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Strategic utopianism and the avoidance of dualisms: An interview with Martin Parker.

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Abstract

Martin Parker is a Professor of Organisation Studies at the School of Management, University of Bristol, the lead for the Bristol Inclusive Economy Initiative and a Distinguished Fellow of the Schumacher Institute. He made headlines with his call and his book to *Shut down the business school* (2018). Parker's prolific writings attempt to widen the scope of business and management studies, whether in terms of particular sorts of organisations (the worker co-op, circus, zoo etc.), or ways of representing organising (in art, cartoons, films etc). His recent writing has been about 'alternative' organisations (including a book on outlaws). His most recent books are titled *Life after Covid-19* and *Anarchism, organization and management*. In this wide-ranging interview, much of Martin Parker's fascinating oeuvre is discussed, including the afore-mentioned books and so much more: Parker's work in the Bristol Inclusion Economy Initiative, the dual character of the hidden curriculum in business schools, the incomplete decolonialisation of curricula, and important influences from Daniel Defoe to David Graeber. Despite the horrific pandemic and the impending climate crisis, Parker promotes anti-binary thinking and strategic utopianism.

Jürgen Rudolph (JR): Martin, thank you so much for agreeing to this interview. You're an extremely prolific writer and your publications cover unusually diverse topics, writing a book on *Alternative business. Outlaws crime and culture* (2012) and more recently one on *Daniel Defoe and the Bank of England* (2016). You are obviously actively questioning the more narrow confines of business schools and you have described your role as Professor of Organisation Studies as being "a sociologist in a business school".

Also, our congratulations on your latest book, *Life after Covid-19*, which was just published on 12 August! It is a collection of 17 essays from a variety of thinkers on a wide range of subjects and refreshingly anti-dystopian, you have described your own perspective as one of "relentless optimism" in a recent radio interview. Could you please give us an idea about your thoughts on the pandemic, how it has affected Higher Education (HE) and how Higher Education will evolve as a result of the coronavirus?



Figure 1: Martin Parker

Martin Parker (MP): Of course! There are a series of different questions in there, but we could just pick up the one about the Coronavirus and that book. So, when England locked down in March, I found myself doing a variety of things, in the middle of the ambient anxiety, doing things that I was quite enjoying. So, I was cooking more, I was starting to do a bit of gardening, I wasn't traveling nearly as much. I was having quite a good time, in a strange way, and felt slightly ashamed about talking about it, because it seemed like in the middle of the terror and the death and the pain and all the rest of it, that it was a bit indecent, that somebody like me – with a nice big house and a nice big garden and room to have offices, and no particular financial pressures, was able to behave like this.

So the book reflects the idea that I wanted to document that moment. And also, to think about the variety of ways in which a large number of people were starting to talk about COVID as a dress rehearsal for dealing with climate change. Because the kind of system changes, huge resource transfers, changes of habits and patterns and so on, that we were seeing was precisely the kind of thing that many of

us have been arguing for years, was necessary in order to deal with the threat of climate emergency. So, just as we've been told that nothing could change, everything suddenly did. It reminded me of that moment in 2007 to 2008, when the financial crisis was taking place, with a similar sense of space, of possibility, of opportunity, as older seemingly enduring structures decayed, and were possibly providing spaces for other things to grow.

So it seemed to me that COVID provided a similar sense of that kind of narrative, of crisis providing opportunity, or something like that. The tragedy of the financial crisis of course was that everything just went back pretty much to normal. There were no serious attempts to rethink the global financial system. And my terrible fear now of course is that we're just trying to do the same kind of thing, that the #buildbackbetter ideas are having very marginal effect. And substantially, we're just moving back to a slightly lower carbon version of the same system, which is going to lead to really critical problems in a decade or so.

I can't remember the other bits of the question because it was a big one, wasn't it? [Everybody laughs.] Oh, universities! The COVID crisis exposed some of the fundamental inequalities which have allowed people like me to work at home and so on, whilst other people who are driving taxis and working in care homes were getting infected. So too did the crisis expose – particularly in the UK, I think – the financial instability of the system that's been built over the last 20 years, which is reliant on a particular model of the undergraduate leaving home for three years and paying substantial fees, and also building up substantial amounts of debt. And also the increasing reliance for virtually every UK University on the overseas postgraduate market. Most institutions are effectively trading on the Chinese one child policy. What's happening now is that the whole Ponzi scheme is being exposed as the rather unstable fund transfer that it always was.

The COVID crisis exposed – particularly in the UK... – the financial instability of the system that's been built over the last 20 years, which is reliant on... the undergraduate leaving home for three years and paying substantial amounts of debt. And also the increasing reliance for virtually every UK University on the overseas postgraduate market... What's happening now is that whole Ponzi scheme is being exposed as the rather dangerous fund transfer it always was.

And now we have a position where lots of British universities are chartering airplanes, in order to fly Chinese students, presumably, so they can be locked in halls of residence in various British cities, paying £25,000 to do an MA in Finance or something. So COVID is exposing the real instabilities at the heart of the university system in the UK at the moment, which effectively has been privatised through the use of

Chinese students' fees. I think that those are probably the two most important processes that have taken place in UK HE over the last 20 years: withdrawal of state funding and its replacement by the Chinese student market.

JR: And when we think a little bit ahead, I mean, hopefully there will be a post-pandemic era: Do you see any lasting changes regarding higher education in the UK and elsewhere?

MP: I can't really speak for elsewhere. But in the UK, I think that there will be a number of interesting changes, and we can begin by thinking about their infrastructure. Many universities, for example, have been heavily involved in developing a variety of city centre campuses, and so on. My University, Bristol, is currently engaged in a fairly substantial development next to the railway station, which is the first time, it has kind of built off its main campus in its 150-year history. But that's by no means exceptional, lots of British universities are doing precisely the same kind of stuff and are engaged in various forms of property speculation as a result. Now, a lot of that stuff's going to start to look a bit [MP laughs], *unwise*, given that, say, the University of Bristol has been operating off kitchen tables across the south west of England for the past six months. So the idea of building large amounts of floor space really starts to look a bit dumb. And also, the last report I saw, was suggesting that rents, even now in city centre office space are starting to dry up substantially, because there's such an excess of supply. I'm not quite sure why universities would be engaging in these kinds of developments when they can effectively be renting much of the stuff that's already been built. So, you can imagine those kinds of changes might be taking place in terms of the way that the university thinks about its physical infrastructure.

The other big question, I think, is about the kind of globalisation of the university. In many ways – and I'm thinking here about globalisation, in terms of people, in terms of students and staff – I've been hugely positive about the sheer diversity of staff and students that we have been teaching in UK HE over the last 20 years or so. It's made campuses richer and more interesting and brought in a whole range of different perspectives and ideas. The problem with that is, it is also effectively revealing a financial model that requires financial flows from elsewhere, in order to keep the UK university system going. And that's largely because of the market advantage that we have, which is that we happen to speak the same language as the Americans, which is kind of useful because it means we've got something to sell, and of course, we've got great shopping in London, which many students are enthusiastic about.

This cosmopolitanism of the UK university campus, which is something that I'm very keen on, is something that's effectively being bought by a global system of student finance, which is something that I think is not only being revealed to be very fragile, but also something that increasingly feels to me like a form of neo-colonialism, in which particular forms of knowledge are being sold, despite all the talk about decolonising the curriculum and all the rest of it. But particular forms of knowledge are being sold in particular places and taught by particular kinds of people

to the rest of the world, as if British higher education, with its Victorian badges [MP laughs], were somehow the measure of our civilisation and our advancement.

Despite all the talk about decolonising the curriculum, ...particular forms of knowledge are being sold in particular places and taught by particular kinds of people to the rest of the world, as if British higher education, with its Victorian badges, were somehow the measure of our civilisation and our advancement.

And it is a profoundly retrograde way of thinking about knowledge. Indeed, and this is the real political danger here, you might argue that, say, people from Singapore should be encouraged to study in Singapore and to think about Singaporean traditions and ideas and all the rest of it. The danger of that, of course, is the turning away from cosmopolitanism, too. And I don't know how to balance that stuff, I want the university to be an open, diverse and varied place where a whole series of different traditions come into contact with each other. But at the same time, I don't want it to be part of this kind of colonial Ponzi scheme. I don't know whether that's very clear, but I don't think there's an easy way out of that.

JR: That makes a lot of sense.

Stephen Shukiatis (SS): It's interesting, because I'm thinking, the former Vice-Chancellor of the National University of Singapore [Dr Toh Chin Chye; VC from 1968 to 1975, appointed by Singapore's founding father, Lee Kuan Yew], he tries to balance this by making a distinction, saying that, 'We've just become independent, we're very concerned about not recreating colonialism'. So therefore, 'we are very conscious to decolonise the Humanities and the Arts, because these are the political subjects, and they advance us'. But we're not concerned about how that affects business, engineering and infrastructure development, because those are 'non-political subjects'. And that's where you get the first year, Singapore is independent, it's also the first year it starts a sort of Institute of Human Resource Development, the development of all these technical, non-political subjects that arguably take up where colonialism left off by appearing to be non-political. It's almost like the division of what is considered to be political or not in the university is the fault line on which those things develop (see Sam, 2017; Shukaitis, 2018).

MP: That's a really interesting observation. But both you and I, Stephen, would argue that all forms of knowledge are political, in that sense of positioning particular subjects' entitlements, statuses, capacities and so on. So any form of knowledge is an act of political stabilisation of some kind.

JR: In Australia – which I observe quite a bit, because my organisation is working with quite a few Australian universities – the STEM subjects are favoured over the Humanities, and the price structure will change dramatically. Humanities will see their fees about doubled, whereas STEM subjects will be



Figure 2: Ade Darmawan, "Singapore Human Resources Institute" installation as part of Singapore Biennale 2016: An Atlas of Mirrors, October 27 – February 26, 2017, Singapore Art Museum (SAM). Photograph by Stephen Shukaitis <https://www.singaporeartmuseum.sg/art-events/exhibitions/singapore-biennale-2016>

made cheaper (Doidge & Doyle, 2020). And it's that whole idea that 'well, why would you want to subsidise a lot of government critics?' – which is the anthropologists and so on. Of course, there is a certain dominant ideology behind the STEM subjects.

MP: I agree. We should always be careful as soon as we start to make generalisations about the university. It's always worth asking: 'Does that apply to Dentistry or Particle Physics'? There are ways in which the Social Sciences, Arts, Humanities, standard lefty critique of whatever form of power the university is supposed to represent is often really about the Arts and Social Sciences and just has a kind of shadow version of the STEM subjects: Science, Technology, Engineering, Medicine, as baddies.

But of course, a lot of those baddies are people that we'd be quite keen on in other contexts, architects and engineers who build buildings; or dentists who know about how to mend our teeth; whatever it is, we need and want those forms of expertise and specialisation. One of the things that I'm often pushed back to thinking is that a university isn't necessarily one thing. It's a kind of strange coalition of things. And as soon as we start making big generalisations about it, they often don't really apply to all of it. For example, somebody I've been hanging around a bit recently, who does a lot of stuff on brains, he's a neuroscientist. And the forms of knowledge he's trying to develop are largely about brain functioning in a very material manner. And though there is a politics in that kind of stuff, and there's various involvement from companies with an interest in developing particular kinds of drugs or treatments, it's a much more contingent one. Interestingly, he does have a political view of the university, but it's not necessarily a political view which his particular discipline is at the heart of. It's more a kind of general condemnation of managerialism, or profit-making or property speculation or whatever it might be. But

I think for me, particularly working in Schools of Business and Management, my condemnations of the University are also directly about the forms of knowledge that I have been complicit in reproducing in a whole variety of ways. So, there's an important distinction there.

SS: Have you ever read the book, *The anti-politics machine* by James Ferguson?

MP: Yeah.

SS: The way he talks about international development, where it's about technical expertise, where if there's a problem with it, the solution to problems are always more of the same thing. So, I'm particularly interested in forms of, let's say, expertise, which by removing themselves from having any legitimate politics, basically cut them off from any sort of criticism at all. I mean, there are certainly forms of knowledge which are embedded in expertise in a way, which is not necessarily always that problematic. I mean, I'm happy the dentists know what they're doing [all laugh].

MP: Yes, exactly. I know what you mean. But it seems like, if we homogenise a version of knowledge power, as if all forms of knowledge power are somehow equally troublesome, then there's a danger that a whole variety of forms of expertise, which are relatively benign, are also included as somehow fascist and authoritarian.

If all forms of knowledge power are somehow equally troublesome, then there's a danger that a whole variety of forms of expertise, which are relatively benign, are also included as somehow fascist and authoritarian.

And it seems to me that many forms of expertise are actually pretty useful and praiseworthy and need to be transmitted in effective ways in order that we can carry on doing some of the stuff we do. And that goes for everything from preparing food without poisoning people right the way up to an engineer who doesn't build a wind turbine that falls apart. Although we should be suspicious of everything, as Foucault tells us, it seems to me that there are forms of expertise which I think do not deserve the same kinds of critique as, say, market managerialism.

SS: If I were to risk journalising your work, which is always a big danger, I would say that one of your big things is actually trying to examine particular organising practices and how they work according to their own logic – rather than saying these are all bad – because there are all kinds of expertise. No, they're particularly localised forms of practice that follow a certain kind of logic, that don't necessarily correspond to the way we think of organising in general, but each follow different kinds of social logics. And I would say, one of your overall projects is trying to explore or expand our notion of what organising is, and what comes within that realm.

MP: Yeah, I guess. It's always uncomfortable, for me anyway, when somebody tries to summarise a body of work that I don't see as being particularly coherent. I was interested in

a variety of different things over the last 30 years. And so I wrote different things about different things. And maybe other people can see that more clearly. But sure, one of the things that I guess I keep coming back to, is this idea that the concept of organising needs to be expanded, rethought and so on. And the central trope in the *Shut down the business school* book (2018) is that whole idea that management is a narrow form of organising. Managerialism embeds particular sets of assumptions about a certain cadre of people doing certain kinds of things, for certain kinds of rewards – when actually *organising* is a much broader, more generous, more various concept that really should be the proper object of inquiry. Hence my suggestion that we should be demolishing the Business Schools and building ‘Schools for Organising’.

JR: I would like to ask one more question about your latest book. Because I was saying earlier, that COVID book is refreshingly anti-dystopian, but then I also found a passage in the book, which does sound a bit more dystopian. And allow me to quote from the Introduction of your book: “As the virus has demonstrated, and many of the chapters in this book explore, we are not all in the same boat. If you have a garden, a nice house, money and work in a knowledge-based occupation, lockdown will not have been too painful. If you live in poor quality or overcrowded housing, are a migrant or from an ethnic minority background, or are in precarious employment, you are much more likely to die” (Parker, 2020, p. 2).

So, I'd like to ask, is your optimism based on the rapid reduction in carbon emissions and the return of wildlife? At the end of your introductory chapter, you write that the pandemic may be viewed as “a dress rehearsal, a warning, a reminder that the human relationship with the non-human (whether virus or planet) is at breaking point” (Parker, 2020, p. 10), this of course with reference to the ongoing catastrophic climate change. While this is of utmost importance, don't you think that events like the pandemic won't benefit the so-called one percent more than the other 99%, and make the gap between the Global North and the Global South even larger?

MP: Yes, those are possibilities. In another commentary, I've written about the way in which certain companies like Amazon and Netflix and so on, have been doing incredibly well out of this pandemic, largely because there's a set of big companies which have been providing the infrastructure for many of us to be staying at home and ordering takeaways, and watching Netflix and all the rest of it. The share values of those companies have been going up very nicely indeed. And the personal wealth of people like Jeff Bezos, Elon Musk, Mark Zuckerberg and others significantly increased during the pandemic.

So, in practical terms, I agree with you, and naive utopianism is not going to save us. The reason I keep on coming back to this idea, and it's a phrase I've used in other contexts, is to stress the need for a relentless optimism or a kind of strategic utopianism. I don't think we can do anything else. I think that those of us on the green left, who believe that another world is possible, just have to double down on that belief. Otherwise, you're just going to cuddle yourself in

the duvet and cry, because there is no point in trying to do anything. I remember talking to Stephen, probably 10-15 years ago when we used to work together, about the capture, recuperation or co-optation of different sorts of practices. And I remember at the time, Stephen, you were saying something like, that co-optation is kind of inevitable, it just happens and it keeps on happening. But that doesn't mean that you don't keep on inventing something new and different. We can escape it for a while. And I guess I'd see that sort of relentless utopianism in a similar kind of way. But it would be sort of an act, an attitude, which just refused the pessimism.

The need for a relentless optimism or a kind of strategic utopianism... – I don't think we can do anything else... Otherwise, you're just going to cuddle yourself in the duvet and cry, because there is no point in trying to do anything.

So I understand that Jeff Bezos is probably going to make loads and loads of money from COVID, but that doesn't mean that the future is completely pointless. And we have to keep on having to think about different ways in which we can articulate these futures. And it's the sort of responsibility particularly of people who write and think and claim to have some voice on these things, to not just endlessly tell us that we are doomed, or that this piece of technology is not the answer, or that we can't replace all our energy demands with wind power, and so on. If we list the problems, then we're going to end up in a heap crying. So, we have to think about the future in terms of optimism and possibility, it seems to me it's the only really rational response. And there's a really interesting relation here to people who are now writing about this notion of nostalgia, solastalgia, a particular sort of malaise, a kind of ennui, about the possibility of any human life existing on this planet in any kind of way. And it's not surprising that people respond to that with all sorts of despair and mental health problems and question whether they should have children and all sorts of things like that. So, in which case, surely, we should use that kind of energy, not for despair, but for pointing at the future to make it different. This is the Extinction Rebellion point, isn't it? Make it into anger, make it into joy, make it into a signpost for the way that we would like the future to be. Sorry, was I making a speech? [all laugh]

SS: It's kind of interesting that you brought up the 99%, because I was thinking this morning about some parallels between Martin's writing and David Graeber's writing. And I think they're actually quite similar in terms of exploring value, practicing and exploring modes of organising, exploring ways of living, that are important to focus on – not because we're unaware of what's happening in terms of power and all the other horrible things that are happening in the world. That's certainly part of it. It's like that Gramscian phrase: “Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will”. It's like, needing to keep that something that makes you wanting to get out of the bed, even if you realise that a big chunk of the day is going to be crap.

MP: To be compared to David Graeber is rather special. And yes, I think there's something in that because the parts of David's writing that I've really enjoyed have been precisely where he is kind of exploring the improbable, or laughing at the strange sedimentations of the everyday. My first discipline is Sociology, and I've always understood Sociology as being a particular kind of way of exposing the contingency of the way we live our lives now, noting that since we are making it all up as we're going along, then maybe we can make it up in different sorts of ways. And a lot of David Graeber's writing – though from Anthropology, not from Sociology – shares that sense of the social as being contingent, and consequently, changeable.

SS: I think you both have similar personalities, you're both highly intelligent, very clever people who are also wonderful, lovely to talk to, and self-effacing in a very good way. And I think there's also a deeper link: A lot of David's work is based upon the idea that, for instance, our notions of Anthropology are overly state-centric, and we don't actually see forms of organisation which are outside of the state. You're making a similar move around 'managerial over-narrowly-focusedness', if that's a word. So I think there are similarities and interesting parallels.

MP: That's right, and I was just thinking about other moves in my writing. I don't do this consciously, but if you've written a lot over a long period of time, you keep on turning back and crossing the same territory in different kinds of ways. It's always struck me as strange that people like, say, Giddens, Habermas or Bourdieu, they seemed to unfold a theory. And it's almost as if they find its germs in their 20s. And then they write their big books and so on. I don't have any investment in big theory but more of a sense that there are particular problems that come up in different ways, through thinking about different materials. You can almost imagine it as a series of tracks with particular kinds of densities in certain places as they cross, you cross and recross? And the diverse variety of ways we think about organising is one of them. But that also then spins off into other sorts of ideas, which are more to do with expanding the sorts of evidence that we have for thinking about organising. And one of the papers I was thinking about when I said that was one I did recently on tower cranes (Parker, 2017), because I've always thought tower cranes were really beautiful things. They kind of excite and scare me in equal measure, and I also got kind of obsessed with that figure of the tower crane driver hanging over the city in an illuminated cab at night. Like Batman, what an amazing idea.

Then I thought about the tower crane as a form of organisation, a particular assemblage of materials, and human beings and money and all the rest of it. And then I began to assemble a philosophy or social theory of organising around that object. So, what makes that assemblage possible? That kind of assemblage of human and non-human stuff, very influenced by network theory. If we have a more generous philosophy, a sort of physics of organising, then I think that's going to make it easier for lots of us to understand different sorts of people, materials and practices that are being organised.

JR: Absolutely! You are originally a sociologist and anthropologist that, as I seem to remember you said somewhere, "accidentally" ended up in a business school. Could you please tell us a little more about your early biography, what was your schooling, childhood and youth like and what made you study the subjects that you offered at University? How did your own educational experience influence your own views on teaching and learning? I hope it's not too intrusive a question.

MP: This is the Tristram Shandy moment.

JR: [chuckles] I love Tristram Shandy.

MP: [Jokingly:] I was found in a supermarket carpark. [All laugh.] I was very lucky in the sense that my dad was, what we would call in England, an extramural teacher. So he taught adults and was based at Birmingham University. So I grew up in a house where academic ideas were very much valued. And I felt very easy with that kind of environment, with that sort of habitus. And I think that meant that I've been able to – because of a certain kind of class privilege, I suppose – play in the university relatively easily because it's a place that I've been at home, in and with, since my earliest memories. It's where my dad was. I remember going with my dad to university, and him taking me to the senior common room where there were all these kinds of strange, mostly white, mostly men in tweed, smoking pipes and reading newspapers and stuff like that [laughter]. And so, I suppose at some point, I must have thought, maybe one day, I could smoke a pipe and wear a tweed jacket as well.

When I was at school, I was really attracted to Sociology because I imagined it to be like an applied form of politics or something. I wasn't very interested in politics in terms of the way that politics was taught in UK schools at the time, which is basically a kind of history of institutions really. But I was very interested in the idea of the everyday world as being political and I'm not quite sure where that comes from. But I remember being so excited when I came across the U.S. symbolic interactionists, all showing us something about the ways in which the everyday is constructed.

SS: Cultural Studies maybe?

MP: Yeah, that's later though, I came across Cultural Studies in my Master's degree in Sociology. I mean, a lot of the Birmingham stuff had happened, and I remember reading a bit of it. *Resistance through rituals* [by T. Jefferson, first published in 1975] I think it was, but it wasn't part of the core sociology curriculum or anything. But what excited me, Stephen, was the people like [Erving] Goffman and [Howard] Becker and stuff like that. So it's a bunch of really smart Jews who were just observing the social world with such forensic detail. When you're a teenager and you're terribly conscious of your body and your gaze and your language and all that kind of stuff, and then you start reading people like Goffman and Becker, it sounds like they're doing the same thing. [MP laughs.] So, I love that stuff. I was really interested in it as well as, of course, the usual British predilection for sort of a morbid interest in the symbols of social class. But then I ended up doing a weird undergraduate degree in Anthropology and Cognitive Studies, which was composed

of artificial intelligence, linguistics, philosophy of mind and various other things. And then did a Master's in Sociology and a PhD in Sociology. And the only reason I ended up doing Organisational Sociology was because that was what the PhD was funded to do. So I wasn't particularly interested in it as such, but I kind of twisted it because the concept of organisational culture was becoming interesting at that time. And because of my anthropological background, but also because I'd come across Cultural Studies in my Master's degree, I started to apply some of those tools to the incredibly shit writing on organisational culture in the mid-1980s. Trying to rethink the relation between culture and organisation from an anthropological or cultural studies perspective.

JR: My next question also picks up threads that we have already touched upon when Stevphen was quoting Gramsci: There is a tension between what has been described as reproductionism versus pedagogism. Schugurensky (2014), in a book on Paolo Freire, has described pedagogism as the naïve optimism that places excessive confidence in education as the main remedy for all social problems. The opposite of pedagogism is reproductionism, i.e. the paralysing pessimism that results from arguing that schools are nothing else than tools of the capitalist state to reinforce social inequalities. In your work, you occasionally cite Ivan Illich's (who I am also very interested in) *Deschooling society*, I would say Illich is perhaps more in the reproductionist camp? What are your thoughts? Does education (within current educational systems) have the potential to build a better, more democratic society?

MP: The answer is yes, of course it does. You'd be daft to give up on the idea of education. But stepping back, when somebody offers you a dualism, it's usually a good idea to interrogate it a bit before you choose. Because it seems to me that either position in the question is a pretty dumb one – in the sense that, if you take the first position, the idea is somehow that we can kind of just educate and qualify our ways out of the problems that we face, is clearly stupid, given the kind of conversation we've had earlier about the complicity of the higher education system with a whole range of manifestations of the same sorts of problems we'd need to address.

You'd be daft to give up on the idea of education.

So, no I don't think universities are going to save us by providing us with some perfect form of education. But at the same time, if you just want to go for the idea that all forms of education are characterised by corruption and the reproduction of elite privilege, then you've got kind of no way of describing any processes of social change. It just seems like a bizarrely structuralist version of the iron cage of ideology.

So somewhere in between has to be the sensible position, doesn't it? A profound suspicion about what education institutions do; how they reproduce knowledge; the positions that they provide for us; and the mechanisms that they use to produce knowledge, but at the same time, preserving a sense that universities do provide a whole range of different

spaces for people to do different things. The obvious reference here, and particularly given people that both I and Stevphen know, is Stefano Harney and Fred Moten's idea of the 'undercommons' (Harney & Moten, 2013). And I really like almost the architectural metaphor in that term, the idea that the institution of the university is a place where you can find all sorts of spaces and holes and rabbit warrens in order to do interesting stuff.

So for example, at the moment, half of my work involves a set of projects with a variety of green and left activist groups across the City of Bristol. And I'm expropriating the resources of the university in order to try and connect us to a variety of people who I think are doing good things in co-ops, low carbon initiatives, industrial democracy and a whole variety of things. But the university is quite positive about that, because it sees it as part of its civic engagement remit, and so on, which is largely how I'm getting a lot of this stuff funded. And that's just fine, they can use that as part of their corporate social responsibility branding. At the same time, it seems to me that I might actually be doing something useful for a variety of organisations that I feel positive about, by getting them rooms and sandwiches and money and expertise and the possibility of bidding for grants and things like that. So, I think I can use the university and be suspicious of it and do some useful stuff at the same time. So basically 'yes!' is the answer. And I refuse the dualism.

I think I can use the university and be suspicious of it and do some useful stuff at the same time... And I refuse the dualism.

SS: If I can tell an anecdote that I think illustrates the same idea: When I was starting my PhD in 2004, I was having a chat with Martin. And I asked him, 'Martin, what's Critical Management Studies? I don't understand it'. He explained to me what it is. And his answer was perfect: 'Oh, I don't know. What do you want it to be? Make it that'. [MP laughs.] And it's a perfect answer at two levels. One, it was a bullshit answer. He clearly knew what it was, he spent 10 years writing about it, right?

I asked him, 'Martin, what's Critical Management Studies? I don't understand it'... His answer was perfect: 'Oh, I don't know. What do you want it to be? Make it that'

MP: [mock-threateningly:] You're calling your supervisor a bullshitter?! [Everybody laughs.]

SS: A very good bullshitter, but a bullshitter. But you're deliberately putting off answering the question with what it actually was. Because saying what it actually was would limit what it could be. So you were sort of delaying this sort of reproductionist argument, you might say, by saying, 'How can we use this space? How can we create this space? How can we use these resources to do something actually exciting, rather than worrying about what it properly is, or should be?'

MP: Absolutely. And you ran with that, right? But I guess I was also understanding you in terms of the idea that if I put you in some kind of box, you're just going to kick it over anyway. So, what's the point of me saying 'it's this, this and this, go away and read Alvesson and Willmott [(Eds., 2003)], and then come back and tell me what they said', like that would work? [SS and MP laugh.] CMS, from the early 1990s onwards, was for me a really exciting space that opened up all sorts of possible conversations. And over the intervening nearly 30 years, those spaces have gradually become more and more institutionalised and sclerotic. There are journals, and there are the standard citations and all this kind of stuff, I am not really interested in it anymore. But that doesn't mean it wasn't really useful at the time. It was wonderful. I remember going to the first Critical Management Studies conference, it must have been sort of mid-1990s or something, I suppose, and just meeting loads of people who were interested in the kinds of things I was interested in, and it was great. It was really good.

SS: Was it back when Britpop was exciting?

MP: [MP bursts out in laughter.] It was the Beatles and The Rolling Stones, you young person! [All laugh.]

JR: You use your critical-sociological perspective on the business school itself. Your early 'attacks' on the business school can be found in your book published in 2002, *Against management*. They sort of culminated, if I understand this correctly, in 2018 with *Shut down the business school* (that I had the pleasure to review in JALT).

MP: Thank you!

JR: The first part is a devastating critique of the business school, the second the development of an alternative School of Organising that could replace the B-school. Could you please elaborate?

MP: Yes, of course. So, if I can summarise the argument very quickly, essentially, it's the idea that the business school, to put it very directly, is a kind of ideological finishing school for capitalism.

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So what does the business school do? It teaches capitalism. And I do make that argument a number of different ways. But I think, probably the crucial one is to say that effectively the business school substantially ignores all the alternatives to capitalist practices, makes the corporation into the kind of poster kid of organising, makes management into the kind of key organising principle for human beings, embedding certain notions of hierarchy, and suggests that growth is the only economic principle that matters.

Now, that's a very quick overview. But essentially, what I try and do then in the sort of the hinge of the book – and this is stuff I was doing back in the *Against management book*,

The business school substantially ignores all the alternatives to capitalist practices, makes the corporation into the kind of poster kid of organising.

you're absolutely right – is to disentangle management from organising more generally. So in other words, to say that organising is the concept which is of most use to us here, in trying to understand how people and things come together to do stuff. Management is a particular instantiation of organising. So we need to put management in its place, and explore the wide variety of ways in which organising can happen.

And when I'm doing talks, one of the ways in which I illustrate this is with reference to another of the books in that series which was a dictionary of alternatives and utopianism that I did with a couple of friends. And the idea of this book originally was that it was going to be a kind of gigantic Encyclopedia of different ways in which we could think about organising. It was going to include actually existing intentional communities and utopias, as well as fictional utopias and examples from organised crime and terrorism, and different green sustainable practices, whatever we could think of. And one of the entries was going to be 'Management', which we could describe as 'a particular practice that was of interest to business schools in the late 20th century'. [MP laughs.]

And we produced this gigantic manuscript, which was about a quarter million words long. And then we sent it to Zed Books, the publisher, and they said, 'This is way too long for us to publish, you got to cut loads of it out'. So it ended up as a big book, but it should have been twice that size. And, potentially, I imagine that if you can use the pretentious theoretical term here, as a kind of *rhizome* that would just connect all sorts of stuff. In fact, Stephen, I was going to employ you to build a website in which people were going to add examples of organising, remember this, and we managed to get permission from Zed to do it?

SS: Yeah.

MP: So the idea was, it would just kind of grow with more and more people adding more and more stuff to either a sort of political-intellectual project or an artwork. But it was just going to be one example amongst lots of others. And then that's essentially how I came up with the argument in the *Shut down the business school* book. What we've got to do is imagine a 'school for organising', which teaches, or helps us to learn from a whole variety of different organising practices, anthropological, sociological, historical, geographic, whatever they might be, in order that we can think about the sheer diversity of things that we might need to do to address the various crises we face. So, organising becomes a way of teaching people how to use a wide variety of different kinds of tools, in order to deal with different kinds of circumstances, rather than thinking about a one best way to reproduce a particular form of global capitalism.

SS: I suppose one way to reframe the move might be following the saying that we're provincialising Management

by saying 'it's one system rather than being a universal one'.

MP: Absolutely. And I think that's a really nice way of expressing it. So yes, there may well be occasions when we want to use aspects of managerialism to address some of the things that we want to do, but we need to be quite specific in thinking about possible alternative ways of doing what we do. So, for example, it seems to me that if we are dealing with complex logistical problems, then using tools of operations management makes a lot of sense to do this stuff effectively. But that's not the same as saying 'Amazon's great', right? [MP laughs.] Those are two different statements. And we need to disentangle them. And I suppose the phrase I keep coming back to now, which I guess in some ways captures a lot of what I've tried to do in terms of what Stephen said earlier, is 'organising is politics made durable'. This is to twist a phrase from Bruno Latour about technology as a kind of a sedimentation of a particular set of political assumptions. But I like that idea of us treating organising as a way of thinking about the political and every particular instantiation of organising, therefore, as something we should assess on political terms. And that means asking: 'What's it doing for us? What kind of positions does it produce? How much carbon does it produce?' Or whatever evaluations we might want to make of it at the time.

JR: You speak of the hidden curriculum. In the context of business schools, I believe the hidden curriculum takes on a dual meaning. First, the agenda of corporate capitalism is somewhat hidden: the curriculum largely offers a corporate capitalist, neoliberal perspective that downplays 'externalities' such as climate change, environmental destruction and degradation, and the hegemony of transnational multi-billion dollar enterprises, raising the question whether B-schools provide education or ideology. The second part of your argument of a hidden curriculum is perhaps less obvious – and we have started to talk about this of course – but you have developed the theme of alternative organisations extensively in various publications. You just told us the quite unfortunate story about the publication of the dictionary, it would have been so great to have the long version actually.

There are cooperatives (that employ millions globally), communes, tribes, local exchange trading systems, collectives, sociocracies, mutual societies, to mention but a few. Together with co-editors, you have published *The dictionary of alternatives. Utopianism & organization* (2007) and *The Routledge companion to alternative organization* (2014) that explore many alternative organisations through a great variety of historical and geographically diverse instances.

You have compared B-schools that ignore alternative forms of organisation with history departments that only teach about certain centuries at the expense of all others or a geography department that only talks about two continents instead of the whole world. Could you provide us with some of your favourite examples of alternative organisations (in Parker, 2018, you for instance discuss the Suma co-op case study) from an industry of your choice? And in terms of HE, what are some of the interesting projects that come close to your own theoretical approach? Mondragon or perhaps the

Bristol Inclusive Economy Initiative (that you have already started to talk about)?

MP: The latter is probably the most helpful one to concentrate on in the sense that what I'm trying to do now after my endless complaints about the business school is to see how we might be able to use the business school, and a particular discourse about the Civic University and civic engagement. So when I arrived at Bristol, I was given the opportunity to repurpose an existing research unit, and turn it into a sort of alternative economy unit. But I was also very concerned that this would not simply be a bunch of academics going out to find out what the co-op is doing, and then coming back to their offices and writing a paper in a journal about it. I wanted it to be an initiative, not an institute, an initiative that pushed forward a variety of co-produced projects, in which I got academics who are committed to various kinds of green, left politics to engage with a variety of organisations in their city that were doing the same. Now Bristol is really fantastic in this regard, because it's had a very long and honourable tradition of radicalism, particularly of green politics, and lots of key green institutions are based there. And there is also a great deal of engagement in ways of thinking about how business practices in the city might be changed in order to address local inequalities of class, gender and ethnicity, as well as carbon emissions targets and so on.

Now, on the one hand, you can talk about business approaches such as the B-Corp [private certification of for-profit companies, distinct from the legal designation as a Benefit corporation]. A B-Corp doesn't necessarily have to change anything about its organisational structure, its forms of ownership, management, control, and so on. But it does have to commit to reporting on a wide range of different social value indicators, whether those be wage multiples, or carbon emissions, community engagement, or whatever it might be. And so we've been trying to think about ways in which we can work with the B Corp movement, in order to encourage more and more British organisations to take on that particular form of certification. It's basically like a Kitemark, if you see a B Corp organisation, that they've at least tried to do something good about the world that they have it.

On the other hand, you can think about much more enduring ways in which forms of ownership or control can be, as the cliché goes, 'baked into' the way an organisation is constituted. And it's those that I've always been most interested in. We are then referring to various forms of employee ownership of which the purest model, of course, is the worker cooperative.

So for example, in Bristol, one of the organisations we've been talking to is the Bristol Bike Project. This is a tiny co-op that employs about ten people, and it sells and repairs bicycles, which seem like pretty good things to me. And they give away their surplus as free bikes to people who can't afford them in order that they can travel around the city without having a car. It's a tiny organisation, and they don't really have time to engage with the university because they're too busy mending bikes and running the organisation.

So that presents some really interesting problems. So, first of all, can the elephant of Bristol University helpfully hold hands with the tiny little mouse that is the Bristol Bike Project? If that's the case – and that's an open question for me – what helpful things can we do for them? How can we assist them? When I was talking to one of their coordinators about this stuff, she was telling me that the things that they were most interested in knowing about were marketing, accounting, and strategy. These seemed to be the practical forms of knowledge that might help them think about how they grow the business, make it more enduring, build up a bit of a cash surplus that can see them through hard times, whatever it might be. So actually, what they want is quite prosaic, but they can't afford to pay for it, and neither have they got the time to do it. So, one of the things that you might need to do is to pay them to have time to talk to you, or provide services for free. Some of my colleagues have used this contact to offer some free training on accounting for a variety of co-ops in the city. More generally, how could the university set up a pro bono business advice clinic to co-ops and mutuals of different kinds that can't afford to pay for some shiny consultants coming in – and probably, ideologically, wouldn't feel very comfortable with that anyway? How can the knowledge that we presumably have about organising help them understand how they do their organising a bit better? And, of course, they can define better in whatever way they want to.

Again, this goes back to you, Stephen, this conversation is rotating as much around you as it is about me. So do you remember us meeting in London once, and you had just been to an anarchist bookshop, I think, and were coming back with a great big pile of books, and were furious because they were closed because they had not done their rota properly, or something like that. And then we started talking about writing a book called 'Management for Anarchists'. It was going to be pitched as 'this is what you've got to do in order not to lose money, stupid!', stripping out all the shiny turbo capitalist rubbish and just describing some techniques. So we just describe aspects of organising in quite prosaic terms. This is what double entry bookkeeping looks like. This is why it's a good idea to have a rota, or to be thinking about what you want the business to look like in a year's time.

So a very simple and direct form of advice. I guess that's where I am at the moment. How do we find useful ways of helping alternative economy organisations do the stuff that they want to do? And sometimes that will be about using the knowledge that's usually sequestered within the university and you only get for money. Sometimes it's going to be about holding hands with them, because sometimes they are quite keen on bidding for various forms of funding, or researching the impact of their products or services. It's sometimes very useful to them to be associated with an university when they do that, to say that they're academically accredited and that their evaluation report has been signed off by professor such and such, those kinds of things. So we can pick our allies, we can find the people that we want to work with, and help them to grow, help them to thrive in various ways. I think that's a way of using the institution productively.

JR: Earlier, you were talking about Critical Management Studies, and that it was very exciting in the 1990s. I have a question, which goes back a lot further than the 1990s. And I'm also using a quote, when you are quoting the novelist Daniel Defoe. In 1731, Defoe suggested that: "I think our meer scholars are a kind of mechanicks in the schools, for they deal in words and syllables as haberdashers deal in small ware. They trade in measure, quantities, dactyls, and spondaes, as instrument-makers do in quadrants, rules, squares, and compasses; etymologyes, and derivations, prepositions and terminations, points, commas, colons and semi-colons, etc. Are the product of their brain, just as gods and devils are made in Italy by every carver and painter, and they fix them in their proper stations in perspective, just as they do in nitches and glass windows" (Hamilton & Parker, 2016, p. 89). Would you say that this characteristic of the scholar as "a kind of mechanick" still largely applies in 2020?

MP: I think it does. I've been fascinated by Defoe for a bit, because he's such an interesting and mysterious character. And lots of the things that are attributed to Defoe probably weren't written by him either. So Defoe is multiple in some senses, with lots of possible and lots of mysterious things about who he was and why he wrote. But he was quite interested in business and organisation. And he was writing at a moment when ideas about business, adventurers and projecters were starting to coalesce. And so that's what that book is about, about that moment when capitalist enterprise is coming into view. I like his simultaneous scepticism and optimism about institutions. Defoe is very often highly critical, as a dissenter, of established institutions, such as the Universities of Oxford, and Cambridge. But at the same time, he sees modernising institutions, and particularly entrepreneurial practices as very exciting developments that might produce a different kind of world. So, in some senses, that's quite a modern way of thinking. He is suspicious of the past and imagining the possibilities of the future.

But going back to the particularities of that quote, in a way that the university has developed as a kind of an internal language game. And my sense is that though there are certain things I would want to defend, perhaps some ideas about 'scholarship', during the duration of my career these ideas have been suborned to a particular version of a kind of very narrow language game, like Hermann Hesse's glass bead game, where we publish articles written in highly exclusionary language which are only ever read by a tiny number of people who also speak that language.

It's a complicated puzzle that only the adept can play particularly well. And I've been the beneficiary of that stuff. Undoubtedly, a lot of the things that I've published have been in precisely those journals that nobody ever reads. And it's been good for my career in a variety of ways. But I'm increasingly feeling that there's a certain circularity in those contributions. And I suppose, annoyed, too, that so many people associated with supposedly critical positions – and I'm not just thinking about Critical Management Studies here, I'm thinking about supposedly critical people, right the way across the Arts and Social Sciences – somehow think that writing an article in some recondite journal is a sufficient form of politics. I just don't, I really don't anymore. I don't get that version of the political, it seems to be self-

indulgent and ineffective. And I want to spend much more time not doing that than doing it.

That being said, because I don't like the dualism, one of my next projects will be as obscure as you get. So one of the things I want to do is to write a big good book on the philosophy of organising. Because it seems to me that organising is not a term that philosophers have ever really thought very systematically about, with the partial exception of Deleuze and Guattari and Michel Serres. But there's a really interesting conundrum there for me, but I think I have to address in quite scholastic ways. And that's not a book I'm imagining being highly impactful. I would be writing it for me, and a very small number of people like me, but that's kind of okay, too, I think. It's just a generalisation of that practice that I think I'm finding so difficult at the moment. And also its complicity with, effectively, the construction of big international publishing firms that have done enormously well out of proliferating the variety of journals that we all publish in, and they're doing very nicely from because we and our readers have to pay to get access to our work.

JR: Absolutely! Actually, that's completely related to the next question that I would like to ask. Because it's about journals and knowledge production and so on. You have been the Editor-in-chief of *Organization*, you sit on various Editorial Boards (e.g. *Journal of Change Management*) and you are extremely well-published (you have a staggering near-10,000 citations on Google Scholar). We also read with great interest on your website that one of your future projects is to write a history of journals. What are your views on Open Access publishing, author processing charges and other such fees, Creative Commons licenses? And how about journal impact factors, h index, i-10 index, Altmetrics and other metrics that supposedly measure the quality of academic publications?

MP: Yeah, it's interesting, isn't it? I publish a lot and I've also been very critical about the publishing system. I think we can talk about this in substantially two different ways.

One of them is to consider the way in which a particular kind of knowledge publishing system now benefits a number of the actors within that system, whether you're talking about the huge knowledge companies, who might own a whole variety of different knowledge assets. And there's about five of them in the world, Thompson Reuters, Wiley, Ingenta and various others. And our little journal was just one part of the knowledge assets that they're involved in and trading on. So in that sense, we're a very small part of a much bigger thing. There's all sorts of other forms of data that they're interested in, like stock market prices, or property values in different cities, knowledge assets, or whatever it might be. These big corporations now monetise the knowledge that academics produce.

The other consideration is to think about how academics have internalised particular sorts of ideas about their value and their role in terms of journal publication. And that's been particularly intense, I think, probably more than any other country, in the UK during my career as a result of the Research Assessment, and then Research Excellence exercises. So many of the academics who are my colleagues

and peers now really are defined, and define themselves, in terms of their success at publishing in a small number of journals. So, being adept at that particular kind of game brings rewards, in terms of promotion and status. And that seems to me to be terribly unproductive in terms of either getting heard or developing work that can attach itself to the world in productive ways. As I said, it's a glass bead game, an internal conversation between academics. So I am profoundly suspicious about those kinds of practices. And particularly in the context of a general information economy, where we can have a whole variety of forms of knowledge and information, whether fake or useful, at the click of a button. I'm not quite sure what the future of the academic as a knowledge specialist is, in those kinds of contexts.

Lets take the example of COVID again. During early lockdown, I was reading a lot of the commentary and there were many excellent people writing really interesting and effective things. But most of them were political activists, journalists, bloggers and so on. Some of them were academics, but only some of them. And most of the academics were writing things that were much more specific and targeted, and about a particular aspect of COVID. So we really are only one player in the knowledge marketplace. And maybe we need to find ways of not muffling ourselves in the ways that we do currently. Finding ways of communicating more effectively.

Now, you talked about the kind of fact that I write a lot, and the reason I write a lot is because I really enjoy writing. For me writing is a practice that I've always found joyful and life-enhancing. So, I do a lot of it, because it's fun for me. Many academics now, I think, have been schooled into a form of writing that is a kind of writing in advance of pain. A writing which expects that you're going to be smacked by the big brother fairly soon. And as a result, their writing is very often quite stilted, quite specific, quite caveated, and coded in various ways, and ends up as a particular kind of language that's very internal, very difficult to get a handle on if you are outside the community. So it produces prickly texts. You can't really kind of land on them and find a home in it easily. So I think we need to teach academics how to write, I think we should all have mandatory courses in the PhD on how you communicate effectively. How do you write like a journalist? How do you write an 800-word piece for *The Conversation*? Or a decent blog entry? Or maybe even a popular book of some description that might actually get some sales? How do we do that stuff? Rather than writing this incredibly dense and often repelling prose?

JR: Yeah, I got this book by Billig, *Learn to write badly. How to succeed in the Social Sciences* (2013). And I think that also describes the situation very well.

MP: Yeah, that's a really nice book, Billig talks a lot about the ways in which particular sorts of sentence constructions and neologisms and phrasings allow us to recognise what academic work is like, what it does, as a particular kind of genre, almost. But that genre is so obscure and technical that the vast majority of people just can't get it. Just a quick anecdote on that. Many years ago, now, I wrote a book about pirates and outlaws and things (Parker, 2013). And I thought I'd written a real page turner, it's going to be a breakthrough book. Me and Naomi Klein, we're going to be

hanging around together pretty soon. And then my friend Kay, who's a really smart woman, not an academic, said 'this looks interesting, I'll have a go at that'. And she downloaded it and then emailed me a week or two later, saying 'I'm sure it's very good and everything, but I don't read books with references'. Now I'm a reasonable writer, and it was an interesting topic, but it's so hard to write something that really does appeal to a wider range of people. I don't know if *Shut down the business school* is more successful in that regard. I was very keen on trying to write that in as open a way as possible. But I don't know whether it's successful or not.

JR: In my opinion, very successful.

MP: It's not just about writing of course, because there are a variety of things that we need to do to the promotions criteria and appointments and the ways in which we think about academic labour and all the rest of it, in order to change the evaluations that academics have of each other and of themselves. But also, I think that there are kind of some practical tools, some ways in which we can help people think about writing as being fun, as being joyful. I've supervised many PhD students over the years, and only a very few of them would talk about writing positively. They were writing in advance of the idea that Professor Parker was going to give them a kick in the head after I told them that their referencing was wrong. I don't think you were ever particularly worried about that, Stephen! But the idea that you're writing defensively, rather than expansively seems such a poor place to start from, if you want to open up ideas for a reader.

SS: I think you could expand that model to publishing as well. Publishing, like writing, should be an act of joy. It's something you do with others, where you protect a library and open up a space for being together rather than publishing so someone can kick you in the head.

MP: I think that's true. And it means that the economy of books and journals is kind of important, isn't it? Because there are a variety of university and radical publishers who have continued to produce excellent books and will continue to do so. The forms of publishing we're talking about are basically those which are mostly owned and controlled by a series of large conglomerates. And many of their kind of structures now effectively mean that they need to sell X number of copies in order to pay for a large infrastructure of distribution and marketing and all the rest of. And that means that they tend to go for safe stuff, they tend to reproduce things, which they know will sell in lots of different territories in reasonably big quantities. That's not a universal rule. But it's a general tendency, isn't it? So, one of the metaphors I quite often use in this regard is the idea of the rock tumbler. So you might start off with a really beautiful argument or book or idea or article. And then you put it into the kind of the rock tumbler of publishing, and it gets all these edges knocked off. And then it comes out smooth and harmless, and it can find itself a home within the economy of academic publishing. And very often, that means that you might start off with something good, but after the editors and the reviewers had a go at it, then it's just as bland as everything else.

JR: Is your alternative/complementary textbook on *Anarchism, organization and management. Critical perspectives for students* (2020) an effort to create sort of an alternative, 'parallel universe' curriculum – in case the business school does not get shut down, at least students can read your text parallel to the 'Organisational Behavior' (an Americanism that we also dislike) etc. standard vanilla textbooks?

MP: Yeah, that was definitely the idea. So this project started with two PhD students at Leicester, both of whom were influenced by anarchist ideas in various ways. And we talked about the idea of a textbook, and it's got text boxes and quick explanations of Kropotkin, Goldman and all the rest of them. And it's addressed to second- or third-year undergraduate students, and the idea was that you could recommend this as well as the U.S. textbook. That was what we were trying to go for. Here's what you need to know in order to pass the exam, but why don't you read this stuff as well, because that might be interesting? So, a fairly obvious example. So this is what they tell you that leadership is and why leadership is important and all that kind of stuff. But in our 'dark side' text, this is what anarchists have thought about leadership, it doesn't mean leadership is a redundant concept. You can think about it in a variety of different ways, temporary, collective, distributed or whatever. So yes, it was an attempt to think seriously about how we might talk to students about some of the ideas that they're not presented with. The problem was that the book came out just at the start of COVID. And so effectively it has been buried beneath the virus. So we've talked about trying to do some other kind of launch event later, just because we really do want it to be used. It wasn't meant to be a kind of vanity project, just sitting in Routledge's warehouse gathering dust.

JR: I think it's very nice book. And I certainly enjoyed reading many of the entries, because it really makes you think! I've been teaching these things for one or two decades. And it's so important to have an alternative perspective on it, and to critically question all these concepts.

SS: Martin had made a similar earlier effort in, I think, in 2005, with your book *For business ethics*, where you were trying to say: Here are what you need to know about business ethics. And here's how you can push that in a sort of more useful direction.

MP: Yeah, I think that's probably true. It's a similar kind of project, I actually hadn't thought about that. It's worth just kind of going back to anarchism, because it does seem to me that anarchism is the purest example of the idea that organising is contingent on circumstances. Because the stupidest thing you can say about anarchists is that they're not interested in organisation, that they don't believe in organisations, when they are absolutely committed to thinking about organising, but making it present in a way that allows them to complain about the aspects of it, they don't like very much. So in a sense, it's the best form of organisation theory we have, because it takes organising seriously. And it absolutely embeds that notion of organising as politics made durable. And the debates between a whole variety of different sorts of anarchists are very instructive in terms of different ways in which you might think about the

various rights, privileges and entitlements of human beings, whether individuals or collectives.

JR: Thank you so much for sharing your views and experiences, and summarising your work for us. Earlier, we already talked a bit about your exciting project to write a history of journals that I find super interesting, because as an editor of a very small and humble journal, I like to think about these things also from a historical perspective. And I certainly love to hear more about that particular project. Any other future projects? I mean, you already mentioned the philosophy of organising.

MP: Of course, I've got a long list of imaginary books I can bore you with, The journal one I would like to do at some stage. It would be a kind of Foucauldian history of knowledge practices, I think, that's what I'd be interested in doing is kind of trying to understand how the idea of the journal sedimented particular ideas about social class, but also masculinity and ethnicity and so on. Certain ideas emerging in coffee shops in cities across the global North produced this notion of the journal as a really interesting mechanism for an additive version of knowledge – in which you could say something like this. Dr. Boyle did this experiment last year, and he seems to have produced these particular kinds of outcome. So what if we did this kind of experiment? So I took Dr. Boyle's work, and then I did something else. And then, people could actually start to read about this project of building knowledge, which is certainly easy to criticise in lots of different ways. But it was also an extraordinarily world-changing way of thinking about how you collect the world together. So I don't just want to criticise some big corporation for making money from journals because I'm interested in the ways in which the idea of the journal also allowed for a very productive form of knowledge accumulation.

But there's loads of things I want to write about, and I won't have time to do them all. What I tend to do is I get interested in something, and then I start collecting piles of things on it, books, articles, comics, and all sorts of stuff. And then about five years after I thought of the thing, then I start to write digesting all the fragments as I go along.

What I tend to do is I get interested in something, and then I start collecting piles of things on it, books, articles, comics, and all sorts of stuff. And then about five years after I thought of the thing, then I start to write about it.

So the thing I'm writing about the moment or will be, on weeds. I got really interested in the idea of the weed as a concept, and particularly thinking about it in terms of relationship between organisation and disorganisation. And I think its an early foray into the philosophy of organising project. I've been reading lots of contemporary nature writing, and noticing the way that they think about disorganisation, disorder and cultivation. And I think it also kind of reflects my ambient horror about the climate crisis stuff too. I've never been particularly interested in trees and

now I am trying to notice them a bit more. And then there's a variety of other projects. I'm going to write something on comic books because I've always been interested in them, and there's another Foucauldian book on the history of institutions. I've done work on the circus, and the zoo and they have been shadowed by Foucault's idea of the 'great incarceration' in which he writes about prisons and schools and hospitals and so on. I want to expand that argument and talk about the 'great institutionalisation'. So this is pretty much the same moment when we're seeing prisons and hospitals and schools and so on emerging. But add to that museums and art galleries, archives and opera houses, universities and zoos, and parks, and a whole range of ways in which things have been collected together, and encased for particular sorts of rather specialist purposes. And I'd like to write something on that, but that's a gigantic project.

JR: And is there anything that we have not discussed yet that you would like to raise?

MP: This is like the job interview question. At this point, would you think worse of me if I say no?

JR: No! [all laugh]

MP: Because at this point in the job interview, the panel are thinking: I really hope he doesn't ask another question, because I want a wee.

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