



# **Dis/continuity and dis/organizing effects: Exploring absent presences in educational change projects**

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## **abstract**

This article aims to contribute to the understanding of the temporal aspect of dis/organization by focusing on dis/continuity in the context of organizational change projects. Based on an ethnographic study of a local change project in a school reform context, the analysis explores how absent presences and affects emerge, intensify, and create unintended disorganizing effects. Building on a conceptual framework from Barad, which frames change as a reconfiguration of time-space entanglement, we point to the dynamic relation between continuity and discontinuity as key to understanding the complexity of organizational change projects in an educational context.

## **Introduction**

In the wake of the neoliberal reform agenda of the 1980s, public schools in many western countries, have faced reforms at an ever-quickening pace. One effect of this is the increased pace and number of organizational change projects going on in schools. Schools must be adaptable to shifting demands for outcomes, and must be able to take themselves to new modes of organising that are considered to be more goal efficient (OECD, 2013).

In this context, leading organizational change through different kinds of developmental initiatives becomes a key part of school management practices. This is also the case in the Danish context, where the empirical case of this article is situated. In light of a recent school reform, a large number of local change initiatives have been launched in Danish schools, many of which intend a break with ‘individual teacher practices’, often inspired by School Effectiveness Research, emphasising shared professional goals as means to increased learning outcomes for students (Robinson et al., 2009). However, national Danish reports show that the long-term effects of developmental initiatives do not occur as intended in the reform (VIVE, 2018a, 2020).

This article analyses a local change initiative, ‘Co-time’, which is supposed to create time and the possibility of improving collaboration among teachers. The analysis aims to understand how disorganizing effects emerge locally and intensify along with the attempt to organize for new collaborative teaching practices.

### **Studying dis/organization in the context of change projects**

This research interest relates to the emergent field in organization studies, which emphasizes organization/disorganization as inseparable, mutually dependent, and dynamically entangled (Cooper, 1986; Knox et al., 2015; Munro, 2001; O’Doherty et al., 2013; Plotnikof et al., 2019; Vásquez et al., 2016).

Recent contributions in this debate aim to understand – not only the way organization and disorganization are conceptually interdependent, or ‘parasital upon each other’ (Cooper, 1986) ) – but empirically *how* organization and disorganization are dynamically interwoven in situated contexts (Cooper, 1986; Knox et al., 2015; Munro, 2001; O’Doherty et al., 2013; Plotnikof et al., 2019; Vásquez et al., 2016). Most of these studies note that there has been ‘little translation of theoretical arguments into empirical analyses of mundane activities’ (Knox et al., 2015:1002).

In this paper, we follow this line of inquiry into the empirical questioning of dis/organization in the context of an organisational change project. More specifically, we focus on *how* absent presences, that are initially in the

shadows of the managerial implementation of Co-time, gain agency and create increasing disorganizing effects as the project progresses. Pursuing this interest, we draw on a relational processual perspective, inspired by Karen Barad.

Building on Derrida's notion of absent presences, Barad (2010: 253) emphasises that every unit is always haunted by its mutually constituted excluded other. That means, when a change initiative like Co-time singles out shared teaching responsibility as the practice to engage in, it is haunted by, and infused with that which is constitutively excluded (Barad, 2010: 178): in our case, individual teaching responsibility. Producing one reality means excluding alternative realities, which however haunt the change process. Hence, organizing new collaboration processes through change initiatives like Co-time also always implies disorganizing.

### **Studying dis/organising effects: absent presences, entanglement, and affects**

Derrida used 'absent presence' as a concept for attributing agency to absence (Derrida, 1994). Hence, what appears to be here and now is always conditioned by the other in the background; both are mutually constituted and part of the same process. Grounded in this thinking, Barad emphasises that agencies are never pre-existing, but emerge in the intra-action and become distinct only in relation to their mutual *entanglement* (Barad, 2007). This emphasis on entanglement means that we cannot determine one thing that leads to the other. But we can explore the *effect* of particular entanglements and how particular exclusions haunt the apparently present (Barad, 2007). We can, for example, explore the effect of the mutual becoming of Co-time with particular past and present change initiatives, and how they might haunt and trouble Co-time. This implies tracing hauntological entanglements and making them visible, since memories and experiences are not erased in each intra-action. In fact, they leave material traces preserved in the entanglements (Barad, 2017: 76).

In this article, we are interested in how unintended *disorganizing effects* emerge, and therefore focus particularly on those intra-actions, where

diversions, troubles, or blockages in the intended change processes occur. In order to grasp this, we follow discourses, affects, and troubled feelings (e.g., frustration) that emerge during the change process. We think of discourse and affects as mutually constitutive, as affects become materialized and mediated through discourses; additionally, discourses can contribute to specific emerging affects and feelings (Blackman, 2012).

To put it simply, how people become in change processes is a discursive matter as well as an affective matter. We understand affect as a concept for the intensity of feelings, sentiments, and atmospheres (Blackman, 2012; Staunæs, 2011). Blackman (2012, 2015) particularly draws our attention to affect as a threshold phenomenon that is produced and materialized in intra-actions. In the analysis, we especially focus on those intra-actions where troubled feelings (e.g. stress or frustration) and affects are intensified during change processes. Process scholars note that any change involves a *felt* difference (Hernes, 2014; Stenner, 2017); and any change involves a change in energy level. In our analysis, we are particularly interested in intra-actions, which make a felt difference and gain agency and effect.

### **Studying dis/organization in a temporal perspective: Dis/continuity**

Barad's reasoning draws the attention to entanglements across time and space, and dissolves the idea of change as a linear progress from old to new forms of organising. This moves the attention to dis/continuity as a temporal concept in relation to change. Traditionally, 'organization' has been associated with continuity and order has been seen as key to ensuring organizations' stability and endurance. In this view, 'organising' pertains to the efforts undertaken to rule out the disorder that threatens this continuity (Pors, Olaison and Otto, 2019). This perspective of organization, centring order, has been challenged by a variety of approaches in organization theory, which take in disorder as central in organizational life. However, while there may be a tendency to privilege *either* continuity *or* discontinuity – i.e. either focus on stability as the basic state of affairs (Cooper and Law, 1995), *or* on how everything flows (Vásquez et al., 2016) – the attention is here drawn to how continuity and discontinuity emerge from, and within, each other.

Thinking with Barad, gives us a basis for understanding organizations as being in a continuous and emergent process of becoming, while still placing emphasis on organizational inertia, past memories, and future expectations as important agents when trying to understand organizational change. It draws our attention to how past and future are reworked and enfolded through the iterative practices of space and time (Barad, 2010: 260-261). In a processual temporal perspective, continuity and discontinuity cannot be separated in a linear matter; rather, there is a continual interplay of continuity and discontinuity (Barad, 2007: 182). Thus, organizational processes constitute both continuity and change; continuity because they always contain past experiences, and change because the past and the future are continually reconfigured in the present, and thereby always imply a novel patterning of past as well as future events (Hernes, 2014: 31).

This assumption about time in a processual temporal perspective also has implications for understanding what is present or absent. Presence and absence must be understood as mutually intertwined: they are part of the same process. Following this track, the article offers an understanding of the difficulties in making a more radically intended change of practice, since any attempts at erasing the past always leave material traces and are preserved in the entanglements (Barad, 2017: 76). In the next section we take up the methodological challenge of making these traces visible.

## **Methodology and empirical material**

The empirical material in this paper is gathered as part of a PhD project (Bjergkilde, 2021) and stems from ethnographic fieldwork, conducted 2015-18 in a municipal school in Denmark. Ethnographic fieldwork allows exploring lived life in organizational change processes, and enables us to focus on complex intra-actions between people and change initiatives on a micro level. In this paper we focus on a specific change project 'Co-time', which was launched at the school. The material in this case includes observations of meetings and everyday life in the school, drawings made by the interviewees, as well as interviews with the Principal and five Coordinators (teachers with the special task of counselling and facilitating change processes supported by the Principal).

The studied school is a large Danish school located in a relatively big city. The Danish government launched a school reform in 2014, with which the school works intensively. Like in many other Danish schools, this results in a school where many change projects are going on. The project that we focus on in this paper, is directed towards the implementation of 'Co-time', which means that there is a shared two-hour timeslot scheduled for all teachers once a week. All teachers are supposed to use the same teaching material and teach within a team of two or more. This, for example, implicates that all math teachers and Danish teachers teach the same subject. In practice, this means that some Danish teachers prepare material for a series of lessons, which the other teachers (in Danish and maths) are supposed to use during their teaching. During other weeks, it would be the maths teachers preparing material for a lesson, which all the other teachers use.

'Co-time' is supposed to result in increased learning outcomes for the individual student, as it enables two teachers to teach in one class at the same time and thereby makes it possible to divide students into smaller groups depending on their level. The intention behind Co-time is to make the preparation of teaching material easier and less time-consuming. 'Co-time' thus aims at qualifying teachers' preparation processes by enabling all teaching material to be shared and developed in collaboration. Collaboration is assumed to enable a higher degree of differentiated teaching material, enable better teaching, and support systematic evaluation practices at the school. Thus, the aim of Co-time is in line with the school management's discourses and overall goal of changing individual teaching practices into new collaborative teaching practices, where the teachers are supposed to work in professional learning communities and take on shared responsibility for all classes and students.

In the research process, the discursive and material set-up of Co-time was first explored. Through observations and qualitative interviews, focus was placed on inquiring into the dominating discourses at play among leaders and Coordinators and the reasoning around Co-time as a way to disorganize previous teaching practices and organize new practices. Not many documents could be traced: Co-time was, to a large extent, a project that was developed during implementation.

During the process of field work, it became clear that effects of disorganization were emerging, however not the intended ones. The researcher (Bjergkilde, 2021) started noticing other more absent narratives. To grasp this, she needed – what Blackman refers to as – a methodological apparatus, which helps in giving form to not only dominating managerial discourses but also absent presences and troubled processes that are dispersed and distributed across space and time (Blackman, 2015: 27, 36). In the data collection, she took inspiration from Blackman’s methodological concept of ‘embodied hauntology’ (Blackman, 2015).

Working with embodied hauntology means giving attention to what appears as (apparently) absent and attending to the sense that there is ‘more’. In practice, this meant as a researcher holding on to a gut feeling that there is something not said or a feeling of being unsettled. For example, the following observation was made during field work:

When I entered the school, strong narratives were told by the leaders and teachers about a progressive school ahead of other schools. The more entranced I became in the field, the more blurred the picture became, and I got a strong embodied sense of something indefinable, a discomfort, which was not apparently visible. Some teachers appeared stressed and frustrated. When I approached specific tables I got an unexplainable feeling that it was reserved for certain ears. At a meeting one teacher said to me during the observations, ‘Well, I’ll guess that now we will be called into a conversation with the leaders regarding what we have said and that it was correct or not’.

Through holding on to observations like this one, the fieldwork focused on following trails, which might tell other stories about the change process than the apparently present one. As in the situation above, it implied sensitivity to bodily experienced contradictions or silences (Blackman 2015: 28). Thus, attention was paid to e.g. an increased affective intensity, which became visible to the researcher (Bjergkilde, 2021) through bodily expressions like a timbre in the voice, intensity in a gesture, facial expression, a flush of the face, or an atmosphere connected to a room, place, or relations etc. Or it could be a discursive outburst referring to particular events or objects. During the ethnographic fieldwork, attention was paid to disruptions, which could imply a break, a blockage, disruption, or a diversion from the usual change process. In this way, the researcher has sought to explore the thresholds and

hauntological entanglements that are key, when we try to understand the (dis)organizing effects of Co-time.

## Analytical approach

The empirical material has undergone several thematic readings leading up to the analyses. Co-time as a troubled case emerged from the empirical material. A diffractive methodology was used, where empirical and theoretical insights are read through one another in attending and responding to new angles and alternative comprehensions (Barad, 2007; Bjergkilde, 2021). The theoretical concepts helped focus the exploration of thresholds and the emerging diversions of the change process. Thus, the analysis explores absent presences which haunt the change process, follow troubled feelings and the emerging entanglements, and disorganizing effects. Barad (2010) draws our attention to intra-actions as the 'where' to begin the analysis, and from there we can trace the hauntological entanglements and how they are materialized in the past, present, and the future, what difference they make, and with what effect. And Blackman (2012: 22, 82) draws our attention to affects as something trans-subjective, which can mediate and materialize in intra-actions and produce potential changes. Thus, we think of affect as circulating and traveling between human and non-human agents in ways where people and change initiatives become entangled in relational dynamics (*ibid.*: 82). By focusing on those intra-actions, where blocks, clutterings, troubled affects, and enforcements occur, we follow incidents where there is a change of energy, which coalesces in events that can set off new directions and cluster in hauntological entanglements (Barad, 2007, 2017; MacLure, 2015).

Being interested in how disorganizing effects emerge and intensify over the time period where Co-time is introduced, we will here focus on: first, how Co-time is launched as a cultural and structural disorganizing obstruction; and second, how absent presences emerge and an intensification of affects are mobilized (un)intendedly in the intra-actions between people and change initiatives; and third, what entanglements are reconfigured and materialized in the past, present, and future and with what (dis)organizing effects?

The analysis falls into three parts, each organized around one of these three foci.

### **Co-time as a cultural and structural disorganizing obstruction**

First, we will focus on the intentions behind Co-time. In line with the school reform and new regulations, the school has for years focused on increasing collaboration among the teachers. The Coordinators have developed Co-time in collaboration with the Principal. The purpose with Co-time is structural change and newly increased cross-disciplinary collaboration. In fact, the project is talked of as an ‘obstruction’ of old practices. Working in this more experimental way is not unique to this school; rather it is encouraged in national reports (BK, 2015). Co-time inserts a disorganizing obstruction, which pushes teachers into new ways of working and prevents them from going back to usual practices:

What we actually do here, is obstructing the teachers’ usual practice in order to make them do something new. That was the idea; we set up an obstruction for the teachers. They are forced into something new. (Interview, Principal)

The ‘obstruction’ has the form of a new scheduled time slot (‘Co-time’), which marks an attempt to disorganize and engender a distinct break in time-space continuity of the school. The purpose is to produce a disorganizing effect, which is supposed to break with ‘what was’; in fact prevent or erase ‘what was’. In the reasoning behind Co-time, there is an expectation that one can disorganize individual teaching practices and engender a new collaborative work practice:

The intention with Co-time is to create a space in the timetables, which is a time belonging to the school and not the teachers. [...] It is no longer the individual teacher’s time, but it is the team’s teaching. Co-time emphasizes that it is the school’s time; it is an attempt to organize a common school [...] It offers new positions related to how we define the content: what is important and who defines what is good or not [...] You can make mutual arrangements and deals, but at the end of the day, the individual teacher goes to the classroom and closes the door. It is difficult for others/us to influence what happens in the individual classroom. So ‘Co-time’ is a structural way of making a common school. (Interview with Coordinator)

The disorganizing efforts are aimed at controlling time and space; hence *where* should the teachers be? and *when?* to do *what?* So, the intention behind Co-time is to make a difference for the teachers' work practice. It installs a break in the continuity of, as well as, organizing of individual teaching practices. In this perspective, Co-time becomes a temporal matter that is also spatial, since it involves a managerial attempt to get 'behind the closed door', where individual teaching practices usually take place; it is a way of pursuing the goal of 'a common school' through a spatial and temporal mastery. Thus, Co-time implicates a potential negotiation of practices, agendas, systems, knowledge sharing, positions, etc., which support collaborative teaching practices:

You can talk a lot about affecting each other's teaching. But in order to succeed eventually, you must mix people. And then you must specify what should happen there. I mean, all the time slots where no individual teachers are assigned. And then you need to set goals. And then you need to say: How do we solve this together? How do we agree on this? And that is exciting, because there is a void emerging, a power vacuum...or a mandate...who is to decide in those classrooms? Who decides what it is used for? (Interview, Coordinator)

This quote indicates not only a request for a new practice, but also the intention of creating a temporary experimental space, which opens up new possibilities and potentialities. It seeks to find possibilities and potentialities that are not yet known and reaches into the future of the school, reflected in the Coordinator's comment: 'it is exciting'. It also implies that the final structure of Co-time is not yet formed, and it opens up room for negotiating "established" decisions, positions, and practices. A simultaneous desire for unleashing potentiality and for controlling and structuring a predefined change is expressed. This makes a difference for the teachers in several ways. First of all, it opens up an unsettled threshold, where the teachers find themselves between practices and the 'need to set goals' and consider 'how do we solve this' etc. Furthermore, it has implications for their relations in terms of decision-making, what methods to use, and how to go about it, etc. An emphasis on discontinuity is installed through Co-time, and as the quote indicates, Co-time is not a ready-made project. It is an attempt to set a new organizational structure, which is nonetheless still relatively open. Co-time exemplifies that organizing for a new practice involves disorganizing efforts in relation to previous practices. It operates on the threshold of organizing

and disorganizing and between a desire for structuring and unleashing potentiality at the same time. We can argue that Co-time 'operates at the interstices of more than one form of practice, playing with the difference between them' (Greco and Stenner, 2017: 9).

However, as we will see in the next two sections, these structural and cultural disorganizing efforts, made by the Principal and Coordinators, also open up *unintended* disorganizing effects, which intensify throughout the time period of the project.

### **Emerging absent presences and mobilization of unintended affects**

The aim of Co-time is to increase cross-disciplinary collaboration, but the process appears troubled:

There is a lot of commotion going on about 'Co-time'. We Coordinators should coordinate and the teachers must do the planning. There are things difficult to achieve, extra things. We have to plan who should do what and when. It is for no use that people say 'no', because it is part of the planning. It is for no good that they just walk out. Some teachers just go down and play football instead. It is a free structure and that is difficult. It is important that we emphasize to everybody tomorrow that it is a common project. Some people are stressed out and will say no. (...) We are all frustrated. We are just different. There are complaints. It can be difficult to address. People get carried away by the atmosphere. There was a teacher, who verbally abused me yesterday. (Observation note of four Coordinators in a meeting)

We experienced that the teachers started giving each other time off and said: 'you know, there's no reason why you have to be present in my lesson, you can just leave'. (Interview, Principal)

Co-time is supposed to be in the foreground and enable collaborative practice and shared organizational values. Instead of an individual teaching practice, where each teacher takes care of his/her own class and students, the teachers are supposed to collaborate across several classes, students, and subjects. Arguably, a discontinuity is introduced through Co-time but along with that very attempt, organizational inertia is emerging. The old practice, which we can understand as some kind of reconfigured continuity, is haunting the change process. If we consult and agree with Barad, continuity will always be

a part of the discontinuity, the creation of which is attempted in the change project. But what is supposed to be in the background is gaining agency. We can perceive individual teaching practices as an absent presence, which emerges and materializes spatially, as the teachers leave the meeting and go somewhere else and play football. The quote indicates that erasing individual teaching practices is rather ambiguous and difficult. Troubled feelings like stress and frustration are mobilized and a blocking of energy emerges, where 'there are complaints' and 'they walk out'. These troubled feelings become a collective matter in the sense that 'people get carried away by the atmosphere', and 'a teacher verbally accused me'.

In the quote there is a discursive referral to things and people: 'there are things difficult to achieve, extra things', 'people are stressed and will say no'. We are told that other absent presences are lurking in the background. Here, Co-time becomes entangled with an intense atmosphere and troubled feelings which disturb the implementation process. Continuity and discontinuity are mutually constituting each other: in the discontinuity that the new schedule introduces in teachers' work day, there is also an inertia emerging and experiences of previous practices intensify, which take on a new importance for the teachers. The dynamic tensions played out in this mutual constitution are intensified, when they become entangled with troubled feelings like stress and frustration and 'extra things'. Arguably, Co-time is performative at the same time as the initiative itself is changed; it is intervening and changed in the same emerging movement (Nissen et al., 2019). While Co-time is supposed to increase collaboration, disorganizing effects are emerging in more than one way, as the relations between the Coordinators and teachers appear fractured in the sense that the teachers are not acknowledging the Coordinators' work, and the teachers give each other time off: 'you can just leave from my class'.

Previous experiences and initiatives from the past that were not initially connected to Co-time, are foregrounded as the project moves forward:

Coordinator A says: 'There is a lot of time reserved for shared preparation in the schedules. How do I even get the time to do my job as a math instructor? I thought that the school would prioritize it'. Coordinator B, who made the time schedules, turns red in his cheeks and says: 'There are a lot of complaints. It is never good enough. People very quickly turn negative'. Coordinator A replies:

‘Yes, I am a person who is venting my spite a lot. I have a high level of stress. I am very sensitive to structures that do not work, especially due to last year’. Coordinator C adds: ‘Enough is enough for some of us. We have been asked to relate to a lot of things the last three years. We do not know what we are teaching tomorrow’. The Principal reacts: ‘There will be just as many things going on the next couple of years. You have to direct your frustrations to us and not the Coordinators’. (Observation notes from a department meeting)

‘Structures that do not work’ and ‘last year’ refer to a previous change initiative called ‘Study time’, which also implied an increased focus on collaboration among the teachers. The initiative was never taken up by teachers and after a while it was given up. Thus, in the quote above, referrals are made to past projects (Study time), other present practices (‘job as a math instructor’), as well as future expectations (‘we do not know what we are teaching tomorrow’). Arguably, they emerge as absent presences in the interaction with Co-time. These hauntological entanglements leave embodied traces, which become visible through outbursts like ‘venting my spite’, ‘stress’, and ‘sensitive to structures’. Bodily expressions like ‘red cheeks’ indicate troubled feelings and experiences. Past projects and experiences leave discursive and affective traces across time and space. They are intensified in the entanglement where affects like stress and frustrations become a collective matter among the staff. Rather than the appearance of a collaborative shared ‘we’ that works *with* Co-time, disorganizing effects are emerging in the form of another ‘we’ which have had ‘enough’ of all the changes. The Principal makes an attempt at mending the polarized energy among the Coordinators and instead directs it towards the leaders as he emphasizes the premise that changes will remain in the future. However, an iterative inertia and continuity are materializing and become reconfigured into the future:

Everybody feels stressed out, when they start up a new semester. They need lots of time to plan and do lots of other things. So the benefit you get by using ‘Co-time’ is that there is already some material you can use; people do not like it. We have underestimated how difficult it is for people to teach with material and a set-up, they have not worked with themselves [...] It is difficult to decide something on another teacher’s behalf. People have different ways of working. Physically, people close the door behind them. It is a physical manifestation...of something structural. You close the door behind you and say: When I enter this room, I decide. Maybe the schedule says ‘Co-time’, but I do something different. People cannot get used to the fact that it is not their

time. It has something to do with ownership and feelings at stake; when you enter a classroom, you are held responsible for yourself. (Interview Coordinator)

Individual teaching practices like ‘you are held responsible’ and ‘ownership and feelings at stake’ are clustering and enforced through their mutual entanglement. Co-time is a structural change project, but this structure is recaptured by the teachers. The classroom is at the center of the dispute and becomes a symbol of a ‘physical manifestation’ and materialization of individual teaching practices. An entangled web of previous practices and experiences emerge and gain agency in the intra-action with Co-time. ‘Different ways of working’ and the difficulty ‘to teach with other people’s material’ are discursively and affectively related to feelings at stake and the sense of responsibility in the classroom. The aim at eliminating previous ‘individual’ teaching practices, which is a direct referral to the national school reform, is clearly troubled. We could stop the analyses here and argue that it is all about teachers who are reluctant to change. However, we would then miss the emerging complexity and absent presences, which tell different stories about the disorganizing emerging effects. Feelings of stress, frustrations, and referrals to previous projects have already left material traces in the change process, not to mention the narratives of the progressive school which the teachers and Coordinators contribute to.

The collaboration among the teachers is not what it used to be. When I started at the school, there was a great feeling of ‘we’. That was the atmosphere out here. There were common goals and teamwork. Then something happened with the collaboration. Many things happened with learning goals, visible learning, inclusion; our relations started to stagger. Some teachers did all the work; some teachers did not do a thing. But there was a lot of things which lagged behind. The pressure was too much. We lacked management. And not everybody understands what good collaboration and timework is. It was a frustrating time. There is also still the construction of new school buildings, and some people are stressed out. I feel you are a bit on your own now. (Interview Coordinator)

Strikingly, the Coordinator refers to a school, which used to have well established collaborative practices through ‘shared goals and teamwork’. How is it possible that all the progressive work on collaboration has resulted in a declined sense of community around teaching practices? From the quote, we do not get an unequivocal answer. Rather, several absent presences are emerging. Referrals to other change projects like ‘learning goals, visible

learning, and inclusion' and 'a lot of things lagging behind' are made, as well as referrals to teamwork which appears as a difficult affair with uneven workloads. Projects, work relations, experiences of lacking management, and construction of new school buildings become entangled across time and place with disorganizing effects. It adds up to troubled experiences and feelings of stress and frustration, which fuel the emerging blockage: for example, the problems of finding a coffee cup due to the mess caused by the construction of new school buildings (the school was rebuilding as the ethnographic work was conducted) added to intense frustration among the teachers at the time when Co-time was running. Thus material objects, like e.g. coffee cups, which had initially nothing to do with co-time, gained unintended agency and contributed to emerging disorganizing effects, when it intra-acted with other phenomena and intensified the feeling of frustration among the teachers. It is not possible to single out entities that caused Co-time's decline; rather, they emerge and re-inforce each other in the intra-action.

### **Reconfigurations and materializations across time and space**

Thus, in the process, emerging absent presences gain agency through their mutual entanglement. They are being reconfigured and materialized across time and space:

Co-time is an example. We are constantly busy so we never get to the bottom of it. [...] You get this constipation. There is a lot of things which are not straight forward, or many of the challenges we had last year, they pop up this year. They are pointing at past problems that we have already solved [...] There are a lot of agendas, which remain vague and not concrete, like e.g. 'professional learning communities' and 'collaboration'. You are aiming at something, but when you get to it, you figure out something else. What you were supposed to obtain becomes vague. It is like a *fata morgana*. (Interview Coordinator)

What 'should be' in the foreground becomes a blur. A 'felt' temporal disorientation is articulated. The continual intra-action of discontinuity and continuity, feelings of change or stability, are increased in pace to the extent that the orientation of time and space (when to do what and where) is dissolved. Without this orientation, the continual stream of change agendas gives rise to feelings of 'fata morgana and vagueness'. In other words, you do

not know what you are working towards when you experience constant discontinuity; neither do you know what you have left behind, since you are never able to get 'to the bottom of it'. Past problems haunt the present and future yet to come – without 'really' being solved. Nothing changes despite constant change. The feeling of 'constipation' indicates a blockage of energy with no way out, which gives rise to a kind of paralyzed inertia. Events become entangled across time and space in an experienced relatedness of constant discontinuity and lack of meaning. Feelings of confusion and vagueness intensify the blockage as 'you lose people' in the process:

Sometimes, it just goes too fast...You lose people and they get confused. I often talked to our previous Principal about this: if he said three years – then you knew...it's fine if it looks like that in five years...you should always add a little time. And that was why things could feel a bit hasty. (Interview Coordinator)

It was like our narrative about the school was here, while the teachers' was down here, and the gap just became permanent...bigger. In the end it was too big. And I think our narrative about the school can exist above reality. But the gap should not be bigger than you can see – recognize it. (Interview, Principal)

The quote indicates that when many change projects are introduced with intensified pace without any experience of continuity, they end up short-circuiting each other and thereby overshadowing the intended change process. Different orientations of time and temporalities are articulated. The wider the gap between teachers' and leaders' experience of temporality and pace, the bigger the risk of 'losing' the teachers in the process. Leaders appear to be farther ahead in the change process than the teachers. In fact, the Principal emphasizes the need for a shared sense-making process among teachers and leaders, which must rework some kind of relatedness across time and space. However, within the time span of the data collection, there was no consolidation of the cross-disciplinary collaboration taking place; rather it was on an emerging inertia and iterative fixation on past and other present events being reconfigured. The sense of purpose is dissolved in the increased pace of change initiatives and the time-space reconfiguration that follows from this is intensified. Arguably, absent presences are gaining light along with the emergence of disorganizing effects. The felt disorientation of time and space due to the many change processes gives rise to a gradual dissolving

of Co-time. The Principal elaborates on the learning from Co-time, which may inform future collaborative processes:

I think the most challenging is all the organizational challenges. You start something up and it runs well. Then you direct your attention to something else, because there is something more exciting, and then what you started disappears again. You have to nurse it, the common preparation and teaching practice and the work in a professional learning community. It was our focus and then we took it for granted. I do sense that it does not exist everywhere. We have to direct our attention to these collaborative processes again. Now we really need to get it firmly established and rooted. All these cultural changes like Co-time must be incorporated in some structures now. (Interview, Principal)

Here, the Principal is in line with the teachers and Coordinators pointing out that ‘too much change’ dissolves the collaborative intentions. The quote articulates the need for a more persistent focus on collaborative projects like Co-time. Hauntological entanglements and absent presences seem to gain agency, when the speed of change processes is too impatient and too many change initiatives overshadow each other. In this context, disorganizing effects emerge along with the intensification of hauntological entanglements and materialize across time and space.

### **Discussion and conclusion: Time matters**

In Co-time, leaders organize a change project in order to prevent individual teaching practices continuing into the future and enable – or even force – new collaborative practices to take place. As shown on the previous pages, unintended disorganizing effects emerge in this process. The emphasis of the analysis has been placed on exploring the performative and qualitative effects of the change process in a temporal perspective (Barad, 2007; Butler, 2010) – what happens with collaboration and relations in the launch of Co-time, and what happens with management and organization during this process: how does it reach into past, present, and future change projects? In other words, we have focused on how a change initiative like Co-time forms organizational life in the school while it is being formed at the same time (Staunæs et al., 2018).

Clearly, the attempt to move the teachers from individual practice to collaborative teaching practices by a disorganizing cultural and structural obstruction is a difficult task, since it is impossible to isolate the initiative or fixate 'the common' in time and space. During the implementation processes, Co-time becomes entangled with past and other present projects, construction of new school buildings, divergent ways of developing and preparing teaching materials, different ways of collaborating and teaching etc. In the intra-action, absent presences, which are initially in the shadows of the managerial implementation process, are emerging and gain light and agency unintendedly. In these intra-actions, diversions and blockages are materializing and the affective atmosphere is intensified. We have explored these material traces, which the ghostly entanglements have left, and hereby showed the emergence of disorganizing and unintended effects of the change process.

When the 'obstruction' in the form of the change project is performed, matters of doings and actions emerge in the intra-action (Barad, 2007: 28). In other words, when feelings and experiences related to absent presences are reconfigured, human matters become important to take into consideration. When the discontinuity is staged, it disturbs teachers and troubled feelings emerge, as they are put out of their comfort-zone, unable to go on with their usual practice (Stenner, 2017). In the analysis, we are reminded that transformational learning processes involve processes of feelings and not just reflexivity (Kirkeby, 2014), since the change process is an embodied process, which is not least explicated when teachers express feelings of stress and frustration. Even the Principal refers to his own embodied traces of experience when he recalls the feeling of teaching with other people's material and how it did not work. These processes leave material traces that are reconfigured across time and space and may trouble organizational change projects like Co-time.

Paradoxically, for years the studied school has worked intensively with collaboration, but the sense of team spirit and community has decreased. It is a well-known challenge for change projects that change processes are easier to envision and reflect upon than bringing them into practice. From the analysis on the previous pages, we can formulate this point more specifically: organizing an enduring change process requires taking into consideration the

time and need to dwell on the important meaning-making process, feelings, and past experiences that emerge as important in the process, since ghostly entanglements will always be part of the process and not erased by a 'clear vision' or 'explanation'.

Barad's theoretical framework here helps us understand *how* organization and disorganization entangle in the change project context: aiming at producing one reality means excluding alternative realities, in this case established (individual) teaching practices. Thus the excluded previous experiences and practices gain agency and create unintended disorganizing effects as the project progresses. While previous studies have addressed dis/organization as empirically and conceptually interwoven (Cooper, 1986; Knox et al., 2015; Munro, 2001; O'Doherty et al., 2013; Plotnikof et al., 2019; Vásquez et al., 2016), related to unexpected becomings (Knox et al., 2015) and multiple meanings (Vásquez et al., 2016), our study foregrounds hauntological entanglement as a particular manifestation of dis/organization that becomes especially relevant in the case of a change project.

Through Barad's concepts of intra-action and entanglement we come to understand how different phenomena *re-inforce* each other when they become entangled across time and space. e.g. the lack of coffee cups, which are apparently absent presences and have nothing to do with Co-time, gain increasing agency as the project progresses and disturbs the intended change process. The attention is drawn to the temporal aspect of these entanglements, as they emerge in the intra-action of material (cups), discursive (narratives), and affective (stress, frustration) phenomena and create unintended disorganizing effects across time and space.

Through the literature of continuity/discontinuity, we gain important insight that every change act carried out is an act of both continuity and change, and that past, present, and future events of change are continually reconfigured through social experiences and collective events (Hernes, 2021a, 2021b). The concepts of absent presences and hauntological entanglements add an understanding of change as happening in the thresholds in-between continuity and discontinuity, where organizational complexity and human ambivalences are most intense. This is where unintended dis-organizing

effects emerge. With the concept of affect we come to understand how disorganizing effects are intensified through embodied troubled feelings.

In the studied case, change is articulated and experienced as a permanent condition. However, there are also traces of inertia, blockage, and a longing for continuity. The many change processes add to an experience of a 'fata morgana', i.e. a blur or loss of direction and a feeling of meaninglessness, when the speed of change is increased. As researchers, we cannot fix the change process as 'what it was', but the analysis indicates that a high speed of change, an increased feeling of disorientation, a lack of meaning-making processes, and many change initiatives taking place at the same time appear to dissolve the purpose of the change processes, in this case Co-time.

While Co-time aims at fixing a common time and space, this becomes a matter of dispute: When should you work, with whom, and where? What should you use your time for and how? When will who decide and when is what important? What new positions and relations emerge where? Do time and space belong to the teacher or the school? Time and space become disjointed as a void is experienced with the launch of Co-time. The teachers are recapturing the individual time and space, and the managerial intentions are reconfigured in unintended ways, when intra-acting with past and other present initiatives. Different temporalities emerging at the same time blur the direction of the process. The intense pace and pressure appear to challenge the vision of the common school. Co-time suppresses individual teaching practices, but at the same token, they are brought to light. What is excluded, the individual teaching practice, is reconfigured and gains agency again.

The Coordinators' and Principal must navigate in-between discontinuity and continuity, as they have to ensure a measurable progression while simultaneously accumulating and consolidating potential common knowledge and collaboration (Pors and Andersen, 2015). Co-time is forming and being formed in the intra-action with people and non-human actors and reworked with past and future events and experiences.

More than ever, maybe, change processes are giving leaders a tough task. Feeling and experiencing continuity and direction across time and space appear more important than ever in a changing world. This seems to be

particularly true in a sector like the Danish school sector, which has gained substantial political attention over the last two decades and has become subject to a number of reform agendas. The question is, how do you then consolidate change? Evidently, there is not one single answer to this, but as a leader, you may have to develop a sensitive awareness of the absent presences which might require attention, and add important insights to the change process here and now. We learn from Co-time that hauntological entanglements, troubled feelings, and absent presences can gain agency and create unintended disorganizing effects when the speed of change processes is too impatient and too many change initiatives overshadow each other. The dynamic relationality between continuity and discontinuity requires continual attention and balancing as it resists fixation, management, and predictability.

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