

‘The machine could swallow everything’

Satin Island and performing organization

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The machine could swallow everything, incorporate it seamlessly, like a giant loom that reweaves all fabric, no matter how recalcitrant and jarring its raw form, into what my hero would have called a master-pattern – or, if not that, then maybe just the pattern of the master.

MCCARTHY 2015: 34

Satin Island, the latest novel by artist and writer Tom McCarthy, is set in the strange world of organization in digital cultures. The book is woven around the experiences, observations and reflections of its protagonist, “U”. U is an anthropologist, whose fieldwork and subsequent doctoral thesis on club culture was mainly lauded not for its insights into the clubbing scene, but for its methodological meditations on ethnographic research and the performativity of the researcher. The thesis brought him enough attention – “a famous anthropologist [...] is about as well known as a third-division footballer” – to be plucked “from the dying branches of academia” and grafted into “the febrile hothouse” of a consultancy firm in London (McCarthy 2015: 28-29). “U” reads as ‘you’, of course: The figure of the corporate anthropologist or ‘semiotic engineer’, as employees of Silicon Valley firms who hold humanities degrees have been called (Lewis-Kraus 2015), represents a contemporary ‘organization (wo)man’. U’s anthropologist “hero”, referred to in the opening quote, is Claude Lévi-Strauss (McCarthy 2015: 33). Yet the ethnographic discovery of social-cultural patterns is now put to work for “the Company”, as U’s employer is called throughout the book, with a capitalized ‘C’. Peyman, the boss of the consultancy firm, tasks the protagonist with writing the “Great Report”: “Not just *a* book: *the* fucking *Book*. [...] Sum the tribe up. Speak its secret name” (ibid.: 55; orig. emphasis).

Satin Island, then, is a novel on the problem of reporting on, and from within, the conditions and effects of today's ubiquitously networked – and thus pervasively organized – spheres of life; at one point in the book, the novel itself is presented as the remnants of the impossible Great Report, the “offslew of the real unwritten manuscript” (ibid.: 103).¹ In this chapter, I read the text as a report on contemporary organization and, more specifically, on the performativity of organization in the time of ubiquitous and pervasive media technologies. To do so, I first discuss existing encounters of organization theory and performance (studies). On this basis, I reflect on different layers of performativity and organization as they are enacted in *Satin Island*. Perhaps the most significant layer concerns the effects of digital technologies and networked infrastructures. Some of the novel's most striking passages, or so I argue, reflect a ‘posthumanist performativity’ (Barad 2003) and therefore instigate a posthumanist theorizing of organization.

ORGANIZATION THEORY AND THE QUESTION OF PERFORMATIVITY

What comes to the fore when one approaches organization through the notion of performativity? As the use of these terms in general and in the book this chapter appears in demonstrate, performance and performativity have become all-purpose “carry-home concept[s]”, widely applicable and taking many forms (Loxley 2007: 29). In this spirit, the study of organization, too, was recently diagnosed to have taken its own “performativity turn” (Gond et al. 2015: 18). Without aspiring to a complete overview, I distinguish between three broad encounters of organization theory, performance studies and performativity. The first relates to questions of organizational efficiency and performance management; the second consists of theatrical and dramaturgical approaches to organization; and the third is marked by a turn to the performativity of different

1 A version of *Satin Island*'s cover already plays with the novel's ‘open form’ and its shifting boundaries with other textual genres: Scattered across the page are both coloured dots of different shapes and sizes and possible ‘qualifiers’ or denominators of what the book ‘is’, all of them crossed out: “~~a treatise~~”, “~~an essay~~”, “~~a report~~”, “~~a confession~~”, “~~a manifesto~~”. Only “a novel” is (momentarily?) not crossed out – “and I think that would be the space of literature, which is neither one nor the other; it's this messy, unresolved between” (McCarthy: 2016: 50).

processes of organizing, where organization becomes a provisional phenomenon and a precarious effect of diverse performative practices.

First, there is a strong current of understanding organizations as machines of efficiency, measured and acted upon through performance criteria – and the critique of such an understanding and its consequences. This is what performance theorist Jon McKenzie (2001) refers to as ‘organizational performance’.² Such ‘performance studies’ reproduce what Lyotard, in *The Postmodern Condition* (1984), discussed as the proliferation of ‘performativity criterion’ and ‘performativity principle’ as a legitimizing practice, which here means achieving desired outcomes effectively and generating desired returns. Part and parcel of “a generalized spirit of performativity” (1984: 45), such a notion of organizational performance is closely connected to the marketization or ‘mercantilization’ of many, if not all walks of life (and prominently includes the educational sector, as Lyotard foresaw).

Second, there is what one could call the theatricality of organizational practice as interpreted through theatrical and dramaturgical metaphors. Drawing upon Goffman’s seminal work on identity formation and presentation of the self, but also the social anthropology of Turner and even Burke’s ‘dramatistic pentad’, organizational life here is analyzed in terms of theatrical performances and according to dramaturgical principles (cf. Mangham 1986; Cornelissen 2004). All organization is a stage, on which rituals, quotidian dramas and role-playing is performed. What mainly comes into view in this line of thought, then, is the everyday performances in organizations and how to think of organizations as made up of such mundane performances. Moreover, there is also work on theaters as well as theatrical performances or interventions as cases of organizing (Beyes/Steyaert 2006), for instance by investigating the practice of Rimini Protokoll (Biehl-Missal 2012; Beyes/Steyaert 2013; Schipper, this volume).

Third, echoing the wider performative turn in the cultural and social sciences – and, correspondingly, the expansion of what falls into the field of performance studies – the notion of performativity has more recently inspired a number of

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- 2 While originating from – and still strongly influenced by – sociological thought, the study of organization has come to be shaped to quite some extent by the institutional power of business school-interests. It is thus often, albeit not exclusively, limited to a certain type of bounded organizational form, usually capitalist firms, and it is prone to an instrumental and oddly normative logic of coming up with knowledge that not only helps us to better understand such organizations but to help them performing better economically, i.e. with insights ‘for’ management and for questions of steering and control (Beyes, 2007).

studies and approaches according to which organization is continuously performed and produced through various actions and processes. It is therefore this loose group of texts that constitutes organization theory's minor 'performativity turn'. Following Latour, Czarniawska (2008: 6-7) distinguished between "ostensive" and "performative" approaches to organization. Whereas ostensive definitions look at organizations as distinct, presupposed units, into which actors are placed and which are therefore assumed to exist independently of everyday social and material processes of organizing,³ a performative sensibility sees organization as something that is continuously effected.

In this register, studies that explicitly enlist notions of performativity have drawn upon what are usually regarded as the main strands of performativity theory (Gond et al. 2015). Based on Austin's speech-act theory and its ramifications, organizational scholars have inquired into performative utterances as perlocutionary acts, i.e. into how organizations come into being through communicational flows (Cooren 2004). Following Callon's 'performance program', others have traced how theories of economy and management are brought into being and translated into organizational practice (Muniesa 2014; Schröter, this volume). Inspired by Butler's work, organizational researchers have interrogated

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- 3 Broadly speaking, the first two 'schools' of performance and organization studies that I have mentioned – organizations as theatre, organizational performance – tend to reproduce the entitative/ostensive view of organization. The third, performative view overlaps with the much-discussed processual shift in organizational theorizing: It entails a replacement of 'what?'-questions (what is an organization?) with 'how?'-questions (how is organization assembled, or how does organizing take place?). In other words, this in itself heterogeneous approach deviates from "a Cartesian habit of mind" (Barad 2003: 807), according to which organizations exist as entities with inherent, presupposed attributes – and anterior to their representation.
- It follows that what is at stake, too, is a shift from the study of organizations as bounded, stable entities (the company, the nonprofit-organization, bureaucracy) to a focus on processes of organizing between, beyond, after or before the bounded notion of an organization. Cooper's work is seminal in this respect. As he wrote, "if we insist on thinking in terms of *organizations*, we miss the bigger question of how *organization* as a generic process both structures and destructures our world, how our minds and bodies are caught up in its complex, reflexive dynamics. To think of *organizations* is to think of specific objects external to us. To think of *organization* is to recognize a more general force which includes us in its perpetual movement between order and disorder, certainty and uncertainty" (1998: 154; orig. emphasis). Hence this chapter's title: 'performing organization' rather than 'performing organizations'.

the performative making of gendered identities in organizations (Tyler and Cohen 2010) and pondered the potential of queer theory to disrupt mainstream accounts of organizational life (Parker 2001). Importantly, the notion of performativity has not only been linked to discursive formations of organizational realities and the production of identities, but also to the very material and affective forces of organizational spaces (Beyes/Steyaert 2012) and to its objects and technologies (Orlikowski/Scott 2014; Nyberg/Wright 2015). Moreover, the performativity of organizational scholarship itself has been discussed both methodologically (Beyes/Steyaert 2011) and politically, the latter primarily by way of the development of, and debates on, the notion of ‘critical performativity’ (Spicer et al. 2009; see McKenzie, this volume).

In sum, organization studies’ minor ‘performativity turn’ has spawned a number of promising approaches for investigating the ‘doing’ of organization, and it has helped ushering in an appreciation of, and a sensibility for, organization as a processual, material, situational and contested accomplishment. And yet, forays into the performative effects of digital technologies are recent and few, and they tend to presuppose formal organizations, in which IT systems ‘do things’ to organizational processes and its actors. The subsequent discussion of *Satin Island* and its layers of ‘performative organizing’ builds up on organization theory’s ‘performativity program’. It briefly touches upon the performative force of communication and the performativity of concepts before arriving at the agency of objects and technologies. As I try to show with and through the novel, however, the entanglements of digital technologies and human conduct deserves further scrutiny.

BLACK BOX ORGANIZING: DOING ORGANIZATION IN *SATIN ISLAND*

Beyond the figure of Peyman, the somewhat charismatic boss, McCarthy’s depiction of the nameless Company barely touches upon formal hierarchies, structures of organizational decision-making or organizational members. Rather, it is infrastructures, media and materialities as well as U’s experience of – and reflections on – these organizational environments and atmospheres that dominate the ethnographer’s narrations. For instance, the Company’s London premises’ glass walls created

“an expansive vista in which sketches, diagrams and other such configurations of precious data, lying faced-up on curved tabletops, pinned to walls or drawn on whiteboards or,

occasionally (and this made the data seem all the more vulnerable, fragile even), on the glass itself, seemed to dialogue with one another in a rich and esoteric language, the scene conveying (deliberately, of course) the impression that this was not only a place of business but, beyond that, a hermetic zone, a zone of alchemy, a crucible in which whole worlds were in the mix.” (McCarthy 2015: 20-21)

Yet what kinds of worlds are in the mix remains unclear. Alongside having to write the Great Report, the protagonist participates in the large-scale “Koob-Sassen-Project”, “supra-governmental, supra-national, supra-everything” (ibid.: 110), in which the Company has a role among hundreds of other players. The Project’s aim and content are never clarified – for legal reasons, as U explains, but also because he and, apparently, the other people involved, simply do not know what the project involves. It is a “black box” (ibid.: 60): “Sometimes it seemed enormous, like an emperor’s mausoleum; at others it appeared no larger than a trunk, or coffin; at others still, the size of a child’s toy- or music-box. The only constant or unchanging aspect of it was that it was black: black and inscrutable, opaque” (ibid.: 70). The Project is amorphous and shape-shifting; it crosses the boundaries of formal organizations; “it has to be conceived of as in a perpetual state of passage, not arrival – not *at*, but *in between*” (ibid.: 74; orig. emphasis). *Satin Island* can thus be read as a novelistic reflection – or a report – on the performativity of organization understood as process, as an unstable and at least partly diffuse phenomenon that perpetually needs to be accomplished through different layers of performative agency. In the following, I tentatively distinguish between three layers enacted in the book: communicative performativity, the performativity of concepts and the performativity of media technologies that is tied to digital devices and algorithms.

PERLOCUTIONARY ACTS

“They discussed [the Project] not as people discuss things they know about, subjects whose properties and parameters are given, but rather as they try to ascertain those of a foreign object, one that is at once present – omnipresent – and elusive: groping after its dimensions; trying, through mutual enquiry, to discern its composition, charge and limit. When, in the course of my professional activities, I asked people to provide a visual image that, for them, most represented it, I got answers varying from hovering spaceship to rabbit warren to pond lilies.” (McCarthy 2015: 63)

Precisely because it is perceived as shape-shifting and inscrutable, the Project has to be performed into its (amorphous) being by way of incessant talk. The

anthropologist’s “in-transit-metaphor” and “perpetual-state-of-passage-analogy” (ibid.: 117) itself becomes a performative ploy, used in Company memos and project representations. The ethnographer is convening meetings with civil servants, asking them to “discuss their sense of what the Project entailed, or more subtly, implied” (ibid.: 50). Yet the civil servants are too clever for ethnographic tricks, knowing full well they are being observed and studied – the ethnographer, of course, knows that his interlocutors know – and in response they conjure up catchphrases such as “‘excitement’ (one hundred and eighty-two occurrences over three hours); also ‘challenge’ (one hundred and four); ‘opportunity’ (eighty-nine); ‘transformation’ (seventy-eight); and, as an upscale variant on the last word, ‘re-configuration’ (sixty-three)” (ibid.: 50). (McCarthy is a brilliant satirist.)

Yet fittingly, nobody else is performing organization through speech acts such as Peyman, head of the Company. McCarthy presents him as a man without qualities of and for the present: as a cipher for organizational management as a kind of art of fabulation. If he (Peyman) had to sum up what the Company did, he would “choose not *consultancy* or *design* or *urban planning*, but *fiction*” (ibid.: 45; orig. emphasis).

“The city and the state are fictional conditions; a business is a fictional entity. Even if it’s real, it’s still a construct. Lots of the Company’s projects have been fictions that became real. [...] We should view all propositions and all projects this way.” (ibid.)

Peyman’s aphorisms, slogans and imperatives sound clever yet are sometimes hard to decipher in terms of their constative or ostensible meaning, part of the Company’s “rich and esoteric language” referred to above (ibid.: 21). Both illocutionary intent and perlocutionary effects of such fabulation seem to reside in attracting and seducing (potential) clients as well as impressing and partly dumbfounding colleagues and underlings.

PERFORMING CONCEPTS

Peyman’s talk already touches upon a second and related layer of how organization is performed in *Satin Island*: the performative force of theories or concepts themselves. McCarthy enacts a dark satire of the translation of aesthetic and allegedly critical theories into contemporary selling propositions. Such theories and concepts seem perfectly attuned to a culturalized or aesthetic economy in which the emphasis shifts to the creation or staging of worlds in which objects

and subjects exist (Lazzarato 2004) – a state of affairs that calls for expanding the categories of use value and exchange value with ‘orchestration value’ or ‘staging value’ [*Inszenierungswert*] (Böhme 2016). Apart from the heavy-handed irony of having the corporate anthropologist and ardent admirer of Lévi-Strauss consult the jeans-maker Levi Strauss, McCarthy’s U makes good use of his schooling in continental theory and scholarly self-reflection, yet for the sake of the market, “feeding vanguard theory [...] back into the corporate machine” (McCarthy 2015: 34). ‘For’ the client Levi Strauss, U stole a concept from the French philosopher Deleuze:

“for him, le pli, or fold, describes the way we swallow the exterior world, invert it and then flip it back outwards again, and, in so doing, form our own identity. I took out all the revolutionary shit (Deleuze was a leftie); and I didn’t credit Deleuze, either. [...] I did the same thing with another French philosopher, Badiou: I recycled his notion of a rip, a sudden temporal rupture, and applied it, naturally, to tears worn in jeans, which I presented as the birth-scars of their wearer’s singularity, testaments to the individual’s break with general history, to the successful institution of a personal time.” (ibid.)

PERFORMING MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES

In *Satin Island*, the performances of human communication, self-styling and concepts are embedded in a narrative of apparatuses and data streams. Stalder (2016) recently suggested three mutually interwoven characteristic forms or qualities that mark digital culture: ‘referentiality’ [*Referenzialität*], collectivity or communality [*Gemeinschaftlichkeit*] and, importantly, ‘algorithmicity’ [*Algorithmität*]. With regard to the novel’s organizational performativity, the dimension of referentiality is at work in the mash-up of theory and (business) practice enacted in the Company. The quality of communality could then be connected to the on-going task of communicatively performing and relating what is occurring, to bring into being different versions of what is taking place. Yet today, both qualities are pervaded and shaped by digital networks and their automated procedures of decision-making that handle data, extract information as well as offer and perhaps pre-determine modes of action. Such is the invisibility and inscrutability of the Koob-Sassen-Project:

“It was a huge, ambitious scheme, he said, on the same scale as poldering and draining land masses of thousands of square miles, or cabling and connecting an entire empire – and yet, he continued, the most remarkable thing about it was that, despite its massive scale, it would remain, in an everyday sense, to members of the general populace, invisible [...]. It was a feat, rather, of what he called *network architecture*. He went on for a long time about networks, convergence, nodes and relays, interstices – it was very abstract.” (McCarthy 2015: 31-32; orig. emphasis)

It seems that what could be called the algorithmic performativity of organizing, which is enabled by network infrastructure, is what drives the Project and what provokes the experiences of opacity and not-knowing (Beyes/Pias 2014). Moreover, this kind of performativity leads the ethnographer to deeper suspicions about the nature and possibility of a Great Report. As U, the good reader of Lévi-Strauss, very well knows (McCarthy 2015: 104), the problem might not be that the Great Report is an unwritable fantasy and thus a quixotic quest in the first place. Rather, the report has already been written or it is continuously being written, albeit not by field researchers, anthropologists or sociologists, but by software. U experiences a kind of epiphany:

“Write Everything Down, said Malinowski. But the thing is, now, it is all written down. There’s hardly an instant of our lives that isn’t documented. Walk down any stretch of street and you’re being filmed by three cameras at once – and even if you aren’t, the phone you carry in your pocket pinpoints and logs your location at each given moment. Each website that you visit, every click-through, every keystroke is archived: even if you’ve hit *delete*, *wipe*, *empty trash*, it’s still logged somewhere, in some fold or enclave, some occluded avenue of circuitry. [...] And as for the structures of kinship, the networks of exchange within whose web we’re held, cradled, created [...]: well, those networks are being mapped, that task performed, by the software that tabulates and cross-indexes what we buy with who we know, and what they buy, or like, and with the other objects that are bought or liked by others who we don’t know but with whom we cohabit a shared buying-or liking-pattern.” (ibid.: 107; orig. emphasis)⁴

4 McCarthy-the-satirist has U fantasizing about the possibilities of resistance and resistance movements against the ‘automatic writing’ in general – which would reduce us to “no more than actions and commands within its key-chains” (2015: 108) – and the Project in particular. It is worth quoting, even if reflecting upon the limits and potential of resistance is beyond the scope of this chapter: “And then my cohorts, that semi-occluded network of covert anthropologist I’d dreamt into being already: they could join me in the cause. Together, we could turn Present-Tense Anthropology™

The novel here reflects a debate that, as far as I can see, the study of organization is only beginning to confront: how the performativity of algorithmic ordering is a common feature of today's processes of organizing beyond the boundaries of formal organizations. To quote the media theorists Galloway and Thacker (2007: 29), there is a new "new physics of organization" that enacts 'protocological' forms of control and entrainment. Such performativity is indeed central to contemporary organization in that it encourages and partly shapes social and individual conduct (Neyland 2015). Part of the problem is the fact that access to – and modulation of – the digitally generated data masses of, for instance, social media platforms, is both restricted to, and everyday practice in, the research departments of, say, Google and Facebook; this kind of data is unavailable for public research (Baxmann et al. 2016).⁵

BUFFERING

The 'being-written' of human/non-human networks points to a final and important aspect or layer of performativity that lurks in the question of the effects of digital infrastructures and algorithms, yet cannot be reduced to these effects. Socio-material analyses (of organization) tend to fall back upon the distinction between human and machinic actors or objects in trying to make sense of the agency of objects and technologies on the one hand, and human agency on the other hand. They enact, in Barad's terminology, 'agential cuts' in order to

into an armed resistance movement: I pictured them all scurrying around to my command, setting the charges, using their ethnographic skills to foment riots, to assemble lynch-mobs, to make urban space itself, its very fabric, rise up in revolt. I saw manholes erupting; cables spontaneously combusting; office wi-fi clouds crackling the way to audibility, causing hordes of schizoid bureaucrats, heads given over to a cacophony of voices, to flee their desks and tear about the streets, blood trickling from their ears [...]." (ibid.: 111)

- 5 In 2014, a study on "Experimental evidence of massive-scale emotional contagion through social networks" caused a minor scandal. Co-authored by a researcher employed at Facebook, the study analysed the results of an experiment with and on nearly 700'000 Facebook users (without their awareness) that entailed the purposeful manipulation of newsfeeds in order to find out if and how moods are transferred and travel across social networks (Kramer et al. 2014). It is surprising that some people were genuinely surprised that Facebook would do this kind of thing, i.e. to instrumentally try to induce changes in users' emotions.

delineate and perform objects, algorithms and subjects as distinct entities (Barad 2003). They thus tend to skirt the problem of thinking together the human and technology. Yet the mapping of the great report through a kind of foundational entanglement of algorithmic agency (which reacts to, and informs human conduct) and human agency (which reacts to, and informs algorithmic communication) hints at a different kind of agency, an ‘intra-agency’, that “calls into question the givenness of the differential categories of ‘human’ and ‘nonhuman’, examining the practices through which these differential boundaries are stabilized and destabilized” (ibid.: 808).⁶ Barad’s notion of posthumanist performativity thus instigates scholars to explore the processes and practices through which such hybrid entanglements, roles and meaning are performatively brought into being, without departing from a-priori assumptions of either human or machinic agency.

In this sense, *Satin Island*’s most striking passages enact a kind of poetics of intra-action that surpasses a ‘mere’ satire of late capitalism’s capture of practices and concepts of cultural and scholarly production. That processes are material and immaterial, human and non-human at the same time, part of the same mangle of practice, seems to inform the descriptions of organizational spaces such as the Company’s headquarters or an airport lounge that sets the scene at the book’s beginning. Relatedly, the phenomenon of buffering is a recurring theme in the novel, perhaps offered as a counterpoint to the bleak diagnosis of software’s great report, which influences how human actors move and communicate yet is readable only by other software. U frequently experiences bouts of buffering that resemble provisional interruptions, suspensions or recesses, in which, for a moment, “the entire time of the world and of your subjective agency is put on hold”, as McCarthy commented after the novel’s publication (2016: 45). By way of Barad’s posthumanist account of performativity, one can grasp these ‘liminal spaces’ as phenomena – for her, phenomena, not things or objects, are primary ontological units (2003: 818) – that are produced through intra-action. That is precisely why these small in-between moments of buffering, when what will

6 The neologism of ‘intra-action’ takes the place of the well-worn notion of ‘interaction’, which according to Barad would presuppose the prior existence of entities that are then related, such as technological object and human being. Instead, “[i]t is through specific agential intra-actions that the boundaries and properties of the ‘components’ of phenomena become determinate and that particular embodied concepts become meaningful” (ibid.: 815). In other words, the concept of intra-action helps thinking the ‘agential cut’ that effects the separation – and thus the emergence of relata like subject and object.

happen next becomes dubious, afford “a sense of bliss” as well as “a kind of dread” (2015: 64):

“I’d spend long stretches staring at the little spinning circle on my screen, losing myself in it. Behind it, I pictured hordes of bits and bytes and megabytes [...] I pictured a giant *über-server* [...] pumping out information non-stop, more of it than any single person would need in their lifetime, pumping it all my way in an endless, unconditional and grace-conferring act of generosity. *Datum est*: it is given. It was this gift, I told myself, this bottomless and inexhaustible torrent of giving, that made the circle spin: the data itself, its pure, unfiltered content as it rushed into my system, which, in turn, whirled into streamlined action as it started to reorganize it into legible form” (ibid.: 63; orig. emphasis).⁷

CONCLUSION

The layers of performing organization that are gathered and interwoven in *Satin Island* present a challenge to rethink and complexify the relation of organization and performativity. There is perhaps an irony in turning to the ‘old’ artistic medium of the novel to ponder processes of organizing (in) digital cultures. Yet it seems to me that the open and speculative form of a novel such as *Satin Island* allows for explorations of the complexity and performativity of organizational processes that are not, or only rarely, to be found in the methodologically controlled and thus less daring proceedings of the social sciences.

In any case, organization in *Satin Island* does not, or only marginally, rely on criteria such as contractual membership, corporative legal form, formal hierarchical power or routinized decision programs – although these classic definitions of what constitutes an organization can of course be studied in terms of their communicative and material performativity, too. Neither does performativity merely reside in organizational efficiency programs or the everyday dramas of

7 U proceeds to derive a speculative theory of experience from the phenomenon of buffering, according to which affect theory’s missing half-second (see Angerer, this volume) is part and parcel of the necessary buffering of experience: „[i]t dawned on me that what I was actually watching was nothing less than the skeleton, laid bare, of time or memory itself. [...] We require experience to stay ahead, if only by a nose, of our consciousness of experience – if for no other reason than the latter needs to make sense of the former [...] and, for this purpose, has to be fed with a constant, unsorted supply of fresh sensations and events.” (McCarthy 2015: 64)

organizational life and its *mise-en-scènes*. For instance, it remains unclear where and how decisions about the Project are made, other than the suspicion that they are shaped in conjunction with the data streams of its network architecture. And although the reader is confronted with U’s organizational experiences and actions, McCarthy is clearly not interested in presenting organizational life as one of role-playing and everyday dramas. Rather, organizational effects are perpetually accomplished through talk and speculation; through translating concepts and theories into organizational imperatives and selling propositions; and, significantly, through organizational practices that rely on digital infrastructures and data streams just as much as on the material spaces of organizing and its human actors. At times, U’s experiences point to a posthumanist performativity that influences organized life, where the presumed agency of human actors and/or algorithmic infrastructures is blurred into more indistinguishable forms of intra-action that produce phenomena.

It makes sense, then, to perceive U as a revenant of “K”, whom Kafka sent into the contingent and impenetrable, uncanny and violent machine of bureaucratic ordering and organization, so often not deemed more than rationally and functionally ordered. As Benjamin (1999: 803) commented, the issue of the “organization of life and work in the human community” would inform Kafka’s oeuvre, in which organization itself had taken the place of fate in modernity. As *Satin Island* shows, the late capitalist and pervasively mediated and networked world of organizing engenders its own obscurity and uncanniness, a fate that requires further and deeper engagements with organization’s posthumanist performativity.

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