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Not the ‘from the editors’¹: On guarding ‘topness’

Organization

1–19

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Abstract

The paper reflects on the experience of preparing a ‘From the Editors’ (FTE) editorial for *The Academy of Management Review* that went through a process of editorial evaluation prior to its rejection. It provides a detailed example of an encounter between orthodox and heterodox forms of scholarship, illuminating their distinctive value-orientations and forms of engagement. Its specific focus is upon evaluative criteria applied, accountability of decision-making and the mobilization of scholarly aspirations and ethical principles in the preparation and assessment of the FTE. Its intent is to stimulate debate on what it means to ‘challenge conventional wisdom’ – an aim that is broadly shared by ‘top’ journals in the field of management and organization.

Keywords

Accountability, ethical principles and practice, evaluation processes, heterodox scholarship, orthodox scholarship, secrecy

‘the progress of science depends on healthy support from scientists who hold divergent views’
(Smolin, 2006: xxi–xxii)

‘we have to change our institutions and we all know how hard that is’ (Barley, 2016: 4)

It is unusual to introduce a publication by drawing attention to its history of rejection. The piece in question – an editorial ‘From the Editors’ (FTE) – was prepared for a journal widely regarded as one that is in the ‘top-tier’² (hereafter TOP). The rejected FTE, available as Supplemental Appendix 1, is taken, in this *Speaking Out*, as an instance of how heterodox scholarship provides insights into the operation and preservation of what I will term TOPness .

The treatment of an author’s submission to any learned journal is of ‘personal’ and a ‘professional’ significance. In the present case, this *Speaking Out* is also of broader ‘public’ significance when it prompts reflection on evaluation practices in our field that, in turn, have implications for

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what knowledge is elevated. For this has wider performative effects, or an absence of them, associated with TOP publications. As TOP ‘insider’, having been a long serving editorial board member of The Academy of Management Review and then an Associate Editor (AE), I am in a privileged position to ‘speak out’.

At *AMR*, FTEs are prepared by AEs in order to highlight issues of relevance for the development of the journal. Its FTEs are directly attributed to their author(s), rather than to the editorial team, indicating that their contents do not necessarily convey the journal’s editorial policy. Submissions to *AMR*, as an exemplar of TOPness, are expected to ‘*challenge conventional wisdom concerning all aspects of organizations and their role in society*’ (emphasis added).³ The journal’s commitment to inclusiveness and diversity is also communicated in its advice to prospective *AMR* authors, as conveyed by the intent ‘to incorporate thought from multiple disciplines and/or areas of management’ (see note 3).⁴

The translation of editorial policy into evaluative practice is undoubtedly challenging, as an Editor of another TOP journal, The Academy of Management Journal (*AMJ*), notes when acknowledging that editorial work may betray an ‘*insidious form of diversity*’ (emphasis added).⁵ When, in practice, the interest in difference is minimal or tokenistic, its effect may be to protect conventional wisdom rather than interrogate it, let alone challenge or transcend it. This is a shortcoming with which exponents of CMS have, it is relevant to note, also been persuasively charged (Butler and Spoelstra, 2014) insofar as an affiliation to CMS has been used as a vehicle for the pursuit of highly conventional career objectives and reproduced patterns of exclusion (e.g. with regard to feminist, queer and post-colonialist work, Prasad et al., 2015).⁶

The *AMR* FTE (FTE3) that was rejected was preceded by two previous versions (FTE1 and FTE2). FTE3 can be found, accompanied by a brief preamble, in Supplemental Appendix 1. An account of the editorial evaluation process is presented in Supplemental Appendix 2. These Appendices are accessible via the *Organization* website, together with the original submission (FTE 1) and its revision (FTE 2).⁷ Their availability makes it possible to track changes to the manuscript against my account of its evaluation (Supplemental Appendix 2). Simultaneous publication of these documents is intended to facilitate reflection, and to stimulate discussion, of how, in this case, a heterodox manuscript was received and evaluated in a ‘top-tier’ journal.

This *Speaking Out* is concerned with a single case, so any lessons drawn from its examination should be treated with caution and, ideally, be contrasted against counter-examples. The exercise of caution would have been considerably assisted and strengthened, I believe, if a positive response had been received to ‘sunshine’ requests, addressed to the editor of *AMR*, to permit publication of a transcript of the evaluation process which was conducted through email correspondence, and thereby equip readers with the empirical basis for assessing the adequacy of my account of the communications leading to the decision. If, following Smolin (2006), the progress of science depends upon nurturing diversity of scholarship, then the question of how heterodox scholarship is received and evaluated, especially by the most prestigious and influential ‘top-tier’ journals, is important, not least because TOP norms of evaluation tend to be emulated by other, wannabe TOP journals.

In almost all learned journals, processes of evaluation are routinely shrouded in secrecy so that, by default or design, editorial conduct is shielded from scrutiny. Lifting that veil, made possible by the access to FTE1, FTE2 as well as FTE3 (Supplemental Appendix 1) provided through the *Organization* website [TBC], in addition to the detailed, if paraphrased, account of their evaluation (Supplemental Appendix 2), presents a partial corrective for the denial of ‘sunshine’. Making these documents available is intended to make possible a more informed assessment of, for example, the consistency between the journal’s mission, as set out in its advice to contributors, and the process of manuscript evaluation as exemplified by the assessment of the FTE. If a disconnect is detected between the journal’s policy and editorial practices, it may then be questioned whether, in this instance at least, the

evaluation process frustrated, rather than fostered, the expression and inclusion of ‘diverse views’, and so impeded ‘the progress of science’ (Smolin, 2006: xxii).

The remaining sections provide a series of reflections on the evaluation of the FTE. They address differences between orthodox and heterodox scholarship, the struggle to publish the FTE, the process of its rejection, efforts to obstruct the study of its evaluation, and the role of secrecy in impeding such scrutiny.

Making sense of rejection and resistance

The FTE (Supplemental Appendix 1) argues that much heterodox scholarship challenges and deepens conventional diagnoses of ‘real-world’ problems as a means of advancing emancipatory change. With regard to CMS, the Domain Statement of the CMS Division of the Academy of Management (AoM) explicitly states:

‘Our premise is that *structural features of contemporary society*, such as the profit imperative, patriarchy, racial inequality, and ecological irresponsibility often turn organizations into *instruments of domination* and exploitation. Driven by a shared desire to change this situation, we aim in our research, teaching, and practice to develop critical interpretations of management and society and to generate *radical alternatives*’ (emphases added).⁸

A core premise of the rejected FTE (Supplemental Appendix 1) is that the world of scholarship is intimately conditioned by, rather than external to, ‘the structural features of contemporary society’; and that the purpose of critical scholarship is to interrogate and change established practices. Such practices include processes of evaluation in organizations which extend to the evaluation of manuscripts submitted to learned journals. More specifically, the remit of CMS encompasses assessment of how evaluation processes may be deployed, more or less intentionally, as ‘instruments of domination’ or, alternatively, operate to facilitate emancipation through an activist promotion and pursuit of ‘radical alternatives’ to established practices.

The rejected FTE, and also this *Speaking Out*, are examples of an ‘activism’ that ‘engage(s) in changing the terms through which we [e.g. business school faculty] constitute the academy, and ourselves as academics’ (Cabantous et al., 2016: 210). Such activism strives ‘to put ourselves into critique’ (Fournier and Smith, 2012: 467) in a way that ‘starts from the personal’ (Fournier and Smith, 2012: 465). In this regard, it is relevant to acknowledge that the preparation of the FTE was written from a position of privilege (as an established white male professor nearing retirement with only his reputation at stake), as is this *Speaking Out*. One unwelcome consequence of occupying this privileged position, which puts me ‘into critique’ (Fournier and Smith, 2012: 467) is a vulnerability to the accusation of wanting to have my cake (consenting to becoming an AE at AMR) and eating it (disparaging TOP). My response is that my ‘hypocrisy’ and ‘disloyalty’ (e.g. to AMR and the Academy) is ethically defensible, if not necessarily compelling. I acknowledge that my motives for accepting the AMR AE position were mixed. I was flattered, foolishly enough; and I was also pleased to be invited in recognition of the many years that I had served as a regular AMR reviewer for the journal and then as a member of its editorial board. But I was not quite naïve enough to believe that acceptance of the AE role would be viewed without suspicion, hostility and perhaps a little envy by some members of the Academy, including CMS purists. When accepting the invitation, I was apprehensive about what difference, or contribution, I would be able to make. I hoped, and actually believed, that my appointment would encourage more CMS submissions to AMR that I might shepherd to publication, wrongly as it turned out. I also anticipated that my appointment would likely raise the profile and perhaps also the credibility of CMS -at least in the eyes of some ‘mainstream’ academics who, it

seems, regard AMR as a citadel of scholarship. In such ways, I assumed that I might contribute to influencing the development of theory and research in directions consistent with the ambitions of the CMS Division Domain Statement (see above). And finally, I was attracted to the prospect of preparing an FTE in which I would be able to raise some concerns, informed by a CMS viewpoint, relevant to AMR/TOPness editorial processes.

When I encountered resistance to publishing my FTE, and eventually suffered the professional frustration and personal humiliation of its (as far as I know unprecedented) rejection, I was faced with a dilemma: should I take this on the chin or speak out?⁹ Even if, as I hope, this *Speaking Out* is not framed or received as a personal vendetta, I am concerned that its publication may damage ‘the organizational arrangements that [CMS academics] are part of’ (Fournier and Smith, 2012: 471) – by, for example, making it even less likely that those identified as CMS scholars will be invited to serve as reviewers, let alone editorial board members or AEs, for TOP. Or that this *Speaking Out* may make it even more difficult for CMS academics to get their submissions beyond TOP editors’ desks. These reflections made more attractive the option of simply drawing a line under the episode and moving on.

Hesitation in speaking out is not difficult to comprehend when the consequences are unpredictable and/or potentially damaging. In the present case, I encountered threats of legal action. And there is the risk that making public what others would prefer to be kept secret and hidden will be cast as a vindictive effort to settle scores or seek revenge. More prosaically, the commitment required to speak out may provoke questioning of, and self-doubts about, why anyone would devote so much time to the issue of manuscript evaluation in learned journals that hardly anyone reads. Instead of drafting and revising this *Speaking Out*, I could be undertaking studies and critiques of more established CMS targets – such as the ‘profit imperative, patriarchy, racial inequality, and ecological irresponsibility’ (CMS Division domain statement)? Furthermore, it might be asked, and I might ask myself, why am I sitting comfortably in my study agonizing over this text when I could be participating in more existentially important forms of activism, such as XR (Extinction Rebellion) or Black Lives Matter (BLM)?

My brief response to such questions is that it is not an either/or choice. The dissemination, rather than suppression, of critical thinking is, I contend, crucially important for problematizing and transforming diverse forms of domination, exploitation and existential threat to whose elimination XR and BLM are dedicated.¹⁰ Resisting provocation by remaining silent can be prudent or pragmatic when it is not passive-aggressive. But, on occasion, keeping quiet can be cowardly and complicit. Ultimately, it is for others, including readers of this *Speaking Out*, to assess the merits as well as the genuineness of my ‘activist’ response, and the wisdom, or ideology, of ‘speaking out’.

On speaking out and non-disclosure agreement’s (NDAs)

The reflections conveyed here have evolved through an extended process of review and revision at *Organization*. The original submission to *Organization*, comprising the rejected FTE and a brief introduction to it, was fully anonymized with regard to my identity and that of *AMR*, principally in an effort to achieve some shelter from threatened legal action. At the urging of the editors of *Organization*, who were apprised of the history of the FTE, I removed the admittedly thin disguise of author and journal, and I have also extended the Introduction. This amended, non-anonymized version was then sent out to review, and the present revision is informed by the constructive feedback provided from the reviewers and the editors of *Organization* who have served during the paper’s quite lengthy gestation.

The anonymization undertaken in the initial submission of this *Speaking Out* had, I submit, the positive effect of focusing attention on the *practices* examined (e.g. the culture and ethos of evaluation) rather than on specific *actors* (e.g. the author and evaluators of the FTE). But when, as in the present

case, many readers are familiar with the territory being studied, anonymization becomes procedural rather than substantive so that it becomes an elaborate and ultimately unconvincing charade.¹¹ Even by inserting some misinformation, it is extremely difficult to conceal the distinctive identity of *AMR* as an exclusively theory-oriented TOP journal with theory-focused editorials.

While I have abandoned anonymization, I have sought to minimize attributions of specific interventions or contributions either to the editor of *AMR* or to specific AEs. I have no interest in identifying or criticizing particular individuals. I did, however, want to make the ‘primary data’ – in the form of correspondence relating to the evaluation of the FTE – available to readers so that my interpretation of events could be compared to it. Unfortunately, my request to make a transcript available was declined, accompanied by an assertion of the editorial team’s property rights over the primary data and a threat of legal action. I have therefore summarized and paraphrased their words and I have provided no verbatim quotes. No objections were raised publishing the FTE elsewhere, and no request was made to anonymize the journal, so the FTE appears in Supplemental Appendix I. Nonetheless, as my primary interest is in the relationship between orthodox and heterodox scholarship, and not its articulation within any specific editorial team or journal, I refer, wherever possible and appropriate, to TOP and to TOPness. That said, I do find it remarkable and disturbing that ethical principles – of confidentiality and informed consent as well as anonymity – have been invoked to exclude the presentation of primary data, in the knowledge that this would weaken my analysis and damage its prospects of publication. I find it difficult to reconcile the negative response to my request to make the primary data available with established norms of research that encourage its disclosure.

I also found it disappointing that I received no *scholarly* explanation for declining my request to make the source material available and, instead, the justification was framed in terms of an infringement of property rights (e.g. ownership of the text). Reference was also made to a confidentiality clause contained in an agreement that I had signed as a condition of appointment to the AE role. Insistence that I comply with the equivalent of a Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA) took priority over support for a (retrospective) study of the FTE’s editorial evaluation. The difficulties occasioned by efforts to comply with this restriction – notably, the paraphrasing of communications rather than using verbatim quotes – make it necessary to address head-on the *possible* claim that this *Speaking Out* breaches (deontological) ethical principles (e.g. of confidentiality). To have responded to the threat of legal action by suppressing, rather than considering, the process of evaluating the FTE would, I believe, have been to bow to pressure to deny examination of how ‘divergent views’ (Smolin, 2006: xxii) are excluded, and would thereby have impeded the progress of science by protecting the epistemic *status quo* from critical scrutiny.

The basic justification for non-compliance with the terms of the NDA rests on the argument that virtue resides in truth-telling which challenges ‘the imposed silence of “business as usual”’ (Bok, 1989: 214 cited by Weiskopf and Tobias-Miersch, 2016: 1623). In recent years, high profile NDAs (e.g. in the National Health Service (NHS) and in Universities in the UK), as well as their use by individuals (e.g. Larry Nasser and Harvey Weinstein), have drawn attention to the potential (ab)uses of such ‘agreements’ when deployed to circumvent or frustrate accountability. Breaching NDAs, it might be assumed, is unlawful. However, UK whistleblowing law indicates that the disclosure of concerns, otherwise silenced by such agreements, is permitted on condition that, and with regard to those affected by such agreements:

- They must reasonably believe that both the information they disclose and any allegation contained in it are substantially true
- They cannot be acting for personal gain, which may rule out a tell-all story to a newspaper in exchange for a generous pay-out

- They have to have already blown the whistle to their employer or a prescribed person – usually a regulatory body – unless the wrongdoing is exceptionally serious or they reasonably believe that their employer will subject them to ‘detriment’ or conceal or destroy evidence if they do so
- The making of the disclosure must be reasonable in all circumstances (Chilton and Sanda, 2017).

Nonetheless, earlier versions of this *Speaking Out* took a cautious approach by limiting reference to how the FTE was evaluated. This drew a challenging comment from one reviewer who wrote that ‘consideration of the evaluation process is important to substantiate your claim that the [FTE’s] rejection proved its *major points*’ (my emphasis). While I rather doubt that the ‘major points’ of my FTE can ever be conclusively ‘proven’, I do anticipate that these ‘points’ will be contested (and properly so). A more likely outcome, I conjecture, is that those who are unsettled or perhaps enraged by this *Speaking Out* will not wish to draw further attention to it.

On reflection, I am inclined to agree with the reviewer’s view that close consideration of the process of evaluating the FTE – which is now provided in detail in Supplemental Appendix 2 – is no less relevant than the analysis contained in the rejected FTE (Supplemental Appendix 1). The reviewer also pointed out that the process of evaluating the FTE is likely to be more salient for readers of *Organization*, and to be of greater potential significance. Accordingly, I have now devoted additional space to the evaluation process. Since the rejected FTE contains the rudiments of how, as a heterodox scholar, I make sense of the way heterodox work submitted to TOP is evaluated, limited space is devoted here to extending that analysis. It may be that readers will judge that a number of points made in FTE3 (Supplemental Appendix 1) are demonstrated during the course of its evaluation (Supplemental Appendix 2).

TOPness and heterodox scholarship

How the appropriateness of manuscripts is assessed can be illuminated by examining the inner workings of the ‘black box’ of editorial evaluation processes, as illustrated by the editorial assessment of the FTE. Some sense of what is appropriate with regard to FTEs is conveyed by Byron and Thatcher (2016), two of my fellow AEs, in their ‘Teaching Theory and Theory Building’ FTE where they explicitly and *exclusively* to ‘colleagues trained in institutions or disciplines’ that fall within what they term the ‘*North American management paradigm*’ (Byron and Thatcher, 2016: 5, emphasis added) (hereafter NAMP).¹² The theoretical and methodological boundaries of NAMP are sketched when summarizing the responses to five questions put to experts in the field as Byron and Thatcher were preparing their FTE. Consider their first question – ‘What is (and Isn’t) Theory?’. Byron and Thatcher report that ‘Because many of our experts noted the benefit of representing theories visually, students could present visual models implied by the propositions using boxes and arrows, where appropriate. Going further, students could be asked to generate ideas for ways these propositions could be tested’ (Byron and Thatcher, 2016: 3). This response is resonant with an earlier *AMR* FTE in which Delbridge and Fiss (2013) characterize the prevalent NAMP conceptualization of theory – in terms of ‘propositions using boxes and arrows’ – as ‘the hegemony of correlational theorizing’, adding that it ‘*stifles* other forms of theorizing’ (Delbridge and Fiss, 2013: 325, emphasis added). Their point, as I take it, is that exponents and guardians of NAMP conceive of it as *uniquely scientific* in its methodology and development of theory, with the result that other approaches are identified as pre-scientific or even anti-scientific. That NAMP is based upon ‘scientific ideals of a century long past’ (Van Maanen, 1995b: 687), and which, in the eyes of many social scientists, have been problematized and widely discarded as a consequence of a series of

discrediting turns (logical, linguistic, cultural-historical, etc; see Delanty and Srydom, 2003: 9–10), will not detain us here. Instead, I want to highlight the language used by Delbridge and Foss to characterize ‘correlational theorizing’. Describing it ‘stifling’ is, I consider, no less cutting, and is potentially more offensive, than anything contained in my FTE (Supplemental Appendix 1). Yet their scathing comment on NAMP escaped *AMR* censorship, and rightly so – perhaps because it was not *directly* related to editorial practice. And yet, of course, it is through processes of review and editorial decision-making that such ‘stifling’ effects are produced.

To be clear, I am not claiming that, within the boundaries of NAMP, responses to the question ‘What is theory?’ *necessarily* presuppose a ‘neopositivist’ orientation (Byron and Thatcher, 2016: 3),¹³ although, and as if to confirm this restrictive and unflattering assessment of NAMP, Byron and Thatcher (2016) write that the ‘set of activities’ identified in their FTE are ‘mainly geared toward the development of variance theories that presuppose a neopositivistic conception of theory’ (Byron and Thatcher, 2016: 3). Instead, I conjecture that Byron and Thatcher’s (2016) exclusive reference to, and reliance upon, a neopositivist conception of NAMP is illustrative of how, hegemonically, neopositivistic norms of scholarship pervade and infuse TOP’s sense of substance, style and format.¹⁴ By prizing a form of rhetoric that denies its rhetorical form, variants of NAMP share a tacit subscription to ‘a logocentric tradition of empirical science with its count-and-classify conventions and taken-for-granted notions of progress’ that reach toward elusive ‘covering laws, causes, operational definitions, testable hypotheses, and so forth’ (Van Maanen, 1995a: 134). To the extent that ‘neopositivist’ NAMP norms are ‘hegemonic’ (Delbridge and Fiss, 2013: 325) and dominate TOP, they become emulated by founders and custodians of wannabe TOP (see also Grey, 2010). NAMP’s ‘hegemony’ and its institutionalization as TOPness is further reinforced as business schools, both within and beyond North America, adopt TOP ‘hits’ as a primary KPI when hiring and promoting faculty, and when submitting staff and/or publications to national research evaluation exercises.

Despite repeated protestations to the contrary by guardians of TOP, heterodox scholars repeatedly find that logocentric exponents of TOPness ‘make sure – as journal editors, reviewers. . . – that the entry costs for moving into a *new area* are high’ (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2014: 975, emphasis added). The ‘[n]ew area’ may refer to a seldom studied phenomena in TOP (e.g. how capitalist enterprise is organized and managed in ways that systematically exploit employees¹⁵). Or, and of more direct relevance to the present analysis, a ‘new area’ may refer to theoretical traditions and frameworks that deviate from TOP’s norms and values, and so are considered to be ‘ideologically tainted’ or ‘politically motivated’ in ways that, of course, NAMP scholarship axiomatically is not and could never be.

Considerations of this kind are integral to what Delbridge and Fiss (2013), again in their FTE, term the ‘structural and political aspects of the social organization of knowledge that limits the diversity of management theory’ (Delbridge and Fiss, 2013: 325). To escape, or at least loosen, these constraints, these authors commend, as a ‘first step’, ‘greater transparency and attention to the power and politics in the processes and organization of knowledge’ (Delbridge and Fiss, 2013: 330) – a call to which the rejected FTE (Supplemental Appendix 1) and this *Speaking Out* are responsive. As a ‘second step’, Delbridge and Fiss (2013) urge ‘a willingness to engage across the range of approaches to theorizing, rather than a *defensive positioning* of the established dominant paradigm’ (Delbridge and Fiss, 2013: 330, emphasis added). Again, this *Speaking Out* is responsive to Delbridge and Fiss’ call: it aspires to challenge ‘defensive positioning’ by moving analysis of evaluation processes beyond ‘the dominant paradigm’. Finally, Delbridge and Fiss (2013) contend that another ‘key step in opening up the spaces for alternatives’ is the explicit acknowledgment of ‘the [particular] ontological and epistemological assumptions that underpin a given approach’ (Delbridge and Fiss, 2013: 330). Their point, as I understand it, is that (the particularity) of such assumptions should be identified and declared, rather than be taken as given or as

universal, so that they become more accessible to critical scrutiny. Consistent with this concern, this *Speaking Out* reflects critically upon the specific and relative assumptions that underpin varieties of NAMP, and alternatives to it.

I am not denying that *calls* for ‘spaces for alternatives’ *are* occasionally articulated in TOP’s FTEs in a way that suggests an inclusiveness and openness to diverse forms of scholarship. But such engaging rhetoric is hollow when *demonstrations* of heterodox scholarship are so infrequently published in TOP, including studies that focus upon ‘power and politics in the processes and organization of knowledge’ (Delbridge and Fiss, 2013: 330, emphasis added), to which my FTE aspired to contribute. Barriers to such studies are encountered when, in the words of another, recent *AMR* editor who invokes the Kuhnian distinction between ‘normal’ (e.g. orthodox) and ‘revolutionary’ (e.g. heterodox) science, ‘reviewers are expecting to read the former and, instead, receive the latter, ‘they can sometimes be confused and even enraged’ (Barney, 2018: 345). As any reader who turns to Supplemental Appendix 2 will discover, ‘enraged’ is probably not too strong a sentiment to characterize some of the reactions of my fellow AEs to the contents of my FTE.

I have already intimated that this *Speaking Out*, like the FTE, will likely displease exponents and guardians of TOPness, even if their manifest reaction is to ignore and decline engagement with it. Ignoring criticism is a standard response by elites, whether at TOP or elsewhere when it is sensed or calculated that little is to be gained from leaving the safety of their echo chambers. Airy disregard and dismissal supplemented, when required, by threats of legal action is a less demanding and risky response than scholarly debate. If a response is elicited, then I anticipate that it will contain reference to examples of how TOP publishes heterodox work – such as Delbridge and Fiss’s (2013) FTE as well as my own contributions! And it will be noted that heterodox scholars to have been appointed to TOP editorial teams and boards, and so on. My response to this is that TOPness is hegemonic, not totalizing, and that some (‘insidious’ Denisi, 2010: 199) measure of diversity lends legitimacy to its normalization and reproduction.

What I do not expect critics of this *Speaking Out* to acknowledge or to address is the claim that TOP’s structure and ethos results in editorial processes operating routinely to ‘discipline’ heterodox scholarship by subjecting it to NAMP normalization, or its consignment to the scholarly outpost of special issues and sections. That said, TOP editors are indeed occasionally appointed who are committed to a meaningfully pluralistic vision of scholarship, and who also possess sufficient strength of purpose and capacity to take risks that mitigate pressures upon them to universalize the norms of NAMP. Appointment of the exceptional editor and team is, however, insufficient to remove and reduce the structural impediments and institutional barriers to publishing undoctored heterodox scholarship in TOP. It is to these shortcomings that a number of proposals in my FTE (see Supplemental Appendix 1) are intended to offer a partial and less-than-radical remedy.

To elaborate further on heterodoxy within TOP, and specifically at *AMR*, it is relevant to acknowledge that my appointment to the editorial team coincided with the simultaneous selection of a significant number of heterodox editorial board members, including other CMS academics. In the broader context of sustained, if modest, growth in heterodox scholarship¹⁶ and pressures within AoM to be more responsive to the internationalization and diversification of its membership, this welcome development at *AMR* may be interpreted as sending a pluralizing signal to prospective contributors to the journal. Although plausible, this interpretation is questionable since, according to the *AMR* editor, the selection of editorial board members was based primarily on the rating of reviewers’ performance by Senior Editors, rather than other criteria, such as subject speciality, suggesting that heterodox scholars are, unsurprisingly to me, amongst the most responsive, constructive and incisive preparers of reviews.

Appointing heterodox scholars to (TOP) editorial boards and teams is, in principle, positive for attracting heterodox submissions and shepherding them to publication. However, without much

stronger signals and institutionally sustained change – such as the routine appointment of heterodox editors or the creation of more balanced (orthodox/heterodox) teams of AEs – there is little prospect of heterodox scholars regarding TOP as particularly receptive to their work. Only if significant numbers of heterodox scholars are sufficiently compelled by a desire to appear in TOP and/or are under strong pressure to deliver TOPness for career or institutional purposes, will the investment of time and effort required to emulate TOP requirements be considered worth the risk of rejection or the bad faith involved.¹⁷ This balance will begin to shift only if, as I argue in my FTE (Supplemental Appendix 1), diversity is institutionalized within the structure of TOP editorial teams and its associated evaluation processes. Confidence in those process could benefit from greater transparency as exemplified, for example, by the ‘top-tier’ *British Medical Journal*.¹⁸ If such a step is deemed too radical, reviewer and editor evaluations could at least be made available at the conclusion of the review process. Increased openness about evaluation processes would also be responsive to a concern voiced by Denisi (2010) when, as editor of *AMJ*, he posed the question: do we ‘talk’ to each other, and to what extent is the ‘value’ of other scholars’ ‘ideas’ acknowledged or disregarded? Engaging in this ‘talk’ necessitates the development of an ethos that supports, rather than suppresses or obstructs, such communication.

Evaluation: The shroud of secrecy

Research on the operation of learned journals, including their evaluation practices, is critically important because their evaluation processes are at the heart of determining what knowledge is to receive the ‘*imprimatur* of scientific authenticity’ (Ziman, 1968: 111) – a badge of credibility that then exerts a (performative) influence upon the wider world. In the absence of a positive evaluation by a respected learned journal, knowledge is destined for oblivion – unless it is resurrected as part of a *Speaking Out* piece, of course! Despite the centrality, there is a dearth of qualitative empirical studies of editorial practice. In one of the more instructive of them, Wellington and Nixon (2005) argue that:

‘. . . it becomes increasingly important that as academic practitioners we take *political stock* of our *little world* and adopt a critical stance to the collective game, which to a large extent shapes our field and determines our location within it’ (Wellington and Nixon, 2005: 652–3, emphases added)

The lack of qualitative studies of editorial practice is, it seems, symptomatic of academics’ reluctance, or resistance, to participating in research that investigates editorial activity.¹⁹ Taking ‘political stock’ (Wellington and Nixon, 2005) of editorial and review processes encompasses critical reflection on the central activity of peer review. On the one hand, well-informed, critically constructive appraisals of knowledge claims are invaluable when these enable authors better to grasp and accomplish their purpose. On the other hand, when *blinded*, the evaluation process is *closed* to inspection. Blinding not only denies insights contained within reviews to the wider scientific community; it also removes review(er)s and editors from scrutiny and accountability.

Blinding manifests a disconnect between (i) a professed and *defining* commitment of science to *openness* that permits scrutiny; and (ii) the *opacity* of processes that bestow the *imprimatur* of scientific authenticity upon particular knowledge claims. This disconnect, I submit, is, or should be!, a source of embarrassment as a ‘dirty little secret’ whose public recognition is strongly discouraged. As a consequence of regarding blinding as a given ‘gold standard’, its questioning is taboo, as is apparent from the silence on its existence, significance and consequences in TOP journals and their editorials.

When ‘*political stock*’ (Wellington and Nixon, 2005) is taken of blinding, secrecy is justified by invoking its role in protecting the vulnerable: from possible reviewer bias associated with knowledge

of the identity or affiliation or the author; and from possible retaliatory attacks by senior authors (e.g. who provide references) on junior reviewers. More darkly, however, could it be that resigned acceptance and accommodation of such possible malpractices is a patronizing rationalization of ‘*the power and politics in processes and organization of knowledge*’ (Delbridge and Fiss, 2013: 33)? Could it be that blinding is widely normalized and defended because it provides the greatest, unspoken protection for decision-makers – editors and reviewers and publishers – as it shields them from accountability?

If it is accepted that evaluation processes are significant for warranting knowledge claims, then they invite exploration. Accordingly, the ‘activist’ purpose of preparing this *Speaking Out* together with its accompanying Appendices is to promote reflection on how heterodox, including critical, scholarship is evaluated by TOP, exemplified by *AMR*, and thereby to anticipate, and to contribute to, its progressive reform.

Composing the FTE

Preparing the FTE for *AMR* proved to be considerably more demanding and instructive than I had anticipated. Prior to its submission, FTE1 went through numerous drafts as I wrestled with the challenge of conveying my concerns about the disconnect between editorial policy and practice in a scholarly, well supported way, that would engage a broad *AMR* readership. The intention was to provide a comparatively ‘tempered’ (Meyerson and Scully, 1995), heterodox illumination of how *AMR* manages the ‘demand side’ of its editorial evaluation processes – that is, how *AMR* presents itself to prospective contributors in order to elicit manuscripts directed, ostensibly, to fulfilling the journal’s stated mission, and so minimize the risk of their withdrawal or rejection. When drafting the FTE, I was mindful of advice that a degree of stealth is required when seeking to present heterodox ideas to an orthodox readership: proceed ‘with circumspection and deference to conventions’ if the message is not to ‘frighten’ and ‘alienate. . . editors and reviewers’ (Alvesson and Gabriel, 2013: 248). I therefore endeavoured to ‘finesse’ my analysis and recommendations so that, in my eyes at least, the FTE took on a form that approximated the look-and-feel of orthodox scholarship.²⁰ In a deliberate effort to bestow credibility and legitimacy upon its contents, I also made reference to other, related *AMR* FTE’s. Finally, I drew upon Weber’s writings to support my analysis, anticipating that his work would provide a familiar, undemanding bridge to orthodox scholarship.

On the issue of the my efforts to ‘temper’ (Meyerson and Scully, 1995) the FTE with regard to the proposals contained within it, a comment by a (self-declared heterodox) reviewer of an earlier version of this *Speaking Out* characterized them as ‘relatively minor and trivial’ – a view that affirmed by own assessment of their ‘tempered’ content. This reviewer might well be sympathetic to the assessment that

‘all you get following the accommodating route is soft support which disappears when the going gets tough; or worse, co-optation, where the purity of your critique loses its integrity and is absorbed into the corruption it is working to replace’ (Pechter, 1992: 176)

The outcome of my efforts to mollify the editor was, the same reviewer suggests, that ‘much of the pivotal substance (e.g. detailed explanation and evidence) of the original case. . .[is] now missing’.²¹ Much of that substance was a casualty my willingness to comply with the editor’s absolute insistence that the 47 pages of FTE1 was cut to 20 pages. Given the scale of the required cut, much of the ‘crucial nuance’ contained in FTE1 had indeed been removed, with the result that ‘. . . [the FTE] comes off vague and somewhat lofty’, as the reviewer puts it. As an example of this ‘vagueness’ the reviewer points to the rapidity, in FTE3, of my dismissal of the ostensibly self-evident

virtue of ‘clear writing’ urged by the editor (see also Ragins, 2012). My critique, this reviewer notes, lacks adequate explication of ‘what exactly is objectionable about the clarity imperative’. Fair enough.

So, while the *Speaking Out* space is not perhaps the most appropriate place to respond to this reviewer’s concern, I can provide a briefest elaboration of the critique of clear writing made in the FTE (Supplemental Appendix 1). When communicating with a *lay or non-specialist* audience, I fully accept that the use of comparatively esoteric terms (e.g. ‘meme’ or ‘trope’) is difficult to justify – except perhaps in the anticipation that, over time, it may contribute to an expansion and enrichment of everyday sensemaking capacities. Prior to being absorbed into everyday vocabulary, such terms are experienced (by non-specialists) as bewildering, and potentially intimidating and disrespectful, ‘noise’. I find criticism of ‘jargon’ in *that* context to be entirely justifiable. However, it is another matter when communicating with a specialist audience. Every scientific field or sub-field, including MOS, NAMP and CMS, develops and applies short-hand terminology (‘jargon’) that, to outsiders, impairs ‘signal’ – until, that is, time and effort is devoted by outsiders to becoming users, or insiders. This ‘short-hand’ facilitates communication by condensing complex ideas in ways that can also enrich, unsettle or qualify established, hegemonic ways of knowing. In this respect, jargon’s ‘way of helping is more important than its way of hurting’ (Pechter, 1991: 181) But, as Pechter then adds, this claim makes sense only if you assume that the equilibrium of our social practice is dangerously fragile’ (Pechter, 1991). Of course, it was precisely the assumed legitimacy of the ‘equilibrium’ at TOP that the FTE was placing in question.

Jargon, I contend, is not necessarily vacuous or disingenuous bullshit. Indeed, the inverse of jargon, conceived here as a way of ‘helping’ (Pechter, 1991: 181), is the clear, disambiguated language of Orwellian *Newspeak* that was ‘designed not to extend but to *diminish* the range of thought’ (Orwell, 1949: 242). Appeals to the ostensibly self-evident, common sense virtue of ‘clear writing’ are particularly problematical when deployed by one specialist community to secure or expand its power and privilege by discrediting or devaluing expressions of ‘difference’ (Van Maanen, 1995a). A virtue of what, tongue-in-cheek, I will term ‘unclear’ writing resides in its potential to ‘extend the range of thought’ by articulating alternative, heterodox, subterranean forms of sensemaking and associated visions of the future.

When tempering the content of my FTE, I did not assume that the members of the AMR editorial team were necessarily NALP ‘box’ protectors (see Alvesson and Sandberg, 2014), or that they were wholly unfamiliar with, or unequivocally antagonistic towards, heterodox scholarship. My experience as an author, and my reading of many editorial decisions at *AMR* over several editorial terms, had led me to believe that such ignorance and/or antagonism was not invariably present, even if it could sometimes be well concealed by a veneer of repressive tolerance.²² I was, of course, aware that my ‘tempered’ heterodox FTE would deviate from what I assessed to be the comparatively orthodox orientation of the editor and other AEs. But I was encouraged, but also possibly (self-)deceived by the editorial team’s very explicit commitment to the mission of developmental reviewing from which I expected to benefit.²³

Evidently enough, these optimistic expectations were unfulfilled (Supplemental Appendix 2). There was little appetite for supporting and developing an FTE in which heterodox scholarship was *engaged* and *applied* to *examine* the ‘demand side’ of the editorial process. This experience has led me to conjecture that TOP’s declared mission to ‘challenge conventional wisdom’ and its advocacy of inclusiveness, was, and perhaps remains, well-intentioned but largely ceremonial. In practice, the meaning of the mission would seem to be largely framed and enacted within the narrow and conservative worldview of NAMP.

Given my years of service as a TOP editorial board member (I served on the AMR editorial board, and then as an AE, from 2003 to 2017), I should probably have been better prepared for

rejection. On reflection, those years provided a shallow foundation for any expectation that espousal of inclusiveness would extend to supporting a heterodox FTE, even one that was had been deliberately ‘tempered’, or ‘doctored’. It was, it seems, one thing to appoint a (single) heterodox AE; it was another thing to permit the publication of a heterodox FTE. Some wishful thinking had led me to believe that my FTE would be tolerated and accommodated, even if it might not be particularly welcome. Only with the frustration resulting from the treatment of the FTE’s have I been prompted to reflect on how, during my many years of service as an *AMR* editorial board member, I never participated in any discussion of, or detected any interest in, making *structural* change(s) that, potentially, could bring about the fulfillment of its espoused mission, or that might move it in the direction of greater openness and inclusivity.²⁴

I should perhaps respond here to another of the reviewers’ comments on an earlier version of this *Speaking Out* which took issue with the indicative bibliography included at the end of the FTE. Its inclusion was my attempt to ‘cover off’ the ‘supply side’ pressures emanating from the Editor who repeatedly asked me to incorporate a primer on critical scholarship or, indeed, to *devote* the FTE to this task. Despite the inclusion of Prasad et al. (2015) in the bibliography, the reviewer (justifiably) takes me to task for failing to reference other examples of feminist, queer and post-colonialist work – a deficit that, I acknowledge and wish now to flag up, reproduces ‘the canonical status of a narrow inner circle of critical authors and scholars’ (Reviewer comment). The reviewer’s point, of course, is that my complaints about patterns of exclusion with regard to the receptiveness of TOP to critical scholarship are paralleled by what is omitted from my indicative bibliography of CMS. This was a timely reprimand to which, shamefully, I plead as charged (see also note 6).

More paranoid-depressive reflections

My auto-examination of a *single* example of a TOP editorial evaluation of heterodox scholarship, taking the form of a FTE, may be regarded and brushed aside as an analysis of a submission that is unrepresentative and abnormal.²⁵ In response, I contend that single case studies are, at the very least, important for stimulating debate – in this case, reflecting upon the restrictiveness or inclusiveness of the norms of scholarly practice. In-depth and comparative studies of editorial evaluation practices are likely to remain a rarity so long as ‘ethical’ barriers of confidentiality, anonymity and informed consent are invoked to impede their pursuit. In the present case, denial of inspection of the source data on which this *Speaking Out* and Supplemental Appendix 2 is based – that is, the transcript of the correspondence that comprised the evaluation process of the FTE – will, I fear, not improve the chance of concerns raised here being taken up, which is perhaps the undeclared purpose of the denial.

It is also relevant to address my fear that resurrection of the rejected FTE (Supplemental Appendix 1) and account of its evaluation (Supplemental Appendix 2) will be construed as a pitiful and possibly delusional tale ‘sour grapes’, or spiteful retaliation. I anticipate that one widespread response will be the observation that review processes are inherently imperfect and that every academic has their fair share of rejections and that it is useless or even counterproductive (e.g. for reputation and career advancement) to turn a ‘private trouble’ into a ‘public issue’ (Mills, 1959). Put it down to experience. Do not share it, or ‘call it out’. Just move on. To understand why I have been unreceptive to such advice, it is relevant to underscore that I accepted the invitation to become an AE at TOP in recognition of the presence and growing importance of heterodox scholarship in MOS. Taking on this time-demanding role, I anticipated, would enable me to develop the journal by attracting and publishing more heterodox scholarship; and the opportunity to publish an FTE would, I expected, be important for pursuing that objective. The FTE would be one of the most visible and enduring of my contributions to TOP, so I devoted

considerable time and thought to its preparation and revision. The rejection of the FTE was, for me, a 'critical situation' as it 'radically disrupt[ed]' (Giddens, 1979: 124) that expectation. I had believed that nothing other than a *heterodox* FTE would be expected from a heterodox AE, and that its publication would be proceed with minimal editorial intervention. The decision not to publish the FTE placed in doubt my judgment in accepting the AE role. By preparing this *Speaking Out*, my decision and experience of rejection has not been in vain, and it has provided an instructive demonstration of *how* orthodox scholarship is silenced. The FTE's fate was, of course, also ironic as this silencing was one of its central themes.

When confronting the brute fact of the FTE's rejection, I was obliged to consider my position. I imagined that my resignation, involving the self-removal of a heterodox thorn from the orthodox flesh, would be quietly welcomed. I also worried that, in the absence of any other explanation, my departure might be widely construed as a fit of pique, rather than a more principled response. Resigning, I calculated, would probably do little to support or advance heterodox scholarship, and so I decided to continue handling the many manuscripts allocated to me, amongst which were a tiny but highly valued number of heterodox papers that might otherwise not have been submitted, or may otherwise not have received an informed and constructive process of evaluation. At the same time, I resolved to curtail involvement in other editorial activities. The one exception was my continuing effort to press, against indifference and resistance, for a radical overhaul of TOP keywords as they largely excluded many of the topics and approaches favoured by heterodox scholars, and so had knock-on effects for attracting manuscripts, 'boxing in' authors and matching their manuscripts with genuinely peer reviewers.

When reflecting on the rejection of the FTE, I have come to believe that it resulted less from the *existence* of my heterodox allegiance to CMS than from *acting out this allegiance* in the FTE. Being appointed, and being '*seen*', as a member of the editorial team of TOP was tolerable and indeed somewhat expedient in a context where heterodox scholarship was growing in other, rival journals (within the FT50). At the very least, my appointment served as a badge of scholarly inclusivity. But being '*heard*' was clearly unwelcome. In an effort to square this circle, the editor repeatedly urged me to provide a *descriptive account* of CMS, instead of my application of it. Ultimately, compliance with this demand was a condition of a publishable FTE. An *abstracted account* of CMS heterodoxy that included little or no reference to TOP editorial evaluation processes could be accommodated. But a *concrete articulation* of CMS to analyse those processes was evidently insupportable.

This exclusionary judgement, I conjecture, stems from a disinclination, or perhaps an incapacity, to recognize that, in the critical genre of heterodox scholarship, at least as I conceive of it, scholarship is intimately related to living in, and radically changing, the world; and that this 'activist' commitment extends to the organization and management of academic/ scientific institutions and editorial structures. Other members of the editorial team, I believe, subscribed to an orthodox, scholastic conception of academic practice whose ambition is to generate and test accounts of how the world, based upon their partially interrogated beliefs about it, with the objective of determining which account most accurately 'captures' or 'reflects' its reality. The coherence of this conception of scholarship is directly challenged in Marx's Theses on Feuerbach in which he famously concludes that 'philosophers have only interpreted the word in various ways; the point is to change it' (Marx, 1848/1975: 423). However, if all eleven theses are to be taken seriously, then this injunction requires some qualification. In Marx's own terms, it is impossible 'merely' to interpret the world because, to use some contemporary jargon, every interpretation is active and performative. Even if an interpretation only (further) naturalizes or normalizes the world, and even if it is intended, or (mis)perceived, simply to interpret it, every interpretation has some impact and, in this sense, contributes to the incessant changing of the world. The self-understanding of specific interpretations might be that they are simply a

philosophical ‘contemplation’ that, to be ‘practical’ require at least a nod towards policy. But, for Marx, they are, inescapably, expressions of ‘practical, human-sensuous activity’ (Marx, 1848/1975: 422). Feuerbach’s *The Essence of Christianity*, for example, offers a materialist debunking of ‘religious self-alienation’ (Marx, 1848/1975: 422) but, in doing so, it also contributes to, and serves to develop and reconstruct, a secular bourgeois worldview that is conceived as comprising ‘single individuals’ and ‘civil society’ (without reference to the ‘practical-critical’ activity that is constitutive of the precarious – because internally contradictory – ‘ensemble of social relations’ (Marx, 1848/1975: 423) through which this worldview is constructed and sustained).

In orthodox scholarship, the politics of practical-critical activity is ostensibly evacuated (or concealed) from the determination of what, ‘scientifically’, is reported to be the reality of management and organization, including the reality of CMS which the TOP editor urged me to ‘capture’ and convey in the FTE. Critical scholarship, in contrast, problematizes the ostensible, value-free objectivity of (contemplative) reports of reality, with the intent of transforming the world in a progressive, emancipatory direction. Rather than bestowing ‘scientific’ solidity and legitimacy upon the world, the commitment of critical scholarship is to challenging and radically changing what has become hegemonic. The instruction to confine my FTE to a primer on CMS articulated, I suggest, an orthodox, contemplative conception of scholarship in which CMS would be presented, abstractly, as another possible ‘lens’ of observation and analysis. To proceed in this way would, in my view, have conveyed a misleading, vitiated sense of CMS requiring an act of bad faith. The ‘good faith’ alternative was to decline the editor’s ultimatum in the almost certain knowledge that defiance would result in rejection (see Bedeian, 2003, 2004; Frey, 2003).²⁶

Further reflections on the ‘critical situation’ occasioned by the FTE’s rejection led me to wonder if I, and perhaps also my fellow editorial team members, were, in Giddens’ words, engaged in ‘regressive modes of object-affiliation’ (Giddens, 1979: 127) – the affiliations being to orthodox and heterodox scholarship, respectively. My investment in CMS scholarship is well known, and this may, in some measure, account for my determination to ‘stand my ground’, rather than risk publicly ‘disaffiliating’ from CMS by complying with the editor’s directive. Whether this determination was regressive is for others to judge. It felt self-confident and assertive. For members of the editorial team, my FTE was held to breach unwritten (and fantasmatic?) TOP guidelines with which they seem to have become strongly identified.

Editorial feedback on the FTE (see Supplemental Appendix 2) appears, to me, to express ‘anxiety or fear’ (Giddens, 1979: 127), as betrayed by reluctance to engage with its substantive content and propositions. ‘Anxiety and fear’ were also, I acknowledge, my reactions to the mostly hostile and even abusive feedback provided by the editorial team (see Supplemental Appendix 2). I *feared* that I had either completely misinterpreted the journal’s mission statement and/or had badly misjudged the commitment of the editorial team to it. I was *anxious* as I struggled to figure out how I could speak out about a disconnect – of espoused policy and editorial evaluative practice – that had precipitated the drafting of the FTE (see Supplemental Appendix 1). The feelings were intensified when I could obtain no response to my repeated requests for clarification and substantiation of the criticisms contained in the feedback I received (see Supplemental Appendix 2).

Conclusion

This *Speaking Out* has sought to interrogate the fate of the rejected FTE (Supplemental Appendix 1) in ways that may stimulate debate about how to increase TOP’s capacity to attract and develop heterodox work, supposing that this is not a purely ceremonial ambition. The ‘development’ of MOS is not just a matter of extending the domain of *what* is studied (e.g. more work on inequality,

greed, corruption, fraud, climate change etc.). It is also an issue of *how* ‘grand challenges’ are framed and examined from a range of heterodox perspectives.

As the development of scientific fields depends upon processes of evaluating knowledge claims, their openness to scrutiny is an important ‘public issue’. If heterodox work addressing issues of inequality, etc. is to be published in TOP journals, then it is timely to take a close look at the structure and operation of editorial and review practices – practices that are currently safeguarded from critical scrutiny by secrecy. Too often, this secrecy is preserved by disparaging studies of scholarly knowledge production as introverted, ‘navel-gazing’ endeavours that displace investigations of ‘real’ phenomena (e.g. organizations and management practices). An undeclared comfort of such opinions is their sparing of scholars from the potentially unsettling disclosure of ‘*structural and political aspects of the social organization of knowledge*’ (Delbridge and Fiss, 2013: 325, emphasis added). Permitting the study of those ‘aspects’ requires a preparedness to renounce the secrecy and defensiveness surrounding how knowledge claims are evaluated.

This *Speaking Out* has sought to contribute to broader efforts to mitigate the risk of TOP journals, including *AMR*, becoming progressively introverted and moribund. That risk is illustrated, I suggest, in the process of evaluating the FTE, summarized in Supplemental Appendix 2, which shows how heterodox (e.g. CMS) scholarship is received from an orthodox position; and it also sheds light on how this reception is interpreted and challenged from a heterodox (critical) perspective. Accordingly, this *Speaking Out* is plausibly apprehended as an instance of ‘act(ing) on the *schemes of intelligibility* that govern who will be a speaking being, subjecting them to rupture and revision, consolidating their norms or contesting their hegemony’ (Butler, 2005: 132 quoted in Contu, 2020: 740, emphasis added). Specifically, it has reflected on the interaction, or collision, of two – orthodox and heterodox – ‘schemes of intelligibility’, showing how each ‘ruptures’ the other. An account has been offered of how, through the process of evaluating the FTE (Supplemental Appendix 2), the orthodox ‘scheme’ came to silence, at least temporarily, the heterodox ‘scheme’. By contesting the process of evaluation that resulted in the (hegemonic) suppression of the FTE, that silence has now been broken. The rejection decision unobtrusively consolidated the power of the norms of the orthodox ‘scheme’. But, inadvertently, it provoked this *Speaking Out*. It is to be hoped that attending to this ‘critical situation’, rather brushing it aside, may contribute to reforming and refreshing TOPness in ways that will valorize, rather than marginalize and suppress, heterodox MOS scholarship.

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Supplemental material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. A playful reference to the BBC television comedy programme, *Not the Nine O'clock News*. The satirical show included sketches on current news stories. As evident from the account of the correspondence over the evaluation of the ‘From the Editors’ (FTE) manuscript (see Supplemental Appendix 2 accessible via the *Organization* website [TBC]), it contains some comedic moments.
2. As noted by a reviewer of the previous version of this *Speaking Out*, the top-bottom metaphor has strong gender-sexual overtones that this piece barely acknowledges or queers. In bondage and sadomasochism culture, for example, ‘top’ typically signifies the position of the sexual aggressor and penetrator, whereas ‘bottom’ indicates the submissive, penetrated and consensually ‘punished’ position. In such a context,

refusal of consent, or failure to comply, is likely to produce a ‘critical situation’ (Giddens, 1979), as discussed below.

3. <http://aom.org/Publications/AMR/Information-for-Contributors.aspx>. Accessed 12 March 2020
4. Formally, similar ambitions of challenging conventional wisdom and fostering inclusiveness are shared by Critical Management Studies (CMS). Specifically, the Domain Statement of the CMS Division of the Academy of Management includes an aspiration ‘to develop critical interpretations of management and society and to generate radical alternatives’ <http://aom.org/Divisions-and-Interest-Groups/Critical-Management-Studies/Critical-Management-Studies.aspx>. Accessed 12 March 2020. However, the sense of context and community in which the meaning of ‘challenge conventional wisdom’ is shaped, articulated and conveyed is not necessarily shared.
5. To place this brief quotation in context, DiNisi also writes: ‘When I served as editor of *AMJ*, it became clear to me that most of us really don’t know what the rest of the membership does. . . [Scholars know of the] ‘work of others in the same ghetto but know little about the ghetto down the road. . . Do we really talk to each other? Do we value each other’s ideas? Do we even know what those ideas are?’ (Denisi, 2010: 198–9). The evaluation of my FTE provides some illumination of these questions. It also begs another question: does the training received by many scholars stimulate and reward, or dull and diminish, an appetite for such sharing of knowledge?
6. As a reviewer of the previous iteration of this *Speaking Out* pointed out, the rejected FTE (Supplemental Appendix 1) that it addresses is (unintentionally) instructive about the identification of CMS by reference to a particular ‘canonical’ version of it. For deference to this canon exposes kind of TOPness in CMS insofar as it overlooks or marginalizes certain ‘matters of difference’ (e.g. much feminist, queer and post-colonialist work) ‘as if it such matters address specialist interests. . . which branch off from the more ‘general’ critical centre represented in the indicative bibliography’ included in the FTE. It is also important to acknowledge and valorize work which, as this reviewer puts it, resonates with CMS but does not necessarily ‘operate within its register’, and so may perhaps slip more easily under the radar of *AMR* editors and reviewers. This possibility is, I suggest, welcome if the purpose of CMS is not to promote or protect the ‘brand’ but, rather, to shift the theory and practice of management in a more progressive direction where ‘difference’ is fully respected, not neglected, disregarded or devalued.
7. Some very minor copy editing has been applied to FTE 3 solely to improve its readability. The earlier drafts – FTE1 and FTE2 – are unchanged.
8. <http://aom.org/Divisions-and-Interest-Groups/Critical-Management-Studies/Critical-Management-Studies.aspx>. Accessed 12 March 2020.
9. I do not question the right of editors to determine which manuscripts, including FTEs, are worthy of publication, even if the decision to reject an FTE is highly unusual. But with that ‘right’ comes, I contend, some responsibility to be accountable for such decisions – which is facilitated by making their basis available for inspection, and impeded by refusals to do so.
10. That said, I readily acknowledge that preparing a *Speaking Out*, with the prospect of delivering a bankable ABS 3* publication, is hardly equivalent to manning the barricades. While I have argued that preparing this *Speaking Out* is defensible, it probably does not compare favourably to the activism of establishing and editing an open access journal, such as *M@n@gement* or *Ephemera*, or the struggles involved in undertaking the arduous and uncertain challenge of becoming a CMS scholar (Bristow et al., 2017).
11. And not least because the 600 subscribers to the critical management list-serve, who could easily connect the author of the *Speaking Out* to a couple of postings from the author that referred to the preparation of the FTE.
12. Byron and Thatcher’s (2016) FTE offers guidance to NAMPers on how to build (and teach) theory, noting at the end of their editorial that colleagues trained outside of NAMP, who are excluded from their intended audience, ‘may have additional insights into approaches for making theoretical contributions’ (Byron and Thatcher’s, 2016: 5–6). The value and contribution of non-NAMP scholarship is seen to reside in extending or strengthening existing, orthodox approaches, without thought to how they might challenge, rather than enhance, NAMP.
13. ‘Neopositivist’ is an imprecise category, so let me be clear about what I mean by it: theory and methodology – whether qualitative or quantitative – is based upon the presumption of an objective social

reality with a determinate nature which is amenable to being mirrored or captured by a Method, or methods, deemed capable of eliminating bias and thereby producing or, better, revealing, valid knowledge of the world.

14. The norms include, for example, the separation of theory development from empirical work undertaken to test and refine theory (as institutionalized in the division between *AMR* and *AMJ*), the reified macro/micro division (as institutionalized in the rotation of *AMR* editors), and the location of phenomena in discrete levels of analysis (as evident in most TOP publications).
15. Labour process theory and empirical studies informed by it are conspicuous by their absence from TOP.
16. The growth of heterodox MOS scholarship had coincided with the establishment of the CMS Division of the AoM and the appearance of a significant body of critical work in so-called 'second tier' journals (e.g. *Human Relations*, *Organization Studies*, *Journal of Management Inquiry* as well as *Organization and Work*, *Employment and Society*).
17. In the case of *AMR*, the risk is particularly high as there are few other journals exclusively dedicated to theory development. The recent appearance of *Organization Theory*, as a sister journal of *Organization Studies*, may 'improve' this situation if, as seems possible, it is (intentionally?) modelled on *AMR*, and so may provide a ready outlet for papers developed for, but then rejected by, *AMR*.
18. 'For research and analysis papers, the *BMJ* has fully open peer review. This means that accepted research and analysis papers will usually have their prepublication history posted alongside them on bmj.com. . . This prepublication history generally comprises all previous versions of the manuscript, the study protocol (mandatory for all clinical trials and encouraged for all other studies at *The BMJ*), the report from the manuscript committee meeting, the reviewers' comments, and the authors' responses to all the comments from reviewers and editors. . . We ask reviewers to sign their reports and declare any competing interests on any manuscripts we send them. Reviewers for *The BMJ* agree to have their signed comments posted if a paper is published, but not otherwise'. Available at <https://www.bmj.com/about-bmj/publishing-model>. Accessed on 21 May 2018.
19. An edited collection that begins to address this deficit in the field of management is appropriately titled *Opening the Black Box of Editorship* (Baruch et al., 2008). Disappointingly, however, contributions to this volume offer little illumination of the mundane practicalities of editorial processes, and so do little to redress the dearth of such studies which may be attributable to scholarly disinterest in the examination of editorial activities or, and perhaps more probably, gatekeepers' denial of access to their study.
20. Another example of such counterfeiting, and one that will be most familiar to orthodox scholars, is the accommodating use of null-hypothesis statistical tests. As Starbuck (2016: 165) argues, these are needlessly applied from fear of their omission eliciting rejection (see also Anonymous, 2015).
21. In my defence, this was largely a consequence of my vocal resistance, but ultimate capitulation, to the insistence of the Editor that I reduce the FTE from 47 to 20 pages.
22. Rather more sanguine assessments are made by commentators who are well entrenched within one of MOS's more established 'boxes' (e.g. Greenwood, 2016; Lounsbury and Beckman, 2015). Symptomatic of such optimism is the claim that 'We' – that is, the OMT Division of the AoM – are 'the most international' (Greenwood, 2016: 28) when a quick comparison with the proportion of international members of the CMS Division refutes this claim. OMT can claim to be the most international division only if, as Greenwood (2016) favours, internationalization is determined by the number of OMT Division members who sit on editorial boards of elite journals (e.g. 45 of 113 on *AMJ*), and when internationalization is measured in terms of appointment at non-US schools rather than where the board members have been trained (e.g. obtained their PhDs). In presenting his analysis, Greenwood excludes consideration of the CMS Division: it is boxed-out as the comparison is made exclusively with BPS (22) and OB (28).
23. Developmental reviewing is said to involve 'intellectual partnership' and 'respect for authors', as well as a process of 'listening to the authors, hearing their voices, and suspending judgment', and thereby 'creat[ing] inclusion' (Ragins, 2015: 4, 6, emphasis added). In the same FTE from which this conception of developmental reviewing is drawn, Ragins also writes that 'We need diverse voices that push forward the frontiers of our knowledge. We need to be inclusive and open to a wide variety of voices. . .irrespective of their school, background, or geographic region'. (Ragins, 2015: 5, emphasis added).

24. At annual meetings of the full *AMR* editorial board, matters of performance, not scholarly content or improving congruence of the journal's contents with key features of its stated mission, dominated proceedings. I do not remember the reporting of any reviews undertaken to evaluate the structures of *AMR* (e.g. editorial team composition) and/or its editorial processes (e.g. accountability of editorial decisions). Instead, numbers and individual achievements – of total submissions, percentages of acceptances, awards for best paper, best reviewer, etc., and especially the position of *AMR* in the ranking of journals – was the focus of the agenda and the reports submitted to the annual editorial board meetings. A strong impression was conveyed of measuring the journal's contribution to scholarship and reputation according to metrics: numbers of submissions, acceptance rates and the trajectory of the journal's Impact Factor, rather than by reference to any initiatives or strategies for developing more effective ways of fulfilling its mission. Any 'taste for science', including the development of 'healthy support for scientists who hold divergent views' (Smolin, 2006: xxii), was displaced, or trumped, by a 'taste for rankings' (Osterloh and Kieser, 2015).
25. To determine whether the communications relating to the FTE provide a typical or exceptional case of editorial evaluation would, to follow orthodox scientific wisdom, require the undertaking of many equivalent, ideally randomly generated, studies of editorial processes across a wide range of journals, while having confidence in the basis of their selection and the preferred framework of their interpretation. Insistence upon such requirements acts rapidly to devalue forms of scholarship that are non-compliant with them.
26. Accounts of critical scholarship in MOS are numerous and are readily accessible by anyone with sufficient intellectual curiosity to seek them out. Restricting my FTE to a primer on CMS would betray a misunderstanding of, or disregard for, the very purpose of critical scholarship: actively to engage with, and change, the world, and not simply to observe and present perspectives on it.

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