

‘Would you prefer not to?’ Resetting/resistance across literature, culture, and organizations

Abstract

In this paper we put the concepts of *reset*, *aprosdoketon* and *minor gesture* to work in the context of organizational narratives. In particular we engage with two iconic characters of the genre of organizational fiction, Don Draper in the context of *Mad Men* TV series and the copyist, who is the main character of *Bartleby, the Scrivener* by Herman Melville. Through a series of textual and performative writings we explore the possibility of setting and resetting organizational narratives/genre. Moreover, we explore what happens when fictional characters from a TV series and a novel (Bartleby and Don Draper) meet us – three scholars working in an array of different fields (literary, methodology, education and organization studies) and how this meeting and interaction shapes our understandings of work, culture, and organizations.

Key words: Bartleby, Mad Men, Minor Gesture, Cyborg Writing, Reset, Post-qualitative research

Encounter 1

Today, I came across a new employee. We were together in the elevator standing next to each other. Only me and him spread across few square meters. I could feel his breath and the smell of his skin. I was intrigued by that man, by his old suit and his manners. There was a certain kind of fixity and tradition in his movements. He seemed a man coming from another era. I had never seen him before at Sterling & Cooper. When we step out together and approached the main entrance, I could not resist and I said:

- Good Morning. My name is Don Draper -

Obviously, I was expecting him to respond by introducing himself, but surprisingly, he kept on walking very fast and disappeared quickly into the photocopy room. It was as if he wanted to hide. Perhaps he did not understand what I said.

Setting

This text is a performative exploration designed to work through the complexities of organization and organization studies while utilizing fiction and pop-culture as a tool to stimulate the exploration. Our purpose is to think and experiment with concepts, namely *aprosdoketon*, *resetting* and *minor gesture* in order to re-orient scholars and readers to think about different kinds of engagements and relations between scholarship, fiction, and popular culture. As a group of scholars working in an array of different fields (literary, methodology, education and organization studies) we engage with stories, organization studies, (work) lives, fiction and pop culture. More specifically, we put the theoretical elements of *resetting* (Latour 2016) and *minor gesture* (Deleuze & Guattari 1975; Manning 2016) to work in the context of organizational narratives. Across the following pages, we wonder what might happen when specific fictional characters namely Don Draper from the TV series *Mad Men* (2007-2015) and Bartleby, the main character of Melville's short novel *Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall-Street* (1853), interact with us in the context of

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academic writing. Our focus on these two iconic characters from the genre of organizational fiction offers two very different narratives and character descriptions, although these characters live and work in similar organizational contexts.

First, we set the scene for our performative exploration and introduce our characters. We have two men, very different one from the other. On the one hand, we have the quintessential manager *hero* of contemporary TV series, Don Draper from *Mad Men*. On the other, the clumsy enigmatic law-copyist who is the focus of *Bartleby, the Scrivener*. The former is tall and handsome, smart, elegant and self-confident, whereas we are not sure what the other one looks like. Both characters work in New York City; one on Madison Avenue and the other on Wall Street. One is a successful creative director in a top advertising company while the other is a copyist in a burgeoning law firm. Both of them are among the most analyzed and epitomized characters in studies dealing with organizations either from the point of view of organizational studies or literary and media studies (Berkman 2001; Beverunger and Dunne 2007; Buzzanell and D’Enbeau 2014; Deleuze 1993; Carveth and South 2010; Goodlad, Kaganovsky and Rushing 2013). Yet we are willing to take the risk of making them bump into each other, and let them speak to (or over) each other, while we step back and listen.

Mad Men is a television series broadcast in the United States since 2007; it has been a huge success all around the world. It is set at Sterling & Cooper, a New York advertising agency – that will later become Sterling Cooper Draper Pryce – on Madison Avenue. The events in *Mad Men* take place between 1960 and 1968, and present the audience with one view of life and work during those years: the aesthetics of space, clothes and objects, and the details of the cocktail and smoking culture. Don Draper, the company’s creative director, is the main character, while the other main characters in the series are the executives at the agency and their secretaries and families. The audience gets to know the public (work) and private lives (family) of each character. In comparison, in *Bartleby, the Scrivener*, the narrator – a lawyer in Manhattan with a rather successful business – decides to hire Bartleby as a copyist in order to deal with increased business activity. At first, the

scrivener diligently produces a huge amount of high-quality work, but one day, when he is asked to proofread a document he replies ‘I would prefer not to’. Following this incident, Bartleby does less and less work, and eventually none at all, always giving the same enigmatic explanation: ‘I would prefer not to’. The lawyer, torn between pity and exasperation, discovers that Bartleby has no home or friends, and actually lives in the office. Not having the courage to fire him, but annoyed by his behavior, the lawyer tries to convince Bartleby to work, or at least provide explanations. Bartleby does nothing but repeat his mantra until the lawyer decides to call the police and sue him for illegal occupation of his office, at which point he is eventually imprisoned. Once in prison, he refuses to eat or communicate with anybody and slowly lets himself die. Two very different storylines are emerging here.

What if, in a fictional relationship, these two men should bump into each other?

What would they talk about?

Would they share their thoughts, fears, and emotions?

Would they work together? Or would they interact?

As we want to interrogate these two characters and explore how their storylines might intersect with ours, we have to #reset what we usually do in our academic work, what we take for granted, and how we write an academic paper. Cyborg writing and post-qualitative methodology have supported these ‘aims’. The idea of cyborg writing has recently been used by many scholars (Author 1; Biehl-Missal 2015; Phillips et al. 2014; Segarra and Prasad 2018) to interrogate ordinary ways of representation and function ‘as a radical site of possibilities – and at minimum, as a discursive means by which to disrupt Enlightenment ideals of Cartesian duality, objectivity and rationality’ (Prasad, 2016 431-432). It is writing which becomes a mash-up of genres and styles; writing which misbehaves and pushes the boundaries of tidied-up texts, to the point where the reader is disturbed or annoyed. This *polluted* writing has also been done by scholars involved in post-qualitative methodologies which disturb standard codes of text and layout (Author 2). Post-

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qualitative research asks us to work within and against our methodological traditions (Author 3) in order to try to inhabit the ongoing becoming of the world. What might happen if we (the reader, us, Dan Draper, Bartleby, other scholars and ... and... and) remain open to that which is not yet but is to come? In the following pages, across the different sections of the paper, cyborg writing, together with post-qualitative research, will conspire to provoke the reader and challenge the normative way of doing academic writing within organization studies.

#RESET

Scholarly conversations

 In many organizations there is no space for resistance. Many organizations are based on controlled hierarchies... Organizations are places that tend to minimize and eliminate resistance in order to be effective and successful. Resistance is the point in Bartleby similar to paradoxes and contradictions.

 Can we use some scenes where there is no resistance, insert Bartleby and see what happens? What would happen if Bartleby entered this scene? What if we put together resistance and gender in different work places- what might happen?

We need to look for those minor gestures (of resistance) that have a potential for something unexpected ... something that we did not know about... which forms a space and place where fiction diffracts and rubs up against predetermined ideas, thoughts, and plans... Can we somehow investigate or study the minor gestures in *Mad Men*, in *Bartleby* and in organizational literature? ... to insert and create resistance ...but also to reset resistance... what might

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3 happen when one resets resistance? When we reset resistance, what
4 (in)exactly are we doing? ... is resistance amplified or not?
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8 Looking for minor gestures... in the first episode of *Mad Men* there
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10 is close-up of a glass containing some kind of liquid. Somebody
11 (perhaps the main character) drops something, a pill/vitamin which
12 effervesces in the water. There was something really interesting
13 in there, in that bubbling, a kind of creative, productive event
14 and an unexpected and unrelated series of happenings. At the same
15 time, the bubbles and bubbling liquid is a mere banality... but what
16 else is bubbling in the office, within relationships, among the
17 workers ... and within the socio-political contexts? It was just one
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19 very evocative minor detail...
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23 If we look at the story or the plot of *Mad Men*... or a small
24 productive difference. A diversity which makes a difference but
25 not necessarily on a large scale. Such minor gestures are
26 productive for meaning-making and interacting through their
27 particularity and detail ... what does this bubbling indicate in the
28 context of work relations or in those organization structures?
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31 We can also think of minor gestures also sounds or colors...
32 something that triggers different and potentially unanticipated
33 perspectives.
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37 There are so many different noises in the background, in the
38 workspaces, and when people work, talk, and relate in the ad firm.
39 This office noise can be another minor gesture. Sounds are always
40 present, in some ways reminding the viewer of the complexity of
41 systems... a voice with agency (a voice which everybody could and
42 should listen to). Background noise also reminds us that the
43 system is always producing and something is happening in relation
44 to the viewer and listener. Yet these sounds and systems are
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separate from the viewer. You know that the system has its own potentialities and activities which in a way are interfering with what somebody is saying and doing. These sounds appear to take place in the background but at the same time engage the viewers and listeners, drawing them into the system.

Smoking: another example. What is interesting about smoking is that it is a unifying, shared experience. Everybody smokes in the office. Smoking also produces this unhealthy environment where non-smokers are excluded- smokers belong together, they form a group, and there is also the visual effect of the smoke being everywhere; objects become less clear because the smoke is in the frame, so things become blurred... and this is related to the politics and policies of smoking in the sixties (the end of the first episode).

Popular culture, literature and organization studies

The case for popular culture in organization studies has already been made by Rhodes and Brown (2005) who at the same time have warned scholars that fiction can be a shield that distances us from fact. In his paper ‘*The Simpsons*, Popular Culture and the Organizational Carnival’, Rhodes (2001) asks: ‘Where can we look when we seek to study organizations?’ (374). As qualitative researchers, we can look into diverse spaces. For example, when some qualitative researchers enter an organizational space they are attracted to artifacts; they talk to people, make observations, and engage into activities/processes which they call *fieldwork*, and which enables them to understand *what’s going on* in the specific organizational contexts. For many scholars, entering workplaces (offices, boarding meeting rooms, canteens and bathrooms), meeting workers, and observing behaviors and cultural objects in order to write an organizational ethnography is often deemed one of the traditional and culturally sensitive ways to study organizations (Van Maanen 1988).

However, ethnography is not the only methodology with which to study organizations. Rhodes explains that ‘organizations also exist outside of their physical locations. They exist, too, as representations – cultural images created as people work to understand and make sense of the institutions that saturate their lives’ (374). Functioning as constructed cultural images, organizations have a place/space in literature, popular fiction, films, television, cartoons, and in countless other forms of cultural (re)representation. The study of organizations within/through media including representations in popular culture and literature has a very long tradition in organization studies. It dates back to the classic *The Organization Man*, in which William H. Whyte (1957) dedicated two chapters to representations of ‘organization man’ in fiction and literature (see Rhodes 2008). Since then, organizational scholars have created various connections between management/organizations and popular culture, which we have divided into five different streams.

Perhaps one of the most consolidated trends is to believe that novels (or movies or popular culture in the wider sense) are a privileged source of information that supports the construction of knowledge about organizational phenomena. Authors who have written novels about organizations (Kafka is one excellent example – see Kundera 1986) can be viewed as privileged witnesses to be utilized in research within organizations (Hassard and Holliday 1998; Knight and Willmott 1999; Olivetti Manoukian 1994). Writers and film directors have their own conceptions/ideas/ of organizational life and their writings can offer us most illuminating descriptions and interpretations. It may be that representation of organizations in literature and popular culture can enable scholars to understand the workplace beyond or behind conventional academic theory. It is as if traditional scholarship on organization studies is somewhat limited because it misses many of the representations present in popular culture and literature. For example, management literature often overlooks notions of ‘...gender, emotions, power struggles, mythologies, the consequences of success and the implications of failure... Yet these representations can inform understandings of everyday work processes by getting at the “heart of organizational life”’ (Buzzanell and D’Enbeau 2014, 699).

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The second approach coincides with the idea of reading a story/a novel/a movie through a particular perspective or approach in order to unveil the textual and representational ‘truth’ or standpoint. From this perspective, an organizational idea, argument, or proposition is situated within a story/a novel/a movie; the story and movie are used to show that this reading/lens works (or does not) to support or dismiss the original argument (Beverunger and Dunne 2007; Pick 2017). In this way, popular culture and literature is used as one alternative venue beyond scientific outlets to make sense about the organized world. One classic example is Melville’s *Bartleby, the Scrivener*, which has been read through very different lens or perspectives such as: Zizek’s politicized Bartleby; Agamben’s whatever Bartleby; Deleuze’s originary Bartleby; and Bartleby and Arsi’s celibatory machine.

According to another prominent stream (the third one), popular culture, literature and more broadly humanistic culture (Gagliardi and Czarniawska 2006) can educate managers (Czarniawska-Joerges and de Monthoux 1994; Czarniawska and Rhodes 2006). Keeping their distance from organizational theories written as textbooks, which are ‘accused’ of providing a weak, abstract description of the methods, activities and functions of management, Knights and Willmott highlight that a novel, in their case David Lodge’s *Nice Work*, ‘provides [them] with a vehicle for bringing [their] subject matter to life in a way that can make it easier for students to explore the experience of managing and organizing’ (Knights and Willmott 1999, 5). From this perspective some concepts (for example leadership, power, inequality, gender, identity, ethnicity) - that might seem very abstract and therefore difficult to grasp – are better understood if they are approached through examples taken from novels, movies, or television series. We also need to mention Gagliardi’s (2006) position, which stated that a manager benefits from an understanding of ‘profound humanistic culture, a thorough knowledge of history, of philosophy, of art, of heritage of knowledge and sensibility that humankind has constructed in history’ (7).

The fourth stream addresses the possibility of exploring new organizational ideas through a detailed examination of a cultural text. This is the case of Heather Höpfl’s (2002) analysis of

Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, where the author deals with the idea of 'tragic sublime' and the gender construction of desire as a sublime object: 'the concept of the sublime and the narrative of the film provide insights into the melancholy of commodified representations in the obsessive-compulsive pursuit of organizational idealisation' (21). Another relevant example is David Pick's (2017) attempt to apply literary theory (concepts and perspectives) as informed by Deleuzian's philosophy to a work of fiction (David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*) which 'provides a rich vein of inspiration for new thinking that will contribute to ... search for better ways of doing organization theory' (p. 802). Furthermore, Munro and Huber (2012) used Kafka's counter-mythologies to reveal a bias in the sense-making approach (Weick 1995) in understanding organizations.

The fifth stream speaks to the need to critique and question assumed notions of organizations and organizational life. More specifically, literature and popular culture offer representations of organizations that can both reinforce and/or critique the normative structure with which organizations are imbued. For example, Höpfl (2003) analyzed the movie *G.I. Jane*, criticizing how the film reinforces problematic gendered workplace constructions (Buzzanell and D'Enbeau 2014, 700). Rhodes (2001; 2002), on the hand, through an analysis of *The Simpsons* and *South Park* demonstrated how these television series present parodies of organizations and question the conventional, normative and hegemonic representations of the workplace. And along the same lines, Pullen and Rhodes (2012) offered a reading of *Futurama*, an American animated television program, demonstrating how one specific episode ('Raging Bender') engages a subversive gender-parody and critiques patriarchal gender relations in organizations.

In all five streams, popular culture and literature constitute a rich platform and a diversified context full of examples/representations/discourses in which researchers gather 'data' to 1) throw light upon organizational life; 2) corroborate a theory (or not); 3) educate managers and students; 4) offer new ways of thinking about organizations; 5) trouble normative ideas of organizations. However, we acknowledge that our reading of the field is limited, other scholars from different perspectives and backgrounds may well offer different readings and understandings. In addition, in

the present paper, all five streams overlap; they intersect and intertwine to the extent that it becomes difficult to mark their boundaries. Therefore, this paper cannot be described as an example of stream number 4 or 5; instead, we hope that this *textual and performative experiment* manages to cut across all the sub-genres in many different ways.

#RESET

Literary studies encounter organization studies: aprosdoketon, reset and minor gesture

From the point of view of literary studies, organizations and their worlds are often reduced to yet another literary theme or motif, which can be traced, catalogued, and described. Such perspectives thereby fail to call into question the status of literature itself and its specific proceedings and devices, and at the same time rarely have any alternative view to offer on organizations and management. In many ways, literary fiction is a self-contained world: when you enter a literary text, you step into a new world that did not exist before, which has its own rules and norms. Literary fiction exists thanks to the proceedings and devices of its textuality; something that cannot simply be overlooked in favor of a thematic content. Every content depends heavily on the form through which it is expressed, told, represented, and it is through this inextricable entanglement that literature’s agency can be set to work.

Melville’s *Bartleby* is a highly canonical work of literature which has produced a vast amount of scholarly bibliography. Is it possible to say something about this work that might be relevant to the interdisciplinary perspective we are trying to explore here? The modest proposal we put forward is to recur to the old traditional method of literary close reading in order to draw from it a few theoretical tools that will take our shared investigation further through these pages. We have three points of departure: the concepts of aprosdoketon, resetting and minor gesture and we have a literary text to be close read. Let us try to put them to work.

Aprosdoketon:

(from the ancient Greek, a-: privative suffix + prosdokao: I wait for)

something which is not expected

The story is told by the voice of a rather elderly man¹ for whom the easiest way of life is the best, who values peace above turbulence, but who, in the last thirty years has been in contact with an interesting and somewhat singular set of men: on the one hand the *long durée* of an ordinary and somehow regular life; on the other, singularity, diversity, strangeness. The acme of this is Bartleby: the strangest one can see or hear of. An aprosdoketon in a long life of everyday gestures, always the same, always immutable.

Yet there is more: regarding Bartleby nothing is ascertainable, he is a big void, an irreparable loss to literature. And actually, in a world where everything must lead to gain, to the financial acquisition of a surplus to be reinvested, where running a lawyer office is pleasantly remunerative this human figure stands out as an enigma, as, precisely what is not, and could not ever be, expected.

Yet we can expect the unexpected: and the aprosdoketon can open up scenes previously unthought of and unthinkable. The main narrative voice, the employer, leads the reader through a series of increasingly strange and singular set of men, the employees who work for him. The organizational hierarchies must be clearly stated, even spatially. As the lawyer specifies: ground-glass folding doors divided my premises into two parts, one of which was occupied by my scriveners, the other by myself. According to my humor, I threw open these doors or closed them.

Then, here is Bartleby, the unthinkable, the one who is *uncircumscribable*, even spatially. It is worth recalling this long passage:

I resolved to assign Bartleby a corner by the folding doors, but on my side of them so as to have this quiet man

¹ The quotations from Melville's text (1853) are in Apple Chancery.

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within easy call, in case any trifling thing was to be done. I placed his desk close up to a small side window in that part of the room, a window which originally had afforded a lateral view of certain grimy back yards and bricks, but which, owing to subsequent erections, commanded at present no view at all, though it gave some light. Within three feet of the panes was a wall, and the light came down from far above, between two lofty buildings, as from a very small opening in a dome. Still further to a satisfactory arrangement, I procured a high green folding screen, which might entirely isolate Bartleby from my sight, though not remove him from my voice. And thus, in a manner, privacy and society were conjoined.

What space is this? What portion of an organisational reality is this? It looks like everything needs to be re-set, when Bartleby enters the stage, when the aprosdoketon irrups on the scene of a perfectly consolidated organisational setting.

#Reset

“What do you do when you are disoriented, when the compass on your smartphone goes haywire? You reset it. The procedure varies according to the situation and device, but you always have to stay calm and follow instructions carefully if you want the compass to capture signals again.” (Latour, 2016, 11)

This is how Bruno Latour and his collaborators interpellated our presence on the scene of modernity a few years ago. And they suggested that we ‘reset a few of the instruments that allow ... [us] to register some of the confusing signals sent by the epoch’ (Latour, 2016, 11).

We can use the concept of resetting to begin again and again without a new beginning.

Latour (2016) discusses the possibilities created by resetting. One might lose her/his bearings but by taking time and following instructions to recalibrate signals, inputs, and affects are recreated and re-established. ‘Nothing spectacular, no hype, no grand narrative, no bright future, no new agent of history, but rather a set of simple resetting protocols, just a series of seven procedures-to see where it leads, what it allows, what it permits us to document’ (21). For Latour, resetting procedures include: relocalizing the global, without the world or within, sharing responsibility: farewell to sublime, from lands to disputed territories, innovation not hype, secular at last, and in search of a diplomatic middle ground. For Latour, these resetting procedures ensure that we stay inside the world we inhabit and yet push beyond it without leaving this world behind. Similarly, we use the notion of reset in this context to keep us returning to the worlds of organizational, fictional and pop-culture again and again.

To continue diverse resetting procedures, Ricci (2016) suggests finishing one resetting ‘protocol’ with a reflexive moment which define the moves for the next game. Resetting processes are always nested within other processes. Before resetting, recalibration, and remeasuring, re-visioning needs to happen. ‘A reset does not break anything; on the contrary, reset is a somewhat fresh term for something that does not refer to critique.... there is nothing direct, instantaneous, easy, in the apparent simple movement of pushing the reset button’ (41). Resetting offers a possibility to render ‘an instrument sensitive again to the signals it was meant to register’ (Latour 2016, 305).

This is the same suggestion the aprosdoketon named Bartleby gives us in the frame of the fictional construction. Bartleby produces an effect of resetting every time we come across him in the narrative space, and every time we bump into his unascertainability, his constitutive loss.

Evoking Bartleby might remind us that ‘it is time for a reset’ (Latour 2016, 11). Historically.

When Bartleby in a singularly mild, firm voice, replies to his employer’s request for the first time with: I would prefer not to, to his - and our - outmost surprise and consternation, a colossal reset takes place. Nothing can be the same again. Everything is

cancelled. Everything now is reset. There is no answer to the question ‘What do you mean’? that the employer poses to his employee. The only answer is a calm, and yet incredibly stunning, repetition of a formula, of five words that become a mechanical gesture: I would prefer not to. These five words act like a definite act: press the button, pronounce the formula. And everything will undergo an irreversible resetting.

For Latour it might suffice to take it easy: ‘Let’s pause for a while, follow a procedure and search for different sensors that could allow us to recalibrate our detectors, our instruments, to feel anew where we are and where we might wish to go’ (11). Yet nothing is easy or given for granted where the enigma Bartleby is concerned. Let us just take a look at some of his employer’s reactions:

for the first time in my life a feeling of over-powering
stinging melancholy seized me. Before, I had never
experienced aught but a not-unpleasing sadness

I was thunderstruck. For an instant I stood like the man
who, pipe in mouth, who is killed, one cloudless afternoon
long ago in Virginia, by a summer lightning

On one single point Latour and Melville can agree: when a resetting starts, there is no guarantee about the outcomes: ‘No guarantee, of course: this is an experiment, a thought experiment, a Gedankenausstellung.’ (Latour 2016, 11) But: where does this experiment of resetting without guarantees stem from? Where do we start from? Let’s take our cue once again from Bartleby.

The minor gesture

A minor key is always interlaced with major keys—the minor works the major from within. What must be remembered is this: neither the minor nor the major is fixed in advance. The major is a structural tendency that organizes itself according to

predetermined definitions of value. The minor is a force that courses through it, unmooring its structural integrity, problematizing its normative standards.

(Manning 2016, 1)

On the part of Bartleby: face composed, dim eyes, not a wrinkle of agitation, no uneasiness, anger, impatience or impertinence. No major gestures, after all. Yet on the part of the lawyer, on the part of the reader and the observer, the surprise turns into stunned faculties, the employer turns into a pillar of salt, standing at the head of [his] seated column of clerks.

How is all this surprise possible? After all, Bartleby's five words are just a simple mechanical formula, surely a minor gesture. In fact, as Erin Manning has pointed out, it is such a pointless intellectual exercise to try to distinguish what is minor from what is major.

In the first days of work, Bartleby had no pause for digestion, he ran a day and night line, copying by sunlight and by candlelight, he was the cheerfully industrious model employee, writing on silently, palely, mechanically. But wasn't this attitude his first minor gesture, *a force that inadvertently unmoored "the structural integrity" and problematized the "normative standards" of the organizational structure?* Wasn't it just in the very middle of everything?

Therefore, when the employee pronounces his five words and starts reiterating them, he takes an irreversible decision that produces a dilemma; a dilemma whose interpretation everyone (the employer, the narrative voice, the fellow employees, the reader, we – as scholars reading Bartleby today -...) wants to postpone as long as possible. The narrative voice describes this dilemma using the term *passive resistance*.

But what exactly is passive resistance, if not an inextricable intertwining of major and minor gestures that produce an unexpected resetting? Perhaps we are now ready, after this (always approximate) close reading of Melville's work, to expose ourselves and our cyborg writing (Prasad 2016) to this intertwining of aprosdoketon, resetting and minor gestures.

#RESET

Encounter 2

Peggy Olson, my secretary, told me that the name of the intriguing aprosdoketon appearance is Bartleby. She knew nothing about him apart from the fact that he worked in the photocopy room. Yesterday, I finished work very late and was just leaving the office when I realized that the light was still on in the photocopy room. Who could be there at this time of day? I walked over to the photocopy room and went in. There was Bartleby, sitting at a table: he was pale and with a wondering gaze. As if he had been caught in the act. Immediately after our eyes met Bartleby went back to reading the papers on the table. I had to say something.

- Good evening. My name is Don Draper. We have already met. What's your name?
- My name is Bartleby –


And our first conversation finished there. We stared at each other for almost one minute but nobody was able to say anything else. From the doorway where I was standing, I could hear and feel our two sets of breathing. I was wondering what this man, a bit sad and bleak, was still doing at work at 9 pm. I was barely able to muster up a: 'Nice to meet you, Bartleby. I'd like to get to know you. I'll be expecting you tomorrow morning in my office at 9.30. Have a nice evening.' He did not reply. On my way home, I thought about our upcoming meeting.

Bubbles, theories, and other things

Mr Sterling: "You're missing a button"

Mr. Sterling walks out of Mr. Draper's office. The door closes.

Mr. Draper inhales out looking worried.

ubbles everywhere.

[Insert here figure 1]

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[Insert here figure 2]

As a minor gesture, small form, and immanent (bubble) matter, subject-objects, data and more are always in relation to major (big) matter. A minor gesture opens things up for variation. Deleuze and Guattari (1975) refer to minor literature as language which deterritorializes, connects individuals to the political, and generates collective assemblages and expressions. Manning (2016) in turn, drawing mostly on the work of Deleuze, Guattari, Whitehead, and Bergson, highlights the importance of minor gestures: in his opinion, they produce variation in the normative organization. The minor works the major from within and throughout. ‘The major is a structural tendency that organizes itself according to predetermined definition of value. The minor is a force that courses through it, unmooring its structural integrity, problematizing its normative standards’ (1). The minor is not known ahead of time; it is produced within the process and in relations. Minor gestures are operational since they shift the fields, alter contexts, and time-spaces. They function as relational forces and potentially invisible rhythms with unexpected force, and these rhythms are not governed by the norm or pre-existing structures but are in a state of flux and change continuously. Minor gestures are not known in advance but are produced in-act and *in situ*. They are activators, carriers, and allies of language in making and in action. Manning also proposes that minor gesture

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3 invents its own value and it does not claim a space but 'space-of-variation' (2). 'Minor gestures
4 recast the field, open it to contrast, make felt its differential. They do so by activating, in the event,
5 a change in direction, a change in quality' (Manning 2016, 23).
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9 Minor gesture is what *activates* the work under precise conditions, what makes the attunements
10 of an emerging ecology felt, what makes the work work' (65). Similar to major and minor, small
11 and big are not opposites but are variabilities of co-composition. Big do not govern without small.
12
13 Minor detail or experience is not resistance against major but a part of it. Minor activates and
14 carries. According to Manning, the importance lies in the techniques that allow singularity to 'open
15 the work to its workings to come to the fore' (66). Invention of techniques resist the major events
16 capturing the minuscular components and elements. Manning also refers to the usefulness and
17 pragmatics of the useless. Minor gestures cannot be known but are felt through their activation and
18 active potential.
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22 Manning (2016) refers to the operative cut of the minor gesture. This operative cut opens the
23 experience to its future and potential. 'The affirmative cut of the minor gesture catalyzes a
24 reordering. Cuts are not good or bad. It is what they *do* that makes a difference' (201). Both
25 Bartleby and Don Draper are defined by their gestures - often minor in nature - relational dynamics
26 and objects which also work as forms of expression (see Manning and Massumi 2014). It is
27 striking, for example, how Bartleby (Deleuze 1993) disrupts the norms and conventions of a
28 bureaucratic organization, by making apparently minor gestures (Deleuze and Guattari 1975;
29 Manning 2016), by giving up on, resisting, and finding alternative ways to respond to a burgeoning
30 capitalist culture. He inaugurates an *aprosdoketon* trope, an unexpected act which opens up the
31 possibility of disrupting taken-for-granted organizational normativity. From the perspective of
32 relational ethics, the minor gestures that shape the life of Bartleby are in flux, continuously
33 changing and produced in the relational act. Don Draper's apparent fixity and unbreakable self-
34 confidence do not seem to be vulnerable to uncertainty and indeterminacy. However, what we want
35 to bring into play here is an improbable encounter, not only between two distant fictional
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characters, but also between notion, theories, and perspectives rarely associated or used together, and between ourselves, our different disciplines, stories, and lives. An important element of these improbable encounters is our desire to draw from non-sense and the non-representational. Many qualitative scholars are obsessed with sense-making and representational ‘needs’ of inquiry. It is possible (and quite intriguing) to consider and carry out inquiry where everything does not need to make sense and where non-sense can be seen as one more ‘kind’ of sense. Deleuze (1990) elaborates on the interrelatedness and between sense and nonsense. ‘Sense and nonsense have a specific relation which cannot copy that of true and false, that is, which cannot be conceived simply on the basis of a relation of exclusion’ (68). Rather, nonsense is a word which calls its own sense. Furthermore, in this context we also highlight the productive and open-ended connections created by applying and utilizing the non-representational. For Lorimer (2005) ‘non-representational theory is an umbrella term for diverse work that seeks to better cope without self-evidently more-than-human, more-than-textual, multisensual worlds’ (83). Drawing from Thrift (2008), non-representational theory generates new intellectual landscapes, which expand procedures and techniques of expression. For example, drawing from the movement and onflow of everyday life, preindividual approaches, performance, and relational materialism experimental wonder and vagueness could be practiced. Materiality, fiction, bodies and their affective capacities enable aliveness, strangeness, and dismemberment.

What strategies will Don Draper use to speak with Bartleby?

Will Don Draper be effective in convincing Bartleby that he *has* to work?

Will Bartleby continue to repeat his mantra?

Will Draper's employees accept Bartleby?

Would.... ? Will... ? How... ? What...?

Don Draper and Bartleby

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3 My name is Don Draper; but this is not exactly my name since I am a liar. During the war in Korea I changed my identity from Dick Whitman
4 to Don Draper. I was wounded and a comrade near me (who was the true Don Draper) was dead. I (at the time called Dick) switched our dog
5 tags so that the real Don went home to my family and Dick (I) was able to reinvent my life.
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9 I love my job even if I feel as an impostor: I sell advertising and deceive people. And that's not all, I am hypocrite not only at work but with
10
11 my wife. I am a fascinating and successful man; a gifted and talented creative director.
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16 It is a summer's day and Bartleby stands "motionless" before an
17 open door, outside the office of a lawyer to whom he has applied
18 for a job as a law-copyist. He has a sedate appearance and is a
19 very quiet-looking man. He exemplifies a strange intertwining of a
20 need for privacy and expressions of suspicion; a need to ask
21 questions and open up unforeseen possibilities. At the same time,
22 one needs to be warned; one cannot forget that Bartleby's story is
23 'a story of Wall Street' told by 'a rather elderly man' who has
24 seen a whole set of diverse people working with him as a law-
25 copyist. He looks at Bartleby and we see Bartleby through his
26 eyes. Bartleby does not speak for himself. He can only be viewed
27 through somebody else's eyes and his story can only be told by
28 another man. Additionally, the scrivener is the epitome of routine
29 and irrelevance. Always the same gestures. Always the same lack of
30 significance. Pale, silent, mechanical. An enormous amount of work
31 done. After all, his job is 'a very dull, wearisome and lethargic
32 affair' Yet it is carried out without a word, with no contact with
33 fellow workers, no cheerful industriousness, as his employee might
34 have expected. And yet: Bartleby is an exception, something that
35 defies established norms and does not match any expectation. He is
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3 a 'strange' fragmentary subject who constantly defies description.
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5 He and his life are unascertainable.
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10 **Encounter 3**

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12 Very early the following morning, I went into the agency feeling excited and full of anticipation. I
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14 hadn't been able to stop thinking about the continuation of the conversation with Bartleby which
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16 had started the evening before. Perhaps it was too much to say that we had even had a conversation
17
18 or a start. But we had encountered each other.
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20 Anticipating that our second meeting would also be quick, I was prepared with some questions. I
21
22 wanted to know:
23

- 24
25 - where he came from.
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27 - how he was able to enter the agency
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29 - who had chosen and hired him
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31 - what his competences, skills and attitudes were, and what professional goals he had
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33 - And also, what did he like?
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36 I have to admit that I wanted to know something about his private life. Was there somebody at
37
38 home waiting for him? Was he living with anybody?

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40 I realized that ever since the first time I saw him, I'd been attracted to his suit. It was rather worn-
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42 out, but it had an unusual combination of colors, an interesting cut, and was made of unusual
43
44 material. It seemed to come from another era. Even if it was rather unusual and worn-out, however, I
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46 would love to have one. Yesterday evening we were both very tired. I supposed that might be one
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48 reason why the conversation did not continue beyond the greeting.
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51 Today I am really keen to listen to him and I had plenty of time to talk with him. Perhaps my
52
53 interest for him is related to my philanthropic inspirations or generosity.

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55 At our third 'meeting' Bartleby knocks at the door.
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- Come in. Good morning Mr. Bartleby. Nice to meet you again this morning and thank you for coming –

- Good morning, Mr Draper –

Our eyes met but I did not know what to say. All the questions I had in my mind seemed to have no meaning and value. I thought about cigarettes and a glass of bourbon.

- Would you like a drink? –

He said: ‘I’d prefer not to.’

- Ok. ... Of course, I see, it is too early. And perhaps you think that it is not healthy to drink this early in the morning. But... would you like a cigarette?’

Bartleby said once again: ‘I’d prefer not to.’

I did not know how to respond. Bartleby’s second answer left me completely bewildered. Was that an answer, or was his reply something between an answer, question, or proposition? Bartleby was using the conditional tense. What a strange situation! I did not know how to involve him; I did not know how to continue. I was embarrassed. Then I had a brilliant idea.

Since the shirt he wore was quite worn out and completely outdated, I thought I would give him a present. I opened a desk drawer and I pulled out one of those new, fresh-smelling, starched white shirts, one of my ‘reserve shirts’ that I keep in the office just in case I spend the night away from home. These are the shirts that make me feel like the real ‘Don Draper’. And I said:

- Bartleby, I think you deserve a present. Here’s one of my special shirts. Please wear it and you can take it home with you. Please interpret this minor gesture as a kind welcome as a behalf of Sterling & Cooper.... Or... would you prefer not to?

I said these five words slightly excited and maybe ironically assuming that replying ‘no’ was not possible.

And I heard:

- At the moment, I’d prefer not to –

He left the room in silence.

#RESET

End credits

- Genre Textual and performative entanglements
- Created by Author 1, Author 2, Author 3 and other authors cited in the reference list
- Based on: *Mad Men* by Matthew Weiner and *Bartleby, the Scrivener* by Herman Melville
- Starring: Don Draper and Bartleby, Author1, Author 2, Author 3 “the scholars”
- Country of origin Italy and United States
- Original language Italian and English
- #RESET

After dialoguing

A scholar: How does this paper offer valid knowledge?

Us: The purpose of these textual and performative writings is not to look for verifiable knowledge or to seek universal explanations based on cause-and-effect relationships in the neo- and post-positivistic sense. The ‘validity and sense-making’ potentially embedded in this paper do not reflect the validity criteria established in positivistic forms of inquiry but are rooted instead in post-epistemic concerns which ‘reframe validity as multiple, partial, endlessly deferred’ (Lather 1993, 675). What we are looking for is exemplars that can provoke and stimulate thinking and dialogue (see MacLure 2011) and for rhizomatic validity that works ‘against the constraints of authority, regularity, and commonsense, and opens thoughts up to creative constructions’ (Lather 1993, 680).

A scholar: Is this paper academic writing? Who is the author of this paper?

Us: Another purpose of this paper is to write differently and experimentally in order to push the boundaries of academic writing in the field of organization studies. Academic writing ‘is

normalized as a guarantor of Truth, Insight and Knowledge; it rests on presumptions of Order, Logic and Transparency' (Benozzo et al. 2018, 12). In line with those authors that call for polymorphic research (Alvesson and Gabriel 2013) and disturb the notion of author (Author 4), this paper resists the regular format of writing and does not follow a tidy structure. Through these textual and academic writings, we hope to open up spaces and places that challenge authors and readers and more generally scholarly process of production.

A scholar: Is this paper an empirical research article?

Us: This is a conceptual piece—not a piece of empirical research as defined by quantitative researchers. Pop culture and literature have been used as connectors and parts of an assemblage in this experimental writing piece. Here *Mad Men* and *Bartleby* were juxtaposed and combined, placed alongside each other and made to overlap in unexpected ways. Rather than using this text as a fixed representation of existing reality, our paper assembles, creates, and produces.

A scholar: What are some of the implications of your work for the field of organization studies?

Us: We deliberately set out to create surprising and unexpected effects for the reader. If in the process of reading these pages the reader (and us) sometime feels lost and disoriented, then we were 'successful' in our aim. Through our fictions and a post-qualitative approach, instead of theorizing and imagining *resetting*, *aprosdoketon* and *the minor gesture*, this paper attempted to actually perform those theoretical resources, to set them to work. We believe that this technique is relevant to scholars in organization studies, where the methodological debate inspired by poststructuralism, post-humanism, new materialism and known as post-qualitative approach/research/methodologies are still to come and make their impact. This debate both asks and performs: once the classic structures of humanism have been undone by poststructuralist theories, what might happen in our everyday research practice? And what might happen to the way we experience organizations and organizing?

Now, all is set for a fresh (re)start without a new beginning.

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Figure 1 – Bubbles everywhere

Figure 2 - Bubbles, theories, and other things



Aspirin tablet is bubbling and dissolving in the water. Bottom of the glass is filled with air bubbles. Molecules of the aspirin react with hydrogen and oxygen. Old substance is dissolved, now blending with other substances creating a compound full of energy and force. Bubbles move around water and rise all the way to the top of the glass.

Life in the office is also bubbling. Various ingredients and matter, executives and secretaries, men and women, single and married, Jews and Italians mix unexpectedly yet surprisingly smoothly. Something is being brewed, created, and becoming.

Headache is here. Stress and worry about having something presentable during next business meeting. Aspirin offers some hope for recovery.