Standing Conference on Organisational Symbolism

2019 Conference
Call for Papers

Ghosts

York has made claims to be one of the most haunted cities in the UK and Europe, with a long history dating from medieval times and numerous ghost stories telling evocative tales of ancestors past and present. Ghost Research Foundation International (2002) labelled York the most haunted city in the world with 504 hauntings around the city. The city contains many historical locations with ghostly histories, including stories of Roman soldiers marching through the cellars of the Treasurers House and the story of Thomas Percy who staggers through the graves at Goodramgate searching for his decapitated head. We invite you to join us at SCOS 2019 in York to explore the ghostly side of organisational life.

The study of organizations by critical scholars is often driven by the feeling that more is occurring just out of sight, at the corner of our eye and veiled behind the surface. Are we being ghosted? These ghosts, of the past, present and future, make sudden and sometimes unwelcome appearances. They push us to look beyond the rational explanations of organizations to search for the emotive, affective and aesthetic sensory experiences. They play on the spiritual, although not simply in a religious sense, but also as a form of enchantment, wonder and imagination which persists in modern life (technology, bureaucracy and even commodities) despite the narrative of a disenchanted modernity (Bennett, 2001). Ghosts haunt us, frighten us and present us with those cracks where the abject seeps in, where the uncanny arises.

We ask scholars to consider their organizational ghosts: dark or light, fleeting or repetitive, veiled or signed. We invite scholars to explore the dark side of organizing: that which resides in the shadows, comes through the crack in the wall or a noise in the night. We also welcome accounts of those organizational ghosts which bring light: or open up other possibilities to us, through drawing on the past and showing the future. Ghosts may be ambivalent, such as the final spirit in the Christmas Carol. Others

bring caution, like the ghost in Hamlet who heralds madness. Similarly some appear fully formed, embodied walking dead who can harm, psychological and physically; while others, like the the shapes in *The Yellow Wallpaper* (Gilman, 1892), are disembodied and take substance through our neurosis.

SCOSSers have already encountered ghosts (see Pors, 2016; Beyes & Stayaert, 2013; De Cock et al, 2013; Muhr & Salem, 2013; MacAulay et al, 2010). Ghosts exist in organizational metaphors and symbolisms: we discuss ghosts in the machine in technology studies; in traces and impressions of corruption; of spirituality, superstition, intuition and gut feelings in decision making; and of invisibility and powerlessness when Othered (especially in relation to gender, sexuality and race among other identities).

However we want to extend these debates to the way in which organizations, in their processes, practices, materiality and temporality, are haunted by ghostly matters (Gordon, 1997) and are part of the organization of the ghostly. Haunting provide the instances where repressed violence emerge, those "singular yet repetitive instances where home becomes unfamiliar, where your bearings on the world lose direction, where the over-and-done-with comes alive, when what's in your blind spot comes into view" (Gordon, 1997, xvi). Haunting represents the repetitive emergence of ghosts, potentially even forming rhythms of the organization (Lefebvre, 2004). Their reappearance may tie them to a particular space or location, forming associations through their ghostly traces. As such it would be appropriate to consider the methodological implications of ghostly matters, tracing the imprints of ghosts on organizational processes, practice and people.

There is of course a significant industry focused on selling ghosts and the consumption of ghostly experiences: the pseudoscience of ghost hunting, ghost tours, and haunted houses, through to commercial blockbusters like Ghostbusters and Harry Potter. Holidays such as All Hallows eve or Halloween (US), the Mexican Day of the Dead (Mexico), the Hungry Ghost Festival (China and some parts of Asia) and Guy Fawks (UK) offer opportunities, or even the obligation, for consumers to play with their identities in adopting personas, while consuming from the vast industry of sweets and food, costumes, decorations and party items. This also includes the industry of publishing, with ghost writers working with industry leaders for their next best seller, or in academia where playing the game may include publications with ghost co-authors.

SCOS 2019 will be in York, a ghostly city. York represents how spaces, places, buildings and organizations' may become associated with ghosts and haunted by stories and persons long since passed. Ghostliness is tied to ambiance and atmosphere, "a surrounding influence which does not quite generate its own form" (Ahmed, 2010:40) but where we still 'pick up' feelings. Ghosts permeate our collective memory of buildings and locations as places and spaces become known as haunted. These memories can shape and undermine us, much as the deceased Rebecca undermined the second Mrs. de Winter through her 'presence' (de Maurier,

1938). Ghosts impact on us, although they are also shaped by the context in which we remember them in. These apparitions bring together our material understanding of the world with the imaginary. How can we speak with these ghosts, hauntings and ghostly spaces, as researchers how do we engage with them?

This call encourages research which seeks out these ghosts, to engage, converse and if needed challenge them. Contributors may find inspiration in the following themes:

- Ghosts, apparitions, superstition, poltergeist, spirit, souls
- Dark side of organizations, corruption, parasitic
- Unintended consequences, shadows and imprints
- Clairvoyance, intuition, dreams, imagination, reality.
- Ghost writers, ghost academics
- Selling and commercialization of ghosts
- Fairy tales, storytelling, morality lessons, folklore, mythology in organizational life
- Dead, appearance of living, human and animal, necromancy
- Corporeality, disgust, invisible bodies, disembodied experiences
- Haunted locations and cities – organizational spaces and places; Haunted houses
- Ghosting as a verb of organizing: To glide, hover. Alternatively: to be spooked, haunted; a 'ghost' trace or impression
- Ghosting in social relationships
- Appearing and disappearing
- Ghosts in the machine - technology, artificial intelligence
- Memories: shadows of the past, possibilities of the future

Open stream and workshops
SCOS 2019 will also have an open stream, allowing for the presentation of papers of more general interest to the SCOS community. In addition we are open to suggestions for workshops or similar events in line with the proposed theme. Outlines of workshops should be the same length as a paper abstract and should give an indication of the resources needed, the number of participants, the time required, the approach to be taken and the session's objectives. Please identify "open stream" or "workshop" on your abstract, as appropriate.

Submission of abstracts
Abstracts of no more than 500 words, in pdf-format, should be submitted as e-mail attachments by Friday 21 December 2018 to: SCOS2019York@gmail.com. You may also direct any queries to this address. The main organizers are Carolyn Hunter and Lynne Baxter, and the conference will be hosted by the York Management School, University of York, UK.

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