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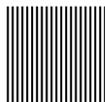


Security Studies and Organization Studies: Parallels and Possibilities

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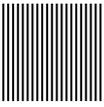
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Abstract. *This note provides an outline of the field of security studies, drawing comparison between it and that of organization studies. It is noted that whilst having many parallels, the two fields exist almost entirely in isolation from each other. The potential overlaps between the fields offer opportunities to extend the range of each and to contribute to the renewal of organization studies.* **Key words.** *human security; intelligence studies; organization studies; security studies*



The mainline of development in social science disciplines may be said to have created a *diaspora* of fields of inquiry related to, drawing upon and yet not quite *of* those disciplines. Thus fields as diverse as criminology, cultural studies, education, media studies, international relations and rural studies all stand in some relation to, *inter alia*, anthropology, economics, political science, psychology and sociology. This is only superficially a matter of the application of social science disciplines to specific empirical domains, since in the process these disciplines are themselves re-configured. However, since the communities in which this occurs are separate, it is not surprising to find that—rather like the divergent linguistic development of isolated populations—particular differences, as well as family resemblances, exist between them.

In this paper I want to focus on the twin fields of organization studies and security studies, with a view to identifying commonalities, divergences and, in the process, prospects for crossover. This attempt is, needless to say, not a random exercise but is instead animated by a particular interest,



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namely work I have been doing (with Andrew Sturdy) on the organization of Bletchley Park, the site of cryptanalytic and signals intelligence activities during World War Two. That study, initially conceived of as a minor foray into a curious organizational byway, has developed into a major, ongoing undertaking. In the process I have become aware of a substantial literature within intelligence studies and, more widely, security studies which has rarely, if ever, featured in organization studies.

My engagement with that literature suggests that there is something at stake for the wider organization studies community. At one level that is just the recognition that what I will show to be a parallel literature exists. At a more significant level, I believe that this literature provides one point of entry into conducting a (critical) organization studies in a way that is broader than is currently the case and, for that matter, that there is scope for extending the range of security studies. Arguably what is at stake here is more than a simple interchange between disciplines: it is also about a recognition that several important issues in the contemporary world have both a security and an organizational aspect.

I will proceed by providing a brief overview of security studies, followed by a longer summary of its development. I will then draw attention to some parallels between security and organization studies before setting out some ways in which the two subjects could draw upon, and enrich, each other.

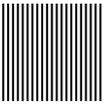
Security Studies: An Overview

Security studies is itself an outcropping of another part of the social science *diaspora*, international relations, which in turn grew out of political theory and science. International relations became a subject of academic inquiry in the aftermath of the First World War and was animated by a desire to understand better, and so hopefully to avoid, inter-state conflict (Sheehan, 2005). Security studies in turn emerged as a subject following the Second World War and was in large part a response both to the failure of the international system to prevent that conflict and to the new international situation emerging from the dislocation and chaos it had engendered. Thus the formation of the subject is directly linked to war, and this has shaped, and continues to shape, its core concerns.

A particular legacy of this formation is that, until recently, security studies has accorded a central place to the State and the issue of security has been primarily conceived of as state security, with the primary threat to that understood to be conflict. Thus:

Security itself is a relative freedom from war, coupled with a relatively high expectation that defeat will not be a consequence of any war that should occur. (Bellamy, 1981: 102)

The linkage of security studies to statehood means that there is an inheritance of debates, and assumptions about, the State inherited from



political theory as well as associated debates about such matters as sovereignty, legitimacy, power and authority. The linkage with conflict is equally significant, spawning parallel or sub-fields, such as 'war studies' and 'intelligence studies', but also positioning the subject in relation to an array of political and military institutions. The consequences of this will be explored shortly, but for now it is worth saying that amongst the mosaic of subject fields in this area, another is 'peace studies'. This too emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War but, again until recently, tended to view security studies critically as being related, ideologically if not indeed institutionally, to the apparatus of war (Green, 1966).

Since at least the early 1980s, security studies has broadened considerably in that, whilst its traditional concerns are still present, there has been an increasing accent upon 'human security'. In distinction to, and often actively critical of, the traditional state-centred approach, human security stresses the multiplicity of ways in which such security may be threatened. Depending upon the breadth of the approach, examples might include terrorism, crime, health (and especially the HIV/AIDS pandemic), intra-state conflict (and especially human rights violations up to and including genocide), people-trafficking, poverty and climate change. Whilst these concerns certainly intersect with issues of the State and war, they can by no means be reduced to them, and in contrast to the earlier definition lead rather to the view that:

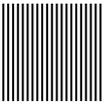
If people, be they government ministers or private individuals, perceive an issue to threaten their lives in some way and respond politically to this, then that issue should be deemed to be a *security* issue. (Hough, 2004: 9)

Indeed, the more radical broadenings of security studies would not even require that the people respond politically for an issue for it to be legitimately considered as one of security.

This shift entails more than a simple widening of academic territory. It implies the need to extend the analytical range of the subject away from the social science of the State. It potentially shifts the relationship between security studies and political and military institutions—which is why the distinction of peace studies and security studies has now somewhat eroded. Both as cause and consequence it opens up a greater likelihood of critique, and this, indeed, is what has occurred.

The Development of Security Studies

Within the broad contours I identified in the previous section are concealed a series of developments and fissures. Of particular interest is what one might call the sociology of knowledge of security studies, and more especially its relationship with its political context. As I have noted, it emerged after the Second World War, but in its early decades was shaped more precisely by the Cold War and by the nuclear arms race (Gray, 1982; Green, 1966; Smoke, 1975). This may be seen as an extension of the more general way in



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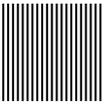
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which, throughout the Second World War, close links between government, civilians and academics were formed (a prime example, in fact, being the codebreaking efforts at Bletchley Park). Within the new and unprecedented context of the nuclear stand-off there was considerable interest, especially in the United States, in bringing to bear social scientific analysis for the policy purpose of prosecuting the Cold War.

The key areas of security research which emerged in this context were, firstly, the application of game theory, developed by mathematicians such as Jonathan von Neumann, to nuclear deterrence strategy. Intimately associated with the influential RAND Corporation, which famously invented the prisoner's dilemma that served as game theory's paradigm (Poundstone, 1992; Smith, 1966), game theory enabled the modelling of different nuclear scenarios under particular assumptions about rationality. This work both fitted with, and influenced the development of, US foreign and military policy. Moreover, it was consistent with an intellectual climate in which social science was seen as having, and being justified by, the possibility of providing reliable guides to action and social intervention. A second key area was in the application of models derived from economics and operations research to defence systems and planning (Smoke, 1975: 290–93). Here the development of security studies and organization studies touch each other directly both in terms of the general intellectual climate and more specifically through the importance of operations research and logistical techniques. Indeed, the historian of management Robert Locke (1996: 43–44) explains how a complex cross-fertilization of military and civilian management ideas around operations research, and with RAND as a key player, developed in the 1950s.

To these two areas one might add that above and beyond military and nuclear aspects of security, the Cold War also provided the backdrop to the allied subject of intelligence studies. Increasing revelations about the role of intelligence in the Second World War, combined with the manifest reality that espionage formed a significant part of the Cold War, as shown by, for example, the defections of Soviet agents in Britain, indicated that intelligence was a crucial aspect of security in its restricted meaning. Once again, the 'classic' work of the 1950s and 1960s was informed by the mathematics, not of game theory but of cybernetics as developed by, especially Norbert Wiener. However, and for reasons which are presumably obvious, at least as important for intelligence studies has been the discipline of history and much contemporary work seeks to reconstruct intelligence issues using the standard techniques of historical analysis (e.g. Aldrich, 2001; Andrew, 1987) or even organizational analysis (e.g. Davies, 2004).

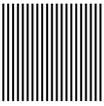
Yet the Cold War was not just about nuclear competition and espionage. Periodically it turned 'hot', most notably perhaps in Vietnam. And this is one reason, at least, for the erosion of what had been in the 1950s and 1960s the dominant approach to security studies. Vietnam showed that the subject 'knew next to nothing [about] peasant nationalism in Southeast Asia



or about the mechanics of a counter-revolutionary war' (Gray, 1982: 90). Moreover, by the 1970s, the politics of the nuclear arms race were beginning to shift dramatically, especially in Europe, with the emergence of vocal protest groups and a more widespread critique of the game-theoretic doctrine of 'mutually assured destruction'. Nor was security studies immune to the transformations which were occurring throughout the social sciences in terms of the erosion of the positivist consensus with its assumptions of economic rationality in favour not just of new methodologies (Jervis, 1976) but also a new and more politicized understanding of social science (Gray, 1982). From this time, criticisms of a narrowly state-focussed concept of security began to occur (Buzan, 1983). Thus for both external and internal reasons the rather anodyne and uncritical, if not—as the peace studies critics would have it—co-opted and compromised nature of traditional security studies began to unravel. When the Cold War came to a close at the end of the 1980s, it became all but untenable for security studies to continue as it had done.

Out of this situation emerged a series of insights which in time coalesced under the label of 'critical security studies', the title of an influential edited volume (Krause and Williams, 1997). This collection drew together a variety of the newer perspectives and represented a critical orientation rather than adherence to a particular school of thought, and was the outcome of a conference held in Toronto in 1994. As well as opening up even further the matter of state-centrism, and therefore the issue of the 'object' of security studies, the collection also asked epistemological questions about the adequacy of objectivism itself, and in this way posed a more radical challenge than simply asking the subject to extend its range. This latter concern is present in another, almost simultaneous, elaboration of a new approach by Buzan et al. (1998). This approach, which has been dubbed that of the 'Copenhagen School', draws upon social constructivism and post-structuralism and in particular develops the notion of 'securitization'. Securitization is concerned with the processes through which particular issues become constituted as 'security' issues, and are seen as amenable to security solutions (or, in parallel, the way that other issues are 'de-securitized' and so seen as outside the scope of security studies). This begins to open up the essentially politicized nature of security and therefore augments the process of recognizing new areas (poverty, HIV/AIDS, etc.) as being ones of security, and also offers a more politicized goal for security studies which for some writers now became, explicitly, that of emancipation (Eriksson, 1999).

The Copenhagen approach links to more thoroughgoing post-structuralist and deconstructionist analyses of security, such as that of Campbell (1998) who explains US foreign policy in terms of the production of an American self via the construction of a dangerous and threatening foreign 'other' (other examples of such analyses include Der Derian, 1995; Dillon, 2006). Copenhagen also has affinities to an increasing stream of feminist work on



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security (e.g. Tickner, 1992), although has itself been criticized for largely ignoring and excluding feminist work (Hansen, 2000; c.f. Krause, 1998). Amongst the issues at stake here are, firstly, gendered aspects of security. These might include the particular effect upon women of war (Stiglmayer, 1994) or, in the more expanded sweep of security studies, issues of rape, prostitution, female poverty and other issues impacting upon the security of women. On the other hand, the discipline of security studies can itself be seen as gendered in terms of the concepts of analysis that it has used, its assumptions about women, and its traditional relationship with the military and defence institutions.

The broad church approach of critical security studies, and still more the constructivist and post-structuralist approaches, is rejected by a group of neo-marxist security studies writers who draw upon Frankfurt School Critical Theory and Gramscian ideas of hegemony and ideology (Booth, 2005a). Here again the construction of security is at issue, but this is seen as part of specific kind of politicized process, one which must ultimately be understood in terms of capitalist imperatives and ideologies. On this account, post-structuralist approaches in particular are seen as relativist and as lacking the political purchase necessary to yield emancipation. According to at least to Ken Booth (2005b), the leading writer of this group, feminist approaches are seen as of value to the extent that they draw upon Critical Theory but are otherwise to be avoided.

Despite the development of these various strands of critical security studies, it should not be thought that the more traditional approaches have disappeared. On the contrary, they continue to be widespread but, as Wæver and Buzan (2007) argue, the security studies field has to a considerable extent bifurcated between the US and Europe. The latter is the source of most of the critical developments, whilst US research is characterized by a positivistic search for general laws and cause-effect relationships. This, they say, is partly to be explained by different intellectual traditions in the social sciences, partly by the fact that European security studies arose later than, and so somewhat reacted to, the US field, and partly by a different set of policy understandings between the two continents.

As a final point in this resumé of the security studies field, it is worth moving from the internal debates back to the external factors which also shape its development. There can be little doubt that, just as the Second World War, the Cold War and the Vietnam War were relevant to that development so too is, and will be, the 'War on Terror' and the more traditional wars in Iraq and elsewhere that are related to it. At the very least, these events make security studies a topical area for research. Within this context, the transformations which have taken place in the field since the end of the Cold War may have a significant impact upon how we think about the construction of certain issues as 'securitized' and the concomitant implications for foreign, defence and intelligence policies; for domestic policies on policing, surveillance and criminal justice; and for the politics of individual and collective identity.



Organization Studies and Security Studies

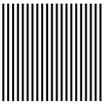
Most readers of this journal, on the fair assumption that they are steeped in organization studies, will have read the foregoing account of security studies with more than a glimmer of recognition of the glaring parallels between the two areas. I have already indicated one point of connection: namely the influence of operations research in general, and the RAND Corporation in particular, in promulgating a particular view of organizations and their management.

However, this connection is itself only an aspect of the wider enmeshment of organization studies with war and, more particularly, World War Two and the Cold War. These linkages have rarely, if ever, been systematically explored in the organization studies literature, although there are many suggestive analyses including the observation that post-war organization studies was dominated by an anti-marxist reading of Weber (Marsden and Townley, 1996); the way that key organizational thinkers such as Kurt Lewin, and key ideas such as action research, were enmeshed in the intelligence politics of the Cold War (Cooke, 2006, 2007) and, more generally the relationship between developments in organization studies and the broad sweep of post-war history (March, 2007). It would therefore be possible, albeit well beyond the scope of this paper, to provide a 'securitized' reading of organization studies.

Above and beyond these specific connections of war and organization studies there is a more general issue about the way that so many understandings of organizations—from the Weberian ideal-type of bureaucracy, through concepts of competitive strategy through to the social psychology of leadership—derive from precisely, if not always explicitly, military organizations.

Beyond this, the story of security studies parallels that of organization studies in ways including:

- The defining imprint of 1950s positivism and economism, and the associated idea that applied social science could, through deployment of scientific method, provide a basis for ameliorative intervention in social life or, more sceptically, was predicated upon the instrumentalization of social scientific knowledge;
- The way that this ideal, or instrumentalization, was located institutionally within, and substantially funded by, the 'military-industrial complex' of defence and defence policy, in the case of security studies, or business schools enmeshed with corporate interests in the case of organization studies;
- The challenge to that ideal through the emergence of broader and more diverse apprehensions of the subject in the 1970s and 1980s;
- The dissolution of that ideal as a result of largely European-led theoretical developments in critical social science which proceeded at the same time as a dominant positivist, economic 'mainstream' persisted in the US;



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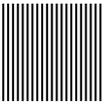
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- The emergence of an explicitly badged ‘critical’ approach in each case
- The way that the critical approaches are characterized by schism, and often vitriolic debate, between neo-marxists, constructionists, post-structuralists and feminists.

These parallels are almost perfect in terms of timing, although in this context organization studies may have the unusual experience of being very slightly in advance of another subject, if the analogue to Krause and Williams (1997) critical security studies collection is taken to be Alvesson and Willmott’s (1992) critical management studies volume. It also seems fair to say that feminist scholarship in security studies is as yet somewhat more marginalized than in the organization studies field: to the best of my knowledge, there is no analogue in the critical organization studies field to the way that Booth (2005b) and Krause (1998), albeit from very different perspectives, explicitly sideline or even dismiss feminist work.

In terms of the argument I am developing here, perhaps the most significant of the parallels listed lies in the way that in the 1980s in both fields there was a major re-evaluation and refocusing of traditional concerns. In both cases there was a shift away from understandings based upon a realist and essentialist understanding of the subject matter. In this shift, the importance of social processes of organizing and securitizing, rather than the instrumental concerns of organization and state come into focus. This matters not simply as part of the story of parallel development, but because it does, as I will suggest shortly, open up possibilities for new engagements between the two fields.

That such parallels exist should not blind us to the many differences which also exist, but nor should they surprise us: there is undoubtedly an underlying set of political and social conditions which a proper sociology of knowledge of these and similar subjects would have to take account of. Yet what is perhaps surprising, and if not surprising then noteworthy, is that the developments in security studies and organization studies have proceeded almost completely independently.¹ In the various works within security studies that I have cited in this paper, there is almost no overlap in references with organization studies. And even where there is an overlap in referencing, it is almost always to what might be considered foundational works in social science or philosophy which were written long before either security or organization studies became constituted as subjects (e.g. Marx, Weber, Hobbes, Kant, Rousseau) or written completely outside those subject areas (e.g. Habermas, Foucault). The specialized research literatures that have emerged in each field post-1945 are almost entirely separate. In intelligence studies, where there has been some attention to organizational issues in terms of the organization of intelligence agencies, we find in Davies’ (2004) study of MI6 that Weber apart, the organizational references are predominantly to the structural-functionalist and contingency theory literature of the 1950s, 1960s and very early 1970s. In an excellent recent textbook on security studies (Collins, 2007) there



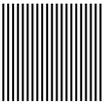
are no references at all to the organization studies literature; whilst a brief check of a handful of organization studies textbooks reveals no references to the security studies literature. With reasonable certainty it can be said that there are more security studies references in this paper than have ever been made before in a paper in the organization studies field.

The Organization of Security and the Security of Organization

Beyond the recognition of parallels between organization and security studies, the substantive concerns of each field are suggestive of a range of possible complementarities and new research agenda. The most obvious of these is that there is clearly space for a considerable amount of organizational analysis of the institutions of security. Even within the restricted, statist understandings of traditional security studies, agencies relating to intelligence, counter-terrorism, warfare, defence procurement, policing and so on can be understood as organizational apparatuses which could be studied in similar ways to any other organization. In fact, such studies are rare when compared to almost any other sector: manufacturing industry, financial services, retailing, airlines, professions, healthcare and so on routinely feature as sites for empirical investigation in organization studies. Security agencies, with perhaps the exception of the police, are notably absent from the repertoire. One reason for that may well be the obvious difficulties of gaining research access to areas which are often cloaked in secrecy. A way around this might be to focus upon historical cases—although this too is an area of organization studies where, despite repeated calls for progress (e.g. Booth and Rowlinson, 2006; Kieser, 1994) relatively little has been made—where previously sensitive or classified information is available.

Even leaving aside the study of security organizations *per se*, the growing apparatus of surveillance associated with these organizations is also of potential interest. The management of populations through CCTV observation, mobile phone tracking, the increased use of databases (e.g. DNA) and ever more sophisticated technologies of identification (e.g. iris recognition) are clearly an aspect of a security landscape animated, ostensibly so anyway, by concerns about terrorism and crime, and in this sense are a part of the classic terrain of security studies. But of course the theme of surveillance is one of the better-trodden paths in organization studies in recent decades (Ball, 2005; Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992), and, through the work of Kirstie Ball in particular, has spawned the sub-discipline of ‘surveillance studies’ (Ball and Haggerty, 2005) with its own journal, *Surveillance and Society*. Such work could readily inform part of the agenda for a cross-over between organization and security studies.

If there is scope for organizational analysis of security agencies in the narrow sense, or the activities of these agencies in the wider sense, then the opening up of security studies beyond its statist origins surely presents even greater opportunities. Here what is at stake are the manifold ways



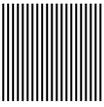
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in which human security is achieved and extended (or lost and reduced) through, for example, conflict resolution, aid and development, healthcare provision, human rights interventions and so on. Much of this is predicated upon, or at least entwined within, organizational delivery of security, or the organized ways in which human security is compromised. Of course some—although not perhaps a great deal—of organizational analysis does engage with such issues, especially as regards development (e.g. Dar and Cooke, 2008) but not generally in terms which place ‘security’ as a central reference point or problematic. One might think that an agenda of this sort could have a particular appeal for more critical researchers in organization studies who, whilst they might perhaps be uneasy about some of the work of state security agencies, might have some interest in, and commitment to, broader issues of human security and the political agenda which might be associated with them.

All of this is suggestive of a way that organization studies could broaden into the areas currently dealt with by security studies. However, there is certainly scope for a two-way traffic. For one could envisage organizations of all sorts, not just ‘security organizations’, as being potential arenas in which security can be achieved. The most obvious example would be questions of employment security. Work organizations can—and in some times and places and for some people have and do—deliver very high degrees of security in terms of continuous, guaranteed employment, sometimes related in turn to securing the continuation of particular communities. Similarly, more commonly and increasingly, they contribute to insecurity through fragmented, discontinuous employment; constant organizational change and a detachment from particular localities and communities by virtue of the international mobility of capital (Sennett, 1998, 2006). Work organizations are also, as has been widely explored within organization studies, sites within which individual security and insecurity and identity is shaped and deployed (e.g. Knights and Willmott, 1999).

These ideas, commonplace enough within organization studies, are very peripheral in security studies. There has been some interest in economic security, mainly configured in ‘macro’ terms of protecting the stability and integrity of economic systems, and some interest in employment issues, mainly configured in terms of population migration, but, in parallel to the point made about the possibility of organization studies placing security as a central concept, so too is their scope for security studies to place organization centrally. This would be wider than the issue of employment versus unemployment, important though that is to human security, to take in the social and psychological implications of work organizations for security. In Bourdieu’s (1999) documentation of social suffering, there are haunting accounts of how change and dislocation in the workplace, even within a stable and relatively prosperous country like France, provokes a very profound erosion of security. Similarly, Ehrenreich’s (2006) account of her undercover investigation reveals the hidden despair of a burgeoning ‘white-collar underclass’ in the United States, eking out a precarious



existence on the margins of economic activity. These insecurities may be less dramatic than those induced by war and disease but, then again, the implication of 'securitization' is the need to recognize the contingent nature of security and, thus, of the topics for security studies to consider.

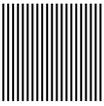
Underlying such issues there lurk broader questions of political economy and society. Boltanski and Chiapello (2007) take 'security' as being one of the dividing lines between the 'second spirit of capitalism' and what they regard as 'the new spirit of capitalism'. In the former, roughly associating to the corporate capitalism of the decades following World War Two, a combination of state welfare systems and stable corporate careers and benefits provided, for some, an apparatus of security in the way just suggested. The wide scale abandonment of this model did not happen by accident, but as a response to various critiques and crises. In the widest sense, we could say that they tie back to the emergence of a globalized economy and society [itself, of course, a complex and contested notion—see, for example, Lechner and Boli (2003) for key debates]. If that emergence impacts upon workplace and welfare security, so too does it form an important part of the contemporary security landscape. Obvious examples would include the globalization of terror networks and of crime; less obvious examples, perhaps, the internationalization of the defence industry and of security agency co-operation (e.g. intelligence sharing).

In this sense, not only are there parallels and overlaps between security and organization studies but there are also a set of common processes—economic, political, social—which impact upon their empirical domains and their internal development. Indeed it could be said that, in the same way that the development of security studies in particular, and organization studies to an extent, was shaped by the geo-politics of wars both hot and cold, so too may current and future directions be in part a reflection of developments in contemporary geo-politics. This is a huge and speculative question, the nature of which I have sketched in only the most cursory way. Yet it does not seem an absurd hypothesis: less so, anyway, than the alternative which would be to see the fields as proceeding in ways unaffected by such developments.

Conclusion

There are good reasons to think that organization studies is currently in need of renewal, including the more critically-oriented parts of the field. In a thought-provoking and far-reaching recent piece, Alf Rehn has bemoaned the narrowness of its range:

The field [management/organization] studies things like proper, preferably big and successful companies, mostly in areas thought to be central right now. Burgeoning, successful fields such as the arms trade, pornography, illicit drugs, money laundering and smuggling are completely ignored, whereas things such as management consultancies and call centers (!?) are studied almost *ad absurdum*. (Rehn, 2008: 607, emphatic punctuation in the original)



This is very different from the familiar hectoring which demands increased corporate relevance for our field. It is also different from what is currently the norm for innovation in our field, which too often consists, at least in critical approaches, of the addition of this or that new theorist to the repertoire. By contrast, Rehn invites us to extend the empirical basis of organization studies, and in the process to redefine what the field means, away from a narrowly corporate focus.

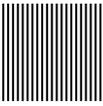
What I have suggested in this paper is that one way of doing this is to engage with the issues posed in a parallel and currently unconnected sub-discipline of social science, namely security studies. The issues of human security, broadly conceived, are pressing and complex, as security studies shows. They are also in no small measure organizational. An organization studies that matters should have something to say about them.

Note

1. A partial exception, published since this paper was first drafted, is Perrow (2007).

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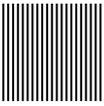
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