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► **To cite this version:**

François-Xavier de Vaujany, Robin Holt, Albane Grandazzi. Organization as time: power and emancipation in the happening of management. Organization as Time: Technology, Power and Politics, Cambridge University Press, pp.1-10, 2023, 9781009297257. 10.1017/9781009297288.001 . hal-04219950

HAL Id: hal-04219950

<https://hal.science/hal-04219950v1>

Submitted on 5 Oct 2023

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Organization as time: power and emancipation in the happening of management

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Introduction

As Virginia Woolf put it, clocks are machines that strike time. To strike is to hit, but also to found or yield, and in periodically recurring to Big Ben in her novel *Mrs Dalloway*, Woolf attends to this intimacy between organization, sound and the passing of hours. As the quarter hours are struck the civic, commercial, ritual and domestic rhythms of London unfold with a distinct yet mutually accommodating order:

Shredding and slicing, dividing and subdividing, the clocks of Harley Street nibbled at the June day, counselled submission, held authority, and pointed out in chorus the supreme advantages of a sense of proportion, until the mound of time was so far diminished that a commercial clock, suspended above a shop in Oxford Street, announced genially and fraternally, as if it were a pleasure to Messrs. Rigby and Lowndes, to give the information gratis, that it was half-past one (Woolf, 1925: 154-155)

It is as if the city is nothing other than a meshwork of temporalities. These are most obviously clock based, such as timetables, delivery times, deadlines, and most markedly, the bell ("[F]irst a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable") (Woolf, 1925: 5). Yet into the structure provided by these measured, 'external' times Woolf introduces the 'inner' time of recollection and expectation. The clocks and bells are not just spatial and aural marks, their appearance resonates with sonorities, with fate and with uncertainty. The boundaries between inner experience and outward structures are porous, which is what lends the novel its peculiarly atmospheric quality. Immediate emotional disturbances thrown up by small events like looking in a mirror ("How many million times she had seen her face, and always with the same imperceptible contraction!") (Woolf, 1925: 55) vie with the natural and social facts of time, such as work rhythms ("There Rezia sat at the table trimming hats. She trimmed hats for Mrs Filmer's friends; she trimmed hats by the hour. She looked pale and mysterious, like a lilly, drowned, under water, he thought") (Woolf, 1925: 134) or historical eras ("This late age of the world's experience had bred in them all, all men and women, a well of tears.") (Woolf, 1925: 13).

It is over a century since Woolf wrote *Mrs Dalloway*, during which time the study of organization and its management has become a disciplinary field. Though time is intimate to the field (as is witnessed, for example, by Lillian Gilbreth's ground-breaking studies on time and motion in the workplace, and Pitirim Sorokin and Robert Merton's studies of social time), it is only recently that it has been understood as more than an uncontested, inexhaustible passage of discrete spatial moments marked by a 't' axis. Through the influence of sociologists, social theorists, philosophers of science and social psychologists like Barbara Adam, Niklas Luhmann, Helga Nowotny, Ilya Prigogine, Isabelle Stengers and Eviatar Zerubavel, and through journals like *Time and Society*, greater attention is now being paid to the internal, phenomenological experience of time structures, as well as to analyzing how (social) machinery

produces time. Fact, it seems is finally catching up with fiction. It is to continuing this study of the intimacy between organization, management and time that the chapters of this book are devoted.

Arguably, time grounds both the practice of managing and the process of organizing (Blyton et al., 2017; Whipp et al., 2002). Management produces nothing, its sole function is to orchestrate and guide productive activity from a set of initial conditions to a desired outcome. As such, it is grounded in what Paul Ricoeur calls the measured structures of before, now and after, and the experiential structures of past, present and future. In combination, we argue these two intimately related forms of time constitute possibility of management. Time also figures as an *a priori* in organization, not in terms of an explicitly stated future toward which managers cybernetically (rationally) steer an organization, but as a raw expression of movement and growth, an inherent mobility in which things are coming into being, and doing so in the company of other beings, all of which beckons organization.

When combined, the intimacy of management, organization and time becomes apparent as an expression of power, the power to grow and move, and the power to control and survey. For example, how, in Europe, the idea of a ‘working day’ emerged with institution of the Gregorian (Hamann, 2016) (further abetted by developments in factory machinery and architecture and transportation, see Bradbury and Collette, 2009). The seasonally governed growth cycles of agrarian systems gave way to an idea of accumulative growth, and so progress, which in turn legitimated overt forms of management. Power shifts from an aristocracy naturally endowed with puissance, and from priests requiring abeyance and sacrifice in exchange for garlanded fate, to managed futures and industrialized factory systems (de Vaujany et al., 2021).

Despite this, and somewhat paradoxically, the field of management and organization studies tends to separate issues of politics and power on the one hand and issues of time and

temporality on the other hand.¹ Most management and organization scholars interested in politics and power (often, though not exclusively, going by the moniker critical management studies) tend to skew their analytic frame toward space, spacing and spatial practices (Dale & Burrell, 2007; Fleming & Spicer, 2004; Kerr & Robinson, 2016; Kornberger & Clegg, 2004). Historically speaking, perhaps we can blame the long-standing association of autonomy with an inner sphere, or of sovereignty with a body, or of politics with nation states, or of love and the family with a household. In the present, we can certainly blame the genius of Michel Foucault (1977) in likening the decentering of attention and the pervasiveness of disciplinary force and surveillance to a panopticon. Power becomes a pervading, atmospheric phenomena, utterly spatial.

This association of power and space sets the scene for much of the critical work being in management and organization studies. Zuboff (2019), in her analysis of ‘surveillance capitalism’, for example, is interesting here. She draws extensively on a spatialized metaphors such as oversight, instrumentarium, “the virgin territory of personal experience”, the architecture of choice” managed through nudge theory, or the closed loop between digital and surveillance capitalism. Yet her critique also hints at the temporal structures, ones that we find often absent in many other critical studies, now the Marxist historicism has been largely junked. Zuboff is attentive, for example, to how recommender systems of social media or platform organizations contrive a future utterly indebted to a past over which they have control, and to how the history of capitalist development is characterized by periodic ruptures in common norms that are then concealed through a collective forgetting (transforming farmers into factory workers was as unnatural as harnessing a deer into a plough, that is, she says, until social amnesia set in). Zuboff’s work is interesting in this regard because it acknowledges how the

¹ In contrast to other fields, e.g., philosophy and anthropology (see Hassid and Watson, 2014; Portschy, 2020; Adib, & Emiljanowicz, 2019; Colley et al, 2012).

spatial is inherently temporal, and, on the flip side, how time appears more as a juxtaposition of rhythms and tempos in societal and commercial dynamics.

Lefebvre (2004, see also Beyes and Holt, 2020) is interesting in this issue of multiplicity of rhythms and the interminglement of space and time. He develops a conceptualization of a ‘rhythmanalysis’ that theorizes the role of rhythms and the conflict between temporalities in daily activities. Rhythms are temporal structures defined by repetition and difference of our activities and social spaces. This temporal analysis is part of a post-marxist, micro critique of daily working and social life by fighting against the abstractions of social space and time that constrains repetitive activities and gestures in a productive logic of capital translation. Lefebvre distinguishes two kinds of rhythms that both produce repetition: what he names a ‘linear rhythm’ (i.e repetition that produces similarity) and a ‘cyclical rhythm’ (i.e repetition that produces creation). Lefebvre’s work is particularly interesting in this regard because it reconsiders the ‘linear’ as possibly creative. His work calls for considering the rhythm through a political perspective in the struggle between ‘linear rhythm’ and ‘cyclical rhythm’. It would seem that a developed and considered concern with time enriches studies of politics and power.

On the other side, those management and organization studies scholars interested in temporality and time as something more than a background variable (often, though not exclusively, gathered around the moniker process studies) conceptualize organizations and societies as flows, activities, events, force, becoming or lines (see Tsoukas and Chia, 2002; Helin et al, 2014; Hernes, 2014; Holt and Johnsen, 2019; de Vaujany and Aroles, 2019). But politics and power are rarely explicitly part of these discussions. By making them so in this volume we begin to make explicit connections between the humility and connectivity implied in process philosophy and what Jacques Rancière (2010: 62) has called *the political*, by which is meant the unstructured, open and discursive exchange of the voices of the surplus, the left over, the unlearned, those who have no warrant for their opinion outside of their being a human

being with a voice. This includes everyone, but only insofar as they embrace the dissensus and refuse the comforts of an informed position with an attendant set of interests,

Relatedly, we tease out the political implications between process philosophy and the time-based categorization of a planet irrevocably touched by human organization, a hybridity most recently made explicit by the unapologetically species-centric concept of ‘the anthropocene’. Against this backdrop, is it right to continue to talk only of flows, flux and force, of affects and sensory immersion, of an ungovernable reality, rather than seek more active organizational structures through which distinct forms can be brought into existence by way of offering resilience, reparation, refuge? We acknowledge process studies has had a critical edge when used in management and organization studies. For example, in the philosophies of Elizabeth Grosz or Rosi Braidotti, whose sense how events, in prehending one another, or in continually calling one another or conversing with each other, are caught in relations of mutually captivation, but not capture. This opening up of what otherwise is a fixed, definitive and presumably distinguishable relationship of overt control has allowed them to offer penetrating analyses of the normal, and hence invisible, ways in which female or minority lives are being persistently skewered by prevailing norms and habits. Yet more still might be done, notably in attending to how the world is not populated by a democracy of things connecting and reconnecting in open networks of mutual agency, but by often stark and abusive hierarchies.

By considering more politically attuned thinkers such as Foucault (*dispositifs*, which settle or sediment subjectivities), process studies can open the way to a more political prehension, so to speak (Eriksson, 2005). Process studies might also consider the political implications of pragmatic philosophy, which has inspired some process studies (see Lorino, 2018), and which has been made organizationally explicit in writing of Mary Parker Follett (cf. Hernes, 2021), but which seems to have been bypassed by those who espouse a pragmatic framing. The form of inquiry adopted by the likes of John Dewey, for example, stresses the

importance of differences, gaps, or *écarts*. Without these glitches and ruptures (to recall Rancière's point on dissensus) it is impossible to create a community of inquiry with the flexibility or creativity necessary to solve organizational problems (see also Julien, 2012). Problematization, transactions, instruments of inquiry are interesting processes to put in conversation with the Foucauldian *dispositifs*. Inquiry fosters a plurality of activities (ahead) instead of a diversity of controlled individuality (in the past and the present).

If some process (and critical) scholars explore the conceptual avenues sketched by Foucault, Deleuze or Dewey, very few define it, and instead link it to a more general conversation between the topics of temporality and the topics of politics (cf. Langley, 2016).

The structure of the book

Though we could have fixed on others, we found it interesting to fix on a distinct pairing of the French theorists and writers Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault to help orient us to the themes raised in the chapters. They are both thinkers who are alive to the spatial as well as temporal aspects of organization and management, as well as to how neither organization nor management can be understood without a sensitivity to power and politics.

Deleuze (as is expressed, for example, in his work about cinema) finds a world in movement, in the making (see Roets and Braidotti, 2012), and as such power becomes a raw, natural force of desire and growth which occur spontaneously, and configure *ensembles* (*agencement*). These have a tangibility, but without ever gaining distinct objecthood (see Deleuze, 1988-1989). Given this grounding condition of reality, there is, at root, an indistinguishability of subjects and objects- All occurrence is braided within, and inseparable from, a plane of immanence which itself is being formed in creepages (*lignes de fuite*), ray-like intersections of light expressing differences in speed and intensity. Politics and power take place

from the within *agencements* themselves, and hence remain in the pre-linguistic or pre-subjective making/folding of a world that is continually underway. Talk of good or bad, fair or unfair, settling justice or not, yields to talk of connectedness itself, of relations and flow. Freedom is already in the inside of the world. Nothing is frozen, possessed, occupied. The ultimate expression of this being the patient and immobile movement of the nomad, moving “not to leave”

For Foucault, the processuality of the world is also key. But in contrast, and notably during the third and last stage of his intellectual trajectory, Foucault emphasized an ethic of care in the distinct, human subject: an “attitude” of attending to the emergence of the self from within the agonistic quality of each event (Revel, 2015; Dews, 2014; Stark, 2017; de Vaujany, 2022). Without the admittedly needy, fragile, and exploratory process of co-appropriating subjectivities being negotiated between multiple beings wrapped in the same situational possibilities, no “better world” is possible.

This distinction between Foucault and Deleuze epitomizes what we found to be a polarity of influence and emphasis amongst the chapters of the book. Some chapters are emphasizing care, emancipatory temporalities, creativity or the metaphysical tragedy of existence- Others stress more the importance of alternative *agencements*, intensities in organizing, material vibrations and forces as political *per se* and temporal performativity of managerial assemblages. These divergences should not be exaggerated. Nearly all the chapters stress the importance of non-dualist, post-human, temporal, material and affective views of organizing and managing.

Our book is split into four parts.²

² Following the 11th Organizations, Artifacts and Practices (OAP) workshop about the « Politics of Time: From Control to Self-Control in Organizing? » (June 17th and 18th). These two days international event gathered 237 scholars from different fields (Management and Organization Studies, Sociology, Philosophy; STS...).

Part I - *The politics of time: ontologies and metaphysics of organization as time* - is devoted to metaphysical discussions around time and power, in particular through a systematic re-exploration of core processual concepts and how they feed or can feed differently ongoing debates in MOS about time and power. In Chapter 1, Tim Barker discusses *Media Temporalities and the Technical Image*. He comes back to the work of Alfred North Whitehead and explores what is at stage in the temporalities of our digital age. Chapter 2 by Miriam Feuls, Christina Luethy and Silviya Svejenova is entitled *In Search of Hilma af Klint's Time: Material Temporal Work and Emotional Resonance in Radical Artistic Innovation*. Their's is an art-based analysis of temporalities in creative practice, one they centre on the making of a "her". Chapter 3 - *In the practice agencement: rhythms, refrains and feminist snaps* - focusses on the processual category of practice, finding Silvia Gheradi coming back to core metaphysical debates on post-humanist views of practice. Lastly, Rémy Conche explores the metaphysical tragedy of time, detailing an existential metaphysics in a chapter entitled *Metaphysics of tragedy, a non-dispositional view of time*.

Part II - *Re-orienting critique in organization studies? Exploring jointly time and politics* - is more programmatic. It targets more explicit and targeted discussion about politics and time. In Chapter 5, Gabriel Costello deconstructs "supersessionism" in a piece entitled *Supersessionism and the Politics of Time: reforming organisational studies with Gadamer's hermeneutic of trust*. In Chapter 6, François-Xavier de Vaujany, Aurélie Leclercq-Vandelanoitte and Gazzi Islam put forward the concept of emancipatory temporalities. They invite scholars to explore the in-betweenness of abandon and derive in management and organizing in a chapter entitled *Between Abandon and Inquiry: On the Way to Emancipatory Temporalities in Organizing*. Chapter 7 - *Future Work: Toward a Practice Perspective* - by Matthias Weinzal, Hannes

Krämer, Jochen Koch and Andreas Recjwitz focusses on the issue of strategizing and its political as well as organizational constitution in the experience on envisaging, or imagining, the future. Lastly, Damian O'Doherty analyzes the politics at stake in small, ordinary, organizational events, in this case the appearance of a bob-cut hair style in Chapter 8 - *Towards a Crinicultural Activism in Organization*.

Part III – *New ways of organizing work, digitality and the politics of time* covers a key topic of management and organization studies likely to resonate with our inquiry about time and politics: novelty and in line with that, so-called new ways of working and organizing. Claire Estagnasié, in Chapter 9 entitled – *Working the time: Time self-management practices of remote workers*, explores various forms of temporal practices of remote workers. In Chapter 10, Renata Cherém de Araújo Pereira and André Carlos Busanelli analyze *Temporal structures at telework in public sector organizations* by emphasizing temporal conflicts. Tor Hernes, Jonathan Feddersen and Silvia Svejenova Velikova explore the *Becoming a 'contemporary landmark' for sustainable urban development: advancing an understanding of material temporality* in Chapter 11. In Chapter 12, Christian Garmann Johnsen considers the temporality of entrepreneurial memory and imagination by examining *The temporality of entrepreneurship: How entrepreneurs blend memories and projections in the ongoing present of new venture creations*. Lastly, in Chapter 13, François-Xavier de Vaujany and Elen Riot discuss *Management as Dramatic Events* and offer the concept of *Intense Decentered Organizing (IDO)*.

Part IV - *History and duration: making things last, enduring politics and organizing* - covers historical and performative relations. In Chapter 14, Deniz Tunçalp analyzes *Times Alla Turca E Franga: conceptions of time and the materiality of the late-Ottoman clock towers* through a microhistorical perspective. Chapter 15 by Sylvain Colombero, Amélie Boutinot and Hélène

Delacour elaborates on *Temporality and institutional maintenance: the role of reactivation work to material artefacts*. Chapter 16 by Marco Velicogna offers an historical view on justice through a chapter entitled *A time for justice? Reflecting on the many facets of time and temporality in the justice service provision*". Finally, in Chapter 17, Mike Zundel, Sam Horner and Bill Foster uncover processes of *Organizational memory as technology*.

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