

## ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

# How Communicative Performances Can Constitute an Organization's Self

Fabien Hildwein\*

Centre d'Economie de l'Université Paris Nord (CEPN), Université Sorbonne Paris Nord, Villetaneuse, France

## Abstract

The creation of an organization's self is the attribution of a collective will and agency to a group of individuals, thereby constituting them into an organization able to interact with its peers. As such, the organization's self represents a central issue for collective action, as studied through the prism of the 'communicative constitution of organizing' (CCO). Performances, as communicative and spectacular events during which a collectivity presents its self and displays a given message, represent a little-studied opportunity to understand the constitution of the organization's self, and to explore the links between the organization's self and the selves of its members. The empirical part of this study analyses the French feminist activist group, La Barbe, which uses innovative performances to denounce the absence of women at the top of organizations. The article's contribution is twofold: first, the analysis presents how visual and symbolic performances can help to constitute an organization's self, notably through what performances produce for the organization: visibility, coordination and mobilization. Second, it shows the impact of performances on those who execute them, which retroactively has important organizational effects by ensuring their engagement in the organization.

**Keywords:** *Communicative performances; Organization's self; Communicative constitution of organizing; Activist groups; Qualitative case-study*

Received: 20 October 2017; Accepted: 6 July 2019; Published: 30 March 2020

How can a group of individuals speak as one and present itself as a unified collective? This question goes back to the very nature and function of organizations, as it questions why individuals need organizations, how they form them, and what they 'gain' when the organization comes into existence. Reducing the group to its members negates the existence and effectiveness of the organization, and considering that the organization exists in and of itself reifies and ignores the agency of its members. Moreover, both of these approaches undermine the role played by nonhumans in structuring the organization. The growing theoretical stream of 'communicative constitution of organizing' (CCO) scholarship (Putnam & Nicotera, 2009) tackles this question by considering how, under certain conditions, individuals are able to constitute themselves as a collective 'we', and thus perform an organization's self: the organization being an entity with personality and agency.

Performances, as scripted public events, focus on the spectacular transmission of a given message to external audiences using mainly discourses, material symbols and bodies.

They remain an understudied phenomenon in organizational studies. Yet, they represent key opportunities for groups to express a claim, make a collective statement, or engage in a political process and, in doing so, to present themselves as a collective actor and perform an organization's self. Studying performances provides an opportunity to understand how a collective constitutes itself into an organization. Performances as such can be considered as objects not only for communication studies but also for organizational studies. In addition, those who execute performances bring into play their bodies, their demeanors, and their speech. To describe a spokesperson as being the 'face' of an organization is a telling metaphor: the body and the expression of an individual take on a new dimension when they represent a collective and speak on its behalf. This proximity lends to the question of the personal involvement of the organization's members in constituting the organization's self and the effects it has on them, in particular; the way in which performances inspire motivation and engagement in its members. This leads to two interlocking research questions. First, how can performances constitute the organization's self

\*Corresponding author: Fabien Hildwein, Email: [fabien.hildwein@univ-paris13.fr](mailto:fabien.hildwein@univ-paris13.fr)

and be considered as organizing events in addition to being communicative events? Second, how are the members' selves impacted in the constitution of the organization's self and how do they contribute to this process?

This article's empirical part is based on a 12-month qualitative case study of the feminist activist organization La Barbe, which denounces the absence of women in power positions. It acts through spectacular and innovative performances, thus communicating not only to external audiences (e.g. journalists, the targeted organization, and public opinion) but also to its members, be it in terms of recruiting them, coordinating them toward action, or retaining them.

Performances thus represent both a communicative and an organizing phenomenon: they constitute the organization's self through three effects: visibility (the organization is made visible to external parties), coordination (activists are pushed into action), and mobilization (activists are recruited and remain engaged over long term). The last aspect is particularly important: what motivates activists in the long run is that performances transform them and help them with feminist issues that matter to them (in particular, with relation to politics and power). By constituting the organization's self through performances, the activists' own selves also undergo change, which motivates them to engage further in the group. I suggest naming this retroactive and reciprocal dynamic the 'organizing self', which takes into consideration how emotions and an individual's inner life can contribute to CCO processes. Since performances are communicative events, they have an important organizing potential: they not only constitute the organization's self *vis-à-vis* external parties, as well as for the individuals who make up the organization, but can also be an important motivating factor. Finally, they link the individual's self and the organization's self in a reciprocal and self-sustaining relationship.

In organizational studies, many studies challenge the reification of organizations, considered as stable objects. Instead, they suggest that organizations should be viewed as dynamic processes (Taylor, 2011; Taylor & Cooren, 1997), hence the use of the term 'organizing' rather than 'organization' (Putnam, Nicotera, & McPhee, 2009; Schoeneborn & Blaschke, 2014). Further research has insisted on the instability (Kozica, Gebhardt, Müller-Seitz, & Kaiser, 2014; McCarthy, 2005) and fluidity of organizations (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015), and on the fact that organizations can exist without actorhood (Grothe-Hammer, 2018). On the contrary, the empirical fieldwork presented here highlights how a (social movement) organization can achieve some degree of stability and permanence over time, especially due to performances.

In a broader perspective, this article contributes to the search for a better understanding of alternative organizations (Barlatier, Chauvet, & Morales, 2017; Dorion, 2017; Gibson-Graham, 1996; Parker, Cheney, Fournier, & Land, 2014)

in order to enrich the field of management by looking at understudied or unusual kinds of organizations (Germain & Josserand, 2013).

## Theoretical framework

### *The constitution of the organization's self*

In the mid-1990s, scholars began to reconsider the roles and functions of communication (Cooren & Taylor, 1997; Taylor & Cooren, 1997). Setting aside the view of communication as simply the bearer of a message between an emitter and a receiver, they explored the way in which communication contributes to the organizing processes of collective action (Cooren, Kuhn, Cornelissen, & Clark, 2011): communication does more than simply express reality; it creates it (Ashcraft, Kuhn, & Cooren, 2009). This stream of research refuses to make a strict distinction between organization and communication (Ashcraft et al., 2009; Cooren & Taylor, 1997; Schoeneborn & Blaschke, 2014), which should be seen as two sides of the same coin, each constituting the other in a retroactive and interdependent relationship. Although CCO started in the field of communication theory, it has gradually integrated organizational studies and is now found in both fields.

An important theoretical contribution of CCO is to explain how a group of actors transforms into an organization. In this perspective, a key attribute of organizations is that an organization is able to lay claim to personality, agency, and action, that is, to constitute the organization's 'self' (Taylor, 2011). The organization's self is essential in the communicative constitution of an organization as it assembles a group of individuals into a single entity that is able to interact with others and present itself as an actor at a broader social level. CCO thus links the individual actors with the broader level of the organization. This article explores the ontological nature of the organization's self and its constitution and seeks to understand the position of individuals within this process.

One starting point for CCO is to consider in what way individuals – when they speak for the organization – are the actors (in the sense of the concrete person) of the actant (in the sense of the abstract person created by the speech act), which is the organization. It thus draws on the legacy of Austin and Searle to analyze the organization as the result of performative speech acts (Taylor & Cooren, 1997). The first condition for a successful performative speech act is to have a *competent* actor, meaning that someone is able to convince others that he/she effectively represents the organization when he/she speaks. The second condition is that individuals need to be truly *legitimate* 'agents' of the 'principal', which is the organization. They have to faithfully represent the intentions of the group that makes up the organization. Only under these two circumstances can an organization's self be successfully

constituted – ‘successfully’ in the sense of being recognized by others (actors or actants) as what they claim to be. This emphasizes the fact that the individual and the organizational levels become imbricated through the performative speech act, which questions the distinction between these levels: “it seems obvious to us that the frontier between interpersonal and organizational communication is not cut-and-dried, but a matter of degree, and is determined as much by epistemological as by ontological considerations (it is not, in other words, independent of the point of view of the person who observes and reports on the exchange)” (Taylor & Cooren, 1997, pp. 432–433). In addition, it is not only thoughts but also feelings that are expressed in speech acts; the performative constitution of the organization’s self thus goes beyond language and affects individuals at a deeper level.

The metaphor of ventriloquism develops this perspective (Cooren, 2012, 2014; Cooren & Bencherki, 2010; Cooren & Sandler, 2014) and describes the interlocked relationship between the actor and the actant. The spokesperson acts as the ventriloquist, making the organization speak as if it were his/her dummy. At the same time, however, the organization also controls the spokesperson (through a specific set of implicit and explicit rules that determine the conditions under which he/she can speak on behalf of the organization, what subjects he/she can address, how he/she is legitimized by the rest of the organization, etc.). Thus, in this relationship, both the organization and its spokesperson can be the dummy or the ventriloquist. There is a constant and indistinguishable oscillation back and forth between those two postures. The organization’s self is created by its spokesperson who incarnates it, but the organization also controls the expression of the spokesperson.

Nonhumans also play a role in linking the individuals and the organization. The organization’s self is constituted by being attributed actions (Bencherki & Cooren, 2011). Nonhumans are attributed personality, intentionality, and actions by humans (e.g. my calendar ‘reminds me’ of today’s schedule); as nonhumans, organizations are constituted through this process of attribution which gives them a ‘self’. By extension, humans can also be attributed actions by nonhumans (such as when a chief executive officer [CEO] is attributed the actions of his/her company). Reciprocally, actions can also be appropriated: by projecting oneself into a nonhuman, an individual appropriates its actions; an organization can also appropriate the actions of its members. Appropriation and attribution blur the line between humans and nonhumans and, by extension, between an organization and its members through a phenomenon called “hybridicity”, in which it is never clear exactly where the action originates. In other words, the action always oscillates between humans and nonhumans, thus creating the organization’s self much in the same way as ventriloquism. This perspective escapes the dichotomy of essentialism (the organization exists

in and of itself) and reductionism (the organization only exists through its members), and instead emphasizes the reciprocal exchanges that form both the organization’s self and the selves of the organization’s members.

However, the position and behaviors of individuals within the organization inevitably involve power relationships and struggles, to the point that individuals may endanger the organization’s self. For example, by letting anyone contribute to its databases, the online encyclopedia Wikipedia jeopardizes the stability and homogeneity of its self (Kozica et al., 2014). Dissenting voices can tell stories that contradict the dominant narratives that constitute Wikipedia (e.g. the idea that anyone can contribute equally is contested by reports of moderators’ abuses). Dissenting voices are silenced or placated through different mechanisms aimed at imposing the dominant identity of Wikipedia: normative shifts in the meanings of words, the use of the utopia of ‘freedom’ as a discursive tool to hide Wikipedia’s limitations, and the legitimization of the dominant party’s technical powers over other members (e.g. the possibility of banning the Internet Protocol [IP] address of dissenting voices). The organization’s self is enforced through normative or even authoritative means in order to ensure the control of the organization’s self. Yet, debates can also serve to reinforce the organization’s self. The hacktivist group Anonymous refuses to reveal its members’ identities and anyone can claim to belong to this organization. This endangers the organization’s self when problematic individuals act in its name. As a result, other members are forced to reveal the problematic individuals’ identities and debate on whether a given action and a given individual are acceptable to the organization (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015). This, in fact, strengthens the organization’s self as it drives a reflection on which individuals can rightfully act in the organization’s name, particularly when the actors are anonymous.

Finally, while previous studies have explored the relationship between an organization and its members, it is also important to understand the communicative relations between organizations. A parallel can be drawn between the construction of an individual’s self and an organization’s self (Taylor, 2011): they both build their selves through connections, transactions, and interactions with others. They should be seen as a result of these connections rather than a cause: they cannot exist without the validation of others and without their inclusion in a network of other actors. This ontological stance explains the importance of communicating with other organizations or actors in the constitution of the organization’s self, as it is through communication, in any form, that organizations validate each other and bring each other into existence. This also highlights the interdependence between actors during transactions: each ‘creates’ the other by engaging in a communicative process and validating the other’s existence.

CCO has built an ontology that challenges preconceptions about organizations. Notably, it disseminates the organization’s

self across several sites: it is not 'situated' in a specific person, object, or place, but exists through their interactions. More specifically, the organization and its members are embedded in several reciprocal and interdependent communicative relationships, sometimes with the mediation of nonhumans or discourses: ventriloquism, attribution, appropriation, power struggles, and interactions with other peers. While many studies have shown the impact that individuals may have on the organization's self, they also imply that these processes affect the individuals themselves – a perspective that could be further explored and developed.

### **Performances in the constitution of the organization**

Performances deserve greater attention in organizational studies, and CCO helps understand how they contribute to the organizing process. This section therefore aims to show what performances are and how they can be understood through the CCO lenses.

What is the common denominator between the general assembly of a company, a press conference given by a non-governmental organization (NGO), a trade union demonstration against a political decision, and an action by ActUp denouncing the homophobic public health regulations? Through each of these performances, an organization expresses a message and – in doing so – presents itself and acts as an autonomous agent. As an event, performances provide organizations with the opportunity to exhibit themselves. As a concept, performances deserve the attention of scholars working in the field of organizational studies.

The concept of organizational performance was developed in the 1970s by Charles Tilly (Tilly, 2008; Tilly & Wood, 2009), who studied social movements in Europe from a historical point of view. The concept refers to the public expression of claims from a group (usually demonstrators) to another external party (a public institution, a firm, a cultural or religious organization, etc.), the movement itself being composed of smaller actions and interactions. Tilly started with a nation-level analysis, but continuators have used the concept of 'tactical repertoire' to explore the organizational level (Fillieule, 2010; McCammon, 2003; Taylor, Kimport, Van Dyke, & Andersen, 2009; Taylor & Van Dyke, 2004; Walker, Martin, & McCarthy, 2008). Viewed from this perspective, performances share several characteristics.

First, contrary to traditional explanations of social movements as deeply irrational events (Le Bon, 1895), Tilly insists on the idea that individuals who engage in performances know what they are doing and develop a conscious strategy to achieve their goals, particularly by adapting a given performance to specific circumstances. Second, performances are routinized: actors know them and put them on regularly. They evolve slowly building on small sporadic improvisations within

a given script of events. Innovative performances are more difficult to create as they require more effort and their meaning is not always clear. The concept of performance is drawn from the metaphor of a theatrical troupe that knows and repeats a limited repertoire of plays, and rarely innovates. To express its claims, an activist group may use a set of performances that is constrained by the group's culture and its members' past experiences.

Empirically, Tilly describes street demonstrations, chanting, and picketing. Many works have explored and analyzed other types of performances. More specifically, they have shown how performances can be prepared and elaborated to create a strong symbol representing a cause (Taylor & Van Dyke, 2004).

In addition to these characteristics of performances, the current of organizational esthetics (Reinhold, 2017) stresses the importance of visuals, objects, and bodies in performances. Reinhold's research into the conception, enactment, and effects of artistic performances in an investment banking firm shows how artists challenge demeanors and behaviors through performance. Their aim is to raise an awareness of the constraints that companies put on bodies, in an attempt to emancipate them, or at least to deepen the participants' consciousness of their own bodies in a strict working environment. In this sense, performances aim to produce a certain message through collective action. Moreover, the esthetic dimension of performances suggests that attention needs to be paid to their use of semantic artifacts. These include (1) the discourses that the organization's members deliver in its name during the performance; (2) the occupation of a given space which is divided into different areas that interact with each other (e.g. the hierarchical relationship between the podium and the audience); (3) the different expected roles of those participating in the performance (not only the organization's members); (4) the behaviors and demeanors of these roles; and (5) the symbols and images used by the participants to express their identity (e.g. ties and suits for male managers). Performances aim at creating an impression on the audience and other stakeholders through a message that is not only textual but also visual, spatial, and, to some extent, ritual (since many of the performances are routinized). However, Reinhold (2017, p. 85) carefully points out that, "[c]ritical artists should not be mistaken for activists but their practice of art, here dance, aims at producing social change, here more sincere embodied relations" (thus focusing more on an inner change), which (while still explicit) may be difficult to pin down than the political claims of an activist group, for instance.

These approaches to performances can be synthesized into a definition. Performances are *scripted public events focused on the spectacular transmission of a given message to external audiences, using notably discourses, material symbols, and bodies.*

While this definition focuses more on the communicative dimension of performance, performances also have organizing

properties. By executing a performance, a group of individuals expresses a common claim, which enables it to surpass the individual level and transform itself into another object – an organization able to interact with its peers. Thus, a central characteristic of performances is to represent an organization to an external audience through the production of images and discourses. Performances cannot be reduced to the innocuous symbolization of an organization: they constitute the organization's self, meaning that they attribute personality, agency, and characteristics to the organization and enable its members to speak in its name. As one of the CCO organizing processes (speech acts, attribution to nonhumans, ventriloquism, etc.), performances should be considered as communicative events that connect the organization to its members and thus build the organization's self.

### Research questions

How can the constitution of the organization's self through performances be explained and integrated into CCO perspectives? Performances are central events in the constitution of the organization's self. They are an occasion for the organization to present itself and establish its existence in the eyes of others. Yet, this is a difficult and fragile process, and not all performances successfully constitute an organization's self, that is, not all of them manage to create the image of an enduring, legitimate, and stable organization. For instance, a major concern for the constitution of the organization's self is the issue of the legitimacy of the spokesperson, who has to be recognized both by the external actors and the organization's members as a valid representative of the organization (Cooren, 2012, 2014; Cooren & Sandler, 2014; Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015; Kozica et al., 2014). The interactions with other organizations and actors (Taylor, 2011), notably journalists (Schoeneborn & Scherer, 2010, 2012; Stohl & Stohl, 2011), should also be taken into account: how a performance can acknowledge and be acknowledged by them, thus engaging in a circle of reciprocal transactions. Finally, a performance calls on the intervention of various humans (including their bodies and demeanors) and nonhumans (discourses, visuals, symbols, and slogans). The performance needs to be able to attribute the actions of these humans and nonhumans to the organization in order to constitute the organization's self (Bencherki & Cooren, 2011).

These issues can be summarized in a first research question: *how can performances successfully constitute the organization's self and be considered as organizing events in addition to being communicative events?*

If an organization and individuals are so interlinked through the constitution of the organization's self, it is likely that individuals are involved not only through their conversations, speeches, and actions, but also at a deeper level through their affects and inner life, as noted in the literature review.

This leads to the question of the interactions between the organization and individuals through the medium of performances and of the individuals' emotional involvement in the performances. The possibility for a performance to become an organizing event might also therefore depend on the performers' emotional and personal involvement. In fact, CCO scholarship has sometimes adopted a broad-based analysis that tends to overlook the fact that individuals' inner life may be influenced by and help to constitute the organization. Exploring the role played by this inner life could give CCO greater insight into the role of individuals in the constitution of the organization's self and into the deep relations between the organization and its members.

This leads to a second research question, interlinked with the first: *how are the members' selves impacted by the constitution of the organization's self and how do they contribute to this process?*

### Empirical work: The feminist activist group La Barbe

#### Presentation of the group

Founded in 2008, La Barbe is a French feminist activist group that denounces the absence of women in positions of power. The group includes about 30 active members and some hundred more loosely connected members, all female, with a relatively uniform age distribution of between 25 and 65 years. On average, they have a high educational level (master's degree or higher). Many of them are journalists, teachers, consultants, or work in associations fighting AIDS epidemics (the founding members originated in these associations), some are photographers or visual artists, while the youngest members are still students. Their occupations give them relatively flexible schedules, which is necessary to be able to take part in performances held during the day on short notice (most of them are prepared a week in advance). A significant number of La Barbe's members are openly lesbian (some are bisexual and/or transgender) and active in movements defending homosexuals' rights, consonant with research that highlights the importance of lesbians in radical feminism (Taylor & Whittier, 1992). The vast majority of La Barbe's members are white.

The name of the group refers to the fake beards (*barbe* in French) worn by the activists, and also plays on words since '*la barbe*!' is an outdated French expression used to express strong irritation.

The group is only lightly structured and has almost no financial or material resources beyond the accessories used during the performances. It has no legal personality: the association '*Les Ami-e-s de La Barbe*' provides legal support enabling insurance coverage and the use of a room every other week at a local cultural center. All of its members are volunteers,

whatever their responsibilities or degree of involvement. The main tools comprise La Barbe's website,<sup>1</sup> its e-mail address, an internal mailing list for decision-making, and a mailing list to contact journalists. Furthermore, the group has few rules (either explicit or implicit), almost no hierarchy, no specific procedures for sharing out work or cooperation, no bureaucracy, etc. Yet, La Barbe has existed for more than 10 years without interruption, although with various levels of activity.

Most of the group's members have prior experience in activism and are engaged feminists. La Barbe was founded in reaction to the many sexist comments leveled against Ségolène Royal during the 2007 presidential campaign (Royal being the foremost left-wing candidate opposing Nicolas Sarkozy, the leading right-wing male candidate). Shocked by this sexist climate against a woman seeking a position of power, La Barbe's founding members wanted to act. It seemed to them that the sexism issue weighed in more strongly than the usual left-right opposition, even among Ségolène Royal's natural political allies:

I was under the impression that sexism in French society had reached a worrying level. I was also concerned that many of my friends who were supposedly left-leaning really hesitated to vote for Bayrou [the centrist male candidate] or even not to vote at all. And my analysis was that they could not imagine voting for a woman. If it had been a man with the same program, they would not have hesitated. [Manon – 26 September 2011]

La Barbe is particularly relevant when it comes to exploring performances, as the group does not rely on traditional performances such as demonstrations, picketing, etc. Instead, its founding members have created a set of performances specifically for their cause, drawing inspiration from other activist groups and feminist theoretical references (mainly Butler, 1990; Delphy, 1979). This characteristic reveals how activists gradually learn and appropriate their performance, while also being drawn to the group by the innovative image it creates (Hildwein, 2017).

La Barbe's most important performance involves ironically congratulating an organization for its ability to keep women out of power positions. The activists of La Barbe 'congratulate' an organization by disrupting a public meeting (conference, general assembly, and round table). They position themselves on the podium facing the audience and adopt a 'dignified demeanor', remaining still and silent (as shown in the photos on pp. 7–8, Figures 1 to 3). They all wear prop beards. Some of them hold placards similar to silent film cartons, bearing words of encouragement such as 'Bravo', 'Marvellous', 'How daring!', or 'Thanks!'. Occasionally, they also carry a banner with the words 'La Barbe'. One or two activists remain in the audience to take photos or shoot video footage (a role that I

often played since, being a man, I could not take part directly in the performance). An activist reads aloud a text – prepared before the performance and afterward distributed to the audience – in which the activists ironically congratulate the organization for its ability to keep women in subordinate positions, with typical formulas such as 'You make the patriarchy proud'. The activists then shake hands with men in senior positions and leave the meeting. This script is often adapted depending on the identity of the targeted organization (e.g. a discourse targeting a political organization and referring to its ideological inspirations), on the statistics supporting La Barbe's claims (e.g. the number of women in top positions in the organization), and on the size and layout of the venue where the event occurs. The script is also adapted at the last minute depending on whether La Barbe is accepted, silenced, or violently rejected (e.g. the discourse may be skipped in order to focus on producing the impactful image of still and silent women facing the audience).

To give some historical context, feminist movements have always worked in detail on the use of symbols in their performances (Taylor & Whittier, 1992, 1995; Whittier, 1995), which makes feminism a fruitful social movement for studying the impact of a tactical repertoire. This dates back to the first-wave feminist movements. For instance, in the 1930s, French suffragette leaders Jane Valbot and Louise Weiss organized spectacular performances in which they chained themselves to the gates of the Senate (one of the two French parliamentary chambers), or handed the senators 'forget-me-not' flowers and socks embroidered with the inscription 'Even if you give us the right to vote, your socks will be mended'<sup>2</sup> (Molinier-Boyd, 1995). More generally, feminist social movement organizations have an enduring self-reflective tradition of looking for alternative forms of self-organizing (Dorion, 2017) and rethinking issues such as hierarchy or task division to challenge power relations. This has led to innovative forms of organizations (Ashcraft, 2001) and great vigilance regarding the eventuality of a 'structureless' organization that could hide concrete power relations (Freeman, 1972).

One of the major inspirations<sup>3</sup> for La Barbe's performances is the activist group Lesbian Avengers, which defines itself as 'a direct action group using grassroots activism to fight for lesbian survival and visibility'.<sup>4</sup> The group was created in 1992 in New York City by experienced activists. It promotes change through activism and encourages women's empowerment through the transmission of skills and a 'do-it-yourself' policy; every lesbian should be able to create a 'chapter' in her city to demonstrate and express anger against

<sup>2</sup> Original French: 'Même si vous nous donnez le droit de vote, vos chaussettes seront raccommodées' (author's translation).

<sup>3</sup> To avoid any misinterpretation, the only sources of inspiration mentioned in this article are those that La Barbe activists explicitly mentioned as such.

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.lesbianavengers.com/handbooks/Lesbian\\_Avenger\\_handbook3.shtml](http://www.lesbianavengers.com/handbooks/Lesbian_Avenger_handbook3.shtml)

<sup>1</sup> <http://labarbelabarbe.org/>.



**Figure 1.** An activist reads the tract from the podium while others face the audience, wearing prop beards and holding cartons (26 September 2011)



**Figure 2.** Activists facing the audience, while the tract is read off-camera (30 November 2011)



**Figure 3.** A general view of the performance (25 January 2012)

homophobic behaviors and decisions. Lesbian Avengers also encourages innovative and spectacular performances:

Avoid old, stale tactics at all costs. Chanting, picketing and the like alone no longer make an impression; standing passively and listening to speakers are boring and disempowering. Look for daring, new participatory tactics depending on the nature of your action.<sup>5</sup>

The most spectacular and well-known performance of their repertoire is to line up and eat fire as a symbol of protest in reaction to the homophobic arson of lesbians' houses.

When lesbians saw their houses get burnt, which happened many times, [the Lesbian Avengers] went to where it happened and gave each other burning torches, they ate fire, they lined up, they have a speech about the fact that they will take the fire someone tried to use against them to build their own strength, their own might, and so they put petroleum in their mouths and they hand it to the next person, who hands it to the next, and finally, they brandish their burning torch and they shout their motto, which is 'This fire will not consume us, we will take it and make it our own'. They reverse the stigma onto the homophobes. [Manon – 26 September 2011]

Although La Barbe draws inspiration from several other activist groups, Lesbian Avengers is the group that most closely interlinks communication and organizing. As for the visual impact of performances, Lesbian Avengers is focused on direct action and activism as the prime means of changing a state of mind and the overall situation. It favors spectacular and innovative performances that create an esthetic shock in order to reach their goals in the shortest time and with minimum effort. In addition, Lesbian Avengers focuses on reversing the stigma and shaming their adversaries, which is an approach borrowed by La Barbe.

The innovative dimension of La Barbe's performances is reinforced by the legacy of Act Up, to which several founding members belonged. An example of Act Up's innovation is the 'die-in', in which activists gather at a given place (public health institutions or the Catholic Church are the usual targets), fall down on the ground, and remain immobile until the police pick them up. In this operation, the activists' bodies symbolize the victims of the AIDS epidemic and shame the target (Broqua & Fillieule, 2009; Patouillard, 1998). La Barbe also draws on a similar use of bodies and the search for visually impactful events.

A third inspiring activist group deserves mention with respect to the role of humor: billionaires for Bush. This American activist group was created in 1999 in order to denounce the importance of corporations and money in US government and politics. To this end, activists disguised themselves as privileged rich people and demonstrated to ironically 'congratulate' the Bush administration for its support to war, its fight against healthcare, etc. What struck the founding

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

members of La Barbe is that Billionaires for Bush created an ambiguous moment of uncertainty, where it is difficult to ascertain whether or not irony is being used. The activists revealed their adversaries' influence not through words, but rather by creating a moment where reality became blurred. At that moment, the audience had to acknowledge something that was obvious, but which then also appeared as deeply unfair:

And so they played their role so well that there is an instant of utter confusion when you tell yourself, 'bastards!', there is an instant when you don't know whether it's real or not, you're in a position where you ask yourself whether they are taking the piss, or is it really them, is it second-degree, what's happening? So it creates this questioning and I admired that because I found that they were invincible even from Bush's friends, who could only see themselves in this portrait. And this is what really inspired the second-degree, the irony of La Barbe. [Manon – 26 September 2011]

Billionaires for Bush influenced La Barbe by bringing the answer to the problem of showing up men and their responsibility. The use of irony means that the opposition between activists and their adversaries can be temporarily obscured, just long enough to reveal the image of the adversaries themselves and challenge the audience's own contradictions: supporting equality while passively accepting male-only podiums of men in power positions. The irony used by La Barbe (particularly in the text read aloud by the lead activist) plays an important symbolic role. From the outset, 'irony' is a concept used by activists to describe how they try to destabilize the targeted organization by congratulating it.

La Barbe gave some 120 performances between February 2008 and July 2012 (from its first performance up to the end of the fieldwork, at which point I stopped counting). Today, the group is still active (although with less intensity), more than 10 years after its creation.

### **Methodological approach**

This article is based on a qualitative case study conducted over 1 year (July 2011–July 2012). It draws on ethnographic methodology (Beaud & Weber, 2010) as applied to organizational studies (Cunliffe, 2010; Watson, 2011; Ybema, Yanow, Wels, & Kamsteeg, 2009), communication studies (Tracy & Geist-Martin, 2014), feminist analysis (Naples, 2003) and social movements research (Snow & Trom, 2002). It follows on from the 'ethnographic turn' of organizational studies over the last two decades (Rouleau, de Rond, & Musca, 2014). With respect to debates on CCO methodologies (Schoeneborn & Blaschke, 2014), this methodology captures the way in which individuals make sense of their interactions with each other within an organization and how they explain their engagement in the organization. In addition, it allows the researcher to become

immersed in the organization and observe it from the inside. This method thus connects sense-making and internal organizing processes, making it a relevant approach to study CCO phenomena.

Concretely, the empirical work consisted of interviews, observations of the activist group, its performances and internal meetings, and substantial data collection. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with activists (17 interviews), with journalists who wrote about the group (5 interviews), and with human resources managers of organizations targeted by La Barbe (11 interviews). All interviews were recorded and transcribed; on average, the interviews lasted for 59 min: the shortest one lasted for 31 min and the longest one lasted for 2 h and 10 min. Interviews with activists followed two main directions: first, the question of how they make sense of the performances and what kind of message they intend to send; and, second, how they joined La Barbe in order to retrace their activist and feminist careers. The interviews with journalists covered how articles are chosen by the editorial board and how performances of La Barbe are represented (connotations, focus on a particular aspect, length of the article, etc.). This approach allowed the interview to capture why activist events are selected (among other possible news) and how they are treated by media. The interviews with managers were more difficult to handle as I chose to avoid confronting them directly with La Barbe's performance, as this tack could have been perceived as an aggression. Instead, they were first asked to describe their position and their work, and the interview gradually shifted toward the issue of external activist influence on management practices. In accordance with ethnographic methodologies (Beaud & Weber, 2010), the interviewees were never interrupted and were encouraged to follow their line of thought even when it went off topic, to allow them to cover blind spots omitted by the questionnaire.

While the interviews with journalists provided a lot of information on their interactions with La Barbe activists and on how they view them, the interviews with managers were not as productive as expected. Even managers sympathetic to the group and its cause could not pinpoint any consequences for their organization and saw the performance as a nonevent. The most notable reaction was that of a female Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Diversity director in a large banking organization, who expressed how she had felt legitimized and had appreciated the performance. However, even she had to admit that it had had no managerial or organizational consequences. These negative results led me to abandon interviews with managers and refocus on the interactions between journalists and activists. The journalists who had covered La Barbe and were willing to answer my questions were nonetheless quite difficult to reach.

The anonymity of the respondents (and, in the case of journalists and managers, of their respective organizations) was



guaranteed by changing their names and any items that could make them recognizable. The records and the raw transcripts were kept confidential, and only selected excerpts are shown and used for academic articles. Two rationales justified this anonymity and confidentiality: first, for deontological reasons, particularly to protect activists, and, second, to gain the respondents' trust and encourage them to speak their mind.

When observing performances as both communicative and organizing processes, I was attentive to several levels within the same event: first, the organization of the performance itself, that is, how activists discuss and decide where and how to act. Second, I described the material, discursive and visual elements of the performance (although they tended to remain the same across the performances): how activists behave, what objects they use, what they say, and what symbols they convey. Third, I noted how the audiences reacted to the performances in order to capture some of the 'atmosphere' of each event. By audiences, I mean not only the audience at the event but also other individuals present: men targeted by the performance, security guards, journalists, people from other activist groups, etc. Their reactions would vary greatly, ranging from cheering and laughter to silence (due to misunderstanding, humility, or disdain), and even booing, harsh insults, and physical contact. Fourth, the interviews with the activists helped me to understand what message they intended to convey through the performances. Interviews were also used to make sense of observations and avoid misconstruing the activists' behaviors during and after performances. Fifth, the interviews with journalists and the coding of their articles allowed me to capture how the message was received and interpreted by them. In addition, I also took note on how I initially would interpret the performances when I first saw them, before my first interviews with activists.

While the activists were always quite friendly to me, I (as a heterosexual man) was soon seen as an outsider. La Barbe never defined itself as a women-only group (some men would also sometimes attend meetings), but its performances could only work if performed by women since men wearing fake beards would not have the same symbolic power. Even when welcomed, the presence of men in some feminist spaces tends to reproduce patterns of dominance and inhibit the speech of group members and hamper their emancipation. Moreover, one of La Barbe's objectives is to be autonomous from men in organizing the group (or any activity). My position as an outsider should be nuanced. I had many characteristics in common with the activists in that most of them were white and enjoyed a high level of education. My access to the field, however, was not without immediate consequence: I was asked not to participate in the online spaces that the activists used for discussions and decision-making and, although I was able to attend internal meetings, I was asked not to record them.

To counterbalance my outsider position and the questions it might have raised, I remained as silent and as withdrawn as possible, intervening only when forced to and expressing my mind as little as possible. Given that the differences separating me from the activists could not be ignored, it was important to assume them and limit their effects as far as possible. Acting as the photographer during the performances was a precious vantage point as it not only involved me in organizing the performance but also benefited La Barbe, while keeping my intervention to a minimum. To further this trust-building and understand the activists' world views, I immersed myself in their theoretical inspirations, whether material feminism (Delphy, 1979), queer feminism (Butler, 1990, 1993), or other references they might mention (Haraway, 1988). This immersion aimed to capture the precise meanings that activists gave to their performances and to identify any misinterpretations on my part. A great deal of introspective work was also needed to understand how my gender identity as a man may have affected my analysis (Hildwein, 2019), and I reflected on my position as a male academic and on how an individual's standpoint affects the way in which knowledge is produced (Espignola, 2012).

A large amount of additional data was also collected in order to complete the field work. The entire data collection comprised (1) 17 interviews with activists, plus interviews with 5 journalists who had written about La Barbe, and 11 managers impacted by La Barbe's performances (as mentioned earlier); (2) notes from field observations of 18 performances (and two performances that were atypical for La Barbe) and 25 internal meetings between July 2011 and July 2012; (3) a total of 2,325 photos, mainly from performances; (4) a total of 226 press articles about La Barbe, published between 28 February 2008 and 19 November 2013 (during the research period), found on the databases Factiva and LexisNexis; (5) 93 press releases by La Barbe; and (6) a total of 138 leaflets on La Barbe's performances.

Press releases and leaflets were used to capture the group's discourse. These highlighted the importance of statistics (related to each targeted organization), metaphors, and irony in La Barbe's argumentation. This written discourse is an integral part of their performance as it reinforces the imagery, expands on the humor by ridiculing the target, and gives statistical evidence to support the activists' claims. Press articles provided insights into how La Barbe's performances are represented by journalists: the length of articles, the connotations used to refer to La Barbe (vocabulary, turn of phrase, and appraisals), and the errors and inaccuracies made by the author of the article.

The coding was adapted to each type of data collected (e.g. interviews with activists, interviews with journalists, interviews with managers, press releases, leaflets, and press articles). For instance, interviews with activists (which are central in this

article) were coded using NVivo to identify the prominent sense units. The initial coding was inductive and aimed at encompassing all the nuances of the text, which revealed issues that had not initially been identified mainly regarding the personal transformations that activists undergo when they join La Barbe and execute its performances. The first sense units were gradually grouped into larger categories in order to reveal the main themes and subjects broached by the activists. Four main categories emerged: 'Meaning given to performances', 'Relationship to the media', 'Mobilization factors', and 'Internal mechanisms of the group',<sup>6</sup> which were helpful in understanding and analyzing the viewpoints and experience of the group's activists. Working on these categories, I identified different organizing roles in the performances: 'Relationship to the media' provided elements regarding their visual impact; 'mobilization factors' showed how La Barbe's members are recruited and retained due to the performances; 'internal mechanisms of the group' helped me understand how performances spur activists to action and enable them to avoid dissension; and 'meaning given to performances' provided the activist and feminist references serving as the basis of the performances. A further analysis of the category 'mobilization factors' showed how deeply activists were affected by the performances and their participation in La Barbe, which justified the exploration of the ways in which the performances had a personal impact on the activists.

Finally, the results were presented to members of the group and their reflections and criticisms were taken into account.

### Results: The organizing properties of performances in an activist group

This section examines how performances constitute the self of a feminist activist group through three effects: The visibility of the group, the coordination of the performances, and its members' mobilization. The analysis follows an inward movement, starting with the effects of performances on external parties (visibility), then the effects on the relationship among the activists (coordination), and finally the effects on activists themselves (mobilization) and the ensuing reciprocal relationship between the organization's self and the members' selves.

#### Visibility through innovative performances

Creating a visual shock has been one of La Barbe's objectives right from the beginning. Its founding members see spectacular performances as a means of action, to express indignation, highlight a status quo, show why it is unjust, and mock those who benefit from it or try to legitimize it.

<sup>6</sup> In French: *Sens donné aux performances, Rapport au média, Facteurs de mobilisation et Fonctionnement interne du groupe.*

I wanted a subversive visual system that would speak for itself, that by itself would show everything, I wanted people to see how serious this is, to see how men are holding the strings and to see it immediately... To deconstruct and make these roles look ridiculous. I wanted to do all of these, I was looking for this inversion mechanism, I knew that we would have to look for places of power, to show the absence of women and men's supremacy and I wanted people to see very quickly, in a single glimpse, what a scandal it is [Manon, a founding member; 26 September 2011].

From the outset, the core activity of La Barbe has been a subversive and symbolic communication process. It is 'symbolic' in the sense that it attempts to have a sudden effect on the audience, without necessarily calling on rationality or discursive processes, by pointing out in a few simple images the omnipresence of (white) men in power positions. Humor (in particular irony and ridicule), surprise, and an ensemble of corny symbols are the key tools of this symbolic shock (for a more extensive interpretation of La Barbe's performance, see Hildwein, 2016). La Barbe's self is constituted initially through the esthetic denunciation of the absence of women in places of power.

These performances are effective on at least two audiences: Potential future activists (as discussed in the 'Mobilization of activists' section) and journalists.

The visual shock created by performances attracts journalists' attention to La Barbe and thus constitutes the group in the media arena. An experienced journalist who wrote an article about La Barbe explains why he was interested in the activist group:

I like the happening, I was seduced by their courage during the performance, by the mode of action, the happening, I found their choices to be interesting, as well as their claims. [Alberto – 28 April 2015]

What first draws the journalists' attention is the activists' direct involvement in the performance (their courage) and the use of the performances themselves, that is, the visual impact of the performances. Irony is often mentioned as a key element in the visual and symbolic shock produced by La Barbe. As a result, the performances afford the group media coverage and visibility, enabling it to reach a wider audience.

In contrast, journalists often commented in the interviews that not all social movement organizations catch their attention. They view many performances as too dull and uninteresting and simply dismiss them without further consideration. Demonstrations in particular are seen as an overused performance, a 'cliché' almost of social movements especially when they focus on a pure show of strength (the number of participants) and fail to explore other symbols (colors, visuals, slogans, etc.). The innovative characteristics of La Barbe's performances distinguish it from other social movements and strengthen its presence in the media.

Journalists are also drawn to La Barbe because its innovative performances meet the need for unexpected images and ideas that rouse their readers' interest. This is not only a challenge for newspapers and TV channels in general, but also for each journalist individually with respect to his or her daily work on the editorial board. Ultimately, their ability to find impactful images has strong repercussions on their career and professional advancement.

Concretely, I have a subject, we have meetings, and each of us suggests subjects, or subjects are imposed on us. 'Here, there is this news about this...' After that, there is a discussion, people have ideas, the management has ideas, but you have your specialization and you want to follow your own mind. We negotiate, we discuss how long each paper should be, and we discuss again and again with the editor-in-chief to determine if articles are well-rounded. [Alberto – 28 April 2015]

This plays a key role in the relationships with their superiors and colleagues, depending on their experience and their power within the editorial board.

We have to juggle with balances of power; which means, my boss comes to me in the morning to prepare the meetings: 'Can you do the paper on Mr. So-and-so', 'No, I have my own thing' 'Please, come on', and here you have the balance of power between a new person who has to work on that kind of thing and a guy like me that has been there for 4/5 years and who can say no to his boss, even if it means shouting, 'I don't care, they can hire someone else, otherwise quality papers are never done'. [Malik – 24 April 2015]

For journalists, an innovative performance represents a weapon in their fight for a certain degree of independence, that is, being able to decide what subject they want to write and resist hierarchical pressures. As such, innovative performances are integrated into the dynamics of editorial boards, which explains their success: It is not only a matter of visual shock, which simply makes an activist group visible, it also strengthens the position of the journalists who write about La Barbe. In this context, La Barbe's performances are effective because they create surprise and facilitate the journalists' work.

From an organizing point of view, performances are not only successful in communicating a message (and making it into the newspapers) but also constitute the organization's self through the interactions with other actors or organizations (Taylor, 2011; Taylor & Cooren, 1997). The performances of La Barbe not only characterize their targets and voice their claims, but also speak about La Barbe and bring it into existence as an autonomous organization and a legitimate actor in the media, acknowledged by other actors (in this case, journalists). Activists can say 'we' and speak as a group, including when speaking to each other ('we [La Barbe] should react to this

event'). In a similar way, journalists can say 'it,' referring to La Barbe. Performances constitute La Barbe as an organization by creating its 'self' from a communicative point of view.

The fact that some performances are able to attract the attention of journalists and others are not indicates that the creation of an organization's self also depends on the conditions in which the message is formulated: It has to be validated (and repeated, commented, interpreted, etc.) by other actors who judge its pertinence in a certain cultural context. In an environment where media attention is difficult to attract amid the vast amounts of information continuously produced, innovative and spectacular performances represent a pivotal tool (compared to others) to create an organization's self, as they directly target the need to be culturally relevant through the intensive use of visual and symbolic means.

### Coordination through action

While the first impact of spectacular performances is visual and directed toward external parties, performances also help constitute the activist group by facilitating the coordination of its members. Being relatively simple, performances are a call to action in themselves and thus encourage collaboration.

### A focus on action

A firm principle of La Barbe is to focus on action as opposed to debates or theoretical discussions. Its founders see theoretical discussions and ideological debates as a real danger for feminist organizations, as some issues (notably pornography, prostitution, and the Muslim headscarf) tend to deeply divide feminists to the point of preventing their collective action. This belief stems from their past experiences in other feminist organizations that encountered problems or even dissolved due to ideological divergences (for a complete analysis of La Barbe's criticisms of French feminism, see Hildwein, 2016: pp. 120–126). As one of the founding members said:

It's the *kiss of death*.<sup>7</sup> The more we discuss ideology, the less efficient we are. [Henriett – 27 September 2011]

According to the members, ideological debates create schisms among activist groups, hinder collective action, and ultimately prevent them from taking any meaningful action. As such, debates constitute internal factors of instability, forces that tend to destroy organizing processes.

Lesbian Avengers provides the model for a different kind of performance in which performances are the essence of a group, and discussions are avoided as much as possible since they tend to divide the group and hinder its action.

<sup>7</sup> In English in the original text.

And so we imitated Lesbian Avengers regarding this, we decided not to have discussions, except for debating dinners where we have debates on specific subjects, we would choose beforehand and have a special meeting to debate them. But the rest of the time we wanted to avoid vexing questions and to really concentrate on action, so this was really the starting idea, it would be direct action. [Henriett – 27 September 2011]

La Barbe's activists agreed that, should any member wish to debate ideological issues, she can organize a 'punk dinner'<sup>8</sup> at home (outside La Barbe), to which she can invite whoever she pleases to discuss a specific (usually touchy) topic. However, it is also understood among the members that this must not impede further performances or become one of La Barbe's main activities.

Performances are a way of gathering activists around a common purpose and acting concretely. Discussions focus on the modalities of a performance rather than on its justification or its form. This way of functioning is possible because La Barbe's performances are not contested by the activists (in fact, performances have undergone little change over the group's 10 years of activity, with only minimal incremental innovations such as shaking the hands of men on the podium). The absence of contestation is, first of all, due to La Barbe's mode of recruitment (see pp. 14–15): the performances are the main reason why women join the group, so those who are skeptical will not take part.

Second, the performances focus on a simple message (the denunciation of the absence of women in power positions) which raises few to no objections. Moreover, the performances are relatively easy to set up (involving few props and activists), which makes coordination all the more easier. Furthermore, by focusing on a single symbolic visual shock, performances do not dwell on complex explanations of the subject addressed and never propose solutions. Activists refuse to give any advice (which could lead to heated debates) or to position themselves as specialists on the subject. Requests for solutions (expressed, for instance, by the targeted organizations) are forwarded to external experts identified by the activists. This position is reinforced by another explicit rule of La Barbe that prohibits joining any other cause or allying with any other organization, including other feminist organizations. The group is focused on one cause and one cause only. This has the same rationale as above: avoiding unnecessary conflict. La Barbe takes part in external public demonstrations only on rare occasions.

Third, the preparation of performances allows for discussions and negotiations before and after the performance. Before the performance, the activists identify a target organization, gather information about it (the gendered distribution of power positions, for instance) and about the event (how to enter, how to escape, how to access the podium,

how dangerous security is, etc.), and prepare a tract. The text of the tract is discussed among the activists and offers a time during which they can align their frameworks and thus channel any dissension into a structured debate.<sup>9</sup> After the performance, activists gather again in a bar, discuss the relevance and effectiveness of the performance, and exchange their impressions on the shared experience. The discussions and negotiations involve three different levels of the performance: (1) how the performance can concretely take place in the room, how activists will move, place themselves, etc.; (2) what the performance means for this specific organization (as the absence of women in power positions has different reasons and consequences for a company, a religious organization, or an NGO, for example, how virulent do they want to be, are the activists shaming the organization for the first time or not, etc.); and (3) what this means in a broader political and social context (e.g. relative to upcoming elections, in the wake of a social debate regarding feminist issues, etc.).

The reason that the performances manage to avoid dissension and spur action is that discussions do not (or very rarely) concern the performance itself (i.e. its symbols, its discourse or its visual shock), but rather its application and its meaning in a given situation. The activists thus start their discussion with a common denominator: the performance itself as a call to action. The discussions do not ask whether the performance should happen or not, but rather how it should be executed. This means that discussions and debates are already part of the general action, which cements the group from the outset and springs from two factors. First, the performances have a strong enough meaning to obviate their renegotiation at each occurrence and make them easily adapted to different conditions. Second, there are organizational spaces and times in which these debates and discussions can take place: Performances play an organizing role also because they exist within a broader network of communicative/organizing processes that support them. This process ensures the group's stability over the long term by allowing a certain degree of flexibility and adaptability, while at the same time reinforcing performances as the group's central and legitimate mode of action.

### The hidden hierarchy in the performances

La Barbe was founded with the ideal of a non-hierarchical organization in mind – a long-standing ideal in feminist organizations but one that has also been greatly contested (Freeman, 1972). Inspired by Lesbian Avengers, La Barbe's performances further this ambition. Because of their relative simplicity, coordination and hierarchy are kept to a minimum. For other types of

<sup>8</sup> 'Dîner punk' in French.

<sup>9</sup> As mentioned in the methodological section, I was unable to directly observe these online spaces; these conclusions are drawn from interviews with activists willing to discuss their internal debates.

performance, La Barbe would require a much more substantial organizational structure, especially for coordinating activists and integrating newcomers (see the next section). Like Lesbian Avengers, La Barbe – which started up in Paris – encourages the creation of other similar organizations nationwide (Toulouse, Lille, Bordeaux, etc.) and helps them to act autonomously without external intervention. This ideal is also reflected in how responsibilities are shared out among La Barbe's members. The activists in charge are changed regularly, for example, the role of coordinator should not be held longer than 6 months. Also, the responsibilities within La Barbe are separate from the responsibilities of its supporting association, 'Les Ami-e-s de La Barbe'. For instance, being the treasurer or president of this association confers no particular right in the main group.

However, whether or not this ideal is achieved is debatable. Activists often mention the aura and charisma of some founding members as being a limit to this ideal. Another issue is the time that each activist spends on the Internet: those who are able to devote a large part of their day to internal decisions tend to have a much greater influence than other members who are no less legitimate.

Another limit to this ideal arises directly from the organizing role of performances. As shown in the previous section, performances spur the members to action and, as such, are part of the organizing process. However, this comes at a certain cost. We could consider that performances have a certain *intentionality* (Cooren & Taylor, 1997) that originates from those who created them: the founders' theoretical frameworks (including feminist ones) are reflected in the performances. For instance, the queer feminist positioning (in the sense of Butler, 1990, 1993) emerges in the use of fake beards and the 'gender confusion' that La Barbe aims to create. These ideas are translated into symbols that incorporate the discourses and demeanors of the performances and make them invisible. By agreeing to participate in performances, newcomers also adopt such ideas. Not all recruits are aware of these theoretical references and have little occasion to debate them. As a result, the performances are also organizing processes as they (implicitly) align the frameworks of the performers and represent a form of hierarchy wherein the founders are a step above the newcomers, even when the former have left the group. Performances encompass a hidden hierarchy and contribute to the stability of the group, although through debatable processes.

The 'coordination' aspect of performances contributes indirectly to the constitution of La Barbe's self. It does not perform the self, nor can it be considered as a communicative process. It nonetheless creates favorable conditions for expressing this self and executing the performances. In particular, it facilitates relations among the activists by helping them to manage any political or feminist positions they may hold that could otherwise divide them. The above described characteristics of performances thus shape communicative processes

(internal debates) in a way that will not prevent the other organizing processes (visibility, mobilization). Moreover, by avoiding divisive debates, the 'coordination' aspect of performances helps activists establish their ties with La Barbe and appropriate its message to the point of identifying with La Barbe's self. Finally, performances also contribute to the group's coordination because they have reified certain theoretical frameworks that direct the group toward action.

### **Mobilization of activists**

Performances constitute the group by encouraging the mobilization of activists and help recruit, integrate, and retain them in the group over the long run.

### **Recruitment and early participation**

Most future activists are attracted to La Barbe after watching a performance or seeing images of a performance.

It's also online, on YouTube. Our movies became a sort of ad for La Barbe, many many women come saying, 'I came to La Barbe after watching the movies'. It has become a recruiting tool, even if it wasn't the initial idea, the idea was to expose some issue. [Henriett – 27 September 2011]

At the outset, the recruiting process relied on classical means, such as individual networks, but later evolved to attract activists outside of the initial group of founders.

Now girls who join the group do it more because they've seen us on TV or because they went on the website or because they read an article, rather than out of cooptation or personal acquaintance. Nowadays, they join us because they heard about the group, because of our communication rather than being girlfriends. This changed a lot. During the first year, we recruited through personal networks, and it changed as soon as we had articles in the media, on the Internet, etc. [Aline and Coraline – 21 September 2011]

The visual novelty and humorous aspects of the performances (particularly the irony) retain activists in La Barbe, as they enable them to express their concerns cordially.

During the performance, you have a small rush of adrenalin before stepping onto the podium, every time. This performance is an extremely polite way to say 'fuck off, we disagree'. This polite aspect fits me well, it's in my nature, my education, it's quasi British humor; dry humor; no exploit, no anger... And I like that it doesn't weaken the power of the discourse. [Marie-Cécile – 5 January 2012]

More specifically, performances serve as a recruitment tool because they constitute a communicative process. They are not only directed at audiences such as public opinion, the targeted organization and journalists, but also at potential future members of La Barbe who may be feminists and/or activists in

search of a new engagement. While personal networks can reach only a limited number of potential members, performances open up the group to new candidates and provide a broader palette for recruitment. This also contributes to the group's longer-term stability and ensures a source of replacements for the founding members.

This recruiting process is not limited to a newcomer's entry into the group. In a second stage, she also participates in her first performance, which not only represents a real hurdle (fear of not fitting in, of not being able to enact the performance properly, and of the audience's hostility and possible violence from the security service) but also a rite of passage. One of La Barbe's principles is that the status of a newcomer should not diminish her legitimacy or her ability to ask questions, take part in decision-making, and represent the organization externally, particularly when answering journalists.

Even if you've been at La Barbe for two hours, you still have the right to express yourself and to reply in an interview. Of course, two hours is a bit of an exaggeration, but there's really this idea that we don't want to confiscate knowledge, we share, we're a collectivity and this is the idea of empowerment,<sup>10</sup> it's 'go on, you'll learn on the job' [Amélia – 20 March 2013]

This principle arises from the founding members' negative experiences in other feminist groups, where they felt that they needed to earn their 'feminist diploma' (in their own words) to have the right to speak or participate in the group. More generally, this principle aims at developing the autonomy of activists by pushing them to act ('The one who says it, does it!'<sup>11</sup> is a catchphrase at La Barbe) and to learn by doing. This is especially relevant in a feminist environment in which the independence of women is an important issue.

The performances embody this principle. Being easy to learn is here of prime importance, as a more complex performance with greater exposure could discourage newcomers and make them leave the group even before taking part in a performance.

When I came to La Barbe, I was shy, and it took me some time. I first observed, tried to understand how I could fit in and look at it. And then, there was an action like the one I saw on Facebook, 'let's meet at that place', it was at the Maison de la Radio, it was in December 2010 and I went there and it was quite friendly, they immediately tried to integrate newcomers, I felt at ease... I took part in meetings, in public events, but my first action was still 6 or 7 months after that, and since then I've been at La Barbe. [Amélia – 20 March 2013]

Apart from the activist who reads the text aloud and the activists who take photos, no distinction is made between

activists on the performance set. Each is invited to participate in the performance. What matters is that performances should be a shared activity that is relatively simple and brings the group together without suggesting or imposing hierarchical positions within the group.

On several occasions, during internal meetings, some activists discussed the question of integration, summarized as follows: 'At which point do I start to say "we" instead of "I"'. Performances help construct a sense of community by creating an organization's self that is relatively easy to identify with: you participate in La Barbe's performances, so you *are* La Barbe. Any activist can easily appropriate La Barbe's self and belong to its community. Furthermore, any activist can act and speak on La Barbe's behalf. The organization's self is reinforced by a strong ventriloquism: Any woman can speak for La Barbe and promote its message; any activist can easily attribute her actions to La Barbe.

What matters in recruitment is that performances are a striking communicative process. What matters in the integration of activists is that performances are a shared activity that is easy to fit into and appropriate. As the performances are easy and accessible, they can be readily reproduced and disseminated, both in concrete terms (anyone can join) and from a personal point of view (everyone feels that they can act legitimately). They constitute the group in the long term by encouraging identification with La Barbe's self through appropriation ('I am La Barbe', 'we are La Barbe') and attribution ('I can act on La Barbe's behalf').

### Retention over the long term

Performances play a longer-term role as they provide the activists with an opportunity to develop skills that correspond to their militant concerns: Developing a feminist perspective on events, practicing a new relation to space and their bodies, rejecting their primary feminine socialization, and learning to defy authority (for a discussion on how those skills are acquired, see Hildwein, 2017). This apprenticeship is reinforced by the acquisition of feminist theoretical frameworks during personal discussions, internal debates, readings, and punk dinners. The activists describe the changes they have experienced through their continuing participation in La Barbe in terms of self-actualization.

La Barbe brought me tons of things. It's linked to my self-improvement, in terms of self-confidence, it's about being conscious of the roles I am assigned to. Before that, I had known subconsciously, since I was a child, I knew something was off, but here, clearly I can put my finger on it, even if I still don't feel free. [Amélia – 20 March 2013]

Performances first impact self-confidence as they force the activists to make a leap of faith and face their fear of social exposure.

<sup>10</sup> In English in the original text.

<sup>11</sup> 'C'est celle qui dit qui fait!' in French (author's translation).

When we go on stage, I have to force myself a bit, and I am really thankful to La Barbe for that because it forced me to be more outgoing and my heart was beating furiously and now I don't doubt the legitimacy of our actions any more. [Louise – 25 January 2012]

La Barbe's performances not only denounce the illegitimacy of a certain type of masculinity but also build up the activists' sense of legitimacy. Given the rationale driving the performances, this legitimacy more specifically involves the relationship with power and politics and pushes the activists to develop self-confidence with respect to these subjects.

Being an activist opened up the field of politics for me as something where I could intervene. Whereas before, as a girl, I didn't even dare to think, I didn't even consider having a political opinion, I let people choose for me, I was listening, I chose among the set of ideas that people chose, but I didn't dare to take a position. And at one point, I told myself, being feminist is political. [Anne-Louise – 2 February 2012]

Participating in La Barbe's performances is also an eye-opener, raising the awareness of power relations and the gendered representations of power and politics.

Being at La Barbe means educating yourself about performances and changing your glasses. It's really like changing how you look at things. I'm in the bus, I'm in a meeting, I'm at a family dinner, what's happening, how many men, how many women, who speaks, who occupies the room, who takes the decisions, something I'd never been aware of, I thought we were equal. You become more attentive to what happens in reality, rather than what you believe. You realize that all aspects of public life are dominated by men. It's exactly that feeling: as if you changed your glasses. [Aline and Coraline – 21 September 2011]

On a secondary note, the irony employed in the performances has an important role as it both creates an enjoyable experience and reinforces the activists' control over their messaging and the course of the performance.

Wearing this fake beard helps, the irony helps to keep smiling, in the warmth of congratulation... when people boo us, we have to greet them warmly, saying: 'Bravo, you are right, we are with you! etc.' Something that helped too was to realize that we are legitimate, we are at home, we are here to support them, we love them and we're here to tell them how much we adore them. [Louise – 25 January 2012]

Irony also protects the activists against aggressive reactions from the target and the audience. Making the target look ridiculous is not only a symbolic act but also helps the activists assume a strong position and manage their stress. Pretending to feel at ease, to be enjoying the situation, to be among friends and peers, and to be serene are all devices to appear calm and in control, and thereby gain legitimacy and fight against any hostility in the room.

Performances retain the activists over the long term not only because they produce a strong and attractive visual message, but also because they contribute to the activists' self-actualization and personal development. To achieve this, they link three different elements together: a cause, the individuals interested in it, and the involvement of bodies and demeanors connecting both of the former. Regarding the cause (i.e. combatting the gendered representations of power), other performances might well not have the same impact on activists. La Barbe's performances are consistent with what they say and how they involve individuals. The constitution of the organization's self also derives from the shared concerns of the activists, who find similar solutions for these concerns by executing the performances together. This reinforces the links between them and creates conviviality. Regarding the implication of their bodies, performances are also *experiences* that push the activists to transgress by stepping into a space that is reserved for men in power positions, challenge their authority, and face the aggressive and sometimes violent reactions. Through performances, the activists can experience themselves as independent political subjects and powerful individuals able to question authority and to think, choose, and act on their own accord.

This has profound consequences for the activists as performances enable them to appropriate La Barbe's message and embody it in the deepest possible sense. By bringing their bodies into play in the performances, this transformation includes how they see the world, their relation to public spaces and to each other. La Barbe's self is appropriated by the activists and reaches their inner selves. In a sense, the revelation produced by performances also applies to the activists themselves: they are their own target. Adopting a broad understanding of what we mean by 'communication', performances can also be seen as communicative processes directed at those who execute them. This very concrete and immediate medium (putting one's body at the center of the performance) shows the activists that they can open up new existential possibilities for themselves. In this sense, the organization's self goes beyond a discursive element directed toward external parties ('we' as an organization differentiated from other organizations or audiences). It is also constituted by the relations between the members and their shared experiences ('we' as an organization, beyond the collection of individuals), and even their emotions and deep thoughts, reaching into an individual's innermost being. In other words, La Barbe is not simply the message it emits. It is also a community of activists and the political and feminist development process that binds them together.

## Contributions and conclusion

This section develops the two contributions of this article. First, it shows that performances can be considered as an

organizing process, and thus reinforces them as a concept worthy of further inquiry in the field of organizational studies. Second, it makes a theoretical contribution to CCO scholarship by proposing the concept of 'organizing self'. It concludes with additional considerations derived from these empirics.

### Performances as an organizing process

How are La Barbe's performances able to successfully constitute the group and what do they produce that constitutes the organization's self?

Performances contribute to the constitution of the activist group firstly as a *symbolic visual shock*. They heighten the group's visibility as their strong symbolic innovations attract journalists' attention (particularly due to their use of irony) and because their novelty gives journalists more power when negotiating their independence with their colleagues. Expressing a simple message quickly, they also help to coordinate the group and avert the need to discuss the performance in itself at each occurrence. However, the situated meaning and concrete unfolding of the performances still need to be negotiated, both when preparing the performance and afterward during debriefings. Performances contribute to a group's mobilization by visually representing the group to potential future activists and thus ensuring new recruits for the group.

Secondly, performances contribute to the constitution of the activist group as a *call to action* that unites activists around a relatively simple and clear-cut task, which avoids ideological debates within the group that could create dissension and hinder its activity. This function is supported by the existence of spaces and events where activists can choose to debate ('punk dinners') and by rules forbidding the group's association with contentious issues or other activist organizations. As the performances are built on specific theoretical assumptions, they also align the activists' activity towards specific goals and means of action. As shared activities, performances enable newcomers to quickly integrate the group and easily participate in its core activities. This aspect is all the more effective as, in line

with the group's rules, new activists enjoy the same legitimacy to act or speak for the group as any other member and are invited to take action and develop their autonomy. Performances also create social bonds between activists and thus reinforce the mobilization of the group.

Thirdly, performances represent *personal experiences* that enable activists to develop feminist skills and experience themselves as political subjects able to question authority and assert themselves. This is possible because the performances involve the activists' bodies and demeanors and push them to act, connecting them directly with a cause that interests them. Moreover, irony contributes to the feeling of being in control during the performance and thus reinforces these aspects. When they participate in La Barbe and appropriate its cause and its message, the activists become transformed. This ensures their engagement and long-term mobilization. While the aspect of performances as a personal experience is narrower than the first two dimensions mentioned above, it also has deeper and long-lasting effects.

At each level, the specific characteristics of the performances (visual innovation, direct and simple involvement of activists, direct link between the symbols and the cause) heighten their effectiveness: A more common type of performance (such as a demonstration) would not produce the same effect. Table I summarizes the effects of the performances on the organization.

Visibility refers to the existence of the group in the media arena: it is the organization's self in its usual communicative sense, performed by the spokesperson and the performances with regard to other audiences and other actors in the field. In particular, by repeatedly commenting on the group in their articles, journalists validate the group's existence and help establish it as a legitimate actor in this field. It is a communicative act: Activists and journalists refer to La Barbe as if it were an existing individual with an independent will (much like any other organization or institution), thus materializing the group's existence.

Coordination does not directly produce the organization's self but creates favorable conditions for its constitution by

**Table I.** The effects of performances at the intersection of their three dimensions and the constitution of the organization

Performances as...	Constitution of the organization through...		
	Visibility	Coordination	Mobilization
...a symbolic visual shock	Attracting journalists' attention Irony	Simplicity: No need for reinvention or ongoing innovation	Recruiting potential activists
...a call to action		Avoid dissension through a shared activity Reified theoretical frameworks	Integration of newcomers Relations between activists
...a personal experience			Acquiring feminist skills Irony Involving the activists' selves

Through visibility, coordination, and mobilization, performances create an organization's self and the condition of its permanence.



giving activists reasons to act together and avoid internal divisions. It facilitates the repetition of performances over time and thus of the constitution of the organization's self. This reinforces the idea that communicative processes are necessary to the constitution of an organization but not sufficient, and that broader elements should be considered (Bisel, 2010).

Mobilization is the existence of the group from both a relational viewpoint (as shared experiences, relations, and affects that bind the activists together) and an internal viewpoint (as a transformative experience that leads to the acquisition and development of feminist skills). Performances convey a message not only to external audiences, but also to the activists themselves. This message suggests that activists should consider themselves as political subjects, demand power positions for themselves, and challenge gender roles, particularly in situations where authority is at stake. Performances are organizing in the sense that they enable activists to appropriate (in the sense of Bencherki & Cooren, 2011) this message and the organization's cause, and thus become part of the organization. The activists appropriate the group's message and cause and integrate these into their own selves. In turn, they attribute their thoughts, affects, and actions to the group as they execute the performances, as they speak to journalists on its behalf, and as they debate the goals of performances and means of action.

To summarize, performances constitute the organization by creating its self. Visibility creates the organization's self by constituting it as an actor *vis-à-vis* external parties (notably through media communication). Mobilization creates the organization's self by having the organization's members appropriate its message and its cause, thus 'becoming' the organization. Coordination does not directly create the organization's self, but it does create favorable conditions for this self by ensuring that the activists act together smoothly.

An additional consequence for La Barbe is that its performances enhance the group's long-term stability despite its relative lack of resources (financial and material) and absence of formalization (bureaucracy, hierarchy, etc.). From an organizational point of view, La Barbe is centered on its performances, which represent its organizing backbone, supported by a limited range of other elements. These notably include the group's explicit rules (any activist can speak for the group, the rotation of responsibilities, the refusal of ideological debates within the group, the reluctance to pose as experts, the call to autonomy, and do-it-yourself) and discussion spaces (internal meetings, the [de]briefings before and after performances, and the internal mailing list). Under specific conditions, performances can even replace traditional organizing functions (coordination, task division, external communication, recruitment, integration, retention, etc.). While La Barbe cannot be reduced to its performances, it certainly represents an original kind of organization, created and sustained mainly by a central event that

permeates the whole group (including its members' inner lives and emotions) and ensures its coherence.

This research contributes to organizational studies by exploring not only the communicative dimensions but also the organizing properties of performances. It furthers and expands recent developments in organizational performances (Reinhold, 2017).

### **Expanding the organization's self: The organizing self**

The involvement of the activists' selves described in the *Mobilization* category deserves further attention. Performances require courage, conviction, and personal involvement to be successful. Their organizing role arises from the (positive) changes that they trigger in activists and which push them to engage and remain in the organization. This process should be emphasized as being essential to the constitution of the organization's self and the organization in general. To mark its importance, I propose naming it the 'organizing self', in reference to the alternating process of appropriation/attribution between the organization's self and its members' selves: the agency and personality of the organization is appropriated by its members, who reciprocally attribute their actions, and personalities (their thoughts, affects, and beliefs) to the organization's self.

The adjective 'organizing' refers first of all to the dynamic and processual nature of the CCO, which is an important notion in the CCO research stream (Putnam et al., 2009; Schoeneborn & Blaschke, 2014) inspired by the work of Giddens (1984). Second, it highlights the importance of the individuals within an organization, which stresses the fact that the members' selves contribute to the constitution of the organization.

The organizing self is also a reciprocal *communicative* process in which the organization's message and cause circulate between the organization's self and the members' selves through the oscillation between attribution and appropriation. Performances reinforce this communicative dimension of the organizing self as they embody a twofold message: one for external audiences that is constitutive of the organization's self and one for the organization's members which influences their own selves.

The organizing self should be distinguished from the organization's self as the organizing self is a process linking the organization and its members, including their inner life, while the organization's self is a personality attributed to the organization through several communicative processes, including the organizing self. The organization's self is the result of the organizing self, as it is the members' emotions and beliefs that are attributed to the organization and thus constitute its self.

The organizing self is all the stronger when it contributes to the self-actualization of the individuals it affects, for instance, by helping them acquire valuable skills. In the case of a feminist activist group, the organizing self is essential as it enhances their political and militant personal development and corresponds to their concerns regarding sexism and patriarchy. When the organizing self accomplishes this dynamic, it contributes to the individuals' sense of belonging to the group and ensures their engagement over the long term given that they have strong personal incentives to participate in the organization. From an organizational point of view, this explains the activists' engagement and the group's long-term stability.

The notion of an organizing self builds on and expands the metaphor of ventriloquism (Cooren, 2012, 2014; Cooren & Bencherki, 2010; Cooren & Sandler, 2014) in the constitution of the organization's self. The members of an organization are not only speaking on its behalf but are also constrained by the organization in a constant oscillation, alternately playing the role of ventriloquist and dummy (Cooren & Bencherki, 2010). An organization and its members are also closely interwoven given that the organization's self and the members' selves influence each other reciprocally. The hybridicity between an organization and its members (Bencherki & Cooren, 2011) extends into their respective selves – even the members' inner selves are influenced by the organization and participate in its constitution. The members of an organization can become the organization as they constitute it in the same way that an actor can become his/her character by engaging his/her personality and affects. Taking the role of the organizing self into consideration adds a layer of analysis to the CCO approaches, since it takes the members' selves into account – their personalities, their emotions, their frameworks, their beliefs, etc. This close link between the organization's self and its members' selves suggests that the former is not limited to its actions and discourses. It can also have emotions in the same way that actions and discourses are attributed to organizations, as the CCO literature has repeatedly pointed it out from its beginnings (Cooren & Taylor, 1997; Putnam et al., 2009; Taylor & Cooren, 1997). An organization can, for instance, 'be angry' in the same way that it can 'declare' or 'decide'. More generally, this is coherent with the CCO ontology in which the boundaries between organizations, humans, and nonhumans are permeable.

### Concluding remarks

A minor and secondary contribution of this article is to add to the idea that communication can be *disorganizing*, as other works have suggested (Bisel, 2010) or demonstrated (Vàsquez, Schoeneborn, & Sergi, 2015). This contrasts with CCO's core assumption that communication constitutes organizations. Internal debates should be able to provide a common interpretation of a situation that aligns the frames

of analysis of the organization's members and justifies their collective action toward a goal. When they fail to do so (particularly when tackling a fiercely debated issue), they may hinder the organization and even endanger its existence. Thus, certain communicative messages can destroy rather than constitute the organization by creating debates that shift efforts and energy away from more important tasks and undermine coordination by introducing distrust and animosity. It is not that communication is absent or fails *per se*. Quite the contrary. The members of the organization communicate well enough to understand their opposing views and interpretations, which in turn prevents them from working together. In this case, communication destroys the organization and, in particular, destroys the organizing self as an inner process (see above). The CCO is only possible with certain types of communication, particularly when it comes to discussing the organization's basic assumptions and worldviews. A diversity of individuals may make it difficult to align worldviews and, in La Barbe's case, it seems simpler to focus on action and let each member find fitting justifications for their participation in the performances – in a way, silence can also represent an organizing principle when it means avoiding destructive communication.

Furthermore, it is worth noting the emancipatory potential of the organizing self, in the sense that individuals (through their engagement in an organization) can experiment with new existential possibilities for themselves and act outside of the predetermined roles assigned to them. In the case of La Barbe, this is made possible by a specific type of performance. Their performances are singular in that they bear a message for the activists themselves – one which corresponds to their own questions relating to feminism and gender roles. The performances also give rise to personal experiences that involve the bodies of the performers; the use of their bodies and demeanors is another means of communicating with the activists themselves. The organizing self can contribute to individuals' emancipation to the point where it becomes the most important production and reason for the existence of the organization in question. The importance of the body in performances brings to mind Butler's performativity in the sense that the way bodies act impacts the interiority of individuals (Cabantous, Gond, Harding, & Learmonth, 2016; Gond, Cabantous, Harding, & Learmonth, 2016). Further research could thus examine through a Butlerian lens how the organizing self can become a subversive organizational process.

Finally, performances rarely occupy as central a position as they do in activist groups, which lends to the question: can the organizing self be an emancipatory process in other kinds of structures, and, if so, under what conditions? Further research could investigate other kinds of emancipatory organizations and consider what importance the organizing self has in these in order to identify their specific characteristics from both

an organizing and a communicative point of view. This would also lead to a broader reflection regarding the possibilities of emancipation in an organizational setting, including an exploration of the different meanings of what is meant by emancipation.

## Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank the editor Jérémy Morales and three anonymous reviewers for their insights and constructive criticisms that significantly improved this article. He also would like to thank the convenors and participants of the sub-theme 'The Communicative Constitution of Organizing: Toward and Beyond (Formal) Organization', at EGOS 2017, Copenhagen, for their remarks and reflections.

## References

- Ashcraft, K. L. (2001). Organized dissonance: Feminist bureaucracy as hybrid form. *Academy of Management Journal*, 44(6), 1301–1322. doi: 10.5465/3069402
- Ashcraft, K. L., Kuhn, T. & Cooren, F. (2009). Constitutional amendments: 'Materializing' organizational communication. *The Academy of Management Annals*, 3(1), 1–64. doi: 10.5465/19416520903047186
- Barlatier, P.-J., Chauvet, V. & Morales, J. (2017). Management alternatif. Déplacer les frontières du management. *Revue Française de Gestion*, 264(3), 11–22. doi: 10.3166/rfg.2017.00125
- Beaud, S. & Weber, F. (2010). *Guide de l'enquête de terrain* (quatrième édition augmentée). Paris: La Découverte.
- Bencherki, N. & Cooren, F. (2011). Having to be: The possessive constitution of organization. *Human Relations*, 64(12), 1579–1607. doi: 10.1177/0018726711424227
- Bisel, R. S. (2010). A communicative ontology of organization? A description, history, and critique of CCO theories for organization science. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 24(1), 124–131. doi: 10.1177/0893318909351582
- Broqua, C. & Fillieule, O. (2009). ActUp ou les raisons de la colère. In C. Traini (Ed.), *Emotions... Mobilisation!* (pp. 141–167). Paris: Les Presses de Sciences Po.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of sex*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Cabantous, L., Gond, J.-P., Harding, N. & Learmonth, M. (2016). Critical essay: Reconsidering critical performativity. *Human Relations*, 69(2), 197–213. doi: 10.1177/0018726715584690
- Cooren, F. (2012). Communication theory at the center: Ventriloquism and the communicative constitution of reality. *Journal of Communication*, 62(1), 1–20. doi: 10.1111/j.1460-2466.2011.01622.x
- Cooren, F. (2014). Pragmatism as ventriloquism: Creating a dialogue among seven traditions in the study of communication. *Language Under Discussion*, 2(1), 1–26.
- Cooren, F. & Bencherki, N. (2010). How things do things with words: Ventriloquism, passion and technology. *Encyclopedia*, XIV(28), 35–62.
- Cooren, F., Kuhn, T., Cornelissen, J. P. & Clark, T. (2011). Communication, organizing and organization: An overview and introduction to the special issue. *Organization Studies*, 32(9), 1149–1170. doi: 10.1177/0170840611410836
- Cooren, F. & Sandler, S. (2014). Polyphony, ventriloquism, and constitution: In dialogue with bakhtin. *Communication Theory*, 24(3), 225–244. doi: 10.1111/comt.12041
- Cooren, F. & Taylor, J. R. (1997). Organization as an effect of mediation: Redefining the link between organization and communication. *Communication Theory*, 7(3), 219–260. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-2885.1997.tb00151.x
- Cunliffe, A. L. (2010). Retelling tales of the field: In search of organizational ethnography 20 years on. *Organizational Research Methods*, 13(2), 224–239. doi: 10.1177/1094428109340041
- Delphy, C. (1979). *L'ennemi principal. I. Economie politique du patriarcat* (Vol. 1). Paris: Editions Syllepse.
- Dobusch, L. & Schoeneborn, D. (2015). Fluidity, identity, and organizational-ity: The communicative constitution of Anonymous. *Journal of Management Studies*, 52(8), 1005–1035. doi: 10.1111/joms.12139
- Dorion, L. (2017). Construire une organisation alternative. *Revue Française de Gestion*, 43(264), 143–160. doi: 10.3166/rfg.2017.00109
- Espínola, A. F. (2012). Subjectivité et connaissance: réflexions sur les épistémologies du point de vue? *Cahiers du Genre*, 53(2), 99. doi: 10.3917/cdge.053.0099
- Fillieule, O. (2010). Tombeau pour Charles Tilly. Répertoires, performances et stratégies d'action. In O. Fillieule, E. Agrigoliansky & I. Sommier (Eds.), *Penser les mouvements sociaux* (pp. 77–99). Paris: La Découverte.
- Freeman, J. (1972). The tyranny of structurelessness. *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, 17, 151–164.
- Germain, O. & Josserand, E. (2013). The M@n@gement journey, spanning boundaries and navigating at the fringe. *M@n@gement*, 16(5), 535. doi: 10.3917/mana.165.0535
- Gibson-Graham, J. K. (1996). *The end of capitalism (as we knew it): A feminist critique of political economy*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Giddens, A. (1984). *The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration*. Cambridge, MA: Polity Press.
- Gond, J.-P., Cabantous, L., Harding, N. & Learmonth, M. (2016). What do we mean by performativity in organizational and management theory? The uses and abuses of performativity: Organizing performativity. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 18(4), 440–463. doi: 10.1111/ijmr.12074
- Grothe-Hammer, M. (2019). Organization without actorhood: Exploring a neglected phenomenon. *European Management Journal*, 37(3), 325–338. doi: 10.1016/j.emj.2018.07.009
- Haraway, D. (1988). *Manifeste cyborg et autres essais*. Paris: Exils éditeur.
- Hildwein, F. (2016). How a feminist activist group builds its repertoire of actions: A case study. In C. Schwabenland, C. Lange, S. Nakagawa & J. Ornyx (Eds.), *Women's emancipation and civil society organisations. Challenging or maintaining the status quo?* (pp. 113–134). Bristol: Policy Press.
- Hildwein, F. (2017). Mobilisation au travail par les compétences: l'apport de l'étude des groupes activistes. *RIMHE: Revue Interdisciplinaire Management, Homme & Entreprise*, 26(2), 49. doi: 10.3917/rimhe.026.0049
- Hildwein, F. (2019). The ethnographer as an intruder: Becoming an 'Honorary Female' within a feminist collective. *M@n@gement – Unplugged*, 92(1), 119–122.
- Kozica, A. M. F., Gebhardt, C., Müller-Seitz, G. & Kaiser, S. (2015). Organizational identity and paradox: An analysis of the 'Stable State of Instability' of Wikipedia's identity. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 24(2), 186–203. doi: 10.1177/1056492614553275
- Le Bon, G. (1895). *Psychologie des foules*. Paris: Alcan.
- McCammon, H. J. (2003). 'Out of the Parlors and into the Streets': The changing tactical repertoire of the U.S. women's suffrage movements. *Social Forces*, 81(3), 787–818. doi: 10.1353/sof.2003.0037

- McCarthy, J. D. (2005). Persistence and change among nationally federated social movements. In G. F. Davis, D. McAdam, W. R. Scott & M. N. Zald (Eds.), *Social movements and organization theory* (pp. 193–225). Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
- Molinier-Boyd, M.-P. (1995). Les crises politiques et l'image des femmes dans les représentations du pouvoir. *Clio. Femmes, Genre, Histoire, 1*. doi: 10.4000/clio.528
- Naples, N. A. (2003). *Feminism and method. Ethnography, discourse analysis and activist research*. London: Routledge.
- Parker, M., Cheney, G., Fournier, V. & Land, C. (Eds.). (2014). *The routledge companion to alternative organization*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Patouillard, V. (1998). Une colère politique. L'usage du corps dans une situation exceptionnelle : le ZAP d'Act-up Paris. *Sociétés Contemporaines, 31* (1), 15–36. doi: 10.3406/socco.1998.1769
- Putnam, L. L. & Nicotera, A. M. (2009). *Building theories of organization. The constitutive role of communication*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Putnam, L. L., Nicotera, A. M. & McPhee, R. D. (2009). Introduction. Communication constitutes organization. In L. L. Putnam & A. M. Nicotera (Eds.), *Building theories of organization. The constitutive role of communication* (pp. 1–19). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Reinhold, E. (2017). Art performance as research, friction and deed. *M@n@gement, 20*(1), 70. doi: 10.3917/mana.201.0070
- Rouleau, L., de Rond, M. & Musca, G. (2014). From the ethnographic turn to new forms of organizational ethnography. *Journal of Organizational Ethnography, 3*(1), 2–9. doi: 10.1108/JOE-02-2014-0006
- Schoeneborn, D. & Blaschke, S. (2014). The three schools of CCO thinking: Interactive dialogue and systematic comparison. *Management Communication Quarterly, 28*(2), 285–316. doi: 10.1177/0893318914527000
- Schoeneborn, D. & Scherer, A. G. (2010). Communication as constitutive of terrorist organizations. *Academy of Management Proceedings, August*(1), 1–6. doi: 10.5465/ambpp.2010.54500925
- Schoeneborn, D. & Scherer, A. G. (2012). Clandestine organizations, al Qaeda, and the paradox of (in)visibility: A response to Stohl and Stohl. *Organization Studies, 33*(7), 963–971. doi: 10.1177/0170840612448031
- Snow, D. A. & Trom, D. (2002). The case study and the study of social movements. In B. Klandermans & S. Staggenborg (Eds.), *Methods of social movement research*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Stohl, C. & Stohl, M. (2011). Secret agencies: The communicative constitution of a clandestine organization. *Organization Studies, 32*(9), 1197–1215. doi: 10.1177/0170840611410839
- Taylor, J. R. (2011). Organization as an (imbricated) configuring of transactions. *Organization Studies, 32*(9), 1273–1294. doi: 10.1177/0170840611411396
- Taylor, J. R. & Cooren, F. (1997). What makes communication 'organizational'? *Journal of Pragmatics, 27*(4), 409–438. doi: 10.1016/S0378-2166(96)00044-6
- Taylor, V., Kimport, K., Van Dyke, N. & Andersen, E. A. (2009). Culture and mobilization: Tactical repertoires, same-sex weddings, and the impact on gay activism. *American Sociological Review, 74*(6), 865–890. doi: 10.1177/000312240907400602
- Taylor, V. & Van Dyke, N. (2004). 'Get up, Stand up': Tactical repertoires of social movements. In D. A. Snow, S. A. Soule & H. Kriesi (Eds.), *The Blackwell companion to social movements* (pp. 262–293). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Taylor, V. & Whittier, N. (1992). Collective identity in social movement communities. Lesbian feminist mobilization. In A. D. Morris & C. M. Mueller (Eds.), *Frontiers in social movement theory* (pp. 104–129). London: Yale University Press.
- Taylor, V. & Whittier, N. (1995). Analytical approaches to social movement culture: The culture of the women's movement. In H. Johnston & B. Klandermans (Eds.), *Social movements and culture* (pp. 163–187). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Tilly, C. (2008). *Contentious performances*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Tilly, C. & Wood, L. J. (2009). *Social movements 1768–2004* (2nd ed.). London: Paradigm Publisher.
- Tracy, S. J. & Geist-Martin, P. (2014). Organizing ethnography and qualitative approaches. In L. L. Putnam & D. K. Mumby (Eds.), *Organizational communication. Advances in theory, research, and methods* (3rd ed., pp. 245–269). London: Sage Publication.
- Vásquez, C., Schoeneborn, D. & Sergi, V. (2016). Summoning the spirits: Organizational texts and the (dis)ordering properties of communication. *Human Relations, 69*(3), 629–659. doi: 10.1177/0018726715589422
- Walker, E. T., Martin, A. W. & McCarthy, J. D. (2008). Confronting the state, the corporation, and the academy: The influence of institutional targets on social movement repertoires. *American Journal of Sociology, 114*(1), 35–76. doi: 10.1086/588737
- Watson, T. J. (2011). Ethnography, reality, and truth: The vital need for studies of 'how things work' in organizations and management. *Journal of Management Studies, 48*(1), 202–217. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-6486.2010.00979.x
- Whittier, N. (1995). *Feminist generations: The persistence of the radical women's movement*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple.
- Ybema, S., Yanow, D., Wels, H. & Kamsteeg, F. (Eds.). (2009). *Organizational ethnography. Studying the complexities of everyday life*. London: Sage Publication.