



# The Integrative Potential of Process in a Changing World: Introduction to a special issue on power, performativity and process

Organization Studies  
2021, Vol. 42(12) 1775–1794

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DOI: 10.1177/01708406211057224

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**Barbara Simpson** 

University of Strathclyde, UK

**Nancy Harding**

University of Bath, UK

**Peter Fleming**

University of Technology Sydney, Australia

**Viviane Sergi**

Université du Québec à Montréal, Canada

**Anthony Hussenot**

Université Côte d'Azur, France

## Abstract

This editorial essay introduces a special issue that tackles the seemingly intractable challenge of re-conceptualizing power and performativity as continuously interweaving and co-emergent dynamics in the processes of organizing. It is in these processes, we argue, that new futures may be *visibly made* through the academic activism of our scholarly communities. We position our argument, and the six papers that comprise this special issue, in relation to Rosi Braidotti's framing of Humanism, anti-humanism and the posthuman. We also suggest some future lines of inquiry to move studies of organizing forward into a posthuman world.

## Keywords

posthuman, power *with* performativity, process ontology, *visibly making*

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## Corresponding author:

Barbara Simpson, Strathclyde Business School, 199 Cathedral Street, Glasgow, G4 0QU, UK.

Email: [barbara.simpson@strath.ac.uk](mailto:barbara.simpson@strath.ac.uk)

## Introduction

Back in those gentler days of 2018 when the Call for Papers for this special issue was first posted, who could have imagined that the world would be so radically changed in a few short years? The Covid-19 pandemic has devastated lives, ravaged economies, disrupted societies, exacerbated inequalities and transformed the very nature of work, while at the same time inspiring phenomenal innovation and widespread community activism. It now seems inevitable that pandemics and other global crises, such as climate change, are here to stay. These massively disruptive events are the inescapable consequence of our profound interconnectedness across the natural worlds we co-inhabit with our own and other species. They introduce an urgency to participate in and interrogate our worlds differently, a clarion call to us as organizational researchers not only to ask new and different questions, but also to rethink the role of theory and its relationship with processes of organizing and researching.

In our Call for Papers we argued that existing theories provide inadequate guidance for negotiating a contemporary condition characterized by constant flux, movement and emergence. Rather than focusing on the safe certainties afforded by stable theoretical constructs, we sought new ideas that place the generative potentials of uncertainties and disruptions at the front and centre of researchers' attention. In this spirit, and somewhat presciently as it turns out, we invited paper submissions that engage seriously with process studies of organizing by taking a philosophically informed approach to unanticipated emergence and the social dynamics of becoming (extensively detailed by Helin, Hernes, Hjorth, & Holt, 2014).

Within process studies of organizing there is a key philosophical distinction between 'being' and 'becoming' (Chia, 1995), each of which offers a different entry point into research while at the same time determining the types of questions asked and the research approaches that are engaged. We label these different approaches respectively as 'epistemological process research', which generally proceeds first by identifying and categorizing relevant 'things' or entities and then, as a secondary consideration, tracing how these move and interact with each other over time, and 'ontological process research', which begins with 'flows' and movements that then produce emergent and ephemeral 'things' as secondary effects. Of course, practical experience is always redolent with both 'things' and 'flows', but researchers necessarily begin by focusing on one or the other, and in doing so we make assumptions about the relative prioritization of epistemological 'things' and ontological 'flows'. Each of these approaches to process (sometimes referred to as 'weak' and 'strong' process theories (Langley & Tsoukas, 2017)) also necessarily engages with a particular theory of time: epistemological process approaches tend to see time in dualistic terms as a progression from past(s) to present(s) to future(s), whereas ontological process approaches are more likely to focus on what new happenings are emerging in the present, and how different reconstructions of pasts and futures may resource different present actions (Blattner, 2020; Simpson, Tracey, & Weston, 2020).

As well as conceptualizing and temporalizing research quite differently, these two approaches entail radically different methodological assumptions. Whereas epistemological process approaches engage familiar dualistic and representational methods of research to *make visible* what is, there are no standard procedures for ontological process approaches, which seek to *visibly make* emergent futures (Ingold, 2013), inviting us to be more viral, more nomadic, more experimental and more immersive both in our empirical inquiries and in our writing (see for instance Jackson & Mazzei (2012) on 'thinking without method', and St. Pierre's (2018) plea for a post-qualitative form of inquiry that eschews formalized methodologies). The metaphor of 'test and trace', which has risen to prominence in our pandemic world, is a wonderful evocation of just such a tentative and incremental research practice. It proceeds by following the action as the virus surges among us

and makes us differently, inviting us to re-imagine methods of ontologically processual inquiry that are more suited to worlds-in-process.

To sharpen the focus of the special issue, we invited contributors to address two particularly topical dimensions of organization – power and performativity – not as discrete entities, but as continuously co-emergent processes. Power, a perennial concern for organizational researchers, has been theorized both as a property that may be possessed and exercised by a powerful elite and as a relationship that is continuously shifting, provisional and unpredictable (Fleming & Spicer, 2014). Performativity is a more recent addition to the organizational literature, it too being theorized in a variety of different ways ranging from speech acts that produce change in social settings, to discourses that constitute actors' identities (Gond, Cabantous, Harding, & Learmonth, 2016). At the confluence of these diverse theoretical threads, there is rich potential to yield fresh insights into the world-changing events within which we find ourselves immersed.

Exploring and elaborating this confluence is the primary goal of this special issue. We locate our argument within a Humanist / anti-humanist / posthuman framing that owes much to Rosi Braidotti (2013, 2019). This introductory essay is structured first to delve more deeply into the assumptions that underpin organizational research on power and performativity, especially from a processual perspective. Next, we move on to discuss what a posthuman framing of power and performativity might look like, and we then use these ideas to interrogate the six papers that constitute the special issue. Following that, each of us reflects on potential future directions for our own areas of research interest afforded by drawing on a posthuman sensibility. Finally we conclude by anticipating new ways of researching in worlds that are always already in flow.

## Power *or/and/with* Performativity

Our ambition is to elaborate power and performativity<sup>1</sup> as confluent flows of social practice that, in their entanglements, generate the ongoingness of organizing. In this section, we examine how the relationship between power and performativity has already been discussed in organization studies. We suggest three possible relationships: power *or* performativity; power *and* performativity; power *with* performativity, where the first two are based on entitative assumptions, while the third is concerned with movements and flows.

Power has traditionally been defined in terms of 'power over' others, typically justified by a timeless Right that affords dominion over life, nature and society. The king, sovereign or CEO holds power over his or her subjects in the form of a social contract where protections and dispensations are offered in return for obedience. In the philosophical tradition of Thomas Hobbes (*The Leviathan*, 1651) this possession of power was symbolized by a monarch (typically male) clutching a dangerous looking sword: power *belonged* to him, at first by 'divine right' and later due to the 'will of the people'. It was a zero-sum game, where more power in the Leviathan's hands automatically meant less for the masses, the plebs and the workers.

This rendition of power infiltrated organization studies through Weber's (1921 [1978]) widespread application, and then French and Raven's (1959) classic 'bases of power', which exemplifies power as a possession, or 'thing', that reifies an elemental bifurcation between the powerful and powerless, typified in Dahl's famous formula, 'A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do' (1957, pp. 202–3, also see Wrong, 1995). As Fleming and Spicer (2014) indicate in their extensive survey of the literature, in light of these precursors, researchers often frame power in organizations using an array of dualisms such as control and compliance; domination and obedience; norms and deviance; regulation and disorder; commitment and conflict; freedom and oppression, and so on. This entitative and dualistic formulation typifies the Humanism of Cartesian memory and its

subsequent incarnations in the Enlightenment, which locate humans and their agency as the legitimate starting point for all philosophical inquiry, and which continues to be the mainstay of the vast majority of research undertaken in organization studies. Debates about Humanism problematize the definitions that have informed much scholarship over the last half-century, but for the purposes of this discussion we work with the Enlightenment Humanist idea that 'Man' is the measure of perfection against which everything 'other' is valued. By setting the ideal ('Man') against the other, this approach to power manifests the 'othering' that is a founding principle of Enlightenment Humanism, where 'reality' is constituted (permanently) by circumscribed entities and the hierarchical relationships between them (Braidotti, 2013).

There is no scope for performativity within this Humanist notion of power. Indeed, the contemporary conceptualization of performativity has roots that are quite distinct from those that traditionally inform power. The origins of 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup>-century theories of performativity that have been incorporated into organization studies are usually traced to the linguistic pragmatics of Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), who elaborate a theory of performative utterances in which words do far more than merely mirroring reality; words can be agentic. Nevertheless, it is the speaker of these words who retains precedence, so pronouncing a person guilty of a crime has no effect unless the person making that pronouncement is supported by the authority of the state. There is an implicit power dimension in this formulation of performativity, where the Humanist actor remains central to the orderly progression of performative events. We suggest, therefore, that these human-centred theories of power and performativity provide no basis for blending or interweaving. They oblige us to consider power *or* performativity, but never both at the same time.

Such Humanist theorizations have been vigorously contested in critical management studies, which decentre the human subject in favour of the absent and marginalized voices of 'others'. This contra (anti-humanist) view seeks to make visible the logical and practical flaws in the myriad hidden assumptions underpinning Humanist hubris. In relation to power, the innovative breakthroughs made by Michel Foucault are key to this critical move (Raffnsøe, Mennicken, & Miller, 2019). His first innovation is to counter the notion that power is centralized in the hands of an elite. While the state, powerful corporations and the ruling classes all undoubtedly exercise formal authority over others, this is hardly an exhaustive consideration of all its modes and articulations. The metaphor of the sword and its implications of violence (inflicted by a king, police officer, etc.) is simple domination and thus presents a very limited view of power. Second, power is not a thing possessed by an authority figure or any other actor, but a relationship between individuals that is dynamic and mutable. As Foucault (2003, p. 29) puts it, power

is never appropriated in the way that wealth or a commodity can be appropriated. Power functions. Power is exercised through networks and individuals do not simply circulate in those networks; they are in a position to both submit to and exercise this power. They are never the inert or consenting targets of power; they are always its relays. In other words, power passes through individuals. It is not applied to them.

Third, power does not only repress and say 'no'. Power can also say 'yes': 'what makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse' (Foucault, 1980, p. 119). Finally, if power is reliant on the putative freedom of those influenced by it, and is relational, productive and part of a network, then we arrive at Foucault's most germane insight: rather than an immovable Leviathan wielding force in a continuous and uniform manner, power is instead transient and relational, reflecting the changing social relations that underscore it. The basic message is therefore this: social relations of power cannot be reduced to some Dahlian formula but are always liable to change, sometimes of a sudden and unexpected

nature (for example, few saw Brexit, Covid-19 or Trump coming, all of which change the ‘game’ of power in significant ways).

This re-imagining of power has opened the door to studying its more prosaic, everyday and ‘capillary’ aspects, especially in those settings that seem, on the face of things, to be free from power relations. Power controls and regulates organizational activity in a manner that cannot be adequately understood as a static resource that some officially possess and others don’t. Instead we are required to view power as an unfolding and relational phenomenon that is exercised in unpredictable flows of social activity, often without social actors realizing what is happening.

Theories of performativity have evolved in complementarity with this relational view of power. Researchers in this area share an understanding of ‘reality’ as always located within the relationality of discourse. In particular, Judith Butler (1993, 1997) extends Austin’s supposition that the subject who speaks precedes the performative utterance, by proposing ‘the subject who speaks is also constituted by the language that she or he speaks, [so] language is the condition of possibility for the speaking subject and not merely its instrument of expression’ (Butler, 1997, p. 28). Performativity ‘cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed by a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject’ (Butler, 1993, pp. 94–5). This appreciation of performativity has been influential in social science, as evidenced by the work of Callon (1998, 2007), MacKenzie (2006) and Latour (1986, 2005), and it has also impacted organization studies through various creative applications (Cabantous, Gond, Harding, & Learmonth, 2016) including critical performativity (Spicer, Alvesson, & Kärreman, 2009), the interplay between ostensive and performative aspects of routines (Feldman & Pentland, 2003), the performative constitution of organization through communication (Schoeneborn, Kuhn, & Kärreman, 2019), materialization and performativity (Orlikowski & Scott, 2015) and the performative potentials of theory itself (Martí & Gond, 2018).

To sum up, we have characterized these conceptualizations of power and performativity as ‘anti-humanist’, first because they are far removed from Humanist accounts of functional organization, and second because they nevertheless tend to be constrained by dualistic assumptions that, for instance, separate ‘self’ from ‘other’, or nature from culture. Opposites such as these implicate each other as immanents, like different sides of the same coin, intertwined but still distinct, each exerting hidden influences on the other. Furthermore, these theories say very little, at least not explicitly, about time and temporality, so process theorists wishing to engage with these ideas tend to default to the dualistic sequencing of before and after, although not necessarily adhering rigidly to clock time (for example, ‘temporal structuring’ (Orlikowski & Yates, 2002) or ‘temporal bracketing’ (Langley, Smallman, Tsoukas, & Van de Ven, 2013)). Importantly though, there is clear common ground between these conceptualizations of power and performativity in that they share a relational epistemology that casts agency not as the primary preserve of elites (see Reed, 2012), nor as necessarily a human-only phenomenon, but as social actions (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998) capable of bringing both stability and change to organizational life. Although performativity remains largely implicit in this approach to power, and vice versa, they do offer a complementary view of power *and* performativity as co-protagonists in processes of organizing.

Our challenge still remains then: how are we to theorize power *with* performativity as confluent and co-emergent flows within the social doings of organizing? How do we move from simple dualistic coinage to a more fluid currency; and how can we allow organizing to flourish by embracing uncertainties? Having exhausted epistemological (entitative) approaches to process, we now turn our attention to the slippery and uncertain terrain of process ontology, which requires us to engage directly with the flows of organizing, noticing in particular how futures emerge from the entanglements of presents. Daunting as this may seem, others have already walked this way

including, for instance: Foucault in his later works especially in their dialogue with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari; feminist scholars such as Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway and Karen Barad; Jacques Lacan and Paul Ricoeur from a poststructuralist tradition; Elizabeth St. Pierre as a post-qualitative researcher; new materialists such as Jane Bennett; anthropologists including Tim Ingold, Kathleen Stewart, Brian Massumi and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro; François Cooren in communication studies; and science and technology studies scholars exemplified by Bruno Latour, John Law and Annemarie Mol. We also note, perhaps somewhat counter-intuitively, that the classical American Pragmatists, especially Jane Addams, John Dewey, George Herbert Mead and Mary Parker Follett, were ahead of their times in articulating an ontologically processual account of social organizing.

This huge array of scholars and disciplines, all of which sit outside, although adjacent to and influential upon organization studies, represents a considerable diversity of thought. However, taking our cue from the Humanist and anti-humanist classifications we have already introduced, we propose a potentially integrative posthuman framing to focus on the problem of theorizing power *with* performativity. In the next section, we lay out our posthuman stall.

## The Posthuman Predicament

The posthuman<sup>2</sup> is an attempt to transcend the ‘lethal binary’ between an imperial Humanism on the one hand and a social constructivist anti-humanism on the other. However, this move is no simple dialectical sublation producing a kind of ‘third way’ by taking the best from both positions. Instead it seeks to disentangle the discussion from the language games circumscribed by these opposing poles. For Braidotti (2013, 2019) the aim is to create a conceptual perspective that allows us to actively engage with emerging worlds, which are currently opaque or only partially penetrable by conventional theory. This perspective offers new possibilities for grappling with organizations, management and work in post-pandemic worlds where the human and its alterity are less important than what happens next.

Covid-19 offers an insightful metonymy for distinctions between the three philosophical positions we have outlined based on Braidotti’s reasoning (2013, 2019). Humanist thought responds by trying to master the virus, with the intention of returning as soon as possible to a ‘normal’ whereby humankind’s supremacy over Nature is restored. An anti-humanist perspective that is, by definition, critical of Humanism, views the virus as a massive and irrefragable decentering of ‘Man’, an act of retaliation whereby Nature puts us back in our place. Now the ‘other’ steps forward and begins to call the shots, denying possibilities for human agency. By contrast, the posthuman opens up a new index of interconnectedness that we must learn from and use to reorient ourselves towards productive ways of going forward. Here, the stuff of life such as viruses, ocean currents, extinctions and robots, as well as the structures, discourses and actors we use to conceptualize experience, do not exist as essentialized things, but rather as commingling flows.

We turn to Braidotti’s theorization of the posthuman because of her critical framing of the Humanism / anti-humanist / posthuman debate, and also because she locates her arguments in Deleuzian thought, which is fundamental to much theorizing about the posthuman. In particular, by drawing on Deleuze and Guattari’s (2004) philosophy, Braidotti provides a very useful way of framing the contributions in this special issue. We believe that this theoretical lens will yield original and useful insights too. Braidotti finds Deleuze and Guattari inspirational not because they disqualify anti-humanism, but because they try to push its implications in creative and uncharted directions. For instance, from a posthuman standpoint, subjectivity is neither primary (as in Humanism which unduly affirms *logos*) nor radically displaced (as in anti-humanism which unduly denies *logos*), but instead is repositioned ‘as a dynamic convergence phenomenon across the contradictions of posthumanism’, an ‘affirmative



vision' that allows subjects to become 'a useful platform to construct the kind of transversal non-human alliances required for a posthuman subject' (Braidotti, 2019, p. 41). This posthuman subjectivity is radically interconnected with non-traditional modes of being, and even non-being, recognizing that we are all entangled in complex co-emergent kinships (Haraway, 2016). Alien and difficult to grasp as this may seem, this posthuman is already manifest: 'we' are already posthuman. Indeed, it is possible to argue that the posthuman has always existed behind the universalizing imperative of modernism (Latour, 1993), and we are not so much moving into a new conception of the human as acknowledging what has always been.

The posthuman does not deny that differences exist and neither does it claim the world is so interconnected that it is somehow 'one'. By the same token, it is not sufficient to merely describe these multiplicities, as in anti-humanist thought. For Braidotti they must be engaged relationally as the generative source of action and movement. The key term here is *generativity*. If Humanism promised emancipation (e.g. the Enlightenment) but delivered a world that is 'radiant with triumphant calamity' (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944 [1997], p. 3), and anti-humanism envisaged radical difference but did not lead to lasting political reforms, then what does the posthuman have to offer when confronting the endemic injustices of the world today? Braidotti argues for a progressive political project that takes into account radical relationality in both theory and practice. The purpose of posthuman inquiry is to actively create (*visibly make*) new futures out of the conditions that currently prevail, seeking unknown potentials from the 'withness' (Shotter, 2006) of fragmentary 'intra-actions' (Barad, 2003). It seeks what could be, by re-purposing what already exists. The posthuman, with its inherent fluidities, can be disorienting and difficult to grasp. We do not present it here as the definitive 'answer' to the many issues arising from Humanist and anti-humanist perspectives. It does, however, reconfigure the questions asked and the doing of research in ways that we find fruitful for approaching issues of organizing, plus it is still significantly underdeveloped in our field, especially in contrast to other disciplines.

Power, performativity and process may be positioned anew within this posthuman perspective, offering great potential for insight into processes of organizing. To begin with, the temporalities of process are less concerned with the passage of time and more concerned with how movement is resourced by time, or how by bringing together particular pasts and futures, novel action may arise in the present. The research challenge, then, is to follow the material traces that emerge in relational engagements. A posthuman approach to power has sympathies with Foucault's major anti-humanist innovations, but pushes them further into the realms of radical relationality. Building on Spinoza's 'ethics of joy', Braidotti (2019, p. 92) describes power in terms of two interdependent modalities – a restrictive force (*potestas*) and an affirmative force (*potentia*) – that combine to produce our capacities for relationality. Posthuman performativity as articulated by Barad (2003, p. 802) is not 'an invitation to turn everything (including material bodies) into words; on the contrary, performativity . . . is actually a contestation of the unexamined habits of mind that grant language and other forms of representation more power in determining our ontologies than they deserve'. It is in this explicit shift away from representationalism that an ontologically processual approach offers an integration of power *with* performativity as entangled processes of becoming produced in the flows and doings of living and organizing. We contend that process, power and performativity, read together in this manner, within and through each other, open up new posthuman possibilities for theorizing organization and organizing.

In parallel with these possibilities for theorizing, it is also necessary to develop an approach to research that properly engages with the viral, rhizomic (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004), mycelial (Sheldrake, 2020) and tentacular (Haraway, 2016) processes of emergence. Our usual functionalist, interpretivist and critical assumptions about methodology (e.g. Burrell & Morgan, 1979) are completely undone by the processual ontology of the posthuman, which encourages instead a nomadic

and immersive approach in which knowing travels (Simpson, Tracey, & Weston, 2018), unsettling the dependable anchors of social life and throwing our world(s) into disarray. Instead of seeking to identify relevant entities within the research domain, our interest must turn to how movements are generated diffractively from relational differences, and with what consequences. At the same time, we need to find new ways of writing and new ways of communicating the insights gained through our immersed inquiries.

## Tentative Responses in this Special Issue

Each of the papers in this special issue grapples with the challenges of integrating power, performativity and process in different ways. In providing an overview of these contributions, we draw out threads that offer some tentative ways of reading the posthuman into organizational life, while also elaborating the notion of the posthuman in productive ways that we hope readers will find useful.

The first paper – by Ian Fouweather and Bas Bosma – exemplifies the posthuman sensitivities that we believe are crucial for capturing the co-productive dynamics of power, performativity and process. This paper asks: how can we think process, performativity and power as a fluid nexus of *with-ness*? In true posthuman fashion, the authors suggest we ‘become Deleuzian’. Echoing Braidotti’s affirmative politics, Fouweather and Bosma posit ‘desire’ as an integral aspect of organizing. They propose that desire hinges on the logic of AND, although we suggest it is actually more resonant with *with-ness* as we have articulated it above. The authors argue that this logic of desire dissolves inert categories and permits us to move beyond the conventional dualisms that so often season research agendas.

This paper’s focus on power opens new vistas in this saturated research space. By seeing desire – in organizations and elsewhere – as a productive force continually undergoing change, the process of subjectification becomes pluralistic, yielding a multiplicity of subjects. What may appear as contradictory or paradoxical logics can be re-conceived as an ongoing folding, unfolding and refolding of selves in time. Fouweather and Bosma also deploy the logic of AND (once again we would suggest *with*) to help us reconcile Foucauldian and Deleuzian theory in constructive ways. Organizing and disorganizing are thus understood as co-generating, so there is always space for errant or unpredictable modes of action.

A final word regarding Fouweather and Bosma’s style of writing, which encapsulates, at least partly, thinking-on-the-move. Interestingly, ‘moving’ refers to both movement and to emotion. Between the first and the last word of this piece, readers will have travelled some distance; and there’s a good chance that something will have been aroused in them by this travelling. The paper offers no neat closure: it freely and productively remains open, evoking a writing ethos that we may want to cultivate more with respect to analysing power and performativity in process organization studies.

The second paper, by Laura Visser and Olivia Davies, consists of a thoroughgoing engagement with Karen Barad’s agential realism. It offers a potent posthuman interpretation of power *with* performativity – as ontologically entangled phenomena that co-emerge in organizing processes. The paper makes a major contribution by detailing exactly what Barad’s agential realism can offer to organization studies; in particular, the authors demystify Barad’s sometimes challenging terminology and show that a key advantage of her work is its escape (which is easier said than done) from human-centred preoccupations that underlie the dominant discourse of organizing. Towards this end, Visser and Davies seek a more-than-human perspective on power-performativity (their term), as something co-actively coming-into-being. These ideas are effectively developed in an excellent empirical study of personal online health communities (POHCs). The authors demonstrate how



different agentic cuts – across multiple symptoms and processes of treatment – intersect differently with expert knowledge, bodily knowledge, technologies, humans, space, time and medications, and with different consequences.

An impressive feature of Visser and Davies' paper (and building on Barad) is its conceptualization of multiple 'diffraction gratings' for understanding power-performativity. This is done in relation to those healthcare outcomes that matter and those that do not. This posthuman stance, we feel, successfully posits an original method for researching the dynamic complexities of emergence. On this score, the approach might go even further. For example, there is no iron law demanding we associate quantitative data with Humanist studies, and qualitative data with anti-humanist (critical) research. A posthuman scholar, among others, may fruitfully acknowledge that there are multiple ways of 'cutting' experience, and that these need not be constrained by the quantitative/qualitative dualism. This invites new approaches to (non-positivist) empiricism that can engage with recent trends such as 'big data' and postmodern ideas about measurement and statistics (de Freitas, Dixon-Román, & Lather, 2016).

The third paper – by Katie Beavan – provides an inspiring empirical investigation of the processual flows of power *with* performativity in organizations. Like Fouweather and Bosma, Beavan invites researchers not only to see organizations in a different way, but to write differently too. If process-sensitive research aims to tarry with the unsettled, unpredictable and often semi-knowable aspects of organizing, then scholars might also reconsider their mode of re-presentation. Drawing on Dewey, Beavan advances a post-qualitative framework in order to supersede conventional Humanist and anti-humanist motifs. By post-qualitative, she means resituating the 'I' of the authoritative text in a manner that remains true to the phenomenon under examination. In the author's words, this demands we 'resist containment within the straitjacketed discipline of academic texts and unravel the alternate logics of process-as-it-happens'.

With this idea in mind, the paper offers a rich and in-depth interpretive study of becoming in a transcontinental conversation situated in the banking sector. Beavan repositions the 'I' of the researching subject in multifarious ways, revealing the thousand plateaux that comprise the processes of *visibly making*. This becomingness is never complete, of course. Further, the frequent blind spots in conversation (e.g. silences, half-jokes, intimations, metaphorical repartee, incomplete statements) are not considered to be deficiencies in this analysis. The becoming is truly in a state of flux, something that the 'straightjacket' of academic writing can rarely capture. By blending power, process and performativity in an inventive conceptual turn, Beavan is able to experiment with a post-qualitative analytic that exposes new and beguiling terrains of organizing. Most important, style is no longer just a secondary concern, as so often is the case in organization studies. Instead, writing presentation imbues both the form and content of the analysis in order to capture the shifting discursive traces operating here. Only then can the hidden abode of becoming be glimpsed, if only fleetingly. The results of this exercise are impressive, pushing Beavan's paper towards the interesting and uncharted waters of the posthuman.

Our fourth paper is a fascinating intervention by Piera Morlacchi. It radically re-thinks Pragmatism as a non-dualistic process philosophy, the basic ontological unit of which is purposive action rather than actors or actants. To do this, the author draws on Dewey and Bentley's (1949 [1991]) somewhat counter-intuitive definition of 'trans-action' – that is to say, an action that emerges continuously from (and is constitutive of) relational differences. The concept of trans-action resonates with Barad's (2007) 'intra-action' and 'diffractive methodology', both of which are discussed in Visser and Davies' contribution too. Morlacchi refers to these generative differences as 'frictions'. Such frictions produce affirmative actions intended to improve, ameliorate or have positive consequences for emerging organizational futures. From this processual viewpoint, power *with* performativity is experienced as continuously emergent dynamics entangled

as ‘performative power’. Morlacchi defines performative power as ‘the continuous relating and integrating of emerging differences that may be consequential in the flow of trans-actions of organizational becoming’. This represents a significant innovation in conceptualizing the commingling streams that flow together in processes of organizing.

Another interesting feature of Morlacchi’s piece is the evocation of Mary Parker Follett, a still overlooked Pragmatist scholar who was the first to consider power within this tradition. Her argument – pre-dating Foucault by several decades, it must be noted – centred on ‘power with’. By this she means co-active forces that sidestep power relations over others, operating instead in a non-hierarchical fashion. This integrative mode of power transgresses relational frictions to generate creative insights and actions in the social world. Here also, trans-actors and their trans-actional situations (in a Deweyan sense) emerge performatively through the connections of organizing. Excitingly, this posthuman processual ontology breathes new life into Pragmatism, which is often dismissed as a dusty relic from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. We agree with a growing chorus of voices acknowledging that Pragmatism was perhaps ahead of its time, with Hickman (2007) even arguing that it is truly post-postmodern.

The fifth paper, by David Hollis, Alex Wright, Owain Smolović Jones and Sanela Smolović Jones, presents a compelling study of performative enactment *apropos* facial beauty norms in a UK cosmetics firm. In this context, the face becomes the site of a strident form of performative power. As the authors put it, ‘facial beauty functions as a (figurative) authoritative text that corporealizes, subjectivizes, and is resisted by makeup artists within a confluence of (concrete) text and conversation’. Although company managers, makeup artists, texts (etc.) develop and reinforce these facial beauty norms (since it is what they sell and profit from), clients themselves become complicit, arguably to their own detriment.

An appealing aspect of this paper is the argument that performative enactment is not just a human activity. For example, the concept of an authoritative text (Kuhn, 2008) reveals how facial beauty regimes feel externally imposed and inevitable to makeup artists as they follow objectified guidelines. This authoritative text appears to enjoy a life of its own, leaving little room for its human executors to manoeuvre. While the face is experienced as ontologically close to us, all is not what it seems. It remains a narratively inscribed multiplicity and thereby reflects the fluid power relations that enframe it.

Hollis and colleagues introduce a very important qualification to process studies, which we think is germane and timely. Despite the processual dynamics observed in the cosmetics firm – that is to say, the performative enactment of these facial beauty norms (always in a state of becoming, always reproduced through practices) – under certain circumstances they can appear ‘natural’ to the actants involved. Moreover, this is so even if the norms are otherwise acknowledged to be manufactured and ‘alien’. Indeed, one of the main tasks and challenges when studying power is to comprehend exactly how some regimes are unquestioned and yet experienced as alien at the same time. By conceptually transferring performative power to non-human actors – in this case, authoritative texts – the authors make an intriguing contribution to power *and* performativity, forging a path for stimulating future research.

Our sixth and final paper is by Vanessa Bowden, Jean-Pascal Gond, Daniel Nyberg and Christopher Wright. They examine how attempts by the city council of Lake Macquarie (Australia) to protect homes from rising sea levels (caused by climate change) triggered opposition from residents. They observe how climate change science was enrolled and translated into a local controversy about future house prices, which ultimately undermined scientific discourses and the local council’s recommendations for urgent adaptation. Australia has witnessed some terrible environmental crises, from devastating bush fires to the slow death of the Great Barrier Reef. And ‘post-truth’ politics has only exacerbated these situations. Bowden and colleagues’ paper is useful for

understanding how these self-defeating political narratives can infiltrate local government politics: not only by working against climate science, but also by partially appropriating it, twisting the narrative into something reactionary and troubling. In order to study this, the authors develop a compelling analysis of what they call mechanisms of ‘enablement’ and ‘theorization’ to demonstrate how the dynamics of power *and* performativity are necessarily intertwined. In this respect, performativity requires constant work (process) to align its interests and is thus ‘in essence, a political process’.

Bowden and colleagues’ paper suggests a number of significant insights for understanding power, performativity and process. It decentres human actors so that they cannot be conceived as separate and distinct agents. With respect to power, for example, climate scientists, councillors and opponents become ‘audiences’ to the power of the ecological environment. Nature is not a passive stage on which these political struggles unfold. It is a silent/silenced actor that plays an ominous role in the case study and has real agency: the sea, lake and global air currents that cause ‘weather’ are demoted in their agency (or silenced), but nevertheless seem vengeful in their impact on local communities. We might also think of Covid-19 in the same terms: here power is not the property of individuals or classes, but a moving force that surges in and through the environment, through ‘nature’, through human physiology and our molecular makeup. Human actants are saturated by the climate; it is not outside them but ‘inside’ them, constituting them. This final paper in the special issue especially chimes with the dark and disturbing disruptions that have shaken humanity to its roots over the last two years. The Humanist assumption that we stand above the natural ecology has been shattered, perhaps forever. New concepts, ethics and politics – particularly in organization studies – are obviously required to grapple with these permutations and offer insights for possible ways forward.

## Implications for Posthuman Studies of Organizing

The six papers in this special issue each illustrate and elaborate novel possibilities for integrating power, performativity and process in a variety of different empirical settings, and using various theoretical framings. But what other possibilities are there for this sort of approach to research? We, the editorial team for this special issue, are quite diverse in our own empirical interests and theoretical orientations, so in this section, we each reflect on the opportunities and implications that we see for further developments in our own scholarly pursuits.

### *Barbara: Leadership and ethics in a posthuman world*

‘We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.’ These words paraphrase comments made by Albert Einstein in the 1940s following the fearsomely destructive unleashing of atomic power upon the world. His message is clear – unless we change our ways of thinking, not just what we think about, we are doomed to perpetuate our current trajectory, which at present seems to be heading towards global catastrophe. At times like these, our natural inclination is to turn towards leadership to dig us out of the mess. But traditional Humanist and anti-humanist views that centre on individual leaders, or the critical dimensions of relations between leaders and others (followers?), are quite simply inadequate for the complex and dynamic situations that confront us. In my view, what is needed is a much more inclusive conceptualization of leadership whereby each and every one of us is engaged in the processes of making our own worlds better for us, processes that necessarily require productive working together. This is no utopian vision; rather it recognizes that we each already make a difference through our choices and actions. As scholars we cannot wait for someone else to tell us what to do; we must join our

communities – whether urban, rural, international, recreational, trade union, professional, religious or political – in *visibly making* local and immediate differences. This, to my way of thinking, evokes leadership differently, as a socially engaged, ecologically embedded form of activism that emerges with the interweaving of power, performativity and ethics. In this special issue we have explored the dynamic interplays between power and performativity in detail, but how can we also include ethics as a co-constituting stream in the processes of organizing?

One of the defining qualities of the posthuman is its rejection of dualistic categorizations of the phenomena and material practices used to represent our lived experiences. Crucially, ontology and epistemology are mutually implicated, and therefore cannot be treated as distinct phenomena. Barad (2007, p. 185) argues instead for *onto-epistem-ology*, which she describes as ‘the study of practices of knowing in being’. But because such practices are ‘a deeply ethical matter’, she extends her concept to encompass *ethico-onto-epistem-ology*, which reflects ‘an appreciation of the intertwining of ethics, knowing, and being’. In a similar spirit, Braidotti develops a posthuman ‘affirmative ethics’ which, rather than responding to dualistic moral imperatives, seeks instead a process of becoming ‘regulated by an ethics of joy and affirmation that functions through the transformation of negative into positive passions’ (Braidotti, 2019, p. 158). Such a ‘posthuman praxis involves the formation of a new alliance, a new people’ (p. 164), to build the new ways of thinking that we so urgently need. This notion of an affirmative ethics is remarkably resonant with the ameliorative stance of the classical Pragmatists, who argued that ethics is a participatory and experimental process that transforms present situations for the better (Simpson & den Hond, 2021). It is this radical ethics of transformation that I believe offers great prospects for re-thinking the nature of leadership in a posthuman world.

### *Nancy: Bringing materialities into process, power and performativity*

With a remarkable lack of ingenuity or originality at this particular point in history, I want to use the coronavirus, along with process, performativity and power, as a means of conceiving non-sentient agents in the ongoing processes of organizational world-making. This requires re-thinking ontology (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008), or trying to push ourselves out from under a smothering blanket that, since the scientific work of Isaac Newton and his contemporaries in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, has separated reason (masculine, God, omnipotent) from (Mother) nature (female, inferior, controllable) (Midgley, 2001). Poststructuralist theories have taught us much about language’s collusion in the constitution of our worlds, but it is unethical to reduce to discourse the lived realities of such things as global warming, hunger, war, refugees, disease, and so on (St. Pierre, Jackson, & Mazzei, 2016). Understanding materialities’ agency as processual / performative / power-imbued may influence how we live and work in the next decades. This challenge is increasingly taken up in organization studies (e.g. Ashcraft, Kuhn, & Cooren, 2009; Orlikowski, 2007; Orlikowski & Scott, 2015; Wilhoit & Kisselburgh, 2015), but we are only recently started on this endeavour of rethinking ontology.

In the autumn of 2020 what I call ‘my’ body was, like many millions of human bodies worldwide, colonized by a coronavirus, a living, non-sentient entity that seems determined on its own continued existence. It took up lodgings ‘in’ my body and proceeded to occupy its every part. It was an experience of process, performativity and power in movement: something was moving from moment-to-moment-to-moment, from cell-to-cell, from body-to-body. Its power was capillary (Foucault, 2019), but as this particular sentient being that I call ‘me’ collapsed onto its bed the virus’s power registered as an external destructive force that was also internal. Could we allocate the power to close down entire economies to the virus, or was it the fear it invoked, all without conscious intention or desire? What form of power is this that has so many faces? It also empowered: it raised awareness of how economies rely on an invisibilized and disregarded precariat. The

virus, like all non-sentient objects, cannot be conceived save through ‘the minds’ that stretch themselves to understand it even as bodies succumb to it, so how do we ‘decentre’ the human?

The Covid-19 pandemic perhaps offers metaphors by which we can begin better to conceive of the indissolubility of materialities / discourses / psyches, the intertwining of process / performativity / power(s), and the multitude of ways in which each of these can be conceived. ‘The’ organization and the people and materials that fall within its territorializing ambitions may perhaps be thought afresh.

### *Peter: The corporate university*

The very difficult and disruptive period during which this special issue took shape really prompted me to reflect on the sociology of knowledge processes that underlie the contemporary university. In this respect, the themes discussed in the special issue papers – and Braidotti’s overarching framework – echoed changing social relations within higher education too as it entered into crisis. Of course, what has come to be called the ‘corporate university’ is now notorious for its specific approach to knowledge creation. Mimic business corporations at all cost; institute key performance indications to gauge value; only count research that has a positive impact on the economy; encourage competitive careerism among faculty and imbue journal or school rankings metrics with god-like status. Under such conditions, some suggest that academia has assumed an ultra-performative flavour where looking the part (perhaps even donning a dark suit) matters more than knowledge itself (Jones et al., 2020).

But the pandemic, with all its horrific consequences for universities and wider society, revealed qualities that still remain crucial to the academic labour process, qualities that have been downplayed in the corporate university for many years. When lessons were suddenly moved online, for instance, stick-shaking managers were largely bystanders to the real action. Academic improvisation, cooperation and professionalism (often assisted by students) achieved this formidable task instead, involving large amounts of unpaid labour and personal sacrifice. The themes of this special issue helped me to conceptualize the rich reservoir of tacit knowledge and social connectivity in my own workplace: a parallel dimension of power, performativity and process moving at multiple trajectories and speeds, within a space of urgency, care and social solidarity that had de-individualized *homo academicus*.

All organizations entail such invisible and intersubjective social exchange, of course. But as Merton (1942 [1973]) famously argued, scholarship *relies* upon it as an essential generative principle (what he evocatively called the ‘communism of science’). For me, this hidden labour represents a kind of posthuman ‘surplus’ that lies beyond (or perhaps beneath) the ossified infrastructures of administrative authority. Here I am almost tempted to use the term *surplus university* to describe this double-world in higher education – one that is unmeasurable, processual and anathema to the surfeit of corporate spreadsheets and metrics. Without that fluid and frequently unappreciated surplus, the formal university would grind to a halt. And no doubt this special issue was a product of this excess too, enrolling the collective efforts of scholars in four different time zones, including late night and early morning meetings. In this sense, the power of the academic community is more robust and vital than those forces that endeavour to corporatize the profession.

### *Viviane: From value to valuing*

Underlying a few papers in this special issue – even discernable in some of the previous explorative paragraphs – and at the heart of several current issues is, for me, the notion of value. In the time when this special issue has been assembled, what we call ‘current global issues’ have acquired a



sharper, more intensively felt presence. Some have said that the pandemic has highlighted or heightened issues that were already very much visible: climate change, inequalities, the precariousness of certain lives. The topic of value – as reflected in what is deemed to count, in what should be privileged and in what establishes the difference between what is important and what is not – has been discussed in relation to the continually emergent effects of the pandemic. But I find that many of these conversations have missed the opportunity to challenge and reinvigorate our way of thinking about those issues.

In our current predicament, as Braidotti would put it – she used this word before the pandemic and, in retrospect, this seems acutely premonitory – what could be gained if we embraced ontological re-imagining of value as co-emerging from interconnected processes of power *with* performativity? First, as is often the case when value is invoked, what gets either lost or obfuscated is that value is not a fixed reference, as Humanist readings of this concept would suggest, but fundamentally an action. Such a reformulation, even displacement, of value to valuation is a key insight from Dewey (1939 [1988]). For the Pragmatist philosopher, value is not an essence; it is relational, an attribution that is performed collectively and always in situ.

Second, conceiving value as valuation processes of power *with* performativity ignites networks of elements that are coming and working together, as value is actively produced: the frameworks (ideas and ideals) against which value is appraised; who or what establishes, maintains and may benefit (or not) from these frameworks; how these appreciations unfold and what organizing effects stem from them. Attending to valuation is hence a way to expose the inner workings of hierarchies that abound in our world – and maybe to work at dismantling them.

Third, as we view value in such a processual way, we recognize that valuing is at the same time devaluing. Maybe we should especially pay attention to this simultaneity of valuing-devaluing: constant, even amplifying, devaluation of certain lives, of certain modes of organizing, of certain other-than-humans are performed as other things are repeatedly constituted as more valuable. In this sense, this redefinition of value reminds us just how much it is connected to care – what we care *about*, what we care *for*, how such caring is assembled and what it generates. But, as the pandemic has also tragically revealed, even care and caring need to be revalued. Attending to these interweaving processes of power and performativity that animate valuing and devaluing thus represents for me an important project, and focal point, for our inquiries into organizing.

### *Anthony: Time and temporality*

For Harmut Rosa, technical and social acceleration presents one of the biggest challenges of our time. According to the author, we live in a time of ‘temporal famine’ (Rosa, 2010), where people have to complete more and more heterogeneous and separated tasks, and be involved in numerous activities, while individuals are regularly changing their jobs, trying new hobbies and so on. The way we have responded to the Covid-19 crisis has been a good illustration of this acceleration. In 2020, despite the fact that most of us had to stay at home due to the confinement, we were asked to quickly implement and use new tools: teleworking, online meetings and collaboration on Zoom or Microsoft Teams, and so on. For a lot of people, confinements were not slowdown periods but rather acceleration periods as we had to rush to learn and experiment with new ways of working and living.

Consequently, individuals live a buzzing life, but they can barely remember all of these tasks and activities let alone connect them. At the same time, most of these tasks and activities do not even make any sense. At work, it is the so-called bullshit job (Graeber, 2019), such a useless and sometimes harmful job that people struggle to justify what they do. Unfortunately, our response to this acceleration is to get involved in even more activities, making this acceleration faster and



faster. This leads to a form of alienation to time in which we experience past and future in an erratic way leading to the impossibility of making sense of our present moment. In other words, individuals struggle to create meaning and usefulness from what they are doing as they cannot enact a past and a future that would bring a sense of continuity to their current activities. Time as we know it is an objectified social construction (also called chronological or clock-time). This time does not accelerate, but what seems to accelerate is the subjective, processual and relational experience of past, present and future leading to the impossibility of constructing narratives (Reinecke, Suddaby, Langley, & Tsoukas, 2020; Simpson et al., 2020).

A posthuman power *with* performativity approach encourages us to pay more attention to the relation between the daily and mundane activities and the making of congruent narratives from which history and purposes can be (re)defined, while decisions can be made. More precisely, a posthuman power *with* performativity approach reminds us that the enactment of a meaningful history and a desirable future is a process always in a state of becoming and it is performed through every activity. In this sense, activities are not isolated but rather are intertwined and participate in the (re)definition of narratives about what we are (as sentient *with* non-sentients, humans *with* non-humans) and where we are going. Rosa (2010) suggests the notion of resonance as a way to understand how we transform and are transformed by the world. As Rosa put it (Schiermer, 2020, p. 6): 'Resonance is something that happens in the inter-space, between "actors" in Bruno Latour's sense; we can also call it "intra-action" in Karen Barad's sense.'

## Moving Towards Uncertain Futures

This special issue has attempted a novel integration of power *with* performativity by engaging an ontologically processual, posthuman stance. The six papers selected for inclusion provide thoughtful and intellectually stimulating insights into ways of *visibly making* 'organization' by weaving power and performativity together, but even so, these are just initial forays into new and potentially disruptive re-orientation of the agendas that shape organizational research. The certainties that have always been the bedrock of research inquiry are now, in a 'post-truth world' (Meyer & Quattrone, 2021), much less certain. So we, as researchers and also as citizens of this world, must become more adept at living with continuously unfolding change. We can no longer ignore the wider world in which organizing is both constituted and manifest, a world that is clearly not reducible to nice neat definitions, and one that can change in radically unanticipated and unpredictable ways. So what lessons can this special issue offer in response to such challenges?

First, the 3Ps – power, performativity and process – are by no means the only relevant dimensions of organizing. Other Ps come to mind – for instance people, politics and profit – but let's not limit ourselves to just one letter of the alphabet. Of course there are many concepts that inform understandings of organization and organizing, but the key point made here is that every concept we choose to engage in a posthuman form of analysis will require re-formulation in ontologically processual, rather than epistemologically entitative, terms. In so doing, the sharp dualistic boundaries that have previously differentiated between concepts become blurred, but at the same time we become better equipped to step with greater awareness into the dynamic flows of organizing as it happens. These more dynamic, travelling concepts sensitize us by continuously adjusting to what is going on rather than constricting the ways we can engage with perceptual experience. This move, in turn, draws researchers immediately into the doings of organizational practice, producing (and co-producing) insights that do not have to be 'made' relevant because they are already situated in the practice domain where they speak directly to practitioners' concerns.

Unsurprisingly, these conceptual matters also have significant implications for how we approach 'methodology'. There are no prior 'rules' or 'recipes', no methodolatry, for this type of

posthuman inquiry, but there are guides who can accompany researchers on their journeys. For instance, the authors contributing to this special issue have chosen to travel with process writers such as Deleuze and Guattari, Barad, Dewey, Follett, Butler and Latour. In each case, a deep reading of the guide's work brings their theories into the living presence of the researchers' practice (St. Pierre, 2018). The careful and time-consuming preparation that this suggests is what liberates the researcher to go with the flow, experimenting and adapting as the research situation itself emerges. It is as if the researcher becomes viral as s/he endeavours to move unimpeded through, while also 'infecting' the processes of *visibly making*. The objective is always to trace the emergence of newness rather than to confirm or elaborate what is already suspected, or known. It is in this sense that posthuman inquiry is distinct from critical, anti-humanist studies and, as such, requires radical re-imagining of research practice more than mere adjustments to already familiar research methods.

The 'methodology' question for posthuman inquiry does not stop with the acquisition of data or the production of new insights. Crucially, it also involves writing differently (Gilmore, Harding, Helin, & Pullen, 2019). Just as the scientific norms of method are too restricting for posthuman researchers, so too are the norms of writing, especially as promoted by scholarly journals, and in the ways we induct doctoral researchers into the academic profession. We are driven to produce writing that makes contributions, has impact and finds closure (Harley & Fleming, 2021), and yet a processual view is always open-ended, always inviting a productive (rather than destructive) continuation of the conversation. This open-ness was certainly a quality of scholarly writing in decades gone by, and now the posthuman is encouraging us to discover anew, or revert to, old ways of writing. The contributors to this special issue have all, to at least some degree, experimented with their approach to writing. Especially notable are the papers by Beavan, and Fouweather and Bosma, both of which adopt an actively experimental approach to their inquiries. Beavan also embraces the perceptual 'I', which is unavoidable in the reporting or recording of the researcher's experience, but she presents this 'I' in a multiplicity of differently interesting ways, reflecting the plurality that is implicit in a process ontology.

One final observation that we make from our own experience of editing this special issue is that working across disciplinary boundaries, while at times frustrating and even infuriating, can also be enormously productive. As scholars we tend to locate ourselves within disciplinary silos as a way of limiting the scope of our conversations and bringing sharper focus to our (narrower) insights. But it is precisely these disciplinary boundaries that the posthuman challenges us to transgress. In fact, why do we feel we have to restrict our writing to purely scholarly forms – what about drawing insights from novels and poetry, music, dance and the visual arts? It is surely only by engaging knowledge and experience across such boundaries that we will ever be able to confront the profound challenges that currently threaten our species and our planet.

Although this special issue is not about the Covid-19 pandemic, it is nevertheless pervaded by the shock and horror of this disease. It is undeniably a disaster of unimaginable proportions, but it is also an opportunity, an open door that invites academic activism as we *visibly make* new worlds. It is in this spirit that we leave the last word to the novelist and activist Arundhati Roy (2020, p. 214):

Whatever it is, Covid-19 has made the mighty kneel and brought the world to a halt like nothing else could. Our minds are still racing back and forth, longing for a return to 'normality', trying to stitch our future to our past and refusing to acknowledge the rupture. But the rupture exists. And in the midst of this terrible despair, it offers us a chance to rethink the doomsday machine we have built for ourselves. Nothing could be worse than a return to normality. Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next.

## Acknowledgement

We gratefully acknowledge the rich discussions that we had with those who participated in the activities of the EGOS Standing Working Group on ‘Doing process research’, which became the motivation for this Special Issue. We also thank previous Editors-in-Chief, Trish Reay and Daniel Hjorth, for their enthusiastic support throughout this process, and the current Editors-in-Chief, Renate Meyer and Paolo Quattrone, for helping us across the finish line. And of course, Sophia Tzagaraki is a force of Nature who we could not do without.

## Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## ORCID iD

Barbara Simpson  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7771-0092>

## Notes

1. Throughout this paper we discuss power and performativity in this order. However, there is no intention to suggest any sort of prioritization between these two themes. Rather our focus is always on the or/and/ with relationship between them.
2. In the context of an emergent, rather than sequential temporality, we understand the ‘post’ in posthuman not as something coming after and superseding (e.g. after Humanism), but rather as something that lies behind or beyond, as in posterior, another horizon, a different plateau, a parallel worlding.

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### Author biographies

**Barbara Simpson** is Professor of Leadership and Organisational Dynamics at Strathclyde Business School. Her research and teaching interests are shaped by the writings of process philosophers and the challenges of practising in ways that are authentically processual. She takes particular delight in collaborating across disciplinary boundaries, where new insights may be generated by differences. She was the lead organizer of the EGOS Standing Working Group on ‘Doing process research’ from 2017 to 2020. Her work is published in journals and books that address various disciplinary communities.

**Nancy Harding** is Professor of Human Resource Management at the University of Bath’s School of Management. Her research and teaching focus on critical approaches to understanding organizations, particularly working lives, gender, and the performative constitution of identities. Her papers have appeared in many of the expected academic journals, and she has published two sole-authored books, two joint-authored books, and several edited collections.

**Peter Fleming** is a professor at University of Technology Sydney (Business School). His research interests focus on emerging forms of organization, technology and management ideology, and the ethical problems they often pose. His work has appeared in various journals and books. His latest book *Dark Academia* (2021, Pluto Books) is about higher education.

**Viviane Sergi** is associate professor in Management in the Department of Management, ESG UQAM in Montréal. Her research interests include process ontology, performativity, project organizing, the transformation of work and leadership. Her recent studies have explored how communication is, in various settings, constitutive of organizational phenomena. She also has a keen interest in methodological issues related to qualitative research and was a co-organizer of the EGOS Standing Working Group on ‘Doing process research’ from 2018 to 2020. Her work has been published in journals such as *Academy of Management Annals*, *Human Relations*, *Strategic Organization*, *Long Range Planning* and *Management*.

**Anthony Hussenot** is a full professor in organization studies at the Université Côte d’Azur. His research and teaching focus on the process view (especially matters of temporality and event) to understand the emergence of new and alternative ways of working and organizing. He has served as a co-organizer of the ‘Doing Process Research’ Standing Working Group at EGOS from 2017 to 2020, and his work has appeared in several journals and books.