A pre-individual perspective to organizational action

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Abstract

While organization studies and sociology have put considerable effort in attempting to explicate the way individual and organizational action are related, this paper proposes to borrow from the insights of French philosopher Gilbert Simondon, and to begin with action first by thinking of it as pre-individual, i.e. logically prior to any individual. This recognition turns the spotlight to the processes by which action, at once, contributes to the individuation of both people and organizations, thus constituting them. Affect plays a central role in the continuation of personal individuation processes into collective ones. The theory is illustrated through the analysis of segments of a documentary, *Nomad's Land* (Corriveau, 2007), which tells the story of the tumultuous relationship between the Canadian army and the spouses of military members. The analysis will show how thinking of action as pre-individual reveals co-individuation's political implications.

Keywords: organization; action; communication; pre-individual; affect; possession; Gilbert Simondon

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Introduction

A newspaper headline reads 'Canadian army heading for Africa,' but the photograph that accompanies it shows that it is men and women who are being deployed, leaving their families behind. The slip from individual to organizational action is common, and has preoccupied organization studies and sociology alike. Both disciplines have kept busy attempting to connect the two levels and understand the passage from individual to organizational action – and the other way around (Eisenhardt, 1989; Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). The prevalence of Durkheimian sociology has led to a framing of the problem following an ontology of being, i.e., thinking of organizations and their members as distinct entities whose relation needs to be understood (Bencherki and Snack, 2016). For Durkheim (1951: 309), indeed, 'Collective tendencies have an existence of their own […] they too affect the individual from without.'

Attempts to connect the collective and the individual have ranged from the principal-agent model (e.g. Grossman and Hart, 1983) to Giddens' structuration theory (Giddens, 1984; McPhee and Zaug, 2000; Scott et al., 1998), and to studies of institutional work (Phillips and Lawrence, 2012; Zundel et al., 2013). Individuals, it has been suggested, carry out actions on behalf of the organization, enact the structures that constrain them, or alter these structures. In all cases, the assumption remains that there are, on the one hand, organizations, and on the other, people. The theoretical problem here consists of understanding how communication can take place between these two autonomous levels.

Rather than inferring the sort of relation that would allow the passage of action between already-constituted people and organizations, I propose to turn the investigation on its head. Following the ideas of French philosopher Gilbert Simondon, I will suggest acknowledging that action is pre-individual, i.e. logically prior to any individual. This recognition turns the spotlight to the processes by which action, at once, contributes to the individuation of both people and organizations, thus constituting them. In this process, affect plays a central role in the continuation of personal individuation processes into collective ones. Through the illustrative case of a documentary about the wives of Canadian military members, I will show how thinking of action as pre-individual reveals the political implications of co-individuation.

Connecting the individual and the collective

The various perspectives seeking to reconcile individual and collective action have, in fact, remained vague on their definition of action. Similarly, while they each suggest some form of communication between the two levels, they provide no clear definition of communication. For instance, the principal-agent model suggests that organizations delegate actions to their stewards, but does not provide concrete accounts of how delegation takes place (Vickers, 1985). Structuration theory, for its part, has a richer discussion of action (Giddens, 1984: 3), but provides few empirical descriptions of the collective–individual relationship, and Giddens himself offers no clear definition of communication (McPhee and Iverson, 2009). As for the institutional work approach, it paradoxically alternates between the stable 'it-ness' of structure, and the agentic capabilities of people who, it turns out, can alter it (Zundel et al., 2013). Current approaches, in summary, presuppose the substantial existence of beings, and each one 'stands for itself, by itself, and has to be (causally) re-linked, which takes a major theoretical effort' (Weik, 2011: 658). Said otherwise, collectives and individuals are two banks that need to be bridged, and it seems that the bridge is harder to build than expected.

The difficulty comes in part from the presumption that only the organization's non-problematic members are worthy of study, thus ignoring those whose belonging is not so clear. For instance, consultants' membership in client organizations is ambiguous (Wright, 2009), and new forms of work blur conventional employment relations (Barley, 1996; Barley and Kunda, 2004), while people with fringe socioeconomic conditions 'dwell and work in the periphery' of organization studies (Imas and Weston, 2012: 206). Literature finds only specific kinds of workers to be relevant, although organizations become increasingly post-bureaucratic (Hodgson, 2004; Kellogg et al., 2006), and precarious work is normalized. The need to redefine the organization–person link is even more obvious when studying alternative organizations – for instance criminal organizations (Dobusch and Schoeneborn, 2015; Scott, 2013; Zundel et al., 2013).

Instead of deciding in advance on who or what matters – which people, what structures, etc. – and then attempt to clarify their relations, starting from the relation itself turns this into an empirical question. In doing so, a relational perspective renders obsolete the project of bridging

the so-called micro–macro gap (Emirbayer, 1997; Latour, 2005, 2008). A relational approach views action as a difference, and refrains from deciding in advance who or what makes a relevant difference in a given situation: whether someone or something is marginal or in a dominant position is the *outcome* of relations rather than being predetermined. What matters is the genetic process that constitutes beings by distinguishing between systems and their environment, and carves out individuals from the continuous stream of reality; any distinction or stabilization is therefore an empirical accomplishment (Cooper, 2005). Authors who have adopted such a process metaphysics have borrowed the insights of many different philosophers. For example, Tsoukas and Chia (2002) borrow from Bergson (1944) to suggest thinking in terms of *becoming* rather than *being*, and that organizations are ever-changing while Czarniawska and Hernes (2005) show how actor-network theory allows accounting for so-called macro-actors without the need to posit an unobservable level of reality. Others have espoused the views of Whitehead (1979) to discuss organizational learning as a process (Clegg et al., 2005) and the role of possession in organizing (Bencherki and Cooren, 2011). Bergson and Deleuze have been shown to provide alternatives to a linear view of information when studying organizational knowledge (Wood and Ferlie, 2003).

These works, however, still tend to distinguish between different types of entities ahead of any empirical investigation. For instance, they often assume that organizations are ever-changing, but humans are not. Bergson, for example, takes a point of departure in the idea of human interpretation. Furthermore, his concept of *élan vital,* some have argued*,* accounts for living beings in different terms than those that are used to describe material reality (Deleuze, 1966). Along the same lines, Weik (2011) convincingly shows that Whitehead's understanding of the ontogenetic process rests on Platonic *eternal objects* that shape reality. More recently, Cooper (2005) has advanced a relational ontology, but he nevertheless retains the notion of a human agent as distinct from its ever-changing environment. As Barthélémy (2005) explains, these perspectives display a continued belief in Aristotelician *hylemorphism*, whereby creativity consists in the meeting of form and matter. Yes, beings are processual, but they need a blueprint – be it ideal forms, human understanding, or people's agency. I would like to propose, instead, that when something appears to be created from the interaction between beings, organization scholars should empirically explore these interactions as a communicational process. Drawing on

insights from French philosopher Gilbert Simondon, I will show that when attention is paid to communication, it reveals how action circulates between people and organizations, and, in doing so, constitutes them. This view allows speaking of the individuation of human beings and that of the organization in the same terms, without needing to suppose that either is stable while the other is changing. To allow such a conceptual shift, it must be acknowledged that action logically precedes the beings that appear to be its authors.

Action as pre-individual

Explicitly opposing hylemorphism, Simondon (2005) proposed an ontogenetic theory to account in the same terms for the constitution of physical, biological, psychical and trans-individual beings. While Simondon's work has received some attention in academic literature, in particular in discussions of technology and society (e.g. Bardini, 2014), it has received only limited attention in organization studies (rare exceptions include Leonardi, 2010; as well as a special issue of Culture and Organization, see Letiche and Moriceau, 2017; Styhre, 2010). For example, the philosophy of Simondon has been shown to subsume the opposition between structure and agency in routines (Styhre, 2017). In his 'allagmatic' perspective (Simondon, 1989: 82) – *allagma* means 'change' in Greek – there is no need to postulate an ontologically prior blueprint, to reconcile levels, or a form with a substance, or understanding with reality, for in fact the phases of being coexist. I am not, as a human being, anterior to society; at any moment, I am contemporaneous to each of my cells and to the whole universe. The constitution of beings proceeds from kin to kin, in an open-ended process[1]: 'an individuated life is neither the unfolding of what it has been originally, nor a journey towards its ultimate term, which it would be preparing. […] The present of being is its *problematic as it is resolving*' (Simondon, 2005: 322).

Action, for Simondon, is not the deed of any agent – indeed, such thinking would grant 'an ontological privilege to the constituted individual' (2005: 23) – but rather a difference that tilts the stability of a being and provokes change. Whether a particular action makes a difference for a human being, a collective, or something else is an empirical question. Several individuation processes take place at once, and as an individual is constituted, so is its 'associated milieu'. For instance, the body is thought's associated milieu (Simondon, 2005: 132), but the body's

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[1] All translations from French works are my own unless noted otherwise.

individuation is contemporaneous to that of thought, and whether one of them is the focal point and others are considered the milieu is a matter of perspective. Action is therefore pre-individual to beings, but it is not chronologically prior to them. A being does not participate in the individuation of others only once it has completed its own; individuations continue into each other ceaselessly. It is as I learn more, as I get older, as I accrue lived experiences, that I am contributing to my department, to my field of research, or to my students' individuation.

Regarding human individuation, Simondon speaks of pre-individual action in terms of affect. Simondon does not use the concept of affect in the common psychological sense, as regularly discussed in organizational contexts (Fineman, 2008; Hjorth and Pelzer, 2007; Styhre et al., 2002). Rather, affect is autonomous (Massumi, 1995), operating contemporaneously but logically prior to any subject: it is 'affect-itself' (Clough et al., 2007). Following Spinoza (1981), affect must be thought as *ad-facere*, as an action on something, such as the body (Massumi, 1995, 2002). This definition turns the spotlight to the organs by which bodies may sense and capture affections, and engage in affective relations. Sørensen (2006: 139) summarizes Spinoza's thought: 'the body does not yet know what it can do, it does not know what it is capable of, it has not yet found the thresholds of its powers to affect and be affected' (see also Deleuze, 1988).

Affect is not limited to human bodies; it extends to organizational and social bodies, as illustrated by the *Ephemera* special issue on the 'symptoms of organization' (Raastrup Kristensen et al., 2008). 'Affectivo-emotivity,' for Simondon, is essential to the constitution of collectives. It is an 'emotional and provisional disindividuation of the subject' which 'prepares a step back towards the pre-individual before the new step forward, towards (psycho) social individuation' (Barthélémy, 2014: 67). In Simondon's (1989: 130) own words:

> the relation to the milieu […] is accomplished, in the case of individuation, through emotion, which indicates that the principles of existence of the individual being are questioned. […] This state implicates forces that put on trial the individual's existence as an individuated being.

For Simondon, affectivo-emotivity corresponds to an individual's (re)discovery of the pre-individual load it/he/she carries, in order to resolve it not within it/him/herself, but through

participation in a collective, for an individual 'does not exhaust the tensions that allowed its constitution,' and it from 'that load of reality that is still non-individuated that man (sic) seeks his kindred to constitute a group where he will achieve presence through a second individuation' (Simondon, 1989: 192). Social realities, including organizational settings, is 'not a term in a relation,' but rather a 'system of relations' established through 'relational activities' (Simondon, 1989: 179). These activities are communicational: 'The transindividual does not localize individuals: it makes them coincide; it makes them communicate through significations: it is those information relationships that are primordial' (Simondon, 1989: 192). The philosophy of Simondon can therefore be summarized through the following motto: the being in relation and 'relation in the being' (Simondon, 1989: 24).

Communication, for Simondon, takes a special meaning. The individuation of any being occurs as a structuring movement propagates from kin to kin, as a process he calls transduction (see also Styhre, 2010): 'there is transduction where an activity starts from the center of being […] and extends in diverse directions' (Simondon, 1989: 25). The transductive establishment of relations consists in circulating actions from one center to another, and in so doing structuring and individuating the collective being. Those actions are pre-individual, which means that transduction does not happen inside, say, an organization. Whether something gets organized or structured due to the transductive circulation of action is an empirical matter. An organizational or human body provides a context or a milieu to its actions to the extent that they contribute to it, but the actions also escape any given body – they are never quite *its* actions. Said otherwise, a being only possesses its components from a particular perspective: their contribution to its individuation process; possession is never complete or univocal.

This understanding of organizations does not preclude the importance of signification processes in constituting organizations (Cooren, 2000; Cornelissen et al., 2015; McPhee and Zaug, 2000). For Simondon (2005: 307), though, signification does not precede the collective individuation process: 'The existence of the collective is necessary for information to be significant.' Information here refers to the *in-formation* of a being, the process through which it is constituted. An action acquires signification through its participation in one or several individuation processes, thus allowing for multiple significations. Concurrent significations,

then, are not mere misunderstandings, but rather the outcomes of the simultaneous individuation processes.

Finally, individuation processes are never final. Organizations, people and things continue, perpetually, their individuation. While there is clearly a challenge in attempting to account for one being's individuation when everything else is moving, recourse to seemingly stable beings is but an analytical shortcut that already implies the outcome of the individuation process. Fully embracing a pre-individual approach, in summary, contributes to organizational studies in at least three ways:

1. Communication becomes crucial for the study of organizational constitution and action, but it must be understood as the propagation of action – what Simondon calls transduction;

2. Relatedly, signification becomes the study of the participation of action in a given process of individuation, while keeping in mind that a same action may take part in several individuation processes at a time, and therefore be captured in several configurations that provide it with different significations;

3. No privilege may be given to any particular being or type of being, including humans, since what is being investigated is precisely their individuation; it is only at the conclusion of the study that the analyst will be able to determine *for whom* or *for what* a particular action was carried out and a particular signification produced.

Methodological and analytical implications

Few Simondon-inspired empirical studies exist, and it is therefore difficult to refer to precedents to describe potential designs for such a study. It is possible, though, to outline a Simondonian research approach from his work. An allagmatic perspective emphasizing individuation processes requires a resolutely empirical approach that does not simply assume that any action occurring within an organization, or any action performed by a formal member, contributes to its individuation (Bencherki and Snack, 2016). Scholars must instead observe, concretely, how action moves around, thus at once structuring and individuating human beings, things, and organizations, and simultaneously making them all act. Hence, empirical research

must remain agnostic as to who or what counts, or what actions matter. For instance, postulating structural influences would amount to granting an ontological privilege to structures.

What makes an action relevant or significant is its contribution to an individuation process. Research must therefore describe those contributions or, conversely, the way individuation processes may be put at risk. I propose to do so by combining a form of second-hand ethnography with a narrative analysis. Cooren's (2004) ethnographic description of the way action may be passed from a person to a note, and the other way around, exemplifies the empirical work an allagmatic perspective demands. Ethnography is also the approach used in many empirical studies conducted in the process tradition (c.f., Jarzabkowski and Balogun, 2009; Langley, 1999). Simondon's insistence on the circulation of action also parallels narrative analysis' focus on the way action is distributed among actors (Greimas, 1987; c.f. Robichaud, 2003).

As an illustration, I suggest looking at excerpts from a documentary *Nomad's Land*, written and directed by Claire Corriveau (2007) and produced by the National Film Board of Canada. The documentary tells the stories of military wives who have little control over their life because of frequent moves, and whose relation with the army is ambiguous. The experience reported by the women she interviews echo not only current literature on gender-biased division of work (c.f. Alvesson and Billing, 2009) but even the very recognition of women as contributing at all to the organization, even in the most gender-stereotypical forms. The documentary thus provides an extreme example of the intricate relation between individuals and their organization.

For the purpose of this article and given the illustrative status of this data, the documentary serves as a form of second-hand ethnography. Cunliffe and Coupland (2012), for example, have drawn from a documentary about a rugby team to illustrate the embodied nature of sense making. Zundel, Holt and Cornelissen's (2013) study of institutional work rests on excerpts from the popular TV series *The Wire*. In each case, researchers are careful to only make claims their data affords. Corriveau's film being a documentary and somewhat reflexive about her own process allows confidence in this data source for the humble, illustrative purpose for which it is intended. Furthermore, Corriveau's account is consistent with research on the

hardships and stress of military families, and spouses in particular (c.f. Asbury and Martin, 2012).

Yet, the documentary has limitations. First, it provides imperfect access to male military members' voices or to those of army representatives. Also, critiques accused Corriveau of describing a reality that was true decades prior to the film's release – and it is now another decade later. Second, it fails to grasp the diversity of the Canadian army, by only interviewing women in heterosexual relationships. Third, another limitation is that the documentary switches between English and French regularly (a typical Canadian reality), and some of the data presented here uses the translation provided in the closed captioning. Finally, and most importantly, using a documentary limits the analysis to what is being said and shown, which in this case leads to the impression of a somewhat stiff opposition between the women and the army, both described by the director as already-constituted entities. I will show that even within available data, it is possible to shake this supposition, in particular by showing that the individuation of both the women and the army is at stake and far from being completed.

My analysis will focus on the women who testify in the documentary, as they are attempting to continue their personal individuation process through the collective individuation of the army. I may suppose that OSSOM, the organization they created to defend their rights, serves as an alternative outlet for their frustrated individuation. Had the documentary provided more data, I could study the way OSSOM's individuation is continued as it captures and channels the available affectivo-emotive loads of the women, as there are clues to the effect that many volunteer organizations may operate similarly (McAllum, 2014). The women's families also take charge of the brimful pre-individual load they carry. The documentary, however, in what may appear as a somewhat conservative move, appears to associate the women with their children, thus conflating the family's individuation with that of the women – not being able to school their children becomes the women's own problem. The husbands are extraordinarily absent from the documentary, an exception being Lucie Laliberté's retired spouse, whose intervention is limited to laconically praising his wife's determination. This may have to do with military regulations on their speech. I may speculate, of course, that the men's individuation is very much affected by the situation of their spouses: there is no reason to suppose that they are not also continuing their individuation processes as members of their family, as fathers of their

children, as participants to their communities and as contributors to many other collectives besides the army. For instance, in the analysis below, I will be making the assumption that officer Saint-Laurent speaks on behalf of the military organization – but of course I have no knowledge of his own family situation, his opinion about the women's situation, or whether he has suffered himself from the throes of deployment. In other words, the pre-individual actions that I study do not only concern the women and their relation to the army. They could contribute to many different individuation processes, and the limited conversation offered below is an artifact of the analysis of the documentary's own partial depiction of the women's reality.

Illustration: *Nomad's Land*

Three excerpts will be presented. The first is a commentary made by Lucie Laliberté, an advocate for the rights of military wives. She introduces a women's group she founded in 1984 to meet and discuss a certain number of issues among them. The group's efforts, though, were met with hostility by the base commander. The second and third excerpts relate to the creation of an army-run community center where women offer each other services on a voluntary basis.

To account for the circulation of action between individuation processes, I will focus on the narrative performance of alternative relations between action, the human author, and the organization. More specifically, I will focus on the relationship between two beings: the women and the army as an organization. Throughout the documentary, the women speak of their outrage at being denied a place in the military. This affectivo-emotivity corresponds to the disinviduation process that renders problematic again the pre-individual load of the women. This load must be resolved into a collective individuation (Barthélémy, 2014). Table 1 presents a few possible relations between pre-individual action and the individuation of either the women or the army. An action may contribute to either a human being's individuation, or to that of an organization. Depending on which contribution is recognized, the human member is allowed or not to continue his or her individuation process into the collective. Possible scenarios include, when both are recognized, either co-individuation (when the recognition is positive) or the channeling of individuation (when constraints are posed); they can also include usurpation on either side (cells 2 and 3). The final cell of Table 1, where both the human being and the organization do not incorporate the action, is more difficult to imagine empirically: it may correspond to acts of God, or to the denial of the action's very existence. While reductive, these four situations highlight

that deciding on an author is the outcome of individuation, not its starting point. Precisely, the documentary's argument is that the women's subaltern position resides in the negation of their own action's authorship. As revealed in the analysis below, depending on how action is allowed to participate into individuation processes, the women may be controlled and, to a lesser extent, exercise resistance.

		Action contributes to human individuation	
		Allowed	Prevented
Action contributes to organizational individuation	Allowed	(1) Co-individuation / Channeling individuation	(2) Usurpation of human action by the organization
	Prevented	(3) Usurpation of organizational action by the human / Avoidance of contamination	(4) Denial of the existence of the action, or act of God

Table 1: The contribution of action to human and organizational individuation processes

Excerpt #1 — Political activity

The first excerpt consists of a comment by Lucie Laliberté, an advocate, lawyer, and spouse of a military member. She explains the beginning of the Organization of Spouses of Military Members (OSOMM):

What we did is was… we decided to organize a meeting, and we outlined in the newsletter where and when the meeting was going to be. We were told that the base commander had to approve our newsletter before we could distribute it, and we had no intention of doing that. Hum, we thought we're civilians, we just happen to live on this base, and we've got some legitimate things we want to talk about, and we're just going to distribute the newsletter. [...] We wanted to talk about pensions, daycare, the dental plan, those kinds of things. The... The base administrative officer basically just went down our list and he said 'this one's political activity, this one's political activity.' Daycare was political activity, trying to get daycare. Dental plan, that was political activity. You know,

pensions, was political activity. And we learned very quickly, that when the military wanted not to give us things that we wanted, they called us civilians, and when they wanted to control us, they always reminded us that we were part of the military. […] But what they threatened to do was to arrest us under the trespass regulations. And, keeping in mind that this is where we lived, our schools were there, the churches are there, our houses are there.

A possible reading of this excerpt consists in recognizing that the women are individuals, but their individuality is an ongoing process that includes preserving their teeth, caring for their offspring, and planning for their old age. As they realize that their personal individuation may only continue through the army's, they experience affective-emotivity when they are prevented from doing so. Their existence as mothers, as bodies in need of healthcare, and as persons who will age, is at stake. That is why they view their requests for daycare, dental plans and pension, as legitimate.

To negotiate the integration of their pre-individual loads – their teeth, their health, their children – into the collective, they wished to publish a newsletter and organize a meeting among themselves. However, Lucie explains, the base commander needed to approve the newsletter. He described their demands as political activities, which are forbidden on the base. If they insisted on publishing the newsletter, he would accuse them of trespassing – into their very own homes.
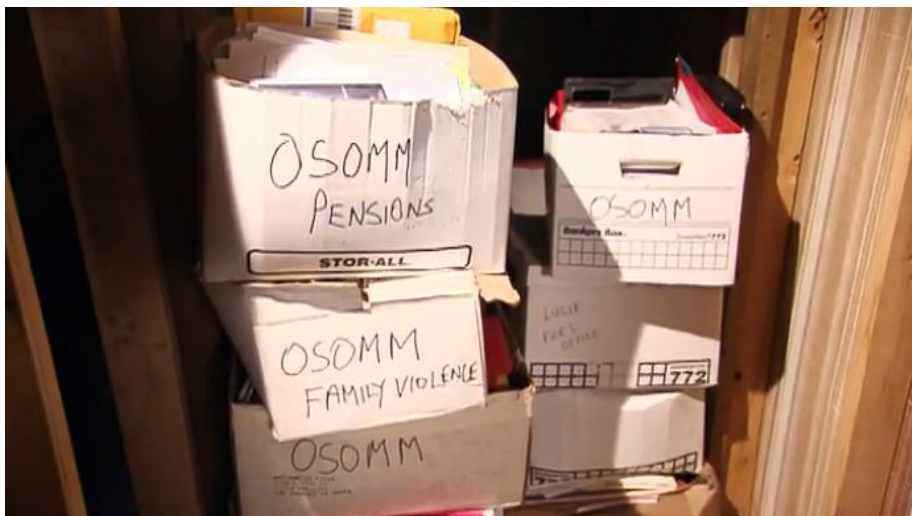

Figure 1: Lucie Laliberté founded OSOMM to defend the rights of military spouses (screen capture).

The base commander does acknowledge that the women's concerns are also the army's, but not in the way Lucie expected: these actions are the army's because they are political activity – such a label seems to be the only organ available to the army's body to capture these actions. The army channels the women's individuation process: if they wish to participate in the military collective, they will do so as trespassers. Lucie describes this situation quite clearly: the army acknowledges them as members whenever it wishes to control them. The women are therefore partial members – Lucie agrees that the women are civilians living on a military base – but the way various pre-individual loads are allowed to participate in collective individuation is the object of disagreement. The commander's refusal puts at stake not only the particular concerns they raised, but all aspects of their existence as individuals and participants to the army collective. If they are deemed to be trespassing, then the army is denying their ownership of their very homes, their belonging to their churches, their children's schools.

The army's perspective is not presented in the documentary. However, it is possible to assume that the commander regards extending privileges to spouses as a threat to the army's (masculine) individuation, as the army is based on 'social instincts, thus contributing an erotic factor to friendship and comradeship, to *esprit de corps* and to the love of mankind in general' (Butler, 1997: 109). In that sense, it is the commander's – and other men's – own male individuation process and its ability to continue into an all-male army collective individuation that is possibly at stake, at least in its current form. It is conceivable that, to the commander, acknowledging women's contribution in the army is not only nonsensical, but is also a threat to the organization's and to male personnel's ongoing individuations. However, the documentary does not present enough data to confirm these speculations.

The base commander's seemingly paradoxical move – recognizing actions as belonging to the army, since they are political activity, but then forbidding them – reveals that control implicates a form of participation. To be subjected to power is, after all, to be a subject. If the actions only belonged to the women – for instance if he could only describe them as private – then they would not have had anything to do with the army, and he could not forbid them, but the women could not have continued their individuation in the army collective in any way. This would have corresponded to the third cell of Table 1: the army attempting to avoid contamination by the women's actions. The commander's narrative therefore allows the actions to participate in

both the women's and the army's individuation processes, as illustrated in the first cell. If limited to the role of trespassers, the women still have a role, and their struggle is recognized as political.

Excerpt 2 — The list

Later in the documentary, Corriveau focuses on the then-new Valcartier Family Centre, on a military base located in Quebec City. The centre's liaison and information officer, Dany St-Laurent, presents 'Operation Oasis':

One of the major services we offer here in Valcartier is called 'Operation Oasis.' Here's an example of concrete help. This is what we call 'The Checklist.' It's a little exercise we ask families to do before the husband or wife leaves on a mission abroad. For example, the car. The Mrs. doesn't know mechanics, or even where the husband's garage is located. They identify all that together. What must be done to have the fewest crises possible while our spouse is away on a mission. The beauty of this is that it wasn't family-center employees who created this, it was community members. That's how we support families undergoing deployment.

Figure 2: Officer Saint-Laurent presents the checklist (screen capture).

Again, the analysis must presume that St-Laurent's voice is also the army's, which the documentary takes for granted. The way the officer skillfully presents the 'checklist,' and gives the example of a practical problem 'the Mrs.' may face following her spouse's departure:

figuring out how to get the family car repaired. While the example builds on a gender stereotype, it reveals that St-Laurent is aware of the affectivo-emotional potential of the spouse's absence.

There are at least two ways in which the checklist helps continue the women's individuation into that of the army collective. First, St-Laurent presents the checklist as a service offered by the military to take over the individuating role of the missing spouse, i.e. it is a service 'we offer'. The army, thanks to the checklist, acts as a surrogate husband, and permits the women to reroute their individuation process towards the collective. Second, St-Laurent presents the checklist (which consists in a brochure) as an exercise 'we ask families to do,' and as one of the ways 'we support families.' Through the use of personal pronouns, St-Laurent appropriates these actions (creating of the checklist, offering support) for the army, but also acknowledges the women's participation in the collective: the tool was created by the 'community.' The army is able to offer that service because the women (and possibly the men) created it; action is shared between the two, which corresponds again to the first cell of Table 1. However, this time, it is presented as a positive co-individuation process: that contribution is not used to control people; rather, it is described as being 'the beauty of this.'

Excerpt 3 — The daycare

In this third excerpt, the narrator explains how it is possible for the military to provide many services, including daycare:

> Many of the activities and services offered in the resource centres rely on volunteers. For this, the army depends on the abundant workforce of women, who in many cases have been forced into unemployment. The paradox is that most of the services women are being offered are being donated by the women themselves. [...] The invisible work of the military wives contributes directly to army logistics. It's a military expense we each cover personally. It goes unacknowledged, unrecorded, and unpaid.

Figure 3: The women have to volunteer their time in order to be offered free daycare (screen capture).

An example of such a service is the daycare, where, according to one of the interviewees: 'If I volunteered, my daughter could go to daycare for free for the duration.' In other words, parents could send their kids to daycare for free, *but only if they were also present to take care of the other children*, which in a sense cancels it being daycare. If I continue assuming that documentary reflects the events as they unfolded, the army appears to appropriate the women's actions: the daycare is offered within the army's facilities and is 'one of the services we offer,' according to St-Laurent. As with the checklist, St-Laurent discursively attributes the action (watching over the children) to the army, whose individuation is therefore continued through those actions. It becomes a more caring organization that offers additional services to its members. However, here the women are not recognized as those who contribute those actions to the army in the first place, before it – the army – offers them back to them. According to the narrator, the work of women in the army 'goes unacknowledged, unrecorded, and unpaid.' The daycare is therefore an example of Table 1's second cell and a case of usurpation: the army recognizes the action as its own and incorporates them into its own individuation process, but ignores the women as also being their authors and prevents them from incorporating these actions into their own individuation processes. Beyond the practical problem of affordable daycare on the base, the excerpt expresses the women's feeling of injustice, an affectivo-emotivity that leads the narrator, but also the women she interviews, to feel a form of disindividuation where their existence as mothers, but also as neighbors and friends taking care of the children of other families, finds no resonance in the organizational collective.

Discussion

The purpose of the analysis is to illustrate, by focusing on the women's experience as presented in Corriveau's documentary, the analytical framework that could be made using a perspective that considers action as pre-individual – and therefore as not belonging *a priori* to one actor or another, but rather as circulating and contributing to the individuation of various beings.

Nomad's Land emphasizes the way that women's actions, in fact, do not necessarily belong to them. Each action may or may not participate in either their own individuation or to the continuation of their individuation into the army collective. The distribution of action to various individuation processes is achieved, among others, through the speech acts of interviewees (and the documentary itself is a set of speech acts). Still, the women's authorship of their actions is not always denied. But when it is recognized, it may be to channel their individuation process and make them 'trespassers,' or to highlight their positive contribution to family center's activities. In the case of the daycare, however, women's actions were entirely usurped by the army, which constituted itself as a caring organization at their expense. Therefore, individuation processes are always at play. Even when an action is not acknowledged as contributing to the women's individuation, it is because other individuation processes – for instance, the army as a male organization – are privileged.

A humanist perspective may refuse to accept the separation between women (and people more generally) and their actions. After all, they invested time and toil in activities that were, then, denied to them. Yet, while the documentary sheds a grim look on that separation, my point is that it is central to the pre-individual character of action. In turn, it allows us to acknowledge the political and constitutive nature of individuation processes. It is precisely because military spouses *need* those actions to continue their individuation that the army's denial of their contribution affects them and leads to affectivo-emotivity. What is at stake is the possibility for these women to continue their personal individuation into a collective individuation. If their actions intrinsically belonged to them, then officer St-Laurent would have done little more than misrepresent reality, with little consequence on the women's individuation. Relatedly, the army's efforts to appropriate the women's actions would make little sense, if it did not need to integrate

those actions into its own ongoing individuation, whether as a male organization or as a caring one. When action's pre-individual character is acknowledged, then the interplay of concurrent individuation processes becomes salient and offers an analytical lens to understand the relationship between identity, organizational membership and power.

In particular, the excerpts show that communication does not only *represent* prior actions; communication is itself a set of actions – including speech acts – through which other actions transductively circulate from one entity to the next, and in doing so, constitutes relational configurations that allows them to exist and to act. Each voice, including the documentary itself, is an attempt to offer an alternative relational configuration. As participants seek to continue their respective individuations through communication that they exist *via* the relation.

This pre-individual and relational perspective allows us to understand the existence of multiple significations for a same action. What an action – say, requesting a dental plan – signifies corresponds to its contribution to the individuation of the entities at play. From the army's perspective, the women's actions are either political activities to be controlled, or services benevolently offered to members of the community. From the women's standpoint, they are legitimate demands whose denial threatens their existence as mothers and aging bodies.

The literature on 'post-bureaucratic' organizing (Hodgson, 2004; Kellogg et al., 2006) suggests that new forms of work are more fragmented and horizontal, and one could argue that they consist in blurring the processes by which people and organizations share their actions. Indeed, while in conventional workplaces, the employer may claim its employee's actions carried out during work hours (Pagnattaro, 2003), ownership of work is made ambiguous by flexible schedules, telework, and new contractual forms. Action now circulates between domains that are structured in vastly different ways, such as, for instance, the relationship between family life and work life. The pre-individual perspective suggests beginning the investigation of contemporary forms of work from action itself.

It is not up to the analyst to privilege one individuation process, one configuration of relations or a set of significations over others. Multiple individuations coexist, for actions contribute to several individuation processes at once. Presuming that one individuation is truer or

of greater priority would amount to downplaying others and those to whom they matter, in addition to assessing individuation processes from the perspective of one of the already-individuated beings.

Conclusion

The excerpts from Corriveau's *Nomad's Land* show the potential of recasting organizational action through a pre-individual lens. Reducing action to its alleged author would render the intricate situation of military spouses, but also more broadly the relationship between persons and collectives, senseless. Instead, a Simondonian view draws attention to action itself, whose contribution to a person's and/or an organization's individuation process is discovered through affectivo-emotivity and the risk of disindividuation. People do matter and make a difference, but an exclusive focus on them would fail to explain why some actions matter to their personal existence, and what makes those same actions organizational.

In Corriveau's documentary, each of the women's actions is singularly captured, allowing or not the women to be (partially) included in the army… in the same way as Corriveau has included some aspect of the women's lives in the documentary and left aside others, and in turn as I have resignified the documentary in this article by selectively incorporating some of its actions and left aside others. The women's actions are therefore recaptured and continue participating in the individuation of beings (a documentary, an article) through Corriveau's work and my own, without necessarily transiting through each individuated woman. The documentary's protagonists admit the difficulty of deciding on the ownership of action. By admitting that there is no ready-made answer, organizational researchers may observe the circulation, from kin-to-kin (there is no abstract communication), of action and its ability to contribute to the individuation of people and organizations alike.

The idea that relevant social actors could be other than humans or organizations (understood as groupings of humans) may appear counter-intuitive. Yet, a pre-individual perspective shows that what scholars commonly call individuals are the outcome of ontogenetic processes whose units are not persons, but actions. It is only at the price of this step back from personhood that, in fact, a person's quality may be understood. If people or organizations were already given, then why worry that their actions may be usurped from them? When it is

understood that individuals are delicate, instable coalitions of actions, then the importance of caring for our relations with them takes on its full meaning.

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