

Editorial Theatre – A Seat for Everyone

A Play in Three Acts

Editor-in-Chief; Associate Editors

Characters

Editor A; Editor B; Editor C; Editor D; Editor E; Editor F

A virtual meeting room recurring in two Acts. Three different sets.

The Acts unfold, successively, sometimes overlapping on the Editors' screens, in Editor A's and Editor B's workplace, in analogue and in on-screen interactions, and in Editor D's office.

Prelude

A Microsoft Teams meeting. Four of the editorial team are present, two women and two men. Two have sent apologies and one has recently left to join another journal. Editor A arrives late to the meeting and finds herself in one of the bottom squares of the screen, next to Editor B and in the middle of a conversation about composting. They have been meeting for over a year now in this format, sometimes experienced as a 'talking shop' and a space of random discussions with no immediate relevance in the real world; editorial action is carried out by some but not all members of the team. Towards the end of the meeting, and after a heated discussion about the topic of the editorial for the next issue, a decision is made to experiment with the editorial and to stage the conversations that took place and continue to take place as an emergent script, an aesthetic artefact.

The play opens in the last moments of the meeting.

Editor A (*in a self-conscious tone*): Shall we set ourselves a deadline?

Mumbling in the background.

Editor B: Maybe not, that is an editorial convention in itself, what if we see how it emerges in the moment between now and the next meeting? We can copy and paste our script from email to email.

Editor A: I see, so our dramatic convention is to co-write this piece via email and to copy the existing parts into the new message with each of us adding our own speaking part.

Editor C: I am not comfortable with the phrase in the stage directions: "and a space that has no relevance in the real world". Several reasons for my discomfort are that: we are indeed in the real world. Or we are entirely in a conceptual space as with everything else we do. Our conversations have relevance! We have been meeting for many months now, getting to know each other so we can offer readers a revitalised journal. Take for example Editor A's comment in the last meeting that when we co-author, we experience a death process. A wondrous, transformative and life-affirming comment.

ACT I: Worms

At one of the large window desks, looking out over the high rising roofs of the City, the London office of the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations. Bright sunlight is chased by a group of dark clouds; the sunlight moves across the room that is partly studio, partly library and accompanied by a circle of chairs and open plan office. You can hear the squeaking sound of a spray bottle. A plant caretaker waters the green living wall next to a long wooden table further down the room, where once printing machines tapped their rhythms against the walls.

Editor A: Stepping into an environment where people feel safe to take risks is not a common experience in groups or organisational settings, albeit something that artistic practice not only affords, it requires risk-taking to exist. Returning to the editorial board meetings that I attended over the past few months, alongside editors from across the world, I realised that one of the most notable patterns of our discussions on institutional politics, wars, working life, artworks and writing (... lots of W's) have been in what Larry Hirschhorn (1999) calls turbulent environments where, as Editor B had pointed out to me, the usual rules and individual adaptive routines no longer work.

Building on the turbulent field typology that was developed by Tavistock researchers Eric Trist and Fred Emery in the 1960s, turbulent environments are fields that are closely interconnected with organisations; fields with high complexity that are exposed to frequent changes (1965). Environmental turbulence is unpredictable, ever expanding, dynamic, fluctuating and chaotic as noted by Pradip N. Khandwalla (1977, p. 333). Take the moment of a candle's plume when its flow becomes chaotic and diffuse. Turbulence is caused by excessive kinetic energy in fluid flow.

Although our meetings on a telecommunication platform this year were situated in a completely different context of organisational change than Hirschhorn's, Trist and Emery's case studies, I found a pattern in our practice directly related to turbulence experienced in groups. Taking risks and choosing a new task becomes a matter of

survival for groups and organisations in turbulent environments. The question that took hold of me during our meetings was about the aesthetics of our own interactions; to what degree are we willing to reconfigure the group's composition and our various artistic practices that affect our ways of working in the face of turbulence?

Editor B: A, it sounds like you are talking straight out of an academic paper there, we don't talk like that in our meetings. What if you reframed the meaning of what you've just written into the experience of being in the meetings?

Editor A: Well, I suppose, hiding behind books, learned phrases and blustery words is less risky than speaking from experience. I am clearly hiding from my vulnerabilities. Perhaps this is why I came up with the topic of risk-taking for the editorial in the first place. What stood out to me in our meetings, although I came late to the party, was that the editorial board must identify a new task for the journal to survive environmental turbulence (... some T's).

Editor C: That is possible, for sure. Political and social turbulence are ever-present, but we may also prefer a safer, more settled environment where we can experiment. Weick (1996) understood the issues: "When people are aroused, they tend to emit dominant, overlearned responses that interfere with efforts to learn newer, less familiar, more complex responses" (p. 254). Our editorial board meetings swing between the two poles: seeking innovation through risk-taking while attending to the safety and security needs of us members as we navigate tricky questions.

You know, a common theme has been present in our 2025 meetings which helps explore the polarities at work: compost. Discussions of compost morph from the everyday into rich dialogue.

Editor B: C, you talk like you're still writing an academic paper, rather than a play. But you do capture those polarities that we swing between of navigating risk and safety and security, the precarious ground we tread whenever we say anything. The roles we play.

Editor A: In keeping with this I have included your suggestion in the play text, B (see below), and C I included your character 'name', Editor R, as agreed in our last meeting, so we can identify different voices. This is not to say that parts cannot be edited or moved around later on. You can add an edit of your speaking part by reproducing it directly below in a different colour (including the changes). These edits become sediments of your own writing, I guess, but there might be worms and other inhabitants moving through it too.

Editor C: I think we should use names rather than letters to mark our voices in the editorial.

Editor B: I am not sure about using names or initials, I don't think we should be so easily identifiable as people, roles in the editorial team. It's good for there to be ambiguity about who is who. I've created an Editor A, B, C etc and assigned ourselves to that. But ultimately when we publish the readers won't see the 'code'.

Editor C: OK, but let me explain my 'academic' bent. I mentioned early in the year, after returning from a holiday in Singapore, my fascination with worms. A visit to the Cloud

Forest in the Gardens by the Bay precinct got me thinking. Flora living in undisturbed protection from the sun, humidity, and pests belied the natural, and sometimes threatening world from which plant species came.

My reservations moved into gardening and then into our domestic composting habits. I asked B what she put into her household waste. She explained and then asked about what I put into mine. "Everything," I replied. "Left-over cooked meats?" she asked. "Yes, everything. What's the problem?" "Vermin," she replied. "Easy, I have bait traps, and I don't get infestations."

I noticed a change in tonality from mutual back-patting about our environmental consciousness, to challenge. My cavalier attitude towards mice and rats came under the spotlight. "We live and let live," A and B cry in unison. But I had wrongly thought that everyone poisoned vermin, and slugs and snails. Maybe I'm a hypocrite by privileging some life forms over others.

However, in my part of the world, we are encouraged to poison rats and mice because they are a danger to indigenous life forms that have evolved in the absence of natural predators. My country is gradually becoming pest-free so that the original inhabitants are protected and saved from extinction.

But indigeneity is problematic. For although I am a native of my country I was raised with a European consciousness. France and England may represent my values more than my Māori compatriots. However, I am as moved by pōwhiri (traditional welcome ceremony) and its attendant waiata (song) and whaikōrero (oratory) as I am performing in Verdi's Requiem.

And that's the beauty of compost. Everything goes in and when ready it feeds the soil and welcomes plants. It takes time; time to break down resistances; time to percolate; and time to develop into a rich source of life for a wonderfully diverse garden.

Editor F: Ooooooh 🌻🌻🙏

Editor B: Yes ooh, all these seductive metaphors about composting as fertile ground and also words that could be and often are applied to human systems with more shadowy implications.

Editor D: I think, composting is a practice of circularity, I guess, maybe a manifestation of how the world works and so how we as organizing humans and researchers work. A shapeshifting relational aesthetic, where we can see that time itself is organized not as linear, as we sometimes tend to think. So, since this will eventually transform into the next issue, I organized a cover image, pending everyone's agreement. Being new to the editorial board, recognizing that our cover images have been metaphorical chairs and stools ever since, I thought about the Monobloc. I think there is an intriguing connection in its democratic and participatory affordable affordances. And yes, we have got, and we look out for voices that may need to have a seat, as well as empty seats in the community, and we're quite summery late this year.

Editor A: 'To be summery late' is an idiom in German emphasising that something or somebody arrives after everyone else has already left for their summer holiday. I think the latency and inviting charm of the photograph fits well. What do you think?

Editor B: Errmmmm ... I remember there was a strong reaction to the Monobloc in our last meeting, that actually the chair itself could also be seen as a representation of privilege despite our various nostalgic associations. My associations to do with my community allotment in central London, where composting was one of the most

contested communal activities. Everyone had a different view, no-one could ever agree on how to collectively compost, what should go in it, where it should happen on the site, when it would be turned, if it would be turned. Also there, Monobloc chairs were reclaimed, as everything there was reclaimed from the thrown out, despite being disregarded they became a place of comfort and shared conviviality for a diverse community. There's also the thread that's woven through of the chair as a symbolic artefact of power and authority in organisation, central to Group Relations work at the Tavistock Institute and Strati's (1999) aesthetics of organisation. Personally, I could do with sitting on a chair far less, my body seizes up in a chair, it's not good for me to sit in them all day long.

Editor A: I just got up from my chair to watch a thunderstorm. On this note, and picking up your point about power and authority, B, there are, of course, a lot of places that don't have a seat for everyone. C, your visit to the Cloud forest comes to mind; I imagine you walking through woods without earthworms, located inside a building in Singapore. It struck me that soil that does not house diverse organisms easily becomes hostile, sterile and short-lived. It seizes to be part of our ecosystem. F, you challenged the Monobloc as a symbol of privilege and colonialism by questioning the institutional legacies that we are hanging on to as we write for the journal: what statues to keep, which ones to knock from their pedestals? Being at risk of sounding declaratory here: Organizational Aesthetics, both the journal and its community, lives at a strategic juncture of its life cycle.

All: We would like to change the aesthetics of OA: political and artful.

Editor D: Being distant from that discussion, due to unforeseeable life composting, I totally get the point about the Monobloc as a symbol of globally distributed problematic aesthetics, the extensive use of plastic resources and its ubiquitous quasi-colonial distribution, but for me it is not so much about the object itself loaded with a lot of sedimented layers or about the sitting posture, rather than the gesture and humane practice of being invited by someone onto a table to take part and to enjoy company, which is a deeply social act felt by everyone. Therefore, my proposal is the following for the editorial headline. *A Seat for Everyone*. I think, with its low cost and omnipresence in outdoor cafés, community events, and public spaces, it stands for something profound — a seat for everyone. No reservation needed. No hierarchy implied. Globally. Just a simple gesture: sit down, be part of it. Don't you think?

ACT II: Dream

A Microsoft Teams Meeting. A further editorial meeting takes place; the same four editors are present; further deadlines are set and requests to write into the evolving script. One of the team shares that they have had a dream about this editorial process. Sound change: a soft pulse with a gentle drone and a voice spill in from background noise in Editor A's office. The offices in three of the four rectangles on the screen are lit up by bright sunlight and deep shadows.

Editor F: I went to bed preoccupied with writing something for the OA editorial.

I dreamed that there were 6–7 of us scattered contemplatively around a table in a well-lit room – light filtering through an enormous window at one end. We overlooked a vast, roofless circular chamber which seemed to be a repurposed industrial building. Grime-

stained brickwork and wire mesh stretched all the way across the open expanse presumably to keep out the pigeons. Hanging down from the centre of the netting were bundles of produce, as if in the pantry of a Michelin starred restaurant: expensive meats, luscious herbs, glorious vegetables. One of our collective made their way to the area between the window and the end of the table, where a flipchart stood expectantly ... and launched into an extemporised story which they were meant to abruptly and in short order break off from telling so that another among us would have to resume but through our own improvisation. The colleague did not pause, and I felt a tide of emotions seize me as we all waited ... and waited. Until one other leapt to their feet, strode to the front and usurped the platform, at which point things began to flow as people spoke a sentence or less and ceded ground to whoever next stepped in. No sooner than this we were interrupted by an unknown voice – from the side; we were in fact in a larger room than I had first apperceived and there were three further groups who had filtered in from ... ?

At once our group's demeanours dropped as we struggled to make sense of what was going on. The dream ended and I woke imagining that the event I'd been experiencing was some kind of 'collaborative artwork as editorial' from the Organizational Aesthetics Journal board. Resonances from the 'real' interventions of the latter by email began to suffuse and colour the affect of the dream. And now also intonations from our Teams meeting subsequently. Scrabbling to make 'good enough' rather than 'sloppy looking' as C expressed feeling time pressures, fearing losing our voices during collaboration, 'dying' as A mentioned, or giving consideration to becoming a hosting platform for outliers; thinking about our heterogeneity for instance one of us, B, feels more fluent using the vocabulary of the visual as they are an artist.

Editor B: And others are more fluent in their other vocabularies. Despite the anonymity promised, a certain fixedness is emerging on our different identities.

Editor E: I am sorry I missed the meetings; personal matters have kept me away. I am joining when the script has already taken a form. I feel the risk of fragmentation in the editorial. There are so many threads to follow, each with its own reason and the risk to me is a collated series of monologues. Is this what we offer to the readers? Is this what we invite the writers to? It is clear we are inviting more than one constituency to be part of the new journal but is it enough to focus only on participation? Are we getting rid of a chair or of the Chair?

ACT III: Community

A small office with frosted glass in Berlin, Germany. Editor D, sat at a small table, types on his keyboard.

Editor D: Meanwhile, research and institutional life go on; we are working behind the curtains on a new platform that will enable us to create better work, shape a community of practice and build new ways of publishing and reviewing research related to Organizational Aesthetics. We have been discussing the future of this journal in editorial board meetings since the handover last year, and we will continue to discuss it after the summer.

We want to open *OAJ* for a better understanding that this is a community that not only holds space for scholarly research, but also for art practitioners working in the field. Infrastructural costs are also a problem we face these days, and we are eager to continue working in this small and pioneering field of research. So, we decided to team

up and shape the community anew with a new platform that will give us the structural tools, format possibilities and simply a chance to do better work and operate as the community that we are in. Frankly, to be accessible to a wide range of contributors and media.

We will transition in the upcoming months while the 2025 issue will still be running on the old platform and fingers crossed, we'll have a new setup in place at the beginning of next year. Our plan is to be ready when AoMO 2026 will take place and invite everyone to take a seat to be part of our new community of practice.

As we close the chapter on the traditional format of our scientific journal, we chose the iconic Monobloc chair for the final cover on this last issue, not by accident, but by conviction. Universally recognizable and radically accessible, the Monobloc is more than a plastic chair: it is a symbol of inclusion, simplicity, and public life.

With its low cost and omnipresence in outdoor cafés, community events, and public spaces, it stands for something profound: a seat for everyone. No reservation needed. No hierarchy implied. Global. Just a simple gesture: sit down, be part of it.

Much like the Monobloc, the new version of this journal will be open, modular, and participatory. We move away from the weighty, exclusive armchairs of academic structures and offer instead a shared platform - lightweight, stackable, and ready to be moved wherever new ideas emerge.

The Monobloc chair marks a humble yet powerful transition: from closed rooms to open dialogues, from individual authorship to collective intelligence, from fixed positions to flexible perspectives. And so, this final cover does not just mark an ending. It invites you to take a seat in what comes next.

While we love a good moment of foreshadowing, this is by no means a farewell. Our doors and pages remain wide open. We warmly invite you to contribute your research for 2025 and help shape what's next.

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