

## **After method in organization studies III**

Date: **2017-09-27 -- 2017-09-29**

Place: **Mälardalen University, Västerås, Sweden**

### **Call for papers**

After methods in organization studies III is a conference taking place at Mälardalen University, Västerås, Sweden, September 27-29, 2017. The purpose with the conference is to provide an opportunity for social science researchers to meet and discuss methodological questions within social sciences in general, and in organization- and management studies in particular, from the perspective that the world we want to understand emerges and changes in such a way that the assumptions, recommendations and applications of established methodologies are challenged. The overarching question of the conference is: How can, shall or should we study organizations and the organizing of work if that we study is in constant change?

The After method-conference was initiated in 2015, inspired by John Law's proposition that the messiness, slipperiness and indistinctiveness of the world (Law, 2004) entails a need to rethink ideas of clarity and rigour when it comes to performing social science research. As one of the 2017 conference speakers, John Law continues to inspire our reflections on these important issues, not least their political aspects.

The acknowledgement of the constant flux of reality is the basis for approaches that invite us to a shift in research focus: from the focusing on entities to the focusing on actions and practice; a shift made through concepts as process ontology, performativity, relational ontology, etc (Ashcraft, Kuhn, & Cooren, 2009; Chia, 1995, 1997; Crevani & Hallin, forthcoming; Diedrich et al., 2013; Helin, Hernes, Hjort, & Holt, 2014; Langley, Smallman, Tsoukas, & Vad de Ven, 2013; Nicolini, 2012; Orlikowski & Scott, 2008; Whittington & Melin, 2003). Organizations are thus to be understood to be in constant change rather than as having an ontology in themselves (Hernes, 2008; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). From this perspective, "organizations" are what they are made to be and to do (Cooren, Brummans, & Charrieras, 2008; Czarniawska, 2008). Doing research based on such theoretical premises poses a number of challenges since such an ontological shift also involves a shift in epistemology and thus in methodological approach.

This entails all dimensions of how organizations/organizing are studied; how empirical material is gathered/produced/constructed; how it is analyzed; how methods are involved in the enactment of reality; as well as how empirical material is represented in an academic (or other) context (Hallin, 2015). Partly, this has already been discussed. "Thick empirical studies" and the ethnographic method has been put forth as a way to capture the multi-facetted reality (Geertz, 1973/2000), as has a combination of qualitative methods in order to get a more detailed understanding of the chronology of empirical material (Czarniawska, 2004). Methods such as "visual ethnography", "auto-ethnography", "snaplogs" and "photo interviews", are yet other methods that have been suggested (Bramming, Gorm Hansen, Bojesen, & Gylling Olesen, 2012; Hurdley, 2007; Schwartz, 1989; Warren, 2005). It has also been argued that a process ontological perspective should involve a greater sensitivity to the subjective dimensions of the research process, since we, by embracing subjective and embodiment-aspects of research, could develop new ways of getting to know the uncertain and slippery "reality" (Jensen & Sandström, 2016; Sergi & Hallin, 2011).

Given the increasing fluidity of phenomena that may require the researcher to move between different sites (Marcus, 1995); the possibilities and challenges of combining different kinds of empirical material in an analysis that makes sense (Lucarelli & Hallin, 2015); the increasing attention paid to materiality (Orlikowski & Scott, 2008) and spatial dimensions (Beyes & Steyaert, 2011), traditionally overshadowed by an almost exclusive attention to temporal developments, also when focusing on processes (Mitev & de Vaujany, 2013; Ropo, Salovaara, Sauer, & De Paoli, 2015; Taylor & Spicer, 2007), these issues need further exploration and contextualization.

#### Previous workshop and the set-up of this conference

The first After methods in Organization Studies workshop took place at Stockholm University School of Business in October 2013 and gathered some 70 participants from Sweden and Finland. Together with an international and interdisciplinary group of lecturers, the participants discussed issues related to research methods based on the common understanding that the world is messy and constantly changing, and that this challenges established methods for developing scientific knowledge. The second workshop was arranged at Mälardalen university in 2015 and since the question is complex, the After method workshop is planned to be a recurring, biannual event, where researchers can meet to discuss, share experiences and develop knowledge about methodology together.

Whereas the previous workshops have been 1-day events, we will this time, encouraged by the enthusiasm of the participants in the previous workshops, arrange a 2-day conference. Here, invited Inspirators will challenge us to think differently regarding social science methodology. Confirmed Inspirators include:

- *Professor John Law*; sociologist on the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Open University, UK and author of “After method. Mess in Social Science Research” (2004). See also: [www.heterogeneities.net](http://www.heterogeneities.net)
- *Ms Bronte van der Horn*; University of Southern Queensland Brisbane, Australia, specialist in the role of visualization and tactile experiences in research
- *Professor Lena Hellström-Färnlöf*; Concert- and Opera singer and Artistic Director of the Chamber Music Program at Mälardalen University
- *Dr Phil Smith*; Associate Professor at Plymouth University and expert on ambulatory performance and situationist practice; and *Ms Siriol Joyner*; choreographer
- *Creative Director Richard Wolfstrome*, UK, who works with cultural placemaking and narrative wayfinding

*Participants are invited to either present a paper in paper presentation sessions (i.e. the traditional conference format), or to develop an idea into a paper during paper development sessions that are scheduled during the conference.*

#### Questions that the papers may address include, but are not limited to:

*Forms of deliberate imprecision:* what new forms of developing knowledge about the indistinct and the slippery can we imagine? How may we study that which we are interested in studying without trying to grasp and hold this too tight?

*Ethics and politics:* what are the ethical implications of researching a phenomenon that is in constant change? What are the political implications of the method we are developing? How is power enacted? How may an emancipatory knowledge interest be advanced?

*The practices of doing research:* how may traditional methodologies be developed in order to better match a world in flux? What can we learn from other fields? Which approaches may be re-visited? What are the challenges in doing research in practice and how can they be addressed?

*Beyond boundaries and stability*: which boundaries (for instance between the social and the material) do need to be problematized and what are the methodological consequences, challenges and possibilities? What forms of taken-for-granted stability are to be questioned and which role does method play?

*Generalization and/or knowledge claims*: how can we rethink how far whatever it is that we purports to know travels? How can we ascertain our knowledge claims across time and space? (Can/should we?) How closed do our knowledge claims need to be and is there space for polyphonic claims?

*Rigour and relevance*: what makes a researcher into a researcher (compared to journalists, writers, etc) when going beyond traditional methodology? What makes our research relevant? Can (do we want to) engage with the reality we study and enact, and what are the challenges when developing our method?

*Academia, publishing and research careers*: what are the implications for publishing, academic careers; and how does Academia need to change? (Can it?)

### Deadlines

**Abstracts** should comprise 200-500 words and be submitted to [aftermethods@mdh.se](mailto:aftermethods@mdh.se) by March 31<sup>st</sup>. The abstract should state your paper idea in a clear way and must include a title of the paper, your name, your affiliation and your e-mail adress.

**Notification of acceptance** is April 15<sup>th</sup>

**Full papers** may or may not be submitted by August 20<sup>th</sup> through the conference website. The conference is explorative in nature, regardless if you will be participating in the paper development or paper presentation sessions, but we acknowledge the importance of publications. We therefore encourage you to submit a full(er) version of your paper. This is, however, not a prerequisite for participating in the conference. If you decide to submit a full paper, make sure you include: a title of the paper, your name, your affiliation, your e-mail address, an abstract summarizing the content and contribution of the paper.

We are also discussing the possibility to have a special issue related to the theme of the conference in an internationally recognized journal and more information about this process will be given at the conference.

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