Special Issue on Organizational Studies

Rethinking Criticism in Organizational Studies

Organizational studies (os) emerged in the 1970s with the foundation and subsequent consolidation of the European Group for Organization Studies (EGOS), in 1973 (Lammers, 1998). This group sought to elude the hegemonic overlap of theoretical or methodological positions strongly linked to the project of American-style organizational theory. Shifting and distancing from the functional and positivist (totalitarian) orthodoxy was fundamental to opening the debate and conversations about critical thinking and organizational analysis (Clegg & Hardy, 1996). It is possible to perceive how a reconfiguration of critique that thinks closely about discourses and power in a territorialized way emerges in os. In this sense, and departing from the predominance of organizational theory, os, like all discourses, is partial, incomplete, and inconsistent since its essence is to have an open inclusion and exclusion policy (Westwood & Clegg, 2003).

Based on the above, we understand os as a field of knowledge that, based on social and human sciences, has contributed to broaden the understanding of the organizational actions that expose the ideologies and dispositions of those who participate in the development of capitalism and that, in one way or another, have violently and cruelly disrupted the relationship of modern labor subordination centered on the dignity of the person. Therefore, we can understand os as the 20th century emerging perspective that seeks to spread a line of work tending to transcend the functional explanations of collective organizational action, resisting the objective view of the unlimited enrichment of capitalism and the symbolic references that intersect with the banal hyperindividualism and ultraliberalism that has crossed borders and national identities.

This reveals one of the main attributes of os: its critical nature (Gonzales-Miranda, 2014), which has not been free of questioning. In this regard, Montaño-Hirose (2014) questions its capacity for transformation, which, according to its detractors, is limited to theoretical considerations:

> With a high degree of paradigmatic diversity, expressed in the eclectic coexistence of diverse positions, carried out with no epistemological modesty, with the coexistence of [...] poststructuralist, constructivist, critical theory and neo-Marxist proposals, among others, causing widespread confusion that restricts the possibilities of developing a solid scientific discipline (p. 35).

Misoczky (2017) also states that the task of critique in os is "to contrast the 'positive' version of critique made from management without questioning it in its essence and its function for the reproduction of social structures that constantly generate victims, that is, an ethical and ontological critique" (p. 147). In this sense, —the author says— speaking of thought as a methodology to create a disposition for an approach to the life of production, work and relationships —as proposed by Alvesson and Willmott (1996)— as an "imitation of critique" is insufficient. Thus, an ontological critique that carries the transforming praxis of social structures is required.

Given this valid and propositional controversy that invites us to understand a little more about what os means, it is possible to controvert and strengthen the discussion concerning os and critique without limiting this discussion through such an exercise. But what is critique? In a lecture given at the French Society of Philosophy at Sorbonne University in 1978, Michel Foucault stated the following: "a certain way of thinking, speaking and acting, a certain relationship to what exists, to what one knows, to what one does, a relationship to society, to culture and also a relationship to others that we could call, let's say, the critical attitude" (2018, p. 46). The ideas of the French thinker lead us to consider critique as a vital, ethical, and aesthetic attitude of being and being in the world, a quality that may be cultivated and revitalizes individuals' relationships in their daily lives. It is the capacity of being informed to develop opinions about the actors and their actions from a more reflexive attitude (Messner, Clegg, & Kornberger, 2008). Foucault (2018) would say that there is an imperative that underlies a critique of general connotation, so it is related to virtue.

The above allows us to make some considerations. One of them is that critique is not malicious as a human quality but stimulates and encourages an individual to act according to specific ideal projects such as the good, the truth, justice, and beauty. In that sense, critique is opposed to a destructive, unwanted, defeatist, or pessimistic action since it is closely related to the reconstruction of individuals' ethical lives. Critique accounts for a way of thinking about life that creates a relationship with the world and, in one way or another, reconditions living with the respect, gratitude, and hospitality that comes with the value of all

human beings' humanity. It also irremediably implies a degree of coherence and sincerity. It is impossible to be critical and, in this, virtuous in the incoherence of ideas that proclaim, on the one hand, absolute independence from the totalizing management discourses that tend to reduce people to a mere successful functionality and, on the other hand, the shy participation in the denunciation that, far from opposing the point of view with courage and bravery, dialogues and accommodates itself to those logics with the intention of not being cataloged as a deserter, opponent or lousy employee.

Therefore, we wish to rediscover critique as a virtuous attitude that must be cultivated and exercised coherently. In this regard, it is regrettable and sad to acknowledge that, in some cases, critique has become an academic fad. Many public and private organizations, and various administration programs, have converged in supporting and adopting critique as a cornerstone of their training programs. Still, many depart from it and —why not say so— distort it when such an uncomfortable attitude (inevitably) leads to self-reflection and to the recognition that precedes a behavioral change relinquishing their form of thinking.

However, critique also recognizes —by departing from any narrow ideology that denies the imperfection of human nature— individual's subjectivities that give them a margin of freedom to decide what is right in their actions. In this sense, critique cannot have a singularity of thought, a typical character with a universalist tendency, since by its nature, as Foucault (2018) would say, "by its function, I was going to say, by its profession, it seems to be condemned to dispersion, dependency and pure heteronomy" (p. 46).

Now, what is critiqued in the organizational context? The conceptualization of the organization has been mediated by a functional, seasonal, synchronic, and static approach. Usually defined with components such as human resources, the organization has seen its social value, expressed in the interweaving of social dynamics, which nest and coexist within it, diminished to a mere superficial, ephemeral, and linear understanding of the sample of society that makes up its very nature. The vast possibilities offered by the concept of organization, to understand society from OS and, with it, identify the forces that underlie them and condition them along paths that seek to prioritize the individual over the collective, are stifled by preventing the elucidation of

its capacity to adapt and reconstruct from the flow of the diverse surrounding agents (Ibarra-Colado, 2006).

This is how a critical attitude seeks to elucidate the social character of organizations and the diverse logics of action carried out by the individuals involved. Here, and among the multiple possibilities of critique in OS, we would like to highlight the question about how organizations are governed, that is, to pay attention to the social practice that seeks to subject individuals —and organizations— through power mechanisms that seek to claim truth for those who exercise such a tool. In that sense, it criticizes the authority discourses stating what it is and what must be done, and is compelled to accept it by the mere fact of being the authority that tells us so. Critique entails wondering, as Foucault (2018) does, "how not to be governed *like that,* by that, in the name of those principles, with such and such an objective in mind and by means of such procedures, not like that, not for that, not by them" (p. 49).

Answering the question of what is critiqued, understanding it from the perspective of virtue, entails a series of issues that are not yet clear in the field of OS, such as the distinction with Critical Management Studies (CMS). What do they critique, and how are they different from OS? In brief, we could say that CMS makes a sharp critique of the hegemonic discourses of power used in management, leading to thinking about the consequences and impact of such actions on the individual, society and civilization from the perspective of social sciences. For this reason, the issues addressed by CMS are often involved with domination and control, with the symbolic aspects of management and fragmented identities, with power and recognition/unawareness, labor and its abuses in the capitalist context, the ideologization of productivity and its reifying consequences for the individual, etc. That is, and being reductive in the discussion, the object of study of OS is the organizations and their underlying organization processes, whereas CMS focuses purely on management.

Other peculiarities, such as the focus/orientation of critique by each approach, could be added to the above. OS is more propositional and seek to build a society with equal opportunities; therefore, some authors inscribe them in the Frankfurt School's critical theory proposal. On the other hand, CMS is confrontational and belligerent and has a more deconstructive orientation, emphasizing hu-

man emancipation. This way, not few scholars relate them to the postmodern proposal; however, the dividing lines between them are diffuse and difficult to restrict, because in the first place both fields of knowledge and their corresponding critical orientations do not oppose, but rather complement each other. Secondly, they share similar themes of analysis. Thirdly, because many authors research in both fields of knowledge, that is, there is no exclusivity in the orientation that restricts their occurrence in either field. Finally, there is a fourth, very concrete, practical, and telling issue: the journals or spaces for their dissemination are not exclusive.

Thus, we note that they have a continuity in the difference since they are not restrictive but allow the dialogue and permeability of positions concerning the study of organizations and management. As stated above, we do not intend to settle this issue here, as it goes beyond the scope of this editorial and is not its central subject. However, they are conceived as *fields* that can recognize each other as different, but with much common ground between them. It would be worthwhile to deepen in these similarities and differences in the future, analyzing their history, epistemic and methodological positions, objects of study and topics of interest, among other components that deserve consideration. The task of expanding on this discussion remains, especially if each of these fields of knowledge has its board of directors/academics and annual dissemination spaces such as their respective congresses.

We wanted to raise this first issue because these similarities, which reveal distances and differences, are evident in the papers on this issue. This, far from being something negative, since some could say that it results in ambiguity, is invaluable. It allows us to continue thinking about os and its efforts to cultivate, vindicate and promote critique as a virtue. The critical thing about os is that, both politically and philosophically, it does not make conceptions with the institutions and the functionalist academic communities that promote that capitalist organizations can function within the framework of an inhuman and suicidal ethical-political horizon of the planet (Cruz, 2003; Rojas, 2003). We attempt to imagine that os can elucidate why the organizational and institutional action has outraged and abused many human beings, condemning them to live in the marginal zones of cities and in rural territories lacking any care and possibility for development. Understanding survival, poverty and human inequality in organizations, as a result of the maximalist logic of contemporary financial thinking, implies strengthening organizational thinking capable of understanding the ways of organizing and valuing work outside banality and idiocy, those that prevent commitment to ethical-critical thinking that defends human dignity throughout our global world-system.

In other words, we understand os as a multidisciplinary network that brings —and can bring— together the reflective and sentimental practice of academics who understand that poverty and economic precariousness cannot be obscured as accidental and merely transitory phenomena of the present. Hence the pressing need to think and rethink our society through the organizations that bring them together. Not critiquing, for example, the commodification of health care, violence, cruelty, hyper-use at work and how the structural corruption that comes with the unstoppable mega-maximization of wealth in our contemporary thinking-living denaturalizes critical thought worthy of rebellious thought (Camus, 2013).

Notably, we feel that, in our mestizo America, and specifically in Colombia, there have been research groups/collectives (formal and informal) that, during the second half of the 20th century, sought to think intellectually (critically) about management and organizations, specifically in their vision and reified treatment of the human (Echeverry, Chanlat, & Dávila, 1998). Recognizing such groups/collectives and their budgets helps to understand and delineate the contours of os and the intellectual and ethical path that Colombian universities have taken in promoting critical thinking, which stands out for denouncing the narcissisms and rational/inhuman conditioning that have ignored the incomprehensible sacrifices made to satisfy the "market god" (Dufour, 2007).

In this special issue, we can elucidate some aspects that allow us to exemplify our statements. A first element that is closely related to the emergence of os is administration. Unlike Europe, where os developed under the command of sociology and humanities, its development and evolution in Latin America has been strongly linked to administration. It is in this sense that os has fostered the incorporation of organization and os theory in the administrative discipline, considered as conservative and

not very reflexive. Therefore, os has contributed —and continue to foster— new deontological elements to the field. In the words of Montaño-Hirose (2020), this has led to various tensions between different groups of professors who have different approaches to the study of administration, and also a challenge for os to avoid falling into a "certain functionalization within the administration, leaving a slight amount of its critical and social perspective" (p. 31).

It is worth wondering then —returning to Foucault— how we are being governed at present. The pandemic has allowed us to appreciate the diffusion, not new but perhaps more radicalized, of a *managerial imaginary* (Alonso & Fernández, 2006) that seeks to homogenize principles, indoctrinate behaviors, and deny the possibility of explaining social phenomena employing a critical theorization. Here, the critical attitude is relevant to accuse the pretensions of this discourse that seeks to become a guide of conduct in a merchandized society, as a body of knowledge that manages individuals' behavior and emotions (Fernández-Rodríguez, 2020; Pappalini, 2015). Management takes a step forward and evolves —which is not necessarily positive and therefore desired— to a postmodern management, leaving the calculation and monitoring behind to focus on values, intuition, and ambiguity as the object of intervention and effective management. The emotional becomes interesting, as it can lead to the individuals' commitment, inevitably linked to the regulation of reifying behaviors.

But emotions are not the only new forms of government; entrepreneurship is another form and is very recurrent and known in the administrative and organizational field. Approaching it from a critical and ontological position is essential to reveal its proposals' consequences and scope. Hence, Torres and Misoczky (2020) propose a negative vital role that allows for new possibilities for action. Thus, there is a critique to critique, seeing that "there is a gap in os regarding the negative critique of entrepreneurship from Marxism and materialist ontology" (p. 62). This is a clear example that critique does not shield itself but is susceptible to being approached reflexively and allows for different analysis.

The lockdown has brought big data and how the people analytics strategies are being managed into the spotlight. This is effectively novel, as the object of interest is now the study of intimacy and the emotions of social interac-

tions. Within this framework, the subjective implementation of these types of devices that seek to legitimize the management of subjectivity is critiqued (Szlechter & Zangaro, 2020). Thus, there is a sophistication through specialized algorithmic techniques that causes changes in the goods and services market by coding various aspects of daily life. This is a type of cognitive capitalism that requires mobilizing individuals' cognitive dimensions to anticipate situations and behaviors, turning knowledge into one of the new fundamental capital of companies.

These actions have a substantial impact on the life and development of individuals and, therefore, on the construction of the emerging identity within organizations. This identity has also been the object of objectifying actions that seek to be manufactured according to organizational objectives, becoming another form of control (Gonzales-Miranda, 2020). The aim is to adapt to the demands of the market and productivity. This identity generates loyalty and commitment, at the cost of violating privacy with the arbitrary effects it entails. This is cause for critique and is not merely a matter of accusations but seeks to explain the process of identity construction to argue that identity is not a minor component in the lives of individuals as they move through the organization. The individual's search for control does not only occur through these actions but also seeks to manage organizational spaces in order to model young people through their self-esteem (Rivera-Aguilera, Lobos-Pessini, & Bork, 2020).

In the case of the work prepared by Bedoya and Maca (2020), criticism focuses on how behavioral management unfolds experiences and forms of thinking, feeling, and behaving, ultimately naturalizing the precariousness of work and life, leading workers to build their identities and occupational repertoires under the naturalization of this condition. This shows the effects of neoliberalism and the logic of new capitalism managed by the companies.

Therefore, to have a critical attitude is to have the conviction and courage to question unjustified submission, the unconsidered respect for the hierarchy that tells us what to do, marginalizing autonomy, confrontation, dissent and interpellation, because we consider them not our own or as a reflection of manifestations of disloyalty and rebellion. It is to attribute the "the right to question truth on its effects of power and question power on its discourses of truth.

Well, then!: critique will be the art of voluntary insubordination, that of reflected intractability" to itself (Foucault, 2018, p. 52). Critique is a virtue that challenges the reality in which we live as individuals in organizations. It implies questioning the power directed to control, consciously or unconsciously, our behaviors, looking to construct a truth or discourses of truth. It is a right that must be realized without fear of being labeled or disparaged and, therefore, of being put in the stand for going against the status quo.

In this short dissertation about os and critique, it is worth wondering: Why do we critique? Critique is a form of resistance that seeks to defend an identity. This constitutes the conquest of autonomy, which is not opposed to obedience but becomes its foundation. Obedience can be considered the way to abide by the rules or submit to the will of the person in command. Critique defends identity and, in doing so, safeguards the principles that promote the correct development of life in society through organizations. To turn our backs is to betray the universal values of good living and respect for those who transit through these spaces called organizations. This is how critique is built on the capacity to mobilize our actions to defend the possibility of a dignified and autonomous development of the individuals from within the organizations.

Therefore, it is worth wondering: What is the use and how to understand organizations in a thought surrounded by productivity and contemporary economic competitiveness? We believe that, like many other forms of critical thinking, os are justified if they can think of the organization as a space of inclusion and respectful and playful otherness that understands work as a space that fights against suffering and the demand of the post-human that inspires and demands the artificial intelligence that supports cognitive capitalism. Thinking about how and why we have assumed a banal and futile way to see and face labor suicide, the legalized creative corruption in many organizational reconfigurations and the depression immanent to stark competitiveness may be one of the paths that os can choose to reconnect with the rebellious reason that critiques and projects the public space and discussion.

This is in line with what Fernandez-Rodriguez (2020) proposes by invoking that we focus our attention on the managerial discourse to understand it better, intending to promote and create critical orientation training pro-grams within this field of knowledge. At the same time, it is expected that this critique will be incorporated into essential topics in business management and administration training since, in today's education, it is rare to find that institutions integrate training and study programs that critically reflect the strong ideological charge present in management.

Another case that explains the purpose of critique —in this case, ontological— is that it allows seeing the relationship between praxis and the awareness of elementary everyday facts. The fact is that often there is no awareness that activities, such as work and human subjectivities, emerge as a self-production that are no longer controlled by unknown and unconscious forces within or outside man. The reifying process produces an ontological distortion and distances the being from its concrete social reality (Torres & Misoczky, 2000).

Critique also allows protecting the privacy by reviewing the various actions and organizational intervention strategies used today to understand user behaviors and trends to predict their actions and make individuals objects of consumption. In this specific case, critique allows us to promote reflexivity in the areas of human resources management, which reconsider actions of a more scientific nature to achieve a culture with measurable, communicable, trainable and operable behaviors (Szlechter & Zangaro, 2020), that is to say, a culture based on data, and not on the processes of human signification and resignification. In this sense, it seeks to draw attention to the growing trend of seeking the individual's functionality and operability and their inter-subjective relationships. The adequacy of related means expects reality to work —in the context of capitalism— for productivity. This way, the productive capacity of the youth becomes primordial at the cost of converting, for instance, employability programs as spaces for the indoctrination of young workers to adopt a managerial discourse that introduces them to neoliberal individualism (Rivera-Aguilera *et al.*, 2020).

Critique also serves to agonizingly understanding our inhuman dimension. The social processes developed in organizations require decantation and reflexivity, a pause in thought to be able, later, to intervene and try to solve/contain the problems that arise. Any decoding and signification process requires understanding and revolutionizing particular social parameters. In this process, it is advisable to have specific theoretical frameworks that allow for a

more in-depth analysis of said exercise. One of them, widely used lately, is Foucault's proposal to analyze and understand contemporary management practices, focusing the discussion on the inadequacy of regulatory and governance measures (Couto & Carriere, 2020). This enriches the reflection, deepens the social phenomena, and allows for a more adequate and "human" intervention of the understood reality in the future. Thus, there is no comprehensive process if one does not look at what has been built.

Similarly, a critical view implies knowing and recognizing previous conversations on a given subject, since all virtuous critique requires being informed. Critical thought requires thoughtful and daring reflections that transcend fads and stand in the way of the status quo. Cultivating a critical attitude implies an act of rebellion that undergoes thought processes which overthrow idols and institutionalized narcissism. This allows building knowledge and a contribution to what has not yet been said. An example of this is the work by Saavedra-Mayorga and Sanabria (2020), who made a literature view on resistance. This is relevant within the framework of this discussion, insofar as it complements the discussions of many of the papers in this first issue that have taken the Foucauldian perspective, as resistance and power are a natural complement, so their comprehensive reading will help to further deepen the phenomena and problems raised in this issue.

It is worth discussing the pandemic and the consequences of lockdown and its measures to lessen its impact on our society. This situation should allow us to understand the need to rethink how and from where os addresses the helplessness of thousands of human beings fascinated by "the seductive influences of images and digital formats that burst through the digital world" (Sibilia, 2012, p. 61). We believe that os is committed to understanding and discussing the society/civilization of the spectacle (Debord, 2010; Vargas-Llosa, 2012) and the new management focused on doing and audiovisual knowledge, which questions the pedagogy that facilitates the social mission *par excellence* of the university: the word (Cristina Correa, cited by Sibilia, 2012, p. 62).

We are reluctant to think that the pandemic that locks us down will not allow us to forge a reconsideration of os that facilitates questioning the imaginaries and ideologies that support the instrumentality with which consumption, dehumanizing careerism and the ultraexploitation of

university research are promoted, increasingly abandoning intellectual thought and critique, and focusing on the productive logic of journals. As expressed by Montaño-Hirose (2020), we must depart from the prevailing trend of normal science, built through the accumulation of knowledge, which leads to an indiscriminate race to publish, generating a new skill —which is far from the very reason for the dissemination of knowledge—, "that of complying with the formal requirements established in an evaluation form" (p. 30).

If the pandemic takes our lives, we should not ignore that the society of spectacle and online gaming produces a subjectivity focused on depoliticized and toxic entertainment to open the doors to the different and the poor. Should not os radically challenge extractivism and productivism and managerial logics that violate human rights, justice, and dignity?

Let us understand that the managerial imaginary (Fernández, 2006) no longer only touched the benchmark of the managers, but also that of many researchers who have not resisted the demand for academic productivity in their universities that ends up being, in the best of cases, uncritical of the values that eroded the idea of a decentralized administration of the dehumanization of man and nature. On this last point, signing agreements or specific commitments through ink and pen to safeguard the orb that we inhabit is not enough. A real and legitimate commitment is required so that these desires contribute to a radical change in the present and future of our planet from its foundations (Pesqueux, 2020).

In this context, and after this brief discussion on os and criticism, this special issue devoted to organizational studies is presented to the academic community. As observed, the articles in this edition have been integrated into the discussion on the editorial theme. Thus, it only remains to briefly present said contributions. There are ten articles written in Spanish, French and English, whose authors come from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Spain, France, and Mexico.

In an attempt to classify the contents included this special issue, three groups can be clearly distinguished. The first of these reflects on issues related to organizational studies such as the current challenges faced by this field from an institutional perspective, the managerial discourse framed in the pandemic, the metamorphosis of corporate social

responsibility, and the understanding of entrepreneurship as an ideology. The second group of articles gathers research studies where the individual is placed at the core of the debate in order to analyze the effects of management. This group includes topics such as the management of big data and people analytics, the construction process and the components of organizational identity, the production of young workers in organizational spaces, the precariousness of agricultural workers within the sugar cane industry, and the analysis of codes of ethics. Finally, there is a literature review on the issue of resistance from the perspective of organizational studies.

It is not possible to conclude this editorial without mentioning the Latin American Organizational Studies Network (REOL, in Spanish). On July 16, 2019, the founding charter of this regional body was signed. On September 8, 2020, during the first session of the Board of Directors, REOL statutes, entry mechanisms and policies were approved. In addition, its governing bodies were elected. We welcome this important cooperative network, which seeks to integrate —with an ethical commitment and a critical, emancipatory and decolonial perspective of OS— Latin American associations and academic groups interested in the study of organizations and their various forms of assembling.

Organizational studies offer the possibility of thinking and reflecting upon organizational life from the virtuous attitude of criticism; from which we wanted to establish a position through these editorial lines. The articles in this edition are proof of this. May their reading encourage the dissemination of OS and open new spaces to critically sustain a dialogue about the fate of humanity and the culture steaming from contemporary organizations!

We would like to finish by saying thanks to the authors on this issue and all the authors who gave us the privilege of receiving their works after the invitation we made for this special issue. We received 88 articles, of which ten will see the dawn in this first special issue on OS, while some others will make part of future editions. Our work in favor of the dissemination of OS could have not been possible without all these contributions, which allowed a continuous understanding of the wealth and the process we now live in our hybrid and libertarian America.

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