The Somatechnics of Organisations

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This special issue of *Somatechnics: Journal of Bodies – Technologies – Power* is an invitation to critically interrogate how our everyday technological, social, and embodied experience of *organisation* as a *traveling concept* (Bal 2002) and socio-material (Orlikowski 2007) production of reality, can generate new modes of organising and being and nonbeing organised. The articles in this special issue span across the humanities, social sciences, performing arts, and critical management studies, to trouble the concept of organisation by *de-organising* it and the manner in which it has traditionally been instrumentalised and put to use in modern-day organisational theory and practice.

In western societies, economies and living environments are organised according to a predetermined pattern which has proven predictable in the past in hope of it remaining sustainably predictable in and for the future. Western culture itself is organised in an 'organisational culture' of supposedly shared 'pattern of basic assumptions' (Schein 2010: 18) about 'the world': who are its members, what are their main values, and how to efficiently go about solving problems that occur within and outside this culture. Interestingly, the concept of organisation seems to materialise when ordered and structured accounts of individual and collective reality are either threatened or urgently needed. For example, it is only when modern-day business organisations incur financial losses that a reorganisation scheme is drawn up by teams of organisation advisors or when a new political reality threatens marginalised groups in society that a call to self-organise is articulated and takes shape.

Academic disciplines and research areas are being organised and reorganised in what Rosi Braidotti (2019) identifies as a 'quantitative

explosion […] [of] often radical and always interdisciplinary practices that call themselves "studies"'. These 'studies', such as 'Women's, gay and lesbian, gender, feminist, and queer studies; race, postcolonial and subaltern studies' (38), to name just a few, attempt to reshape the organisational culture we have been ordered to recognise as universal and everlasting. By situating knowledge(s) of 'dialectical and structural "others" of humanistic "Man"' (38) within given or reclaimed spatial and temporal coordinates, the whole cartography of the concept of organisation has been reshuffled and drawn anew.

Organisation is no longer only a fixed entity residing in a physical chamber and instrumentalised in an orderly fashion to achieve maximum results or a predetermined purpose. As such, organisation materialises as a relational process, in which a plethora of bodies, human and nonhuman, social and technological, systematically organised and disruptively chaotic/unruly, participate in dynamic shifts, movements, and exchanges between states of being and nonbeing organised. In that sense there is no outside of organisation which serves as an imminent concept or rule. Two questions seem to be crucial here. The first question to be asked is, how did we get to this point where such a concept appears almost as a natural law without which everyday reality cannot be explained or experienced? The second question that needs to be asked is, how are our bodies affected by the predominance of such an 'organisation' rule or guiding principle, which has also played a key role as an explanatory metaphor and structuring concept in biology since modernity in the way bodies are anatomised, classified, and perceived as bounded entities which, more often than not, warrants the fixity of their ontological status? In a day and age where different perceptions of how human and nonhuman bodies interact with their environment the concept of organisation seems outdated. And yet it is very much here.

Occupying its own particular and playful space of a *purposiveness without a purpose,* to evoke Immanuel Kant's (1914) concept of the beautiful, this special issue of *Somatechnics* invites its readers to actively take part in developing and collaboratively prototyping a new soma-technics of organisation(s). Whether self-organised, disorganised, or affectively organised, the articles in this special issue are *inefficiently* gathered around the theme of organisation and as such they do not aim to make a totalising account of what organisation could or should be. In that sense they are inefficient, as there is no purpose or goal to bundling them up in one issue of an academic journal. Instead, they are to be experienced as provocations or bird chirps of different frequencies that put the concept and its intermediaries such as infrastructure,

technology, knowledge, productivity, purpose, community, protocol, and methodology under fire.

The first article by Ruowen Xu poignantly and vividly identifies and *tickles* the governing force of *techne*, by weaving a newly coined term 'chaosmo-technics' (119) which 'encapsulates the generativity of technological disorganisation and the cosmological chaos' (119) with and through Martin Heidegger's interpretation of the onto-epistemology of modern technology as that which orders and organises 'materials, bodies, information, and capitals' (117–118). Calling for a 'non-binary imagination and affirmative ethics' (120), the concept of chaosmo-technics Xu coins, de-organises the 'universalised organisational episteme of technology […] in the names of error, chaos, faults, nullification, uncontrollability, and catastrophe' (119). Theorizing from a case study of Japan's Robot Theater Project (2008 to present), the author shows how the threading of Buddhist concepts of non-being, chaos, and the void, through a theater-based practice that revolves around human-robot interactions, can shift thinking about technology away from its organisation-orientedness to warrant, instead, as Luciana Parisi (2021) elaborates, 'the acknowledgment of the materiality, contingency, and necessity of noises and disorganization' (39). By subverting the human-led organisational tendency to purposefully and efficiently control machinery output, 'broken down' lethargic robots sluggishly refuse to work as expected in the theater play, suggestively embodying other ways of being and caring for robots and humans.

Letiche, Moriceau, and Letiche's paper 'Liminality Affect and Flesh' crystalises and gives flesh to the concept of *liminality* as 'concrete embodied social event(s)' (145) that are 'risky, embodied, frightening, and without any guaranteed end' (7). Flaming through an auto-ethnographic account of an unfortunate and unresolved fire in *Saint Saturnin*, a small and picturesque village in central France, the three-headed author lingers in the aftermath of the fire as a *persona non grata*, after over twenty-years of being accepted and valued as a member of the village community who met frequently on the terrace of the local bar to drink in conviviality. The passage from being someone to being no-one, reorganises the aporic relationship the author had to place and uproots them from the 'safe haven' they mythically thought they had and were part of, to being, without what Vilem Flusser in *The Freedom of The Migrant* (2003) calls a *heimat* '(in German meaning home, homeland, and region often accompanied by notions of nostalgia, even myth, referring also to one's family home or "being at home")' (1). The feeling of being without a heimat means suffering the loss of 'many bonds, most of which are hidden and not accessible to

consciousness' (3), while at the same time, freeing oneself from the idea of being settled in a homeland which is 'not an eternal value but rather a function of a specific technology' (3). Setting oneself free from such a 'homeland technology' in which 'the mysterious rootedness in heimat [...] [clouds the] ability to see reality clearly', one learns to shape a technology of the self where, 'clear judgment, decision making, and actions become possible'. Finally, rather than 'cutting one's attachments to others [...], weaving relationships in concert with them [...] elucidates the meaning of being free' (4) for Flusser.

If, as Silvia Gherardi (2021) claims in *A Posthumanist Epistemology of Practice,* '"organizations" are the effects of organizing practices rather than its source', then the 'shift from entities that have agency to relations that perform entities' (237) are at the center of Sandra Fernández García and Francisco Sánchez Valle's contribution to this special issue of *The Somatechnics of Organisations.* In their article '"Informal Infrastructure" of Prototyping: Practicing Organisation by Performing Materiality' they use the term *things* 'to refer to the constituent relational character of material participants – including bodies – which emerges as they inhabit an environment' (165). Succinctly, in three different case studies the organisation and management of the concept of 'air' as an ontological category that refers to human breathing and ideas of health in the city of Madrid highlight how 'bodies and artifacts are mutually in/trans/formed through the process of prototyping as a political process of performing materiality' (165). In the process of prototyping together a device for measuring and/or visualising air quality in the city, for example, a sh-air-ed understanding of 'air in relation' (177) is produced. Such a heuristic understanding both encapsulates in its materiality how the act of organising as an ordering gesture is part of the final prototype, and at the same time, it organises the way subsequent collaborations are to be executed in the future.

Foregrounding the practice of prototyping is envisioned by Fernández and Sánchez as essentially collaborative and temporally constituted as it 'emerges for people in practice [...] [and] becomes infrastructure in relation to organized practices (Star 1999: 113)' (167). By inhibiting the teleological characteristic of the prototype to reach the fixed 'state prior to a final form with a specific function' (169), prototyping itself emerges in their article as 'a way of doing' which is open ended, recursive, relational, and with a political purpose (169). Collaboration as a practice 'acquires a "body"' (171) in a mode of social experimentation through 'the changing relationship between individuals, groups, raw materials, and devices' (171). Endangering the formal and normative dimension of such an organised collaborative body, is the

idea of failure which is incorporated as an integral part in the development of a prototype. Emerging when disruptive circumstances put at risk the available material resources and capabilities, *resistance* as an informal mode of doing 'repair work' (177) in infrastructures stabilises the process of prototyping, while revealing its transformative power.

The same etymological origin of the word *proto*-type, prōtos meaning first in Greek, is also the focus of Andries Hiskes and Ohad Ben Shimon's methodology-concerned article 'Stuck Together'. Instead of the first form, that serves as a basis for other forms and objects, such as it is encapsulated in the idea of the proto*type* in the article of Fernández and Sánchez, Hiskes and Ben Shimon attempt to loosen or *unglue* the way in which a proto*col* [from the Greek prōtokollon, a combination of prōtos (first) and kolla (glue)] *glues* scholars to a certain organised way of giving an account of their chosen methodologies and theoretical framework in the various networks in which they operate whilst being glued to the methodologies they use to construct their frameworks (193). Alexander Galloway identifies protocol(s) as a 'technological problematic' which refers to 'the technology of organization and control operating in distributed networks' (317). According to Hiskes and Ben Shimon, such a technology, which is used to 'organise and control agency within a network' (191) also shapes how researchers doing scholarly work are embodied, as 'the organisations and institutions in which [they] work follow protocols (in how they are to conduct themselves within them, in how [they] give accounts of their scholarly practice)' (197). Further, the authors reflect on how, in their case, their bodies as the 'object' of research *and* 'subject' *doing* the research may 'simultaneously follow protocols of their own' (197), further destabilising clear-cut protocols of doing scholarly work within and across the academic disciplines of cultural analysis and anthropology.

Closing the special issue of *The Somatechnics of Organizations* is Andra Siibak and Marleen Otsus' paper 'Tracing the Innovation-Decision Process for Adopting Microchip Implants'. Situated in the innovation-led Estonian telecommunications and IT sector, the burgeoning phenomena of employees having microchips being implanted within their bodies is 'meant to give new abilities to employees and replace natural movements' (201), such as opening office doors or going up or down the elevator in the organisations employees work at. Rather than delegating work-related bodily movements to machines outside the body, work-related movements in the 'microchipped society' seem to go deeper into the body of employees, and are considered usefully 'handy when running different work-related errands, like printing and sending meeting notes from the smart board directly to

their email, or when buying coffee and snacks from the vending machines' (214). Whilst sounding like a futuristic dystopian social and political imaginary in which megacorporations control and organise the bodies of their employees at their will, the authors bring forth informed predictions that 'by 2030, two-thirds of people will consider having microchips put into their brains to improve their job prospects' (Dentsu 2021: 7). When explored through an inter-generational lens the 'predictions indicate that younger people are quite open to exploring this "creepy or cool" trade off' (201) suggesting that when 'more members of the Millennial generation, who have expressed the most favourable opinions of […] technologies put under the skin (201), become part of the workforce', it will become an everyday reality within organisations. According to Siibak and Otsus' interview-based findings pivoting an employee's decision to volunteeringly adopt the microchip implant, was the 'social reinforcement from their colleagues' (211). Whether organisationally nudged to adopt the innovation through social structures within the organisation, such as 'interpersonal information channels' (210), top-down communication channels that increased the knowledge and awareness of the innovative topic, or as branding efforts of the organisation, employees wholeheartedly cultivated the technology and described it as a '"liberating technology"' (216). This, according to Siibak and Otsus, suggests that a 'strong element of homophily' (217) exists between birds of a feather, furthering the idea that similarity within such organisations breeds connections and connections within such organisations breed similarity.

In closing the introduction to this special issue, it seems that there is one element that the somatechnics of organisations cannot seem to *efficiently* shake off, whether organised, disorganised, or deorganised, and that is the realisation that organisation is at its core a relational embodied concept that is acted upon and with, praised for and condemned, mobilised and repressed, technologically mediated and unpredictably imagined, as bodies come (together) *undone*.

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