Becoming Processual:

Time to De-place Managerial Education[1]

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Abstract: Managerial education and managerial research are still deeply emplaced phenomena. They are expected to be emplaced somewhere, in bounded space-times and in the powerful subjectivities of students and colleagues, awaiting their expression and expansion. This constitutes a strange extensive continuum which remains the heart of academic work. In this provocative essay, we invite organization scholars to de-place managerial phenomena and to become processual. We use one-block auto-ethnographic vignettes to show that existentiality matters and can lead to different life paths, in particular processual ones. In a final discussion, we offer a manifesto for those interested in cultivating processuality in their work as teachers and academics.

Keywords: becoming processual; de-placing; business schools; managerial education; process philosophy; phenomenology.

1   Introduction: Beyond a "stance" or a "position", becoming processual as a work of the self on its becoming self

Process perspectives are now a significant tradition in management and organization studies (Chia, 1995, 2003; Helin et al, 2014; Hernes, 2014; Langley and Tsoukas, 2016; Simpson and Revsbæk, 2022)—influenced by for example Bergson (1896), Alexander (1920), Whitehead (1920, 1929), Deleuze (1957, 1969), amongst others. They defend a view of organizations and organizing as flows of ongoing action, events and becomings. According to this tradition the things we normally, and quite intuitively, take as entities such as self, organizations,

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infrastructures, human actors, technology systems, and so forth, are rather open evolving processes of becoming.

In this essay, we want to explore what it might mean to become as a process researcher and teacher in our field, and also what this might mean for management learning and education to overcome the spatial and territorial approach which still grounds the bulk of our practices. In the spirit of Brewis and Bell's (2020) vision of a provocative essay, we want to challenge and problematise the predominant managerial thinking, research, and education in terms of what it might mean to become processual. Our aim is to move our readers along the lines of processuality, affectively and emotionally. We argue that such a moving along processuality is both a decentred learning and an existential process. Becoming as process researcher and teacher is an ongoing perpetual journey not a destination. Most of all it is an ongoing and indivisible work of the self on its own becoming self, which is particularly needed in the western context and traditions that both authors of this paper are emersed in.

As a starting point, we would suggest that it does not make sense to 'be' a process researcher or to follow a processual 'stance,' or 'approach' as such. The process way of doing research implies a process of continuously (re)becoming processual. But also sometimes overcoming it, to anchor oneself in a nonchalant moment (Bachelard, 1932, 1936)—momentarily inhabiting the instant, poetically. These moments of being just there in a poetical symbiosis with the world, might also be a paradoxical necessity of an experience in flux, and of flux. Following Foucault's ethics of the self (see Revel, 2015), becoming processual also involves a continuous work of the self on its own becoming self and a fluid conversation between the multiple selves resulting through time from this effort. That is, with reflectivity, will, and courage, it is possible to become a continuously evolving self from within the ongoing becoming, rather than merely being swept along by the forceful flow of ongoing processual becoming.

Most of the time (in particular in the functional world of management), our selves are already emplaced. With this, we do not want simply to emphasize the overlap between the notions of 'role' and 'person'. In any collective activity, we have a visible 'I', but it is not a 'I' likely to act upon the world. It is not a 'I' melted with a 'we'. For instance, a meeting on Zoom, clearly emplaces our self somewhere, in a box under which our name appears. But this subjectivity is not agentive (yet). Should we be asked to introduce ourselves, we do not know where we are for the others. We do not know who stands next to us. In addition, some algorithms of video-conference systems will valuate people differently depending on the frequency of the speech during the meeting. The more one speaks, the more she will appear on the left upper side of the interface. Subjectivation, as the birth of agentive selves, clearly requires here an effort, a will, a resistance with the happening of technology. It is an event or a flow much more than an essential locus of power.

Numerous western and non-western philosophies can be meaningful to orient this ongoing process of becoming in the flow—as mentioned above, for example, the work of Whitehead, Alexander, Bergson, Deleuze, amongst others. However, in drawing on these intellectual resources we should be careful not to become dogmatic when it comes to process metaphysics—this is always a present danger (see Cunliffe, 2022 about so-called 'strong' process views). We would suggest that even orthodox (Husserlian) phenomenologies[2] could be seen as key 'frictional' experiences that can potentially work against such dogmatism.

But let us start with one of the major intuitions of process philosophy. According to Whitehead (1929: 15) "Philosophy is the self-correction by consciousness of its own initial excess of subjectivity." As a text, narrative, and tradition, process philosophy speaks to consciousness about its epiphenomenality and eventfulness. This speculative philosophy brings into focus and

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[2] For a general introduction, see de Vaujany, Aroles and Pérezts (2023).

indeed completes, the great inversion: consciousness is not *the* constituting experience of the world (as suggested by Descartes and others); it is merely an event among many other events; it is part of a much larger ongoing process of becoming. Thus, "Each actual occasion contributes to the circumstances of its origin additional formative elements deepening its own peculiar individuality. Consciousness is only the last and the greatest of such elements by which the selective character of the individual obscures the external totality from it originates and which it embodies." (Ibid: 15). What Whitehead is questioning, in a rather radical way is the primacy that we award consciousness in becoming and 'knowing' the world, pointing out that it is *merely one register* amongst many of our ongoing becoming and knowing—we also become subjectively, bodily, affectively, communally, technologically, and much more besides.

But what do most MOS scholars do in their research and teaching practices—often also those that claim they take a processual approach? They use the conceptual language of process but then orient themselves predominantly towards consciousness. Through their epistemic practices they invoke process theories to 'account' for the world as becoming but background—as a sort of forgetting—the becoming of their own epistemic practices and of themselves as researchers. They write up their research—mostly without any attempt to re-invent the taken for granted academic style of writing and manners of communicating and experiencing research. They theorize and diffuse their knowledge with books, articles, and teachings. And most of all, they do at some point claim, quite insistently, that they are 'taking' a processual approach. Yet, they produce epistemic objects that aim to *arrest* the ceaseless becoming of the world in research questions, research methods, conceptual frameworks, analytical rigor, and much more besides. Likewise, in their teaching practices, they talk to students as pre-constituted and emplaced subjects that would need to be sensitized, alerted, and trained in specific cognitive skills to 'capture' the world and bring it into analytical existence for theory making or practical intervention. They pre-emplace their space and that of their speakers. Colleagues and students'

'I', their powerful essential subjectivity, is just there, in the room, with the teacher, ready to act upon the world. The bulk of the teaching practices, their processes of spacing and emplacing pedagogy, assumes that a stock of knowledge is also out there, awaiting to be transmitted and expanded on site.

But how do we make sense of this process of speaking through consciousness to consciousness? How do we make sense of those who proclaim themselves to be process researchers—in the phenomena they study—but act in their own epistemic practices and practical life as if this is seemingly not the case? What if we take seriously the idea that process researchers are also necessarily processes of becoming? Since our language keeps spatializing (see Whitehead, 1929: 82, 114, 209) and since our academic rituals keep orienting themselves to consciousness, such an uprooting process seems to be a paradoxical necessity. Maybe it is high time to de-place and de-space managerial education to truly open managerial learnings, to make them possibly existential. In this vein, there would not be a planet out there (transformed into a resource) or an alterity at hand (necessarily aiming at being a managerial object or a space to be commodified), but only a unique movement we are all part of. So, how to become processual in this manner? How to crack and de-coincide with our language (in particular the managerial one) from the absolute emplacement and spatiality which imbued it (Jullien, 2019, 2021)? How could we criticize everyday language through alternative discursive, material, affective practices in order to open a way to our processuality and to the temporal nature of our being in the world? This is what this essay wants to explore.

Paradoxically, both the way to phenomenology and the (critical) departure from it could be a powerful answer. Returning to phenomenology and its limitations again and again could be a paradoxical ritual to (re)become processual continuously. To continually re-invent a past and a future that is likely to host the present becoming of our research. But the authors of this article have met very few process scholars that claim such an ongoing reconfiguration. As if process

thinking is a point of arrival rather than merely another transition point in and ongoing flow of thinking and practice. Even a process philosopher needs a past—that is, comes from somewhere, and this somewhere matters—and is always already heading onwards towards new transformative possibilities. Too often we get stuck in the myth of a unique self, located somewhere, as a powerful integrative instance, rather than opening up to an identity that is a fluid generative multiplicity, at work and in life. Such transformative trajectories are evident in the evolving and multiple identities of many process philosopher such as the evolution from *Principia Mathematica* to *Process and Reality* for Whitehead; the exploration of Hegel and idealism for Dewey (see Misak, 2008 for this two first examples); and the preliminary passage through orthodox phenomenology for Foucault (Depraz, 2013; Rogov, 2014).

In what follows we first offer two short auto-ethnographies of the authors. Both are one block narratives, written without chapters and divisions[3], expressing the flow of their becoming. This existential material will be an opportunity to explore our ongoing trajectory and creative work of becoming (a)processual. Through these autoethnographies critically co-built (see Cann and DeMeulenaere, 2012) we want to bring to the foreground some possibilities (among many others) of becoming processual—that is, various embodied, existential and even instrumental ways in which processuality matters. In experiencing these, we also want to invite our readers, colleagues, and students to connect with, and immerse themselves in, their own autoethnographical becoming. In the concluding discussion we elaborate a manifesto for managerial education and the way we educate and approach our lives as academics in Management and Organization Studies.

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[3] Two section inside each of them have been added afterwards to improve readability.

2 Two Auto-Ethnographies: Different Work and Trajectories of Becoming Processual

2.1 Author 1: From Questioning and Doubting to Flowing

Only God creates

When I was a child, my mother kept correcting me about the use of the verb 'creating': "Only God creates." I could not write that an artist, an entrepreneur, a biologist "creates" something. She merely reassembled the world. Further, it would not have been possible for me imagine for a single second that the world itself could be a continuous self-creation. Intuitively, self-organization might have made sense to me. But not that all organisation is "self-organization"—this idea that all that happens in the world is a creative process. What a reassuring and soothing idea! Everything is self-contained and an ultimate cause is behind the world and its functioning. As one steeped in a strong Catholic education, divinity had its own space-time. The permanent space-time of an original and seminal opening point. This point from which originates the universe we all live in. I loved this idea that the source originated from somewhere. That I originated from somewhere. It seemed to the 'I' steeped in this tradition that everything needed an original point of departure—a unique, clear-cut and ephemeral creative moment. I guess many of my gestures, habits and orders followed this education that settled the world as the certainties that hosted my childhood. Nonetheless, a part of me, a very playful one, always in search of experimenting, of exploring the 'what if I do that?', was deeply suspicious about this theology that never unveiled itself as such. But these emotions and affects radically opening experience were always pushed (painfully) far in an obscure past and rarely expressed.

Plunged during my adolescence and youth into the life of a small industrial family-owned company, I could also feel a sensory order of noise, smells, vibrations, images of machines that reassured me. As I helped my father, I could touch this ordered universe that was so meaningful

for me. I could gradually and practically learn the way things should be done. 'The right man at the right place'. From this experience, I was sure I had my place somewhere in the universe. I could pack and tape the boxes, watch the capsules go by in front of me or the machines printing and sealing pots of cosmetics or yogurts, participate in trade shows, understand how to manage the fruits of this directional world that could become mine one day. On the one hand, this world of input and output was the solid proof of the chain-based life of most of us. I was sure that not "only god creates," but also some passionate entrepreneurs create their world, and the world we live in. A better world, it felt to me. On the other hand, the very experimental, improvisational, and playful meaning of what I lived was more and more obvious to me. But the words, poetry or conversations that inhabited me could not be expressed yet. It had not even a vocabulary and more generally, a way of expression, to do so.

Much later, during my baccalaureate, I followed a philosophy path (baccalaureate A1 mainly in philosophy). I loved philosophy. But it has been a strange, missed rendez-vous, it seems. I only saw in it a culture and a way to think more *punctually and precisely*. And most of all, it seemed to me to be a tool to understand the world at hand, just there and to question it, in what Husserl called the 'natural attitude.' One exception was a day in 1991. My professor of philosophy of that time was both professor at my high school and professor at the Université Catholique de Lyon. He invited the class to a conference[4] he was part of. The event was about "Time of the world, time of mankind, and time of God". It included several talks, for example on "Time of physics: from Newton to Prigogine" (by Gilles Bertrand), on "Self-consciousness and temporality" (by Marie-Françoise Tinel), and on "Temporality and existence" (by Bruno Roche). Like most of my fellow students, I did not understand much of these complex discussions. But I felt like someone attending a tennis match. I remember supporting 'my'

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[4] Actually, it was the very first academic conference of my life.

professor. It was a great, jubilant, moment. I bought the small book, a 'green book' summarizing the discussion (Cahiers de l'ICL, 1991). A couple of days later, I also bought a small book about relativity theory. I read the later but put aside the former.

After a couple of years in the world of business schools (something I remember calling 'a spiritual desert' at that time), my years of PhD had been absolutely non-philosophical. Probably led by some frustration, in the years following my PhD, I read about Marxist philosophy and critical realism. I wanted to explore reflexivity, as a form of a 'true encounter' with the world. But something sounded wrong ("sonnait faux") and I quickly interrupted this (illusory?) philosophical parenthesis. At the same time, I had the opportunity to do some research about temporality and organizing seminars on this theme in 2006 and 2007 (references anonymized), but I did not make this link with philosophy. That was a huge mistake… I understood much later that the understanding of temporality requires philosophical resources. Indeed, it seemed to me that temporality is *the* philosophical issue.

It was only when I attended (by chance) a PROS conference in 2012 that the reconfiguration started to happen, with its seminal point being that earlier exposure in 1991. It has been an opportunity to discover or re-discover Cooper, Chia, Langley, Tsoukas or others and the broader process philosophy behind them. I started to come back to the philosophical readings I had put aside since my baccalaureate, the preparatory class, and the intense philosophical sessions they both included. But it was not enough. Something was still resisting. Something very far in the past, somewhere in the house of my childhood; and also, very far in the future in how I saw myself in academia. This resistance started to wain in my reading and exploration of Merleau-Ponty, followed later by that of Deleuze. I mean a real, extensive, painful, and slow process of reading. Reading all I could. Working on the texts and working the event of myself through the happening of the texts. The horizon in front of me was this green book that I found again on the shelves of my library. I re-visited it several times. In various discussions I experienced this

event in my past with more and more intensity in my present. With a mix feeling of nostalgy and enthusiasm, I discovered that my former professor of philosophy had focused his analysis on a strange philosopher whose name sounded so serious in 1991 (too serious and frightening at that time): Merleau-Ponty! So, in a way, I was both continuing and discontinuing my past. Good to feel that… I found in this idea both a comfort and a powerful first caution.

A little bit later, another experience extended the metamorphosis. From 2014, I took part in a new open science-oriented research network exploring new ways of working both for entrepreneurs and academics. We wanted to co-design different types of academic events. Truly open events, likely to re-create the flow frozen by most of our rituals. In particular, we implemented collective flâneries mixing entrepreneurs and academics in the exploration of a large urban territory. These events (lasting between one and five days) were free, open to all and aimed at writing collectively reports and articles by means of various open source and open science techniques. No pressure. Some walks resulted in something. Others did not. But the process was always productive of something. *Instead of involving a research setting, a bounded place to reach for data collection, our walking ethnographies implied that an inquiry and research process could start at any time, in the encounter of a problematic situation around which conversations and longer temporalities could flow.* And my selves amazingly benefited from this radical openness. I built and put into conversation my new selves, those of the past, present, and future, from these experiences. The depth of me happened in the thickness of this intense, fluid dialogue between my pasts, presents and future events, along the lines of their becoming. I started to abandon my monolithic, emplaced, self to them. Obviously, my old conceptual apparatus did not fit with this experimentation. I had to experiment further. Soon, intellectual allies joined the party: Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze but also Heidegger, Bergson, Arendt, Whitehead, Dewey (a very important ally for our experimentations), Alexander, James, Braidotti, Nietzsche, Cixous…and so forth.

In this process, phenomenologies and post-phenomenologies played and still play a paradoxical role. In a world that primarily addresses 'my' consciousness, they push the logic to its limit. They explode the endogenous proposition of intention, of being and consciousness, from the inside[5]—*flesh* is a first movement in this direction (Merleau-Ponty, 1964). Interestingly, in the event of my 'selves', this sudden obscurity of my consciousness allowed for a flow through it. The academic ritual itself opens the world. It opens sometimes my world. In his lectures at université de Vincennes about "Sign and time", Deleuze stressed the fascinating convergence between Heidegger and Bergson about openness[6]. Both of them illuminate the importance of totality, temporality, and openness. The world is not a closeness surrounded by openness and infinitude. Our world is an ongoing movement of opening. *Opening to the world (that's what the Dasein-ing cannot but be) and world as always and already opening—that's what life cannot but be.* In the many processes of writing my articles, experiencing my fieldwork and renewing my ways of teaching over the years, I felt this intuition—this sense that phenomenology becomes a very interesting point of return, or detour. Even the sensible exploration of the limitations of traditional, Husserlian phenomenology (e.g., the process of 'eidetic reduction') is extremely helpful. This strong past, this present, this thing I want to keep in my future makes me flow. It makes visible the event of my past to better allow it flow towards a new horizon. Phenomenologies and post-phenomenologies becomes a necessary liminalization. The kind of liminalization I think most of us need, deeply.

Suspending or anchoring the flow: the writing of a book

Right after the episodes of my life described in the previous section, I had another opportunity to reflect deeply upon my ontological journey within academia. In May 2017, after a study trip

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[5] More and more, I see phenomenology as a field largely fed by paradoxical attempts to overcome itself.
[6] See sequences 2 and 3: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=msYR9L6IuTQ

in New York, I decided to write a book. "To do something I would not intellectually be ashamed of." I started to write a narrative about the Americanism of management. Drawing on the presence in New York during World War II of Saint-Exupéry and James Burnham, I started exploring the relationship between industrial mobilization and the birth of management. In 2019 and 2020, a one-year research sabbatical at NYU made it possible to focus on the writing of my book and the exploitation of several archives. I was in the most intense set of flux I could imagined. Here, in New York. I was drawn by thousands of possibilities of new archives, encounters, intuitions, articles, books… Life is all about novelty, but some moments of life are much more intense than others. This moment of my sabbatical was extremely intense and reconfigurative of others in my past and my future.

Most of my days, I was at the Bobst library of NYU, reading and most of all, writing. I had never had the chance to really write something in my life. I had written articles, edited books, academic books… but in many ways, I never had the opportunity to be(coming) in the process of writing. Having the time for that. Having the serenity for that. Having the big emotion to push to something big with a narrative. But here it came. I was in the process of writing a long book, without knowing the final destination of this experience at all. My thinking was in my fingers. These fingers typing. Many times, I felt like a spectator of my own creative process, assembled and pushed by the keyboards, my hands, my fingers, thousands of ideas, and emotions. An astonishing multiplicity of selves kept happening in an abandon, that of just writing things as they came and following the lines of my inquiry. Thinking itself was in the process of writing. It was experienced, pushed, bumped, shaken by this ongoing flow and numerous conversations around it.

But this experience was not just a 'flow' or 'event'. Sometimes, it was also a verticality (Helin, 2020), a deep moment I was nested in, a suspended instant without the sense of a before and

the expectation of an after[7]. It was a cut, an ongoing spacing, inhabited poetically by a rêverie, and a slow movement inside this momentarily stable space. Something likely to become a non-event, silence and pure emptiness in my memory.

Surprisingly, these flows or moments did not 'sediment' nor do they really succeed each other. Retrospectively and prospectively, they were not linked linearly to the broader flow. Instead, I remembered and anticipated them as a strange nexus of events, with no centre and no direction. And my self in the present was not happening or expressing itself as a sensible flow. It was just there, as a being made proper to itself. It was a-ppropriated, made proper by the powerful happening of the book (see Heidegger, 1938[8]). I was in the process of becoming or I was becoming my true being in the same movement as all other beings of the book (e.g. the characters, New York, cybernetics, management…) reaching their true self.

In most poetical and/or autoethnographical part of this book, my self-inhabited vertically the world. I thus experienced the necessary 'aprocessuality' of the world which is inseparable from its processuality. Indeed, both non-events and events constitute experience and are "propositional" to it (Whitehead, 1938; Debaise, 2022). They matter. Both what happens and what does not happen open new possibilities in the future[9]. More than a paradox, it was and still is something I see as a deep mystery. Organizing is both continuous and discontinuous as a set of flows. It is made of fullness and emptiness, of holes and folds. But it is also a fragile

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[7] The first author wants to thank here Jenny Helin and Pierre Guillet de Monthoux for very important discussions he had with them about verticality, Bachelard and the pure intuition of instant.

[8] This movement is thus close to Heidegger's (1938) *Ereignis* as it is described by Rojcewicz (2012, xv): "As regards its sense, however, the book is the exact opposite of a private pondering. Right from the start, Heidegger denies that these are to be understood as his own personal contributions to philosophy. Instead, we have here a speaking "of" (understood primarily in the sense of the subjective genitive) the event (Ereignis). These ponderings attempt to let themselves be appropriated by the event. Thus, what is here struggling to come to words arises out of a view of thinking that is radically different from the traditional, metaphysical understanding of thought as the generation of concepts out of the thinker's spontaneity. That radical difference accounts for the struggle.".

[9] Non-events also build skills, bifurcations or unfulfilled pasts feeding the future.

multiplicity which is important to cultivate inside, against and beyond the process of becoming. It is both an active work from events and a passive abandon to some suspended moments.

Organizing is made of flows far beyond subjectivity and objectivity. Organizing makes even indiscernible such categories and categorizations (see Deleuze, 1985 about movement-images and time-images). But nonetheless, subjectivation can occur more or less punctually in chiasm with objectivation. Paradoxically, it can happen both by the continuous effort building an ethics of the self (Revel, 2015) or by 'letting happen' and 'letting go' (Chia, 2010, 2014). It needs to be conquered and cultivated, for the sake of resistance, emancipation, on the way to a better world and on the way to an abandon to it (Revel, 2015).

In these suspended moments of reverie in New York, these poetic wandering in the world, I felt like I could be a sensible agency that can contribute to a better world of flux. I was preparing my selves to it.

2.2 Author 2: Seeking the Ground, Autopoiesis and Becoming Flow

Seeking the Ground

I grew up in a very unintellectual household that was very much focused on the necessities of everyday life. School did not make much sense to me and was, in my eyes, not very useful to solve everyday problems that were of concern to me. Rather, my education was just being in the world, immersed in my own curiosity, and concerned with very practical mundane things. I was first and foremostly a practical person concerned with getting things to work. To trace and understand the mechanisms and logics that they embodied and that might reveal what interventions might lead to good outcomes…. fixing things, making things, solving problems, this was what concerned me. In that sense, one might say that I had quite a mechanical view of my lifeworld. More importantly, there was a strong sense in me that there existed indeed an

ultimate logic (rules, laws, mechanisms, and so forth) that explained all behaviours that, if revealed, would gift me with the agency to intervene effectively.

At university I wanted to study architecture but did not have the grades, so I did a business degree with industrial psychology. My emerging interest in computer programming made me include some computing and programming courses, which I took to like a fish to water. The idea that everything had a logic that determined its behaviour was reinforced when I bought my first computer—an 8-bit Rank Xerox 820 machine without a hard drive and a pre-windows operating system called CP/M. It did come with a BASIC compiler and a Word text processing package called WordStar. Programming in BASIC reinforced the idea of *rule governed behaviour* and the idea that one could understand behaviour by understanding the rules that determined such behaviours. More broadly, it reinforced the idea that there is an ultimate and graspable ground that was the foundation of all beings (also my own self). My intellectual search was to find this logic or ground—and existentially the ultimate ground of my own subjectivity.

In my wonderings in the library, during my undergraduate studies, I stumbled on the work of Herbert Simon & Allen Newell (1969), in particular their idea of a 'general problem solver.' This introduced me to systems theory and the idea of a general language (systems theory) that can describe all phenomena in ways that rendered them 'solvable,' possibly. I explored systems theory (Ackoff, 1978; Beer, 1995) and found the work of Ashby (1956), especially the idea of the law of requisite variety very insightful. However, one aspect of system theory (Ackhoff, 1978) that caught my attention more than others was the idea of *feedback loops* and with it the idea of *emergence*.[10] They were troubling because they did not just change the inputs they could

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[10] The idea that systemic properties or features could exist *in relationality* and not in the things themselves. Thus, adding things together were not additive and that some of the outcomes cannot be predicted by studying the constitutive elements, as such. This was a truly transformative idea, indeed.

also change the rules or logics of behaviour, which could lead to unpredictability, indeed to chaos. Quite unexpectedly my stable and potentially explainable world became unstable and with it the realisation that if the world is continually transforming—or evolving—through a multiplicity of feedback loops then the search for ultimate logics and grounds seems misguided, at least to some degree. The realisation that systemic behaviours were *relational and emergent* rather than rule governed started to unravel much of the certainty that grounded my own subjectivity and my view of the world as a child and as a young adult.

Autopoiesis and Becoming Flow

After my undergraduate studies I started working as a computer operator, programmer, and system designer. The unstable and chaotic world of feedback loops was continually transforming the world around me in ways that were difficult to discern. It became my daily and often painful reality. When the neat world of my computer algorithms and interfaces coincided with humans all sorts of feedback loops emerged—which created unexpected and unintended emergent outcomes. Nothing seemed stationary, everything was on the move! Agreements changed, systems changed, attitudes changed, needs changed…*all with different speeds*…there seemed to be no fixed or sufficiently stable points…and tracing the *origins* of these transformations just seemed impossible, just infinite regression. Change or rather transformation without discernible origins. I was desperate to find some logic for it all and during my MBA studies I discovered the work of Maturana & Varela (1992) on *autopoiesis*. I consumed the book *Tree of Knowledge* and found resonances everywhere. The idea of operational closure made me realise that every system/being (also my own self), in continually transforming, orients its ongoing operation primarily to maintaining some form of internal coherency (an identity, self, survival, life, etc.). More significantly, that all encounters with

other systems were *not inputs* (as is assumed by classical systems theory) but rather *perturbations*—always dealt with primarily in terms of the principle of internal coherency. It was stimulating and insightful, but soon the concerns and pressures of daily life overwhelmed me, and I was focused on deadlines and meeting user/client expectations—especially as I had started working as a management consultant and the pace of work was frenetic.

As a consultant the desire to get at least some answers to the questions of how to 'implement change'—which is of course non-sensical as everything were always and already transforming—in complex organisational settings made me think of doing a PhD. There was still an implicit belief in me that there must be some logic or theory that would be better than my improvised approach to coping with this ungraspable emergent complexity—a world, including my own subjectivity, always on the move. As I progressed in my PhD studies it was clear to me that much of the management literature I was reading consisted of idealised normative models of how management ought to behave, think, and that reflected very little of the actuality of the chaotic flux and contingency of my lifeworld. During my studies a friend, studying philosophy, recommended the work of Martin Heidegger (1962). His magnum opus *Being and Time* changed my worldview entirely. He introduced me to a phenomenological understanding of *be-ing*, and in particular, *temporality*. That being is always ongoing *be-ing* that emerges in a temporality that is not a linear line of past/present/future moments. Rather, that the present always already contains the past (our givenness) and is always already pregnant with the future, heading somewhere. Slowly, through my PhD, and my early work the question of temporality—or the temporal unfolding that is the eventfulness of life—became more and more significant. Initially it was more in the background but over time the question of temporality became stronger. But also, significantly, the call of phenomenology to 'return to the things themselves.' This is a call to return, not to the *things* as such, but rather to the flow

and flux of everyday normal experience—the ongoing experience of the actuality of the world, as it happens.

As the question of temporality became more prominent my orientation changed from trying to understand what entities are—in terms of their logic, character, key features, process, etc.—to how they transform over time through ongoing relationality—abstractly expressed, from beings to becomings. Not only the movement of history became important but also the questioning of boundaries as more or less fixed or stable. Through the work of Latour (1992) and others I started to question the human/non-human boundary; through Bergson (1911) I started to see how spatialisation pushes us to make boundaries (such as counting, categorising, analysing, etc.) in ways that temporalisation does not; through the reading of Bergson (1911, 1949) and Whitehead (1978) I realised that boundaries, in as much as they exist, take a lot of work to make and maintain. My 'I', my identity, the organisation, the computer, and so forth, are always in the process of transforming, on a trajectory, from birth to death—a trajectory that is an indivisible duration, as Bergson (1949) would say. That is to say, an indivisible trajectory that cannot be reduced to a sequence of points (or, instances) in a similar manner that the flow of an athlete's stride, the flight of a ball, or the flow of a meeting are indivisible and irreducible to a sequence of points that constitute them as such.

Taking temporality seriously requires a 'language' of temporality. In Tim Ingold's (2011, 2013, 2015, 2017) work I found such a language. He argues that our practical gaze turns the flows of life into 'things,' what he calls the *logic of inversion*—an inversion that "turns the pathways along which life is lived into boundaries within which it is enclosed" (Ingold 2011, p. 145). It is practically useful to think of the computer screen in front of me as an entity/thing, just here. However, it is in fact an indivisible *trajectory*—what Ingold (2015) calls a 'line'—that emerged from somewhere and will terminate somewhere, continually transforming. Not treating it as a trajectory comes at a significant cost—the exploitation of our natural world, labour, resources,

and much more besides. According to Ingold, the primary condition of being in the world "is not to be *in a place* but to be *along a path* [trajectory]," not to be contained but rather to be on the move (Ingold, 2011, p. 12, emphasis added). Along-ness is in fact our experience of everyday life—as we know from our own evolving subjectivity. Everyday life, in its unfolding, always *flows along multiple entangled lines* (Ingold, 2015). When I was working as a consultant, the project did not stop when we went home. Often the client or I changed our mind overnight, reformulated the problem, reimagined the proposed solution—requiring us to seek new convergence of ideas, plans and possible outcomes as we met again in the morning. And, as we embarked on the project many new lines of flow emerged that disrupted the flow of the project, sometimes requiring catching-up, slowing down, or the rethinking/restarting of the project. Great ideas at the time of our planning simply no longer made sense in the emerging 'now' of the project life—underling the importance of *timing*. We know this, timing is everything, in life as it is in comedy. The same idea, plan, action, at a different time can be great or a disaster in equal measure, often contingently. What is important is how our unfolding project corresponded (or not) with other lines of flow because knotting or weaving together of multiple lines of flow is the fundamental principle of coherence (Ingold, 2015). We know this from practical life. We give our projects life by weaving it into other forceful flows (such as strategic initiatives). And we know that a perfectly good project can lose its momentum and die because it had become entangled in another that has lost its momentum. Indeed, it is such a co-responsive interweaving of contingent flows of action (or trajectories) that is constitutive of what a self, a project, a melody, a conversation, a football match, or a life is becoming, as they flow.

Of course, we do experience ourselves and 'entities' in the world of daily practical experience, in practical consciousness. However, as we suggested in the introduction, consciousness is merely another line of flow, already interweaved or entangled in the meshwork of the

multiplicity of lines constitutive of the flow of life, as lived. Consciousness does not have ontological primacy, it is entangled in experience, and *biased towards living life rather than knowing life* (Bergson, 1911). Hence its preference towards entity making, which is useful for practical action. Indeed, in all disciplinary processes it is evident how much work is required in ongoing entity-making to allow for a practical world of action. Legal processes produce legal entities, academic processes produce epistemic objects, management processes produce managed entities, psychological processes produce the 'self,' sociological processes produce societies, etc., technical processes produce technical things—computers, bridges, buildings, etc. But 'entities' do not last, they transform as they are being made, deteriorate, need to be maintained, and ultimately become useless, repurposed, recycled, or transformed into some other, perhaps toxic, processes in the continually emerging world. These processes of formation and continual reformation is the very stuff of our daily existential life—something I saw, felt, and experienced as a manager, consultant, and indeed, academic. An embodied and situated existential life that I was always *in*—never *out* of. It seems that formation and (re)formation are always *within* the flow itself, as it flows—indeed, (re)making a world that is continually unmaking itself seemed to correspond with my daily life. That is why (re)formation—the (re)making of concrete practical 'entities'—is so difficult. It has to correspond (Ingold, 2017) and knot together with other flows, whilst it flows, contingently. Something *we experience and is deeply felt* (with pain and joy) but is also felt by all living beings—actually Whitehead would say felt by all actual occasions. Indeed, any assumed 'outside' is a made-up outside. In the diverse currents of living there are no 'outsides' of the ongoing flow of transformation, no separation, only duration and only sometimes some enduring moments. Understanding how to live in the multiple and contingent flows of life, without the certainty of a *ground*, as a manager and an academic is still a journey—in some ways barely started.

As processual researcher, what has become clearer to me is that the world trans(forms) as a productive—or one might also say performative—tension between processual and aprocessual becomings, between enacting and being enacted. Of course, it is not just flux; this is phenomenologically and practically clear. However, any assumed entity is on a trajectory from birth to death, continually transforming, and maintaining itself in that trajectory *requires a lot of timely weaving together work*—and such work is emergent, fragile, contingent, and mostly not at the behest of any assumed entity (human and nonhuman alike). In the entangled multiplicity of flows of life, we make and are made, we become subjects by being subjected, we make our projects by becoming projected, contingently.

3   The existential learning process of becoming processual and aprocessual

What are the implications of the existential process of becoming processual for management education and learning? A long time ago, Whitehead (1933: 97-97) noticed:

> *"But we are faced with a fluid, shifting situation in the immediate future. Rigid maxims, a rule-of-thumb routine, and caste-iron particular doctrines will spell ruin. The business of the future must be controlled by a somewhat different type of men to that of previous centuries. The type is already changing, and has already changed so far as the leaders are concerned. The Business Schools of Universities are concerned with spreading this newer type throughout the nations by aiming at the production of the requisite mentality" (Whitehead, Adventures of ideas, 1933, pp. 96-97).*

He invited explicitly management institutions to a transformation[11], what we see here as an onto-existential transformation. What is such a transformation? It derives directly from his view of process and becoming, and the emergence of consciousness (sometimes) from within. A number of years before the previous quote, he thus explained:

> *"Consciousness flickers; and even at its brightest, there is a small focal region of clear illumination, and a large penumbrian region of experience which tells of intense experience in dim apprehension. The simplicity of clear consciousness is no measure of the complexity of complete experience. Also this character of our experience suggests that consciousness is the crown of experience, only occasionally attained, not its necessary base"* (Process and Reality, page 267, emphasis added)

In the affective process *inside* eventful becomings, subjectivity *can find its away*. In the resonance of something felt, in numerous existential ruptures (love, death, illness, unemployment, encounter…), in the struggle of going through something, being swept along by something, subjectivity opens its space, in the opening and mattering of the event within our present. This process is what we see as the onto-existential process of becoming processual. It is the engaged, courageous, willing, active moving along towards a subjectivity that recognises its own fragility, ephemerality, discontinuity, in the continuous movement and flow of life.

Rather than this, what do we mostly teach our students, or even hope for ourselves? We teach them that they are already constituted *outside* this flow of life—as more or less fully formed subjects. The business school itself emplaces them in the space of an amphitheatre or a teaching room. Exceptions exist (e.g. labs, makerspaces, incubators…) but at the end they often emplace

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[11] His son Thomas North Whitehead joined the Harvard Business School in 1931. He has pioneered the fields of pioneering the development of the fields of human relations, organizational behavior, and human resource management.

the exception somewhere. Here, space is ambiguous, necessarily collaborative… but outside, in the other spaces of the business school, a place is waiting for you somewhere. And accessing the (physical or digital) space of the business school is a selective process, emplacing a knowledge which should not be accessed by those who failed or did not pay for the knowledge service. Hence, students and colleagues own becoming processual does not even come up as a relevant question for them. They take themselves as already powerful actors that can act *upon* the world of practice, as if it is some reality that can be managed through strategies, plans, and interventions. Or, simply grasped through their categories, theories, and concepts. Being always and already *inside* the flow, being continually transformed, enacting and being enacted is a very different existence, indeed a struggle for existence—becoming processual. This being always and already inside the becoming, the flow of life, implies the need to question many things— for example, language (which tends to spatialize experience), the immediacy of materiality (which seems to be an immobility more than an event), and the need most of us feel to "have", "possess", "acquire" or "gain" some territory. But there is not territory as such, just ongoing processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization (Deleuze, 1987), or ongoing processes of disorganising and (re)organising.

Such an onto-existential move requires a move from learning through reflection—on practice— to meaning-making in the ongoing flow of performance (Ramsey, 2005). It is much more than the activation of consciousness, the kind of reflexive process that is proposed in the bulk of the literature on existential learning (e.g., with Rennemo and Åsvoll, 2019; Walter, 2008 or McCoog, 2010). It is not just about rousing consciousness as a pre-existing instance, which would have somehow missed something. It is a much more embodied and affective process of de-placing the world. It is to become *attuned* to the eventfulness of life, in its ongoing happening. It is to *listen*, which requires, sometimes, not more action but less, not more speaking but the cultivation of silence. Management can be a lot of noise. It is necessary to

become affectively attuned to the silence below it, on the other side of it beyond language and speech, as it were (Chia, 2014; de Vaujany and Aroles, 2019). Silence and silencing help us to attune to the process of becoming of the world. It helps us to come closer to our affects (rather than our effects). Understood as a chiasm with speech and the broader noise of activities, activity and passivity, they become the punctuation, breath, instances of our world. Silence, silencing and waiting could be a way to share the intuition of the instant elaborated by Bachelard (1932). To feel the non-processuality of the world unveiled by the event (Heidegger, 1938). This paradoxical non-process behind all processes, these suspended moments. The eternal possibility of an immobility and nonchalance in all experience. The presence of this most intimate refuge inside all of us, a true being made proper by the event of the world, the being inside becoming.

To understand what this might mean, Foucault (in particular in his late work, see Foucault, 1982, 1984a and b) offers a very interesting perspective (Revel, 2015, 2017). For Foucault, becoming, historical becoming, is a chiasm of folding and unfolding both history already here (the "present") and the opening of history through the event ("actuality"). Instants—the fragile ongoing moments of our lives—always happen from within something larger and connective: our present horizon. Actuality opens it, unfolds it. Inside this process of (un)folding, subjectivity (becoming subject) and subjectivation (being subjected) are major stakes for Foucault. *From the inside of events, the process of becoming is what needs to be resisted, opened by courage, willingness, and projects*. Affects opens a way "I" can follow, expand, and deepen. *In this movement, a space is opened for subjectivation, and then, for resistance (Foucault, 1984a and b)*. This theoretical possibility is crucial for Foucault. It is the very process of our freedom, it opens up the possibility to transform the world. If such a possibility did not exist the subject would merely be swept along, at the mercy of the currents, puppets in the flow and movement of history. Importantly, this kind of existential process, described by Foucault,

is very different from that described by Sartre for instance, and very close to that of the late Merleau-Ponty (see Revel, 2015). The becoming "I", highlighted by Foucault, is far from the dominating, overarching consciousness of most existential philosophies. It is an ongoing onto-existential crisis wrapped in a broader material, embodied and affective crisis.

How can management institutions help their students to become attuned to their processuality, existentially? How can they disclose this possibility of a "I" made of multiple selves in the making of the world, and not before it? How can they attune themselves to the absolute ongoing relationality of the world—the world not as a 'resource,' but as a relational unfolding they are always becoming within. We would suggest that they need to see/feel their lives in terms of *trajectories*—unfolding life stories full of contingency, fragility, openness and indeterminacy. Seeing/feeling becoming requires that they see themselves as continually becoming in which their becoming selves are always at stake, never secure. Art, in particular creative writing, could be an important part of such a form of seeing differently, both individually and collectively (see Kostera, 2022). Instead, we tend to teach them conceptual writing, arguments, analysis, and so forth. Auto-ethnography and creative writing should not only be for PhD students and researchers. Learning existentially, our processuality through writing, would mean shaking the ground of our apparent self, verticalizing existence (Helin, 2020).

Not all students and colleagues will make it or more simply, will desire it. We also need to respect that. But for those who at least desire it, whose selves may resonate with processuality, we need to give them a true chance to experience a more processual management through our teaching and research practices. We need to help them see the *ethicopolitical* of relational becoming. Feeling processes, developing processual affects, makes us immediately part of the same world, always within it. Again, the world is not a resource invested by a powerful consciousness. It is always an ongoing process we are part of, we emerge (or not) from—as a fragile, discontinuous, subjective conscious event. Becoming attuned to our becoming makes

obvious our absolute connection with all others. Such attunement makes the normal assumed categories, categorizations, and dividing boundaries fade. In our becoming we have more in common than what divides us. Only ongoing life matters, beyond the usual logic of territory.

We need to work against the *myth of the powerful actor* that can make the world in his/her image—the leader, the manager, change agent, and so forth. The flow of agency is not located, has no origin, cannot be possessed (as Foucault taught us). We need to help them become humble in their claims, projects, and assertions about what they can do. More action is not needed, perhaps less. More letting-be rather than calling forth (Heidegger, 1971; Chia, 2010, 2014). Less calculative, cybernetic thinking, more meditative thinking. Less creators, more co-creators. What we need to cultivate is a new way of being in the world that is in tune with this ongoing unfolding of life itself.

More specifically, in their becoming subjects (as leaners, managers, employees, etc.) we need to help them question the orthodoxy that time (or rather temporality) is a resource like others that can be managed—as suggested by the notion of time management—as if their becoming was 'outside' of the flow of time rather than always and already in it, constituted by the forces of its flows, contingently. Likewise, we can open them up to the possibility that their becoming is not happening within one universal timeline or trajectory, as suggested by the clock. Clocks do not measure time; they are timing devices (like schedules) that can function to coordinate the multiplicity of becoming flows. Understanding, that there are many different timelines of becoming each with its own speed, rhythms, polyphony and durations—that need to correspond for meaningful action to come about—will help them to understand the importance of being attuned to these different flows of time. Appreciating that the world becomes as a real *temporal plurality*. We can indeed schedule a meeting, but that does not mean that everybody arrives within the same temporal flow. Some might be still dealing with a prior issue, wanting to slow down the flow of their timeline, others might be already thinking of corresponding with other

timelines in the future and might want to speed up the flow of their timelines. Additionally, we can help them to see that all becoming/actions has a temporal trajectory that is indivisible—the flow of becoming and action takes time to emerge, coincide, and subside. Forcing becoming into a timetable or schedule, forgetting the depth of experience, is like forcing a conversation into a fixed time period. It can of course be done, and we often do it for practical reasons of organising, but it is often at the loss of quality, affectivity, serendipity, and meaning—leading to the alienation and apathy that we often see in our students and employees. We can hope that they will see that the management of temporality is a thingification of time, and like all thingifications it always comes at a cost, which sometimes might be minor and at other times very significant indeed. What we are suggesting is that becoming processual calls for a very different comportment in the world. A very different way of becoming a learner and a manager that takes its own becoming seriously, as a process of discovery within the flow of life itself, which is fragile, contingent, and not determinable, as such.

Most of all, in our collective learning we need to rediscover *collective experimentation* rather than individualized projects. John Dewey's experimentalism epitomizes this shift. If diversity is the enrichment of a pre-existing social entity with more diverse categories, real plurality embodies a more radical rupture (Dewey, 1915; Boyte, 2003). From the process of ongoing problematization, a community of inquiry can emerge. Through the plurality of unique individual lives, a different common can become possible (Arendt, 1993)—not one where differences are erased (in pursuit of an ideology), but one in which differences are valued and respected as the very source of novel becomings. Generative tensions, differences, are constitutive of the commons gathered to tackle with the concerns linked to the problems made visible through inquiry. *Going in such a direction is also an existential shift. It requires a sense of derive (drift), a move towards flânerie, a process of self-surrender. Plurality is pure becoming (in contrast to diversity).* But this process takes time, has its own open temporality

(see de Vaujany and Heimstädt, 2022). It is both a resistance about contemporary institutions (e.g., the bulk of business schools) and an abandon to deceleration, verticality, poetic wandering and letting go. From that, multiplicity is opened further, liberated and differences can be more productive than ever on the way to ephemeral commons.

Why is the process of learning and experiencing processuality so important? Why do we need to orient our students and colleagues towards it? Because in a time of climate crisis, of the return of a possibility of a nuclear apocalypse, of the impossibility for divided communities to live together or even understand each other, of a crisis in managerial practices as such, and much more besides, we need to overcome the entity and resource-centred relationship we have with the world and our common planet. We need to problematise our assumed 'powerful' self-image and attune ourselves and our manners of living to the flow of becoming. What resists is institutions in search of clear stable problems to ground their business model. What resist is the teaching techniques, modes of publication, ways of recruiting students and colleagues… from their events, our efforts can and will build new selves, agonistically, as agentive possibilities for a better world.

In this way, perhaps, we will re-experience the fragility and mystery of the world. Perhaps we might help our students—those managers to be—to see the necessity of some non-management of the world. To overcome their dispositional view of alterity that still grounds most managerial activities and orientations. And, perhaps, to help them see that ultimately the flow of life will sweep away their 'achievements' so that new ideas, worlds, and ways of being human will emerge. Sweep away, not because they are immobile but precisely because they are always and already flowing as part of something bigger that will more or less incorporate their actions transformatively to keep on flowing, evolving, and becoming. As Nietzsche (1873, p. 42) says, even the clever animal (humans) will eventually be swept away by the flow of becoming: *"In some remote comer of the universe, poured out and glittering in innumerable solar systems,*

there once was a star on which clever animals invented knowledge. That was the haughtiest and most mendacious minute of 'world history'- yet only a minute. After nature had drawn a few breaths the star grew cold, and the clever animals had to die."

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