



## Book Review

Paul R. Carlile, Davide Nicolini, Ann Langley, Hardimos Tsouka (2013): *How Matter Matters. Objects, Artifacts, and Materiality in Organization Studies*. Oxford. Oxford University Press, 294 pages. ISBN 978-0-19-870885-8 (pbk.)

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**B**ring materiality back in! This is the agenda of *How Matter Matters. Objects, Artifacts, and Materiality in Organization Studies*. This timely edited volume comes out from Oxford University Press of the series called ‘Perspectives on Process Organization Studies’ and is related to the yearly conference organized by the International Symposium by the same name. In this regard the book has the flair of a conference proceeding, offering state-of-the-art and new reflections on the topic of objects, artifacts, and materiality in organizations.

Turning to materiality, the field of organizational and process studies is not an exception. The past years the material turn has been increasingly influential within the social sciences and humanities. Particularly theories developed within science and technology studies (STS) and feminist materialist theories are becoming influential within new and old disciplines. New conceptualizations enabling inquiries across the social, psychological, material, or technological are in demand, and the material turn might be able to deliver conceptual tools. Another reason might be a material neglect in the social sciences and humanities for years that in the end might have made researchers ask simultaneously if materiality never matters. At least that is the argument put forward by the editors citing Barad: *Language matters. Discourse matters. Culture matters. There is an important sense in which the only thing that does not seem to matter anymore is matter* (Barad 2003: 801). However, this volume is not only a call for bringing the materiality back in, the contributors of the book also engage in very interesting conversations about how materiality ought to be reconceptualized, reconfigured, and methodologically addressed.

The edited volume is composed of an excellent introduction unfolding the theme of how matter matters. The editors are not only concerned with materiality, they are also inquiring into the implications that different conceptualizations of materiality may have. They argue that they are not only accounting for materiality but also accountability—an ethical sensibility is of importance.



This introduction is followed up by selected contributions presented at the conference. The chapters are mainly either theoretical, discussing conceptualizations of materiality in organizations, or empirically founded contributions that enable us to see examples of how to understand materialities or materializations. The empirically informed chapters are all interesting informative cases of materializations and why paying attention to materiality is in high demand. As examples, the chapter by Enddrisat and Noppenys illustrates how the immaterial materialize as they follow the design process of perfume. Dourish and Mazmanian discuss how representational practices of digitalization of photography and atomic testing have material consequences. Finally, Orlikowsky and Scott explore and compare old and new online valuation schemes from the travel industry, and pay attention to material consequences and questions of accountability. These interesting empirical contributions underscore the need for new conceptualizations of grasping how matter matters. The ongoing exercise of mapping the conceptual options and testing them out empirically throughout the chapters is the strength of the book. In this regard particularly the empirical chapters make a strong and useful contribution not only for organization studies and work studies, but also as a social science reader in general.

Although one of the arguments for publishing the edited volume is that materiality ought to get back in, materiality has not been completely absent from organizational studies. Materiality has been reflected in some scholars' work as they have been conducting work across disciplinary fields of organization studies, work studies, and STS. Wanda J. Orlikowsky and Lucy Suchman, two of the keynote speakers at the initial conference, are both very well known for their work contributing to organization studies, empirically and theoretically paying attention to relations of technology and humans, entanglement, and social materiality.

More novel to the field of process studies and organization is the more prominent place given to Karen Barad in the edited volume (Suchman does unfortunately not contribute). Although it is less clear why Barad is introduced as an inspirational scholar in this volume, there are good reasons as to why Barad is given this role.

Barad has a background in quantum physics, but today she holds the position of Professor of Feminist Studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz. In the 1990s she had developed the theory of agential realism. This is a theory that offers a way of understanding how materialization is at stake by drawing different disciplines and theories together from the quantum physicist Niels Bohr, queer theoretical feminist Judith Butler, poststructuralist Michel Foucault, feminist STS scholar Donna Haraway added with postcolonial and critical race theory. A combination of theoretical inspirations creates quite a challenging read, as very few readers are well read in both quantum physics and poststructuralist theories. Engaging with Barad is in this sense demanding.

Unfortunately neither the introduction of *How Matter Matters* nor the essay written by Barad is very helpful to make the reader aware of how agential theory could potential contribute to organizational studies, which is a shame. Due to this reason it is advised to at least read one of her papers written to a social science audience (Barad 1998, 2003) that introduces some of the main concepts and explains the vocabulary of agential realism.

Making this point is not a critique of Barad's contribution to the volume: It is a fascinating essay reflecting on how time and space is mattering and materializing, which in itself is extremely relevant in process organization studies. However, as the contribution is drawing heavily on quantum physics, and uses her theoretical vocabulary without further

introduction, it is a difficult read that presumes too much. It would however be a shame to give up on reading Barad as an organizational scholar, as agential realism has a lot to offer being interested in materialization, change, and processes.

Barad's theory of agential realism is a nonrepresentational theory offering conceptualizations of how the world materializes. However, the main driver for her theoretical project is to develop a theory that addresses issues of social justice and ethics in the natural sciences, which she would argue is strongly related to processes of materialization.

Although agential realism is a theory engaged with materiality, Barad would also argue that we cannot grasp how the world is becoming, if we do not pay attention to intersections of social categories of gender, race, and ethnicity:

Matter is a mater of tran/materiality—a cutting together-apart differentiating-entanglements, agential relatings and differences across, among, and between genders, species, spaces, knowledges, sexualities, subjectivities, and temporalities. At stake are questions of being/becoming, knowing getting along together, and living well (2013: 17).

Her point is likewise to be aware of how inclusions or exclusions are produced as we are part of the world's becoming. Her theory of materialization is hence also a theory of ethics that reflects on both materiality and the subject.

Unfortunately, this rather central theme in Barad's theory is not very well reflected within *How Matter Matters*. It is striking that as the material is being canonized, the subject disappears. It would have strengthened the volume if a few more empirical chapters had been included with a focus on both materiality and subjects, not as separate entities but entangled.

Although ethics is emphasized in the introduction this is another aspect that is less reflected. Only in a few chapters in this book get involved with the issue such as the chapter by Orlikowski and Scott and the final chapter by Introna that deals with ethics beyond bifurcation.

Nevertheless, working on materialization in organizations, *How Matter Matters* is a must read, with a lot of very well-reflected contributions on conceptualizations and methodologies of analyzing materialization in organizations. A constructive suggestion is to continue the discussions regarding ethics in material practices, including a further reflection on intersections producing inequalities of gender, race, age, class, and materialities. These issues could potentially be interesting to address on future conferences of the International Symposium on Process Organization Studies.

## References

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