Plan

Faces of oppression and resistance: old and new
- the complex context & history of oppression & emancipation
- the utility of realism for studying OE&R (anti-reductionist)

Realisms: old and new
- historical context (highlighting successes): Abolitionism, Feminism, Marxist studies, Labour Process Theory, Critical Realism

Challenges & issues:
- Competition on the ontology market (discourse, ANT, sociomateriality.....)
- Accessibility: CR language
- Methodology: the difficulty of identifying causal mechanisms. The challenge of abduction and retroduction.
- Methods: CR asks for rich, immersive data, which is time consuming to collect (see the decline of ethnographies)
- "Isn't this just good traditional research?" A comment from Harry Collins..... Most 'realist' studies don't feel the need to specify their realism (e.g. WES; Industrial Relations etc)

The SI
- Why didn't more get submitted
- Why didn't more make the grande
- An introduction to the two papers

Conclusion
this reflects the state of development in CR and across academia more generally - striving to "make a difference" is only just becoming the "new" normal, and, elsewhere, engaged scholars have used CR to do impactful research [doffs cap to Monder Ram and colleagues] - the project has just begin, and we are pointing the way!

Realist studies of oppression, emancipation and resistance

Faces of oppression and resistance: old and new

Despite a century of all but continuous growth in global wealth and productivity, income gains in the West, at least since the late 1970s, have remained primarily in the hands of the 0.1%. Consequentially, disparities in health, education and social mobility have also worsened, especially in those countries which are more unequal (Piketty & others). Yet, this accumulation (and denial) of wealth, health and happiness is no accident and can be traced to a complex mix of neo-liberal mechanisms which contribute to the oppression of workforces across the globe.

The oppressive mechanisms of 21st century capitalism combine the old and new in their substance and effects. Thus, whilst practices such as slavery, insecure work, low wages, and colonial exploitation, are themes as familiar to historians as to scholars of modern organizations, more recent techniques and technologies such as off-shore banking, robots, credit default swaps, and information technology have provided modern elites with new mechanisms to appropriate capital, degrade workers, and delegitimise the mechanisms of resistance and emancipation. Together, these and other mechanisms have combined to generate complexes of oppresive practices that are familiar to 21st century workers: the casualisation of work, the low minimum wage, the gig economy, exploitative international supply chains, and debt-laden households. Such mechanisms do not exist in a vacuum. Indeed, they depend upon cultural and discursive contexts for their actualisation, legitimation and reproduction. Moreover,

such mechanisms operate at a variety of levels from the individual to the transnational. Trump's tweets about *'bringing the jobs home'*, for example, are intricately linked with an increasingly disenfranchised and impoverished working class in the USA, the 'race to the bottom' in low-wage economies, and the rise of nationalism and isolationism in economic policy.

A similar mix of old and new mechanisms operating at a variety of levels is also true of those who seek to resist oppression at work and emancipate others. Old practices of resistance such as strikes, the refusal of work, and the harnessing of public outrage have also been added to, and transformed, by modern political, technological and social contexts. For example, the globalisation of the 'Justice for Janitors' movement, was accelerated by a variety of old and new mechanisms operating at a number of levels; from hunger-strikes and alliances with the clergy, though to the agency of Ken Loach in crafting a documentary on the movement and sucessful social media campaigns (Dencik and Wilkin 2015).

In seeking to explain and understand oppression and emancipation, reductive approaches, those that seek to explain the social world solely in terms of, say, events, actor-networks or discourse, face at least three challenges. The first is that reductive approaches struggle to provide a multi-agent or multi-level analysis that includes, for example social structures, people, discourses, social relations and technologies operating in different ways at individual, group, organisational and international levels. Instead, their tendency is to focus on the local, immediate or measurable, resulting in 'thin' descriptions and weak explanations. The second is that reductive explanations often adhere to a relativist ontology and thus tend to put the word *truth* is quotation marks. The difficulty with this for studies of oppression is that if all truth is relative, then one person's oppression may well be another person's emancipation and there is no objective ground to judge one perspective, or indeed theorisation of that perspective, over the other. Thirdly, as people are represented as mere assemblages, events, or discursive subject positions, it is difficult to conceptualise how resistance can occur.

These limitations of reductive approaches have resulted not only in a reduction in extreme reductionist positions (such as *strong* social constructivism), but equally a *de facto* use of realist assumptions in texts which ostensibly reject realist principles (O'Mahoney 2011). Indeed, the complexities outlined above suggest that oppression, resistance and emancipation cannot be analysed adequately without a non-reductive, multi-level analysis that is sensitive to the relations and distinctions between people, material artefacts, social structures, discourses and organisations. It is here that we believe realism, especially critical realism, can help.

Realisms: old and new

Whilst early managerialist interventions in organisations, such as those of Taylor or Ford, were unashamedly positivist, or at least pseudo-scientific, in their approaches, early studies of the workplace were based, at least implicitly, on realist assumptions. Whilst few early studies of workers clearly articulated their ontological and epistemological foundations, many adhered to principles such as a distinction between ontology and epistemology, a commitment to causality, and a non-reductionist conceptualisation of the person. Weber's materialist analyses, for example, whilst emphasising an interpretivist methodology, adhered to a Kantian (realist) distinction between the empirical world and the world of intelligibility (Koch 1994), and, further, rejected a Humean (postivist) notion of causation (Ringer 2000). Durkheim, to take another example, clearly held society to be a *sui generis* reality, and that epistemologically and methodologically, social facts should be treated as real

objects with causal powers. Yet whilst these, and their intellectual progeny, provided insights into the malaises of modernity, and thus the oppression of people, their focus was more description than emancipation. Whilst early realist writings on workplace oppression and emancipation can be traced to Enlightenment theorists such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau or François Charles Fourier, or even earlier religious abolitionist movements, the major social and theoretical influence in this field was, and continues to be Karl Marx.

The realist foundations of Marx's historical materialism and dialectical materialism, which spurred a wealth of realist studies which have examined in depth the causes of workplace oppression, the forms of resistance and the possibilities of emancipation, need little introduction here (Brown et al. 2002). It is pertinent to note, however, that Marx provided an (often explicit) complex realist metaphysics, arguing for a structural, emergent, dialectical, and essentialist ontology linking human properties such as labour power, knowledge, false consciousness, and alientation, with structural phenomena such class conflict and modes of production (Bhaskar, 1979; Lukács 1978).

The influence, and development, of Marxist thought, were felt strongly in the post-war emergence of the sociology of work, especially concerning conflict (Hyman 1972; Nichols and Benyon 1977).

As Elder-Vass (2016), such arrangements are complex, in that they are often not only a mix of oppression and emancipation, but also find traditional Marxist or post-structural critiques wanting.

combine old and new complexes to change, accelerate, and introduce novel forms of oppression.

have modified both what is popularly recognised as oppression and introduced new, complex forms

The occupy movement, the arab spring's economic demands,

The effects…… gig economy and the casualisation of work, through to

Effects – material & ideological

The effects of globalised business, especially since the great recession

slavery, casualisation of work, gig economy, recession, outsourcing, replacement with I.T., globalisation of supply chains, refugees, political extremism, off-shore banking,

= dehumanisation,

Realist studies have good pedigree here…..

have ameliorated some forms of oppression, such as disenfranchised women in Western democracies, but have also generated new forms of exploitation

Table 1 Citations of Marxism & Critical Realism in Management & Organization Journals
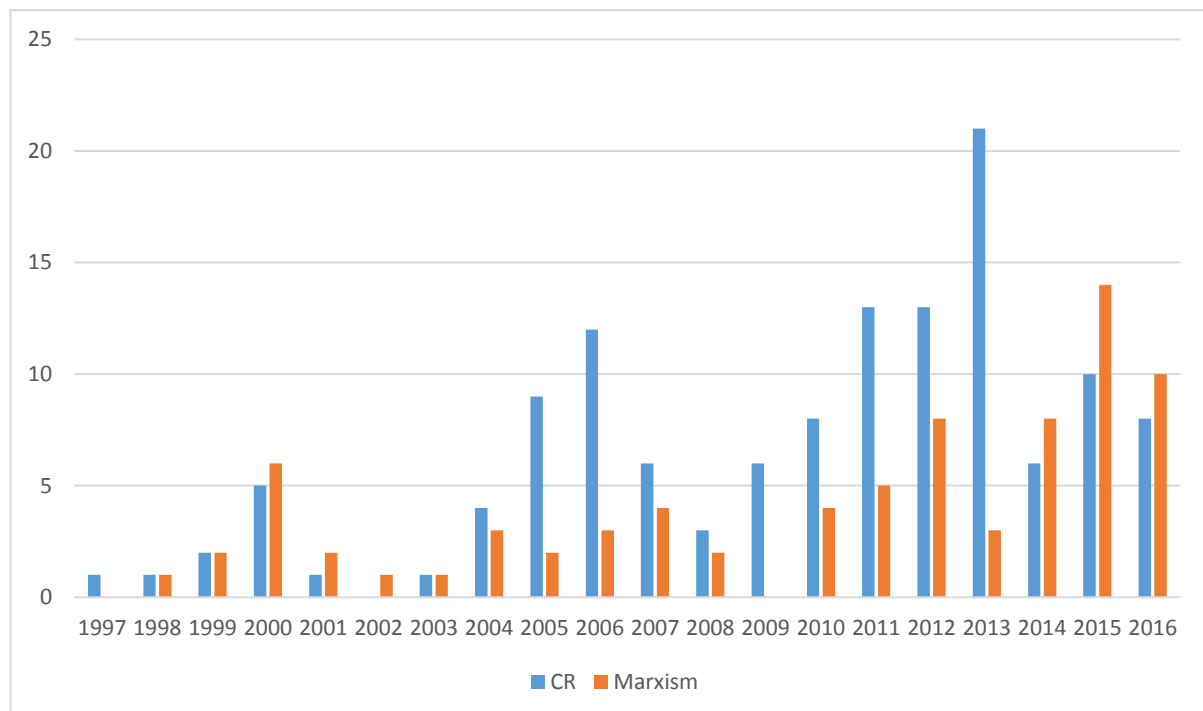
The potential of critical realism

Most obviously, they (re)produce an oppresive ideological architecture which is increasingly legitimised through populist politics and enabled, not least, through sophisticated information technology. Theoretically, this requires more of academics than 'micro-level' studies of workplace discourse, and necessitates a multi-level understanding of capitalism which might integrate Trump's tweets to 'bring US jobs back' with the conditions and consequences of a marginalised and debt-laden working class.

Over the last twenty-five years, critical realism (Bhaskar 1979, Archer 2000) has provided an ontological foundation for multi-layered, emergent analyses in organisation studies (Fleetwood and Ackroyd 2004, Edwards et al. 2014, Brown et al. 2002). The 'critical' in critical realism concerns 'the possibility that an explanatory critique of the ways in which structures of power operate in society can be emancipatory' (Kilduff et al. 2011: 308). Yet, despite this aim, in organisation studies at least, critical realism has rarely fulfilled its potential in explaining sources of oppression *and* the potential for resistance to, and emancipation from, such oppression. Although many realist studies focus on these themes (for example, Reed 2001, Newton 1998, Fleetwood 2005), there are relatively few examples where an empirical approach is used (for exceptions, see Jenkins and Delbridge 2014, Porter 1993, Hart et al. 2004, Vincent 2005). – see also the edited collections of ackroyd and fleetwood…..

For the most part, 'critique' has involved generating rather detached and passive realist analyses of oppression rather being engaged with processes of emancipation (see Ackroyd and Karlson, 2015).

The absence of realist empirical studies of oppression, resistance and emancipation at work is surprising. By distinguishing the person from structure, discourse or action, critical realists frequently claim a superior basis for understanding resistance than alternative approaches (Reed 2000). Moreover, critical realism uses a number of concepts, such as emergence, structure, agency, stratification, transitive/intransitive, abduction and retroduction, which are well suited to developing empirical methods which might make a difference (O'Mahoney and Vincent 2014, Pawson 2004, Edwards et al. 2014, Pawson 2006). Certainly outside of organisation studies, critical realists have progressed non-relativist theories of embodied, reflexive individuals with a (bounded) capacity to resist material and discursive mechanisms of oppression (Sayer 2005, Sayer 2011, Gorski 2013, Smith 2010).

Themes of oppression, resistance and emancipation are, of course, central to a critically-informed organisation studies. The traditional framing of these concepts in Marxist and Labour Process theorising (Thompson and Van den Broek 2010, McCabe 2011) have a strong affinity with critical realism (Brown et al. 2012, Taylor 2006, Thompson 2010). Yet, although these approaches are often defined in opposition to constructivist and post-foundational theorising, we would emphasise the forms of realism that can be found in alternative philosophies. Over the last ten years, for example, a number of authors have sought to emphasise not only the potential of realist approaches to discourse (Fairclough 2005, Chouliaraki and Fairclough 2010, Thompson and Harley 2012) and the realist assumptions of many social constructivists (O'Mahoney 2011). Such work has been paralleled by the re-reading of philosophers such as Foucault, Derrida, Latour and Lacan as realists (Caldwell 2007, Pearce and Woodiwiss 2001, Wright 2004, Clarke 2003). There are also a variety realisms that are used to study oppression, resistance and emancipation outside the Bhaskar / Archer lineage. These are not

limited to, but include work based on MacIntyre (Finchett-Maddock 2015); Polanyi (Levien and Paret 2012), Bourdieu (Dick 2008); Nussbaum (Sayer 2007), and Goffman (Bolton and Boyd 2003). There are also interesting realist developments on emancipation in the sociology of religion (Wight 2006).

In line with these developments, this call seeks *empirical* papers that use a realist approach to identify the processes of workplace or organisational oppression, and explain how resistance or emancipation can occur. We encourage new empirical studies using a variety of lenses and research methods, including those that seek to improve upon extant realist theorising in this area.

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