At the least, the book will remain extremely attractive for students, academics and organisation practitioners, many of whom may be similar to how I was twenty or so years ago; that is, through education and/or intuition/experience underwhelmed or quite rightly cynical/suspicious of mainstream OB or human resource management texts, or question the relevance

and role of human resource management in tackling both time old and contemporary critical and organisation challenges. Crucially, the book is timely given organisations operate in apparently increasingly turbulent times, e.g., emerging from the Covid-19 pandemic, the long-term effects of the 2007-2008 global financial crisis, a cost of living crisis not going away anytime soon, long-term low-levels of employee engagement and industrial productivity, and in the UK at least, a resurgence of industrial action and merit in organised labour. Indeed, all of such changes will cast additional doubt over orthodox views of organisations and how they “should” behave. Hopefully, the book will continue to play at least some part in influencing the widest range of accounts of organisations that consider realities over ideals.

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