

Dialogic organizing: Affirming public engagement for hope and solidarity

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Conveners:

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“...what the world needs now is heavy doses of counter-negativity in the mode of affirmation. What the world needs *now*. [...] you actually should do a bit of work yourself. Get active! Get empowered to act!” (Rosi Braidotti, 2019)

“Becoming-active is affirming and affirmative...” (Deleuze, 2006: 68)

In this call for papers, we invite participants to re-imagine the possibilities of dialogically-affirmative organization. In particular, we are interested in how public engagement for hopeful and solidary futures of a diverse and increasingly fragmented world can be understood, theorized and practiced through forms of dialogic organizing.

In a world confronted by dark clouds in the form of radical climate change, pandemic turbulence and their socio-political implications, the public space is increasingly occupied by divisive populist discourse and discriminatory speech that suppress sustainable collective futures rather than generating conditions for organizing new forms of collaboration and solidarity. At such times of fragmentation and ambiguity, we are reminded of the oracle of Delphi, which was visited by the powerful of the earth to receive a forecast about their future but often entered a ritualized “game of useful deception” (Zahariadis, 2016), where interpreters could make visitors believe what they wanted to hear. Today, there is no central place like Delphi, once seen as the ‘navel’ of the world, but rather we live in conditions of “informational abundance and multimodal communication” (Knight & Tsoukas, 2019, p. 183) where deception and lies often easily outnumber attempts at honest and frank truth-telling (Weiskopf & Willmott, 2013). As a consequence, we are confronted with a decentralized cacophony of half-truths and ‘fake news’ produced by many prophets, gurus, spin doctors, and oracles in politics, economy and society that through social media and algorithmic manipulation try to steer the

debate in polarized and vicious ways. The clouds only get darker, the light even bleaker and it is getting hard to see.

Noticing these forms of ‘depression’ and defeatism, while not giving in to the trap of alarmism, there is a growing sense that ‘becoming-active’ is needed. There are plenty of examples ranging between: the ‘now or never’ tone of the climate change strikes of energised students; the urgency of the ‘MeToo movement’ in its call to stop sexual harassment (Mendes et al, 2018); the lasting protests in Hong Kong aimed at safeguarding its democracy; or the ‘balcony’ manifestations of gratitude and solidarity during the COVID-19 crisis. These are recent examples on the global radar but there are many more initiatives – as much on a grassroots as on a planetary level – that indicate that there is a strong desire to participate in and to care for our joint futures. At the time of entering the 2020s – which should be ‘regenerative’ rather than ‘roaring’, there is a search for new forms of collective feeling – a “sociable happiness” (Ahmed, 2008) in different “spaces of hope” (Anderson & Fenton, 2008). These can reflect the ambivalent anticipation of our futures and imagine alternative ideas of happiness (Ahmed, 2010), yet invigorate to engage fully and joyfully with the dramatic challenges and complexities of our times. It is time to return to the public sphere – from festivals (Johansson, 2017) and grassroots activism (Vachhani, 2020) to the city’s public places (Steyaert & Hjorth, 2002) for democratic action and dialogic organization. ‘Return to’ primarily entails ‘finding the creative organizational forms for’, which is what we would like to turn our attention to.

In this call, we emphasize that generative engagement with hopeful and solidary futures requires not only to return to and to re-occupy the public space but also to consider carefully and imaginatively how to create alternative conditions, which meet the social, cultural and political complexity of a superdiverse world (Vertovec, 2007). We propose a focus on the creation of these alternative conditions as ‘dialogic organizing’ and an intensive inquiry into the possibilities of dialogical organizing as a way to interconnect diverse life-worlds, to affirm the generation of inclusive and playful spaces (Hjorth, 2005) that come with “affective solidarity” (Hemmings, 2012). Therefore, we anticipate that the notion of dialogue needs to be re-thought and re-examined to align with the new complexities of today and tomorrow and of bringing together fragmented diversities – like generations, ethnicities, languages, and sexualities – and to enable those that are living in fragile, unequal and precarious conditions to equally give voice to such dialogical encounters.

In terms of theoretical frameworks, we invite conceptual approaches that develop and enlarge the understanding of dialogic, affirmative organizing. This entails that we not only re-turn to the classics of dialogic thinking as in the writings of Socrates, Martin Buber, Emmanuel Levinas, Michel de Certeau, or David Böhm, but make connections with practice-based, socio-material and affect-theoretical approaches of writers such as Lauren Berlant, Rosi Braidotti, Jane Bennett, Patricia Clough or Karen Barad. In this respect, the work of Mikhail Bakhtin that has richly informed polyphonic organizing (Belova, King & Śliwa, 2008) and the communicative constitution of reality (Cooren & Sandler, 2014) can be central in understanding dialogue as the interconnection

between heteroglossic and polyglossic forces (de Certeau, 1997a; b; Bouwen & Steyaert, 1999). Dialogue is always simultaneously a linguistic and multilingual practice, but one that is performed with its own affective-corporeal and socio-material entanglements – a social practice of translanguaging (Janssens & Steyaert, 2014). Therefore, we encourage thinking about dialogues along the lines of a relational ontology (Bell & Vachhani, 2020; Janssens & Steyaert, 2019) and its different theoretical approaches – ranging between practice-based, feminist and queer-theoretical frameworks, so that its conceptual understanding can be enriched in forming interconnections between human and non-human elements, as an intercorporeal meeting of bodies, histories and affects (Johansson & Jones, 2020; Mandalaki, 2019; Pullen & Vachhani, 2020) and as a translation among socio-material and affect-political forces. Therefore, dialogic organizing needs to be opened theoretically, empirically and methodologically to understand it through its silences (de Certeau, 1984), disruptions and dissensus (Lyotard, 1984; Ziarek, 2001) in order to re-imagine it as multi-sensory, intercorporeal and queer social practice (Ruffolo, 2009). Understood with its own affective-rhythmic orders (Lefebvre, 1992; Katila, Kuismin & Valtonen, 2020) and affective oscillation (Resch & Steyaert, 2020), the resonances and attunements of dialogic organizing can reshape our futures into generative and hopeful affective landscapes of living and working with multiplicity – for example, the ‘surging capacities’ of ordinary affects Kathleen Stewart (2007) attests or the ‘moods of enchantment’ that Jane Bennett (2010) proposes and our bodily, affective entanglements with place and space that resonate different affective landscapes.

Working towards a generative and ‘truthful’ conversation, we welcome empirical studies interlinked with conceptual development that document and theorize processes, practices and forms of dialogic organizing. We are interested in a broad range of organizational initiatives, interventions, experiments and alternatives that may involve – among others – social and grassroots movements, social entrepreneurship, social and political activism, artistic projects, alternative festivals, educational experimentation, community initiatives, alternative economic exchanges or virtual artistic expressions of public solidarity. This list is not exhaustive as we are open to a variety of empirical settings that focus on becoming-active, on affirmative organizing for hope and solidarity, especially also those that do not easily reach public attention. Aiming for interlinked conceptual development, we are interested in research themes and questions that address, among others, the following:

- the processual nature of dialogic organizing – identifying and describing in-depth the activities, affects and socio-materiality that mutually constitute the accomplishment of dialogic organization
- the conditions that enable dialogic organizing – understanding how dialogic organizing is made possible through heteroglossic and polyglossic forces, intercorporeal and affective intensities, and socio-material entanglements
- the pragmatics of dialogic organizing – identifying and understanding which experiments and interventions initiate hopeful public encounters and solidary engagements

- the poetics of dialogic organizing – multiplying dialogic forms through exploring its wordlessness and silences, its hesitations and irritations
- the politics of dialogic organizing – critically interpreting how dialogic organizing can be aligned with other forms of activism, protest and resistance
- the generative and controversial nature of dialogic organizing – attending to the effectuation of the dialogic organization in terms of emancipation, diversity, ethical encounters and political transformation.

At our workshop, we want to emphasize the dialogic and affirmative nature of the event. Therefore, keynotes will be set up as open conversations between invited speakers and conveners of the workshop. We also invite conference participants to reflect upon and eventually experiment with the dialogicality of their writing and ‘presentation’.

Submissions

The 16th Organization Studies Workshop will take place from the 26th to the 29th of May 2021 in Chania, Greece. Those interested in participating should submit an abstract by December 7th 2020 through the OS Workshop website: www.os-workshop.com. Abstracts should be of no more than 1,000 words. Authors will be notified of acceptance or otherwise by January 15th 2021. Full papers must be submitted by April 30th, 2021. The venue of the workshop is Minoa Palace Resort & Spa, Chania, Crete, Greece. Further details on the logistics of the workshop will be published through the OS Workshop website. Following the workshop, a Special Issue will be announced in *Organization Studies*. To be considered for publication, papers must be submitted via the OS website at <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/orgstudies> by November 30th 2021. There you can also find guidelines for submission and information on the review procedures. Please note that participation in the workshop is highly recommended (but not a prerequisite) if you intend to submit a paper to the Special Issue.

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