

CALL FOR PAPERS

LACAN AT WORK

**Conference to be held at Copenhagen Business School
Copenhagen, Denmark, 4-6 September 2008**

Keynote speakers:

**Ian Parker, Manchester Metropolitan University
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To imagine psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan at work is improbable if not outright amusing. If alive today, one could be sure that Lacan's eccentric style, often with a crooked cigar in his hand, as well as his inexhaustible ability to coin new terms, would have attracted the interest and fascination of some business leaders – at least those who most strenuously search for novel and adventurous ideas. But Lacan's unfailing desire to turn things on their head, and his refusal to make things easy for his audience would have made this career a short one. Lacan openly claimed that he wished not to be understood too quickly. In the world of work, this is rarely a commended attitude.

But Lacan's slim chances of making a career in a business does not mean that he has nothing of importance to tell us about work and organizations. On the contrary, Lacan's life-long commitment to psychoanalysis has led him to draw from and to develop a number of fields, many of which are of clear relevance for the study of work and organizations. One of the most important of these is the theory of the subject. Throughout his career he opposed his theory of the subject to the individual and conscious subject of bourgeois philosophy, of psychology and of economic discourse. Indeed, Lacan's critique of the subject constitutes a powerful attack against today's ideology of emancipation through 'becoming oneself'.

By removing the ego from the centre-stage, and at the same time reactivating the Cartesian cogito, Lacan throws new light on at least seven areas which we suggest are important for studying work, management and organizations:

1. Discourse

What is the function and field of speech and discourse? Discourse has today been almost captured by the technocrats of communication and sensible exchange of meaning, and discourse analysis has become a technique for understanding organizational discourse and manipulating 'talk at work'. Such a treatment of discourse leaves little space for ethics, and fails to recognise the simultaneously constitutive and slippery nature of discourse.

2. Subject

The question of the self, which usually moves between cognitive studies and social psychology, has traditionally been hectored by a psychologism, which mistakenly

perceives external conditions as the result of an inner psychology. All too often, the ‘working subject’ appears to be articulated along the axis structure-agency, and as such, an appreciation of the ways in which subjectivity is ‘extimate’ to its constitutive influences remains needed.

3. Theory

Despite many advances in addressing subjectivity, organization theory continues to be baffled by the question of the subject. Lacanian psychoanalysis is wholeheartedly committed to the central aspects of the subject formation, thus shedding light on issues such as desire, enjoyment, fantasies, and transference which have been largely omitted from the uptake of poststructuralist theory in studies of work and organization.

4. Enjoyment

Lately, much organization theory has signalled the urgency of theoretically addressing emotions, pleasure and pain. Yet, it has remained remarkably impotent as it has rarely provided substantial analytic categories to disentangle the complexities of such states. For example, what has tended to escape contemporary research is the way in which enjoyment at work may be intimately bound up with restraint, deprivation and pain.

5. Laughter

Working life is rarely experienced as humourless and dull. Even when conducting the most repetitive of tasks, we insert enjoyment and disjoint dullness by laughing at situations and ourselves. But theories of organization are only rarely able to notice this, and rarer still are organization theories themselves able to incite more than a wry chuckle.

6. Ethics

In recent years, organizational life has become infused with talk of ‘business ethics’ and ‘corporate social responsibility’. Might Lacan – or at the very least an adequate conception of the working subject – be needed if we were to turn this talk of ethics into what it is, that is, a philosophical category.

7. Life

Organization theory has recently stressed the place of lived space and embodiments with researchers seeking to focus more on how organizations are spaces of lived experiences. Lacan’s perspective on subjectivity and the struggle with lack shifts our focus away from abstractly conceived spaces of organizations toward the lived and embodied struggles, in the context of a struggle over nothing less than the meaning of life itself.

We invite contributions on any of these areas. We are aware that they require, to put it modestly, quite a bit of work. We propose to hold a discussion that will give some focus to these conversations by looking at what we can say to each of these themes, and others, in the light of the work of Lacan and of others in the Lacanian tradition. The conference will be a working conference, that is to say, a venue to work on ideas with one another. We welcome contributions from academics, practicing and trainee analysts, and from practitioners, activists and analysts. We wish to promote a space for the critical

examination of ideas and therefore hold only to the orthodoxy that all orthodoxy is subject to examination.

Submissions

We invite submissions of abstracts of no more than 1,000 words. Deadline for submissions is 30 June 2008. Full papers will be required by 1 August 2008. Abstracts should be sent as a Word attachment to Sara Louise Muhr (slm.lpf@cbs.dk). For questions regarding the conference, please contact any member of the organizing committee.

Publication

Papers presented at the conference will be considered for a special issue of the journal *Organization* and a book on *Lacan and Organization* to be published by MayFlyBooks. Please prepare papers according to the formatting guidelines at the journal homepage at org.sagepub.com

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