

# **What do we mean by performativity in organization and management studies?**

## **The uses and abuses of performativity**

### **Abstract**

John Austin introduced the formulation “performative utterance” in his 1962 book *How to do things with words*. This term and the related concept of performativity have subsequently been interpreted in numerous ways by social scientists and philosophers such as Lyotard, Butler, Callon, or Barad, leading to the co-existence of several foundational perspectives on performativity. In this paper we review and evaluate critically how organization and management theory (OMT) scholars have used these perspectives, and how the power of performativity has, or has not, stimulated new theory-building. In performing a historical and critical review of performativity in OMT, our analysis reveals the uses, abuses and under-uses of the concept by OMT scholars. It also reveals the lack of both organizational conceptualizations of performativity and analysis of how performativity is organized. Ultimately our aim is to provoke a ‘performative turn’ in OMT by unleashing the power of the performativity concept to generate new and stronger organizational theories.

**Key-words:** Austin, Organization theory, Performativity, Translation, Theory-building

# **What Do We Mean by Performativity in Organizational and Management Theory?**

## **The Uses and Abuses of Performativity**

### **Introduction**

Austin's initial insights about how words "do" things, and the related concept of performativity, have given birth to an interdisciplinary family of works which have displaced Austin's ideas from their original setting to expose them to new contexts and objects (e.g., scientific discourses and activities) (Denis, 2006: 2). Noticeably, the notion of performativity has resonated throughout philosophy (Derrida, 1979; Lyotard, 1984 [1979]; Searle, 1969), gender studies (Barad, 2003; Butler, 1997), and sociology (Callon, 1998; MacKenzie, 2006) leading to important and sometimes break-through contributions in those fields. These migrations of performativity across disciplines and concurrent re-appropriations have contributed to a profound redefinition of the notion of performativity, and led to distinct conceptualizations (Denis, 2006). They also show the heuristic value of the performativity concept, and its ability to generate long-standing ideas across disciplines.

The generative nature of the performativity concept is also visible in its numerous sequels in organization and management theory (OMT): scholars have used this concept to reconsider organizational routines (Feldman & Pentland, 2003), rational decision-making (Cabantous & Gond, 2011), the functioning of markets (Callon & Muniesa, 2005); the gendering of the workplace (Rittenhofer & Gatrell, 2012), the constitution of managerial identities (Harding, 2003; Learmonth, 2005); the concept of performance (Guérard, Langley & Seidl, 2013) and the sociomaterial conditions of valuation (Orlikowski & Scott, 2014).

But OMT scholars draw on different interpretations of the term, often with little regard to how their work relates to foundational conceptualizations of performativity, and little effort to take stock of what is performed through these multiple uses of performativity. As a result, understanding of how a distinctive organizational interpretation of performativity could

emerge is still missing. This paper starts addressing this gap by reviewing the foundational perspectives that OMT scholars have used in their work, and evaluates critically how they have mobilized existing conceptualizations of performativity or generated new performativity perspectives.

In performing a historical and critical review of performativity in OMT, we make a threefold contribution to the discipline. First, we highlight the uses, abuses and under-uses of performativity in OMT by studying the discrepancies between foundational perspectives and their actual uses by management scholars. This analysis points to both missed opportunities and promising new research directions. Second, we reveal a lack of organizational conceptualizations of performativity: discussions of how organizations are performed and how performativity is organized remain embryonic. Third, our taxonomy of OMT work on performativity, which complements prior attempts at mapping the performativity landscape (e.g., Diedrich et al., 2013; Guérard et al., 2013), sheds light on the fragmentation of this landscape and contributes to creating the conditions for dialogue across different perspectives. Ultimately, in ‘bringing into being’ a field of studies on performativity, this review aims to provoke a ‘performative turn’ in OMT and to push OMT scholars to harness the power of Austin’s original insights to develop new theories.

### **Performing a Historical and Critical Review of Performativity**

#### *Provoking a ‘performativity turn’ in OMT*

Figure 1 shows a sharp increase in the use of the terms ‘performativity’ and ‘performative’ in OMT since the late 1990s (see Appendix One for more details).

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Four influences on this upsurge can be identified. First, OMT scholars inspired by the “linguistic turn” in the social sciences (Rorty, 1967) share the view that discourse does not

describe but co-constitutes what appears to be external social reality (Boje, 1995; Czarniawka & Gagliardi, 2003). This non-representational view of discourse is central to the performativity concept (Austin, 1962). Second, the “vaguely ... similar pragmatic roots” of performativity studies (Muniesa, 2014: 15) resonate well with OMT’s growing interest in the actual *doing* or *acting* of organizational actors (Schatzki, 2002), sometimes referred to as the “practice turn” (Whittington, 2006). Similarly attuned to such ontological assumptions about the “becoming” of actors’ practices (Diedrich et al., 2013) is, third, the “process turn” in which OMT scholars regard organizational phenomena as fluid (Langley, Smallman, Tsoukas, & Van de Ven, 2013). Finally, OMT’s interest in the sociomateriality of organizational life (Orlikowski, 2007) – the “material turn” – is aligned with performativity studies that aim at understanding the material effects of discursive practices (Cooren, 2004) and the sociomaterial nature of knowledge constitution (Barad, 2003).

These four “turns” in OMT, together with the current “performativity turn” in the social sciences (Muniesa, 2014: 7), create “felicitous conditions” to provoke a performative turn in OMT and call for a historical and critical review of prior performativity studies in OMT.

### *Scope and semantic clarifications*

Our aims to identify the foundational perspectives that influence OMT scholars and critically evaluate how they have been used led us to delineate the scope of our review as follows.

First, we concentrated on papers published in 11 leading OMT journals and papers from other journals referenced in these papers.<sup>1</sup> Although this approach reduces the scope of possible approaches to performativity, it is consistent with our aim of providing a critical account of performativity in the OMT field.

Second, we focused on publications where the terms ‘performativity’ and ‘performative’ were clearly identifiable as a concept and were important for the paper’s thesis. We thus

excluded papers that only incidentally used these terms, and those that developed similar ideas but did not explicitly use the two terms. We specifically excluded papers that mobilized the concept of ‘performance’ in its Goffmanian sense (Corvellec, 2003) but did not use the terms ‘performativity’ or ‘performative’.<sup>2</sup> There are two main reasons for this choice. One is practical: using the term ‘performance’ in our search – even if restricted to its Goffmanian sense – expands the scope too greatly as this term is widely used in OMT (e.g., ‘performance studies’), and often without informed theoretical application. The other is theoretical: our primary purpose means we are not interested in papers that allude to ideas related to performativity *without* using the terms ‘performativity’ or ‘performative’ because our aim is to critically analyse what OMT papers do with these two words.

Finally, we restricted our search because our aim is not to present an exhaustive overview of all the papers mobilizing the concept of performativity in OMT but to critically evaluate its uses. Thus we focused on papers that actively engage with the concept and hence best illustrate each perspective on performativity. Appendix One details the criteria used to identify and select these papers.

### *Organizing the review*

Driven by our objectives, we organized our analysis as follows. We first analysed the selected papers with the aim of identifying the foundational perspectives on performativity mobilized by OMT scholars. We found that OMT scholars recurrently used five conceptualizations of performativity: *doing things with words* (Austin); *searching for efficiency* (Lyotard); *constituting the self* (Butler, Derrida); *bringing theory into being* (Callon, MacKenzie); and *sociomateriality mattering* (Barad).<sup>3</sup> These foundational works reflect, what Oswick, Fleming and Hanlon (2011: 322-323) call “radical travelling theories”, that is general theories that have “considerable conceptual latitude” within and beyond their disciplinary context, and

which are typically imported, in the OMT field, through a process of borrowing. We adopted an historical approach to present these foundational perspectives because each draws on its predecessors.

Then, we re-analysed the OMT papers so as to distinguish the multiple uses of the concept in the field (Boxenbaum & Rouleau, 2011; Oswick et al., 2011) and identified two dominant uses of the concept in OMT. On the one hand, some OMT work has followed the dominant pattern of OMT “borrowing” described by Oswick et al. (2011), which consists of “a one-way process in which attributes and characteristics are carried over from domain to another” (Oswick et al., 2011: 328). Yet, most OMT work related to performativity has borrowed one of the five aforementioned ready-made concepts of performativity (e.g., Butler’s notion of the performativity gender) and has narrowly applied it to the organizational context. In consuming and domesticating the performativity concept, OMT scholars have re-contextualized it, and have been able to generate new OMT knowledge. For instance, OMT work borrowing Butler’s concept of performativity has advanced OMT studies on gender by uncovering the role of materiality. However, this type of borrowing, seldom leads to a contribution to the source domain (Oswick et al., 2011).

On the other hand, some other OMT studies have engaged in more sophisticated forms of theory-building around the concept of performativity. One of these forms resembles what Oswick et al. (2011: 328) call a “correspondence process”. In this case, there is a two-way exchange between the source domain from which the (performativity) concept is imported and the OMT field, such that OMT scholars have been able to add to the source domain. According to Oswick et al. (2011: 330), this approach is well-illustrated by the works Cooren (2004). Another sophisticated form of theory building in relation to the concept of performativity in OMT is similar to the two-way “blending process” described by Oswick et al. (2011: 328). In this case, OMT scholars merge and combine concepts from a source

domain and the OMT domain to create new concepts. The “critical performativity” concept as well as the “performative routine” concept are two illustrations of this type of blending. For the sake of clarity, we grouped under the banner of “creative re-appropriation of performativity” the three instances of such uses of performativity we identified in OMT: *performativity as constitutive communication* which relates to Taylor and Cooren’s communicative approach; *performativity as enacting routines* which is associated with Feldman’s theory of routines; and *performativity as making critical theory influential* that concerns current debates in critical management studies (CMS) (Spicer, Alvesson, & Kärreman, 2009).

In what follows, we review the five foundational perspectives we identified, presented in Table 1, before discussing their uses in OMT as follows. We firstly present the work of OMT scholars who followed a one way process of borrowing (see: Table 2). Then, we review three OMT perspectives that reflect “creative re-appropriation” of the performativity concept and aim at developing original organizational perspectives on performativity (see: Table 3).

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### **Foundational perspectives: The building blocks of performativity studies**

#### *Performativity as doing things with words (Austin)*

John Austin’s *How to Do Things with Words* is an intelligent, witty, if disarmingly complex work. Even though, as the book proceeds, the caveats and complications tend to multiply, its basic claim seems simple enough. Not all speech acts are utterances of true or false sentences (i.e., a “constative” speech act). Rather, some sentences are, to use Austin’s own neologism, “performative.”

A performative utterance is one “in which to *say* something is to *do* something; or in which *by* saying something we are doing something” (Austin, 1962: 12; italics in original).

Austin's performatives, then, bring about what they say. Sentences like 'I pronounce you husband and wife' or 'I bet you a fiver it will be sunny tomorrow' are not primarily true/false statements. They do things: marry a couple or place a bet; or better, they have the *potential* to do so. Austin argued that performative utterances do things when two conditions are met. First, the context must be felicitous. In order to marry a couple for instance, 'I pronounce you husband and wife' needs to be said in a wedding ceremony, and by someone with the authority to say the words. Second, the speaker's intention must be "serious ... [not] parasitic upon its normal use" (1962: 22). For example, if any of the above statements were said in the course of performing a play, or as a joke, then such a speech act would be infelicitous; it would "fall under the doctrine of the etiologies of language" (1962: 22) (etiology is a biological term referring to enfeebling).

Austin also distinguished three types of speech acts, namely locutionary or constative (the ostensible meaning of the utterance), illocutionary (the intent of an utterance), and perlocutionary (the actual effect of an utterance, whether intended or not). For example, saying: "there's a bull in the field" is a locutionary act (the speaker is describing a fact about the scenery); it might also be intended as a warning (an illocutionary act); and its effect could be that listeners change their minds about entering the field (a perlocutionary act).

Austin developed his ideas within a group of mainly Oxford-based philosophers known as the "ordinary language" school of philosophy, who held that it was important to pay close attention to the details of the use of everyday, "ordinary" language. Even though, in the context of the discipline of philosophy, this school of thought is "now a historical movement, rather than an active force in contemporary philosophical discussion" (Forerguson, 2011 [1969]: 325), its ideas have influenced a number of scholars in related disciplines and have led to several breakthrough contributions. Austin's writing thus can be said to have been both a locutionary act and a perlocutionary act. As a *locutionary act*, Austin's view of



performativity challenged his contemporary philosophers, who focused exclusively on semantics and the meaning of linguistic expressions (e.g., logical philosophy of Carnap, works of Russell). By pointing to their neglect of the actual uses of such expressions in ordinary social contexts, Austin and the philosophers of the ordinary school of language have radically challenged the way philosophers study language, and have opened the whole field of linguistic pragmatics.

As a *perlocutionary act*, Austin's writing has reshaped the mindsets of generations of philosophers and his works still occupy a prominent position in the theory of language, a field in which it still sparked controversies about the interpretation of "literal meaning" (see: Crary, 2002 vs. Hansen, 2012). Austin's ideas have then "migrated" across social sciences where they provoked radical contributions and a series of new conceptualizations of performativity (Denis, 2006). Subsequently, these radically new ideas about performativity have migrated to the field of OMT. OMT scholars' interest in the performative is related, we suggested above, to the wider "linguistic turn" (Rorty, 1967) in OMT, resonating well with the idea that "that the method *most useful* to philosophy is the observation and study of the ordinary uses of language" (Parker Ryan, 2010: 123; italics in original).

#### *Performativity as searching for efficiency (Lyotard)*

The 'performance' of a company is a widely used metaphor referring to its efficiency or profitability. This seems similar to Austin's deployment of his neologism performative, leading Lyotard (1984 [1979]) to write in a footnote of *The Postmodern Condition*:

The term *performative* has taken on a precise meaning in language theory since Austin. Later in this book, the concept will reappear in association with the term *performativity* (in particular, of a system) in the new current sense of efficiency measured according to an input/output ratio. The two meanings are not far apart. Austin's performative realizes the optimal performance. (1984: 88n; italics in original)

In re-using Austin's concept, Lyotard moved away from Austin's preoccupation –

questions of language proper – to questions of organized systems. He sought to problematize part of what he identifies as the postmodern condition, that is, the taken for grantedness of ‘performance’, here defined as efficiency. For Lyotard, “a generalized spirit of performativity ... [is represented by an] equation between wealth, efficiency and the truth” (1984: 45). As Jones (2003: 512) argues: “While performativity merely asks of knowledge, ‘what is it worth?’, Lyotard turns the logic of performativity back onto itself and asks ‘What is your ‘what is it worth’ worth?’” (1984: 54). Lyotard’s point is to show how “the imperative ... [for knowledge to focus on] performance improvement” (1984: 45) is not given in the natural order of things but is a contestable ideological stance. Thus, Lyotard’s central message in problematizing performativity is not that we should entirely avoid contributing to the efficiency of systems. Rather, it is that we should be suspicious of the effects that the overriding importance attached to efficiency in the postmodern condition might have – especially for education. As Marshall (1999) argues, following Lyotard, education:

“[...] is no longer concerned with the pursuit of ideals such as personal autonomy or emancipation, but with the means, techniques or skills that contribute to the efficient operation of the state in the world market and contribute to maintaining the internal cohesion and legitimation of the state.” (p. 309)

#### *Performativity as constituting the self through citation (Derrida, Bulter)*

In 1979, Jacques Derrida engaged directly with Austin in his essay, “Signature, Event Context.”<sup>4</sup> In Derrida’s reading, Austin argued that the “force” (1962: 100) of a performative (i.e. its ability to do things) is provided primarily by the authentic intentions of the speaker, usually allied to the context in which speech is uttered. But Derrida made clear that for him the force of a performative is not intention, but citation; that is, iterability or citation underlies any ‘successful’ performative:

Could a performative utterance succeed if its formulation did not repeat a ‘coded’ or iterable utterance, or in other words, if the formula I pronounce in order to open a meeting, launch a ship or a marriage were not identifiable as conforming with an iterable

model, if it were not then identifiable in some sort of way as a 'citation'. (Derrida, 1979: 191-2; italics in original)

Thus, in Derrida's reading, Austin's neat distinction between felicitous and infelicitous performatives breaks down. One cannot exclude writing a play, making a joke, etc., from successful performatives because no such thing as a fully serious performative (i.e. an entirely non-citational) utterance is identifiable. Further, Derrida argued that citation is prior to intention; indeed, it is a condition of possibility for intention to operate. For example, one cannot intend to get married unless there is already a marriage ceremony in existence. Furthermore, the marriage ceremony can only be performative if (like a play) it cites earlier examples of marriage ceremonies. For Derrida, then, the marriage ceremony is not (and cannot be) a fully serious performative (in Austin's terms). This, in a nutshell, is the reason why, for Derrida, performative statements must be citational in order to enable intention and thus to do things in the world. However, paradoxically, while Derrida fully deconstructed Austin's work on performative utterances, this deconstruction was central to his later work.

As Miller observes:

The performative is an essential aspect of Derrida's ideas about the secret, literature, friendship, hospitality, perjury, decision, sovereignty, politics, responsibility, justice, death, temporality, religion and so on. ... The performative is seen as a response to a demand made on me by 'the wholly other' ... a response that, far from depending on pre-existing rules or laws, on a pre-existing ego, I, or self, on pre-existing circumstances or 'context' creates the self, the context, and new rules or laws in the act of its enunciation. (Miller, 2009: 152)

Judith Butler's thesis on performativity has many affinities with Derrida's. Indeed Derrida's analysis of Kafka's "Before the Law" first led her to ponder how gender might be "an expectation that ends up producing the very phenomenon that it anticipated" (Butler, 1999a: xiv). Influenced by a number of theorists, notably Foucault, Althusser, Freud and Lacan, her development of the theory that gender is performatively constituted takes Derrida into the material realm. She explores how even the flesh of the body is performatively constituted: "'the body' is itself a construction, as are the myriad 'bodies' that constitute the

domain of gendered subjects” (1990: 8). *Bodies that Matter* (1993), a book-length exploration of that statement, analyses how the materiality of bodies cannot be approached except through discourses, so discourse shapes how we conceive of and constitute bodies.<sup>5</sup>

Butler’s development of the performativity concept is achieved through exploring how sex and gender are constituted. “Within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance” she writes “gender proves to be performative – that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be” (1990: 24). This performative accomplishment is achieved through a “repeated stylization of the body”, i.e., through a myriad of acts undertaken within “a highly rigid regulatory frame” that “congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (1990: 33). Hence, rather than being born or socialised into gender, we become male or female through performatively constituting those identities. Performativity here refers to micro-movements of the body: each tiny, repeated act occurs within a set of meanings that facilitate constitution of gendered bodies. These meanings pre-exist us: born into them we learn how to move within them to “constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self” (1990: 140). Derrida’s iterability within language is akin to this iterability within the material, where “the reiterative power of discourse ... produce[s] the phenomena that it regulates and constrains” (1993: 3). So Derrida’s argument that citation is prior to intention is echoed in Butler’s argument that there is no gender prior to its citation: no male or female pre-exists the discursive, material practices which bring about their masculinity or femininity:

Subjected to gender, but subjectivated by gender, the ‘I’ neither precedes nor follows the process of this gendering but emerges only within and as the matrix of gender relations themselves. (Butler, 1993: 7)

Butler has recently argued that if gender as a “a metaphysical substance that precedes its expression” is “critically upended” by performativity, then so must be “the economy” which only “becomes singular and monolithic by virtue of the convergence of certain kinds of

processes and practices that produce the ‘effect’ of the knowable and unified economy” (Butler, 2010: 147). This offers the possibility of understanding organizations, management and work as ‘knowable effects’ produced by converging processes and practices that performatively constitute the ‘effect’ of organizations.

*Performativity as bringing theory into being (Callon, Latour, MacKenzie)*

Another foundational perspective is found in the work of Science, Technology and Society (STS) sociologists inspired by Actor-Network Theory, such as Callon (1998), Latour (1996), or MacKenzie (2007). These authors took seriously Austin’s idea that some statements are performative, and applied it to scientific statements that are not “outside the world(s) to which they refer” – but are “actively engaged in the constitution of the reality that they describe” (Callon, 2007: 318; see also Hacking 1983).

The idea of studying the performative role of scientific statements (or theories, or models) originated in Latour (1996) and was developed by Michel Callon in an edited book, *The Laws of the Markets* (1998). Callon (1998) argues that economic markets are embedded in *economics*. He advanced the “performativity of economics thesis” according to which “economics, broadly defined, performs, shapes and formats the economy, rather than observing how it functions” (Callon, 1998: 2).<sup>6</sup> With this thesis, Callon invites sociologists to reconsider their discourse on economics – which has often consisted in criticizing economics for its lack of realism – and to study the performative effects of economics: economic models are key ingredients of economic activities (Fourcade, 2007). Callon (1998) laid the ground for a body of works considering the multiple processes whereby economic variables, formulae, or tools (e.g. statistics [Didier, 2007]), shape the economy. MacKenzie and Millo (2003) offer a striking empirical illustration of Callon’s thesis by showing how the Black-

Scholes' formula, which originally had a low predictive power, shaped traders' practice and thus became able to predict options' prices on derivative markets.<sup>7</sup>

MacKenzie (2007) further distinguished between types of performativity: "generic performativity" corresponds to the actual use of an economic concept, while "effective performativity" corresponds to the "cases in which the use of economics 'makes a difference': for example economic processes in which economics is drawn upon are different from those from which it is absent". A third type of performativity, called Barnesian performativity (after Barnes, 1983), is the strongest because:

...an effect of the use in practice of an aspect of economics is to make economic processes more like their depiction by economics. (MacKenzie, 2007: 56)

In a consolidative review essay, Callon (2007) developed his thesis further by engaging critically with Austin's ideas and building on a critique of representation inspired by STS works (Hacking, 1983; Pickering, 1995), and propositions from ANT (Latour, 1996, 2005). He integrated Merton's (1948) concept of self-fulfilling prophecy, the Butlerian and Goffmanian legacies in the works of Mol (2002) and prior texts on performativity to define what he calls *performance*:

We can agree to call *performance* the process whereby sociotechnical arrangements are enacted, to constitute so many ecological niches within and between which statements and models circulate and are true or at least enjoy a high degree of verisimilitude. This constantly renewed process of performance encompasses expression, self-fulfilling prophecies, prescription, and performance. (Callon, 2007: 330)

#### *Performativity as sociomateriality mattering (Barad)*

Our next foundational perspective on performativity is that of Karen Barad (Barad, 2003, 2007), a feminist theorist with a PhD in theoretical physics. Barad's conceptualization of performativity derives from Butler, Latour and, more broadly, the STS field. Barad (2003) moves beyond purely linguistic or discursive approaches to performativity to affirm what is, for her, the profound materiality of performativity:

A *performative* understanding of discursive practices challenges the representationalist belief in the power of words to represent pre-existing things. Performativity, properly construed, is not an invitation to turn everything (including material bodies) into words; on the contrary, performativity is precisely a contestation of the excessive power granted to language to determine what is real. Hence, in ironic contrast to the misconception that would equate performativity with a form of linguistic monism that takes language to be the stuff of reality, performativity is actually a contestation of the unexamined habits of mind that grant language and other forms of representation more power in determining our ontologies than they deserve. (Barad, 2003: 802)

Barad's work can be regarded as a critical extension of Butler's. It has strong similarities with ANT but her more radical stance on materiality – derived from quantum physics – considers the intimate entanglement of non-human and human elements that are *both* made of matter. Hence, separation between humans and non-humans is radically challenged; their micro-entanglements need studying so as to understand the constitution of meaning. She focuses attention on the flow of practice:

A “posthumanist” notion of performativity—[is] one that incorporates important material and discursive, social and scientific, human and nonhuman, and natural and cultural factors. Such a posthumanist account calls into question the givenness of the differential categories of “human” and “nonhuman,” examining the practices through which these differential boundaries are stabilized and destabilized. (Barad, 2003: 808)

Barad (2003, 2007) provides a new vocabulary to describe how actors, objects and meanings are dynamically brought into being through the continuous flow of practice. Concepts such as “agential cuts” and “intra-objects” suggest that agents realize “cuts” to delineate objects and humans and constitute specific entities. The constant shaping of boundaries that distinguish between material and social, and implications for constituting meaning, become the main locus of analysis.

In sum, foundational perspectives on performativity analyse the dynamic moves and circular processes whereby presentation, language and bodies of knowledge co-constitute the realities they ostensibly describe. They demonstrate the power of Austin's insights for generating radically innovative theories in multiple domains of research and thus illustrate the ‘magic’ social property of performativity (Bourdieu, 1991; Butler, 1999b).

Performativity has indeed emerged from our review as a highly generative concept that has greatly inspired social scientists and stimulated theory building in various disciplines. Importantly, these new performativity conceptualizations have radically challenged dominant ways of thinking in their respective disciplinary field. For instance, Butler's performativity view on gender was an important influence on the rise to 'queer theory' which had a massive impact within and beyond gender studies; Callon's performativity of the economics thesis has enabled the development of an approach to the social studies of markets which was singled out by Fourcade (2007) as distinct from the dominant institutional, structural and political paradigms. All these "migrations of performativity" (Denis, 2006: 2) are radically creative re-appropriations of performativity that have constituted new sub-disciplines or renewed the theoretical landscape of their field.

In relation to OMT, these foundational approaches all have the status of "radical travelling theories" (Oswick et al., 2011: 322), i.e., they are "general" theories that are "produced outside of the discipline and, as such, are not specifically designed for consumption by an OMT audience". Such theories are typical candidates for import in OMT as they are perceived as "fresh, appealing, and seductive ways of exploring organizational phenomena" (p. 323) but they are also likely to be "de-radicalized" and bounded to "narrow applications" when used in the field. This raises questions as to whether these performativity concepts can keep their radical potential when OMT scholars import them: How have OMT scholars used these foundational conceptualizations? Have they benefited from the claimed 'magic' properties of this concept?

### **How OMT scholars borrow foundational perspectives on performativity**

We analyse firstly OMT studies that have engaged in one-way borrowing of the five aforementioned foundational perspectives in order to shed light on organizational



phenomena. This type of borrowing, which reflects the consumption of foreign theories by OMT scholars, is the dominant type of borrowing in OMT in general (Oswick et al., 2011) and we found it is also the dominant type of borrowing in the performativity case. Table 2 presents exemplary OMT papers from this stream. We discuss them in turn and analyse how OMT scholars have used – and sometimes misused – these foundational perspectives; and whether they have harnessed the performativity concept capacity to stimulate theory building in the OMT context.

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#### *Mobilizing ‘performativity as doing things with words’*

Austin’s thesis has had a massive impact in OMT research, in particular through story-telling studies (Boje, 1995) and the work of Fairclough (2013) on critical discourse analysis. While studies directly inspired by Austin, and studies relying on story-telling theories or critical discourse methods all share an interest in language (or discourse), and its performative effects, it is important to distinguish between them. Story-telling theorists explore how actors *make sense* of their world (Boje, 1995), whereas those influenced by Austin focus more on how language constitutes that world. The difference between critical discourse analysis studies and Austin’s performative is more subtle, and best understood by distinguishing between social constructionism and poststructuralism.

Studies inspired by critical discourse analysis are often associated with a social constructionist approach (e.g., Vaara, Sorsa, & Pälli, 2010) that loses some of Austin’s insights. For instance, Hardy, Palmer and Phillips (2000) use a critical discourse method within a social constructionist epistemology in which, to cite Fairclough (in [Hardy et al., 2000:1235]) “the discursive constitution of society does not emanate from a free play of ideas in people’s heads but from a social practice which is firmly rooted in and oriented to real,

material social structures”. That is, it is through language or discourse that subjects come to interpret a pre-existing material world. A poststructuralist approach rejects the possibility of any such ‘real, material social structures’, and explores how discourse constitutes structures that have the appearance of ‘reality’. Where Hardy et al. (2000) regard discourse as a ‘strategic resource,’ a performative approach explores how their arguments constitute such a possibility.

Although numerous works on performativity refer to Austin, there are relatively few studies in OMT that draw directly and solely on Austin’s work, or that of his student, Searle. Ford and Ford’s (1995) is one of the few. They use Austin’s insights into the multiple dimensions of speech acts to illuminate the role played by various conversations in intentional change in organizations. Another noticeable example is Kornberger and Clegg’s (2011) paper that relies directly on Austin’s approach to discuss how the “discourse of strategy” acts performatively in the context of New Public Management. These authors develop understanding that “strategizing is an activity that *does* something” (p. 138). Specifically, they investigate the case of the *Sydney 2030* strategy by showing how strategy discourse altered actors’ power positions by giving voice to some and silencing others.

#### *Mobilizing ‘performativity as searching for efficiency’*

Lyotard’s arguments were picked up early in OMT by Cooper and Burrell (1988) who note how performativity often “takes precedence over thought itself in the social mind” (p. 96). This critique proved particularly significant in reflections upon the management of universities. For Parker and Jary (1995), the McDonaldisation of the academy is, in part, due to elevating Lyotard’s version of performativity over more traditional university values, while for Cowen (1996), Lyotard’s critique “highlight[s] the reconstruction of university systems around ‘performativity’ in an increasingly competitive international economic world” (p.

245). Similarly, Dey and Steyaert (2007) argue that current crises in management education reflect a lack of passion arising from understanding performativity as mere efficiency.

The influence of Lyotard's ideas in OMT is also visible in the work of CMS scholars, especially since Fournier and Grey (2000), who follow Lyotard, by suggesting that a characteristic of CMS research is its anti-performative stance:

A performative intent (Lyotard, 1984), here, means the intent to develop and celebrate knowledge which contributes to the production of maximum output for minimum input; it involves inscribing knowledge within means-ends calculation. Non-critical management study is governed by the principle of performativity which serves to subordinate knowledge and truth to the production of efficiency ... CMS [on the other hand is anti-performative in that it] questions the alignment between knowledge, truth and efficiency (Fournier & Grey, 2000: 17).

There is no direct invocation of Austin's work in Fournier and Grey's paper or in other, mostly CMS, publications, which adopt Lyotard's definition of performativity. Many subsequent CMS studies have emphasised the 'anti-performative' stance of Fournier and Grey (2000, p. 7) and are actively hostile towards the assumption that 'performativity' is of supreme and overriding importance in organizational life. However, Spicer et al (2009) have challenged CMS's anti-performative stance by championing 'critical performativity' – a debate we turn to below. Finally, some scholars, including Ball (2003), have relied on Lyotard's notion of performativity to make the point that 'performativity' (as efficiency) can be a resource in the construction of the self:

Performativity ... is a new mode of state regulation which makes it possible to govern in an 'advanced liberal' way. It requires individual practitioners to organize themselves as a response to targets, indicators and evaluations. To set aside personal beliefs and commitments and live an existence of calculation. The new performative worker is a promiscuous self, an enterprising self, with a passion for excellence. For some, this is an opportunity to make a success of themselves, for others it portends inner conflicts, inauthenticity and resistance. It is also suggested that performativity produces opacity rather than transparency as individuals and organizations take ever greater care in the construction and maintenance of fabrications. (Ball, 2003: 215)

Ball's arguments gesture towards the next major way that performativity is read in OMT – as how the self is constituted.

*Mobilizing 'performativity as constituting the self through citation'*

Borgerson (2005) passionately advocated the adoption of a Butlerian framework within OMT, arguing that, through Butler's concepts, the range of questions we can ask about organizations expands and the field of political action broadens. However, few of the numerous OMT works that reference Butler actually engage with her work. In those that do, two main approaches are identifiable: performative accomplishment of firstly, genders and sexualities, and, secondly, of identities.

Exemplary of the first is Tyler and Cohen's (2010) analysis of organizational "spaces that matter", in which they use Butler's thesis to explore how (female) gender is materialized within organizational power relations. Their empirical study illuminates how women use office space and artefacts to constitute a gendered identity that conforms with organizational gender norms of the "normal" woman who is "acceptable in organizational terms" (p. 192), because she is materialized within the narrow confines of the heteronormative matrix. They thus challenge a still-dominant approach within OMT that presumes gender identities are given and immutable and which, as Rittenhofer and Gatrell (2012) observe, constitute the norms within which gender is performatively constituted. These authors' Butlerian framework challenges dominant notions of gender, opposing fixity with instability, traits with social norms, teleology with fracture, and homogeneity with declassification. OMT queer theorists draw on Butler's work more broadly, indicating the importance of her work for 'working at the site of ontology' of business schools (Ozturk & Rumens, 2014: 513). Parker's (2001) seminal advocacy of queer theory for OMT identifies the potential in Butler's work for "queering theory itself" (p. 37), i.e., disrupting the power of the academy to constitute organizational 'reality', opening possibilities for exploring the performative work of organizational theory. Rumens (2010) uses both Foucault and Butler to explore new ways of 'performing masculinity' through analysing workplace friendships between gay men, while

Harding et al.(2011) explore how leadership's unsaid/unsayable performatively constitutes 'the follower'. This category of Butlerian analysis therefore challenges ontologies of, within and through organizations.

Another category explores the performative constitution of identities and problematizes overly-reductionist theories. Hodgson's (2005) paper is perhaps seminal. He argues that the fruitfulness of a Butlerian perspective lies in its insights into processes of subjection, organizational power relations, and into how identities are both attractive and repellent, sought and resisted, passionately attached to or passively rejected. Kenny's (2010) analysis of passionate attachment to workplace identities builds on this; she shows how a discourse of 'ethical living' imposes behavioural norms that discipline the performatively constituted organizational self. Those who failed to conform, for example by eating 'junk food', become the excluded 'outsider'. Harding's (2003) analysis of management textbooks' constitution of the normative framework which subjects and subjectifies managers similarly points to the instability of and unexpected turns in the constitution of identities. She argues that textbooks locate the performatively constituted manager in an unstable, controlled and controlling subject position. Researchers using Butlerian interpretations of performativity therefore develop identity theory through analysing complexities, subtleties and contradictions in formations of identities and selves.

Accordingly, OMT theorists who have engaged more deeply with Butler's work are challenging ontological assumptions about the organizational self, its gender, sexuality, professional identity, relationships, and so on.

### *Mobilizing 'performativity as bringing theory into being'*

OMT scholars have mobilized Callon's conceptualization of performativity in several ways. Some briefly refer to Callon's work when discussing the impact of economic language on

organizational functioning and the influence of management research on practice. Ferraro, Pfeffer, and Sutton (2005) for instance, build on the notions of performativity and self-fulfilling prophecies to show how economics has won the “battle for theoretical hegemonia in academia and society as a whole” (p. 10).

Other scholars engage more directly with Callon’s thesis to show how theories (from economics, finance, but also other disciplines) influence organizational practices (e.g., Beunza, Hardie, & MacKenzie, 2006). Cabantous and Gond (2011) advance the concept of “performative praxis” – i.e., sets of activities enable theories to become social reality – and offer a framework that explains how theories can be instantiated in practice. These authors argue that knowledge (theories) and practice are intrinsically linked and conceptualize a set of mechanisms that bridge dynamically actors, tools and theory. They illustrate “performative praxis” using the case of rational decision-making. Organizational actors perform rational choice theory when they rely on tools, such as decision trees or various kinds of optimization software (e.g. budget planning). These tools embed rational choice theory assumptions, and in extending actors’ cognitive capacity facilitate their becoming calculative “*homo oeconomicus*” (Cabantous, Gond, & Johnson-Cramer, 2010).

If the first OMT scholars who have mobilized Callon’s work have focused on the performative power of economics, recent work has also looked at the performative role of *organization theories* themselves in the constitution of organizational phenomena. D’Adderio and Pollock (2014) study the performative effect of modularity theory and demonstrate how to leverage Callon’s thesis in OMT. Such work invites scholars to develop more reflexive understanding of how their teaching and consultancy influence practices.

*Mobilizing ‘performativity as sociomateriality mattering’*

Organizational scholars' long-standing borrowing from ANT to develop a 'performative' understanding of organizational phenomena (Czarniawska, 2004) is being rejuvenated through engagement with Barad's explorations of "sociomateriality" (Orlikowski, 2007; Orlikowski & Scott, 2008) or "materiality" (Leonardi, 2011). Few empirical works have mobilized Barad's concepts, but Nyberg's (2009) ethnographic analysis of a call centre shows how a dysfunctional computer system can generate 'non-existent' entities (e.g., insured drivers who do not have a driving licence) that influence actors' interactions and practice such that roles and meanings co-emerge through 'intra-actions' (Barad, 2003, 2007). Orlikowski and Scott (2014) also put Barad's concepts to work in analysing how evaluation practices are transformed by moving on-line. Online reviews produced by inter-nauts become 'material-discursive' products that demultiply criteria, shake the authority of officially established experts, democratize access to and reshape practices of evaluation, notably by constituting anonymity through specific entanglements of matter and meaning. In contrast, authors such as Leonardi (2011) use the concept of performativity to oppose 'material agency' to 'human agency' (Kautz & Jensen, 2013: 21).

Assuming fully Barad's (2003) assumptions is empirically and ontologically challenging, as it is difficult not to assume tacitly the separation of human from non-human (Kautz & Jensen, 2013). This contradicts Barad's (2003) emphasis on the "ontological inseparability" of subjects and objects where performativity "is understood as the iterative intra-activity within a phenomenon" (Kautz & Jensen, 2013: 25). Relying on Barad's ideas also requires mobilizing her specific vocabulary, which may lead OMT scholars to develop the use of "jargon monoxide" in organizational analysis (Sutton, 2010).

In sum, the dominant pattern of borrowing is that of simple borrowing: a large amount of OMT studies have simply imported one foundational perspective on performativity to stimulate new empirical developments in OMT. This type of borrowing has allowed OMT

scholars to reconsider the dynamics whereby language, knowledge, gender, theories or material entities contribute to ‘perform’ or ‘bring into being’ organizational actors and organizations; and has contributed to complete the migration of the performativity concept to a new field.

However, in adopting such a type of borrowing, OMT scholars have not fully exploited the radical potential of the foundational perspectives on performativity. This is especially noticeable in performativity’s most recent mobilizations in OMT. OMT scholars who have imported Barad or Callon’s conceptualization have followed a one-way process of borrowing that does not have the power to generate new theoretical insights into performativity. Contrary to thinkers such as Butler, Derrida, or Callon, who have been able to offer new perspectives by elaborating on Austin’s ideas, OMT scholars who have developed theory by simply domesticating one of the foundational perspectives on performativity have not fully benefited from the heuristic reach and generative properties of the performativity concept.

### **How OMT scholars engage in creative re-appropriation of performativity perspectives**

Hopefully, some OMT studies have engaged in more creative re-appropriations of the foundational perspectives on performativity, and have contributed to generate new organizational perspectives on performativity. Table 3 summarizes three of these OMT perspectives on performativity.

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#### *Performativity as constitutive organizational communication*

A growing stream of research in OMT elaborates on Austin’s linguistic roots (1962), Searle’s (1969) notion of speech-act, and insights from ANT (Latour, 1987) to develop understanding of organizations as performatively constituted through communicative events. Labelled the



‘Montréal School’, or the ‘Communicative Constitution of Organization’ (CCO; Ashcraft, Kuhn, & Cooren, 2009; Taylor & Van Every, 2000), this research builds on Taylor’s (1993) pioneering work to offer an interpretation of performativity that departs from a purely discursive interpretation and recognizes material dimensions in the constitution of organizations through communication and language.

CCO works study the performativity of communication (Cooren, Kuhn, Cornelissen, & Clark, 2011) and focuses on processes of *conversation*, whereby organization is accomplished in situ, and of *textualization*, in which organizations become stabilized as recognizable actors through textual representations (Taylor, 2011; Taylor & Van Every, 2000). For CCO scholars, organizations are performed through the constitution of networks of communicative practices; they are literally “talked into existence” (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005: 409). CCO studies thus highlight how communications, on their own and through their materiality, shape the stabilization and repetition of organizational activities. They do so by revealing: “the active contribution of texts (especially documents) to organizational processes: that is, on the ways that texts, such as reports, contracts, memos, signs, or work orders, *perform something*” (Cooren, 2004: 374).

A special issue of *Organization Studies* edited by Cooren et al. in 2011 shows that CCO scholars contribute to organizational domains including strategy-as-practice, organizational identity, sensemaking and clandestine organizations. Stohl and Stohl (2011) for instance, challenge the need for CCO scholars to assume some form of transparency about organizational members’ communication, using the case of al Qaeda, an organization that avoids inter-member communications. However, Schoeneborn and Scherer (2012) respond that such clandestine organizations illustrate the value of the CCO perspective because these organizations could not exist without communicative acts of third parties, such as the media, that make their actions highly visible. Al Qaeda will exist as long as “there is a flow of

communication that continues to enact its existence” (p. 969), so its inhibition requires interrupting communications that constitute its existence.

Christensen et al. (2013), show how the CCO perspective challenges the notion of organizational hypocrisy in the domain of corporate social responsibility by suggesting that gaps between action and talk are a necessary condition for raising aspiration and inspiration. They suggest that responsible practices become enacted because they have been firstly ‘talked-into-existence’.

Even though the CCO perspective remains somewhat ‘bounded’ by its relatively narrow focus on “communicative events” (Cooren et al., 2011:1153), it demonstrates how to advance organizational analysis, notably through a performative theory of organizational socio-genesis that challenges the distinction between organizing and organization. By blending Austin and Searle’s ideas with ANT, CCO scholars are moving OMT towards post-structural and anti-structural paradigms (Hassard & Cox, 2013). In this sense, the CCO perspective offers an interesting attempt at moving beyond a one-way process of borrowing of the performativity concept and has the potential to add to the source domains of performativity.

#### *Performativity as the expression of routine*

Martha Feldman’s theory of routines (Feldman, 2000; Feldman & Pentland, 2003), and work it has inspired (D’Adderio, 2008; Labatut, Aggeri, & Girard, 2012), is another original conceptualization of performativity developed within the OMT community. Feldman’s (2000) theory renews OMT’s explanations of routines by explaining how routines, usually said to promote stability, are also a source of continuous changes. Building on Bourdieu (1977), Giddens (1984), Latour (1986), and specifically (but not explicitly) on the ‘relational epistemology’ of ANT (Hassard & Cox, 2013), Feldman re-conceptualises the ontology of routines and overcomes opposition between structure and agency (Friesl & Larty, 2013). This

theory considers that two aspects constitute routines: the ‘ostensive’ captures the abstract idea of the routine, the routine ‘in principle’ or its ‘structure’ (Feldman & Pentland, 2003: 94); and the ‘performative’ that refers to the routine ‘in practice’ and “embodies the specific actions, by specific people, at specific times and places, which bring the routine to life” (Feldman & Pentland, 2003: 94).

Feldman’s (2000) illustration involves hiring routines in an organization providing students’ accommodation. On the one hand, the hiring routine has standard and stable features– e.g., “[p]eople submit applications, they are screened and interviewed, they are given letters of rejection or job offers” (p. 612). On the other hand, the accomplishment by actors of the standardized elements of the routines is subject to evolution and change:

... at the beginning of my observations, an applicant for a job in this organization would have to submit applications to every residence hall he or she wanted to work in, would go through a separate screening and interviewing process in each hall, and may receive multiple rejections and/or offers. During the observation period, the routine was changed so that applicants submit only one application, are screened in a centralized process, then interviewed in each of the halls they are interested in working for. They receive only one offer of a job at the end of the process. (Feldman, 2000: 612)

ANT’s ‘relational ontology’ (Law, 2008) is visible in Feldman’s theory which insists on the idea that the performative and ostensive aspects of routines are in continuous recursive interaction: the ostensive dimension guides the performance of specific occurrences while the performance of the routine enacts the routine’s ostensive aspect. Yet, Feldman’s initial use of the adjective “performative” – and its subsequent use in the many studies that build on her theory of routines (Brown & Lewis, 2011; Howard-Grenville, 2005; Zbaracki & Bergen, 2010) – remain largely disconnected from the ANT perspective on performativity developed by Callon (1998).<sup>8</sup> There is nothing in Feldman’s work that invites OMT scholars to study the sources of the ostensive aspect of the routine, even though such study could reveal how the ‘principle’ of some routines is modelled after theories, so that the accomplishment of these routines contribute to performing specific bodies of knowledge.

This is precisely the line of enquiry adopted in D’Adderio’s (2008) blending of Feldman’s and Callon’s approaches. D’Adderio reworked Feldman’s dichotomy between ostensive and performative to distinguish *routines-as-representations* from *routines-as-expressions*, and theorized the iterative cycles of “framing” and “overflowing” (Callon, 1998: 244-269) whereby artefacts, formal rules and agency interact. In doing so, D’Adderio (2008) built on MacKenzie (2007) to theorize modes of performativity of routines that reflect the capacity of *routines-as-representations* to constitute, through actors’ performance and interaction with artefacts, the idealized representations of organizational functioning they integrate. Labatut et al. (2012) similarly draw on both Feldman and an ANT-inspired perspective on performativity to explain the disciplinary role of technology in routines’ changes. These studies make explicit the ANT roots of the study of routines.

These promising recent works indicate how further empirical studies could help understand the multiple connections between the representations of routines that inform their design and the overflowing-framing cycles whereby organizational routines are performed. Although these studies apply the performativity concept to a relatively narrow domain, they are an interesting case of creative theory-building through the blending of distinct approaches to performativity successively imported in OMT.

#### *Performativity as ‘making critical theory influential’*

Spicer et al.’s (2009) recent conceptualization of “critical performativity” – allied with subsequent papers that similarly promote critical performativity (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012; Wickert & Schaefer, 2014) – has stimulated heated debates in OMT. The notion of ‘critical performativity’ is a critique of the anti-performative stance held by critical management scholars after Lyotard’s definition of *performativity as efficiency* (Fournier & Grey, 2000; Grey & Willmott, 2005). In advancing critical performativity as a possible new unifying

paradigm for CMS, Spicer et al. (2009) aim to develop an “affirmative”, “engaged” and “pragmatic” approach to CMS that, deployed in the public sphere, would “constructively” influence managerial practice. Hence, this approach to performativity is first and foremost about making critical theory influential – a “progressive understanding of performativity” as Wickert and Schaefer (2015: 107) put it. This version of performativity therefore reflects both a willingness on the part of critical scholars to reduce their cynical distance from their object of analysis, and a renewed appetite for political or ethical engagement (McKinlay, 2010a, b).

But this effort to break CMS out of abstruse theory and into the realm of social practice relies implicitly on maintaining a double notion of performativity, that is, gesturing towards the conventional interests of managers in making organizations “perform” (the Lyotardian approach), while also remaining critical (i.e. sufficiently academic to be published in a scholarly journal). As Alvesson and Spicer (2012) put it:

The concept of critical performativity ... aims to combine intellectual stimulation through radical questioning with an ambition to use discourse in such a way that has an impact, both in terms of emancipatory effect and practical organizational work” (p. 376).

To elaborate the concept of critical performativity, Spicer et al. (2009) and Wickert and Schaefer (2015) refer both to Lyotard and Austin, but rely mainly on Butler’s theorization of performativity as citation to address some limitations of the use of performativity as efficiency:

Approaching performativity as possibly subversive mobilizations and citations of previous performances, instead of as an overarching concern for efficiency... (Spicer et al., 2009: 544)

They theorize the dimensions of a performative approach to CMS, including an “ethics of care”, the “normative” dimension of managerial practice and the “potentialities” of organizations, illustrating each with possible subversive interventions that could be used to advance critical ideas in the workplace.

Despite their reliance on Butler's conceptualization of performativity that insists on its material dimension, most of the interventions or tactics in this critical performativity approach remain discursive: that is, they aim at reshaping managerial discourse to make it fit CMS's emancipatory ideals. Their attempt at "shifting our understanding of what performativity means" (2009: 538) is open to criticism for misrepresenting the theorists they invoke. What Spicer et al. (2009) see as a "more fruitful way of conceiving of performativity [one which] draws on the work of J.L. Austin and Judith Butler" (2009: 538) is not a mere "shift in understanding of what performativity means" (2009: 538). Indeed, as we have shown Austinian and Butlerian performativity is very different from Lyotardian performativity – it is not in any sense a shift in, nor a development or critique. Such theoretical confusion leads to further problems. For example, it seems to us simply to be straightforwardly misguided to use Austin, as Spicer et al. (2009) appear to do, to make arguments such as: "instead of fighting against performativity, CMS should seek to become *more* performative" (Spicer et al., 2009: 554, emphasis in the original). As McKinlay points out, "following Austin, one can be no more 'anti' performative than one can be 'against' verbs or give only qualified approval to nouns" (2010b: 138-139). So although we might applaud these attempts to take CMS into organizations, we are concerned that their proposals are weakened by the sorts of confusion this paper seeks to address.

In sum, this second stream of OMT works on performativity has strong potential for organizational analysis, as it moves beyond the mobilization of foundational perspectives to develop new conceptualizations of performativity, in the generative spirit of performativity's foundational works. In this regard, these "creative re-appropriations" have the potential to address the limitations inherent to one-way borrowing strategy for theory-building (Oswick et al., 2011). These three organizational approaches to performativity can potentially add to the

performativity conversation, helping to construct a two-way bridge between OMT studies and social sciences works on performativity.

However, some conceptualizations (e.g., critical performativity) may rely too much on the “magic” property of performativity and thus lost touch with important aspects of the solid conceptual roots provided by the foundational works on performativity.

### **Towards a research agenda on performativity for organizational scholars**

Our review suggests that OMT scholars have either borrowed foundational perspectives on performativity to develop new empirical analyses without necessarily capitalizing on the generative property of Austin’s ideas, or they have worked in alignment with the generative spirit of performativity to develop new concepts, but have sometimes insufficiently grounded their approach in thoughtful engagement with foundational works.

We now reflexively analyse our critical review, and discuss its main implications for maintaining the power of performativity to generate theory while grounding OMT conceptualizations of performativity in solid foundational perspectives. We suggest avenues of research that explore: How is performativity performed in OMT? What can we learn from OMT work on performativity about how organizations and organizing are performed? Is it possible that our review and our flexible taxonomy can contribute to performing a ‘performativity turn’ in OMT?

#### *Reconsidering how performativity is performed*

In distinguishing between five foundational works and their on-way borrowing or creative re-appropriations in OMT, our review has identified a variety of uses, under-uses, misuses, and sometimes abuses, of the performativity concept. In so doing, it has evaluated whether OMT scholars have added to the performativity debate. In relation to the pattern of import

strategies of the performativity concepts in OMT, our review points to the un-balance towards one-way borrowing and a relative lack of creative re-appropriation. This un-balance, which is common in the OMT field, limits the capacity of OMT scholars to contribute to the domains they borrowed from (Oswick et al., 2011). We conservatively focused on OMT papers that sincerely engaged with foundational works on performativity, but identified important debates that point to discrepancies between the ontological claims in these papers and their empirical treatment of performativity, in particular in works mobilizing performativity's interpretation by Barad, Butler and Callon.

Most current conceptualizations of performativity inspired by ANT insist on blurring the borders between human and non-human entities, and assume a non-representational view on the phenomena investigated. They adopt a relational ontology in which entities cannot be assumed to pre-exist but are brought into being through discursive-material practices (Law, 2008; Muniesa, 2014). Our review showed that assuming the methodological and epistemological implications of such ontological stances proved challenging for OMT scholars. While we recognize that conceptual translation is always a form of treason, we invite OMT scholars interested in performativity to engage more carefully with the foundational perspective on which they rely, so as to avoid conceptual slippage and ensure greater fidelity to ontological and epistemological assumptions.

Our review also suggests that some creative re-appropriations of performativity may be deemed over-selective—if not abusive—in that in picking only one element of a performativity conceptualization they overlook numerous ontological implications. The interpretation of early works from Butler by critical performativity scholars and the cherry-picking of the ostensive-performative tension from Latour's works by organizational routines scholars offer two telling illustrations. More positively, these 'abuses' of the performativity concept act as 'Trojan horses' that create conditions for situating the newly established



organizational construct (e.g., critical performativity, performative routine) in its foundational work. For instance, D'Adderio (2008) *de facto* realigns Feldman and Pentland's (2003) insights about routines with Callon's (1998) thesis on *performativity as bringing theory into being*. In the same vein, Wright (2014) highlighted how the approach of *performativity as constitutive communication* clarifies the material embodiment of routines and complements Feldman's conceptualization.

In relation to how performativity is performed, our review also shows the under-uses of foundational works in OMT. We highlighted a tendency to import the subject/objects about which specific conceptualizations of performativity have been developed. CMS works that have made the most of Lyotard (1984 [1979]) tend to focus on universities; studies inspired by Callon (1998) primarily document the performative effects of economics; Butlerian studies of organization mainly focus on gender and identity; and works using Barad (2003) typically investigate IT problems in organizations. Yet, Lyotard's performativity of knowledge thesis matters to many organizations beyond universities; multiple bodies of knowledge beyond economics may shape organizational life; Butler's view on performativity may inform research on other objects than gender and identity; and Barad's ontological assumptions can help revisit how any 'types of matter' matter within and across organizations. There is nothing wrong with sticking to the world associated with original performativity concepts, but it limits the potential of what they can offer within OMT.

Such under-uses are especially striking in the case of Callon and Barad's conceptualizations of performativity, and point to directions for future research. For instance, Callon's theory has potential to reinvigorate the long-standing debate on the usefulness of management research (Mesny & Mailhot, 2012; Shrivastava & Mitroff, 1984); this would benefit from a more thorough engagement with ANT and STS work that challenges representational theories of knowledge (Hacking, 1983) and analyse knowledge as a set of

sociomaterial practices (Latour, 1987; Pickering, 1995). Future studies could also document further “performative struggles” (Callon, 2007) in organizations, as it is likely that various theories, embedded in tools or routines, strive to be enacted in organizations (D’Adderio & Pollock, 2014). Arguably, multiple theories co-exist and compete to shape actors’ praxis, but how these competing representations are dynamically instantiated remains largely overlooked. Considering these dynamics could extend OMT’s use of Callon’s thesis to understanding organizing and organizations within performativity processes. In so doing, OMT scholars could study how organizations are sites and outcomes of performative struggles, and more generally, organizing as a vehicle for theory performance. A first step in this direction is Gheman et al. (2013) approach to organizations as contexts within which specific values are ‘performed into being’ through actors’ practices.

In the case of Barad’s interpretation of performativity, future studies need not focus on IT systems but could explore political and power issues inherent in the redesign and negotiation of socio/material boundaries within and across organizations. Such research would be in line with Keevers et al.’s (2012) study of how Results-Based Accountability shapes the enactment of social justice and participatory practices at locally based community organizations in the US.

### *Performing organization/organizing performativity*

In showing that only three perspectives on performativity have emerged from organizational analysis through blending, in comparison with five borrowed foundational conceptualizations, our review also shows a relative deficit in OMT-based performativity works. In this regard, and in contrast with what happened in other social sciences, OMT scholars have not (yet) fully exploited the radical heuristic potential of performativity for theory-building. Too few OMT scholars have sought to generatively use performativity, even

though such approaches could lead them to develop original perspectives through highlighting, for instance, organizations as sites for performativity struggles or the importance of organizations for performativity mechanisms.

The stream of studies on performativity as constitutive communication is the only approach that has engaged with analysing how organizations are performed into being (Cooren et al., 2011), suggesting the value of overcoming the distinction between organizing and organization and advancing a non-representative view on communicative flows constituting organizations. Adopting a similar organizational perspective while mobilizing other foundational works could contribute to advancing understanding of organizations and organizing. Paradoxically, some perspectives that may be more distant from foundational works (e.g., *performativity as the expression of routines* or *as making theory influential*)—and hence, potentially the more ‘abusive’ of performativity—could be the ones with the greater potential for developing the specific contribution of organizational elements to broader performativity processes. For example, these perspectives could specify the roles of routines or academics (together with their theories) in the dynamic constitution of organizations and organizing. Yet, such research agendas could be delivered only if these approaches assume more fully the ontological assumptions inherent to the performativity concepts they mobilize.

This situation calls for a more systematic engagement of OMT scholars with foundational performativity perspectives, in order to move performativity studies in OMT from a catalogue of borrowings to creative *and theoretically grounded* reappropriations of the performativity concept through conceptual blending. Following this view, we would encourage future work starting from the perspective of foundational works in OMT to (re)consider whether they accurately or sensibly perform these perspectives. OMT scholars interested in performativity could also think about how they contribute to the *performing of*

*organizations* (i.e. how organizations are constituted into being) and/or the *organizing that underlies performativity* (i.e. how performativity is organized) by focusing their analysis on organizations or organizing. Here, OMT scholars have the potential to add value to current conversations on performativity in the social sciences by conceptualizing the properly organizational or organized dimensions involved yet often overlooked by foundational performativity works.

### *Performing the performative turn in organization studies*

In offering a flexible classification that captures the diversity of the uses of performativity in OMT, this critical review itself can ‘bring into being’ (‘performatively’ constitute) an organizational field of study on performativity, and, we hope, enhance the conditions for the emergence of a ‘performative turn’ in OMT. Although our goal was not to taxonomise performativity studies, organizing a literature review necessarily involves ‘re-presenting’ this literature in ways that may contribute to performing it. As Tables 2 and 3 show, our review of performativity studies in OMT suggests that scholars often operate in silos, largely ignoring the multiple definitions of this concept and debates taking place in neighbouring sub-disciplines. The heated ontological debates in information theory about how to use Barad’s (2003) approach remain largely unheard by scholars discussing the performativity of critical theory, even though considerations about materiality matter to political and power issues.

Juxtaposing eight perspectives on performativity has by itself important implications for future organizational studies of performativity. First, it shows that OMT knowledge of performativity is relatively fragmented, with scholars operating in one subfield engaging in little dialogue with other conceptualizations, even though they may be highly relevant to their agenda. For instance, the recent study of cooperative incubators in Brazil by Leca, Gond, and Barin-Cruz (2014) shows how the conceptualization of *performativity as making critical*

*theory influential* could be advanced through using *performativity as bringing theory into being* that recognises the role of materiality and theory in critical performativity. Future studies could aim at reconsidering the debates from one domain by taking stock of debates and advances from other performativity perspectives. Such works could stimulate exchange and cross-fertilization across these multiple perspectives.

Second, this juxtaposition also highlights the potential of performativity as a concept to develop transversal conversations across multiple fields of OMT. Future organizational studies of performativity could embrace the complexity of organizational phenomena by recognizing the gendered, citational, sociomaterial, nonrepresentational, self-referential, communicatively constituted, and routinized aspects of organizational functioning. Such work could also theorize further the mechanisms underlying each of these eight approaches to performativity and develop theoretical platforms to bridge them and identify their boundary conditions. For instance, Guérard et al. (2013) have illustrated how multiple approaches to performativity can inform new developments about the concept of performance in strategy.

Finally, by reminding OMT scholars about the assumptions underlying foundational works on performativity, and through facilitating the emergence of conversations between multiple perspectives, we hope our review will help in developing a performativity turn in OMT, and will demonstrate the value of adopting an organizational perspective to advance the conceptualization of performativity in the social sciences.

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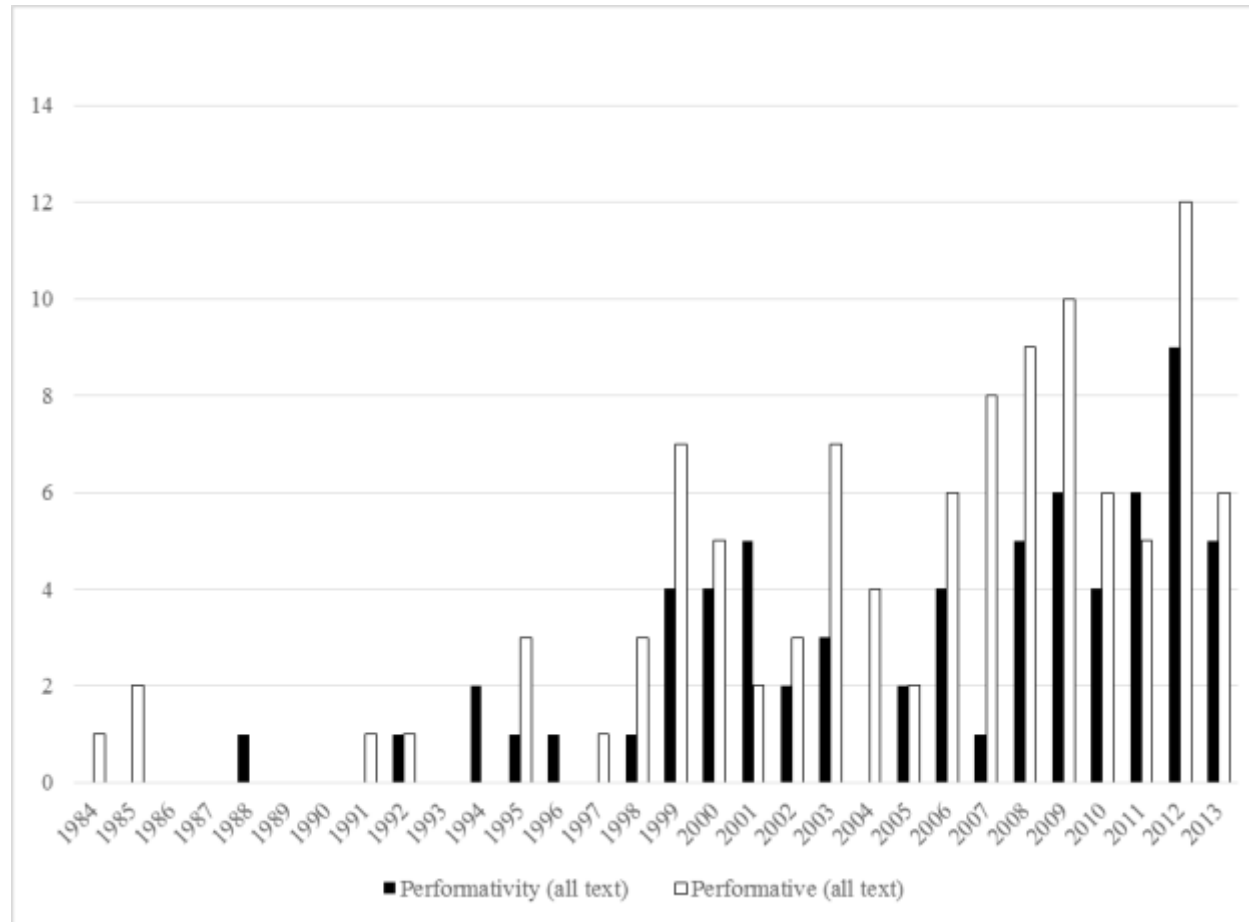


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**Figure 1. Papers quoting ‘performative’ or ‘performativity’ in ten OMT journals (1984-2013)\***



\* Distribution, according to a search in EBSCO-Host (updated on 02/10/2014) of the 64 papers referring to “performativity” and 104 papers referring to “performative” in their full text and published each year in one of the ten journals that follow: *Academy of Management Journal*, *Academy of Management Review*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *British Journal of Management*, *Human Relations*, *International Journal of Management Reviews*, *Journal of Management*, *Journal of Management Studies*, *Organization*, *Organization Science*, *Organization Studies*.

**Table 1. Foundational conceptualizations of performativity**

<b>Foundational perspective</b>	<b>Foundational author(s), research roots</b>	<b>Main question(s)</b>	<b>Key concepts or thesis</b>	<b>What is performed?</b>	<b>Outcomes of performativity</b>
Performativity as doing things with words	Austin (1962) Searle (1969) <i>Philosophy &amp; linguistic</i>	How to do things with words?	Processes whereby an utterance does what it says; speech acts; typology of speech-acts	Utterance, discourse	Realization of actions described by the performed utterance
Performativity as efficiency	Lyotard (1984/1979) <i>Philosophy &amp; post modernism</i>	What characterises knowledge production in post-modern societies?	Alignment of truth, knowledge and the search for efficiency in post-modern societies	Knowledge	Rationalization of education systems through the search for performance
Performativity as actors' constituting the self	Derrida (1979) <i>Philosophy</i> Butler (1990, 1993, 1997) <i>Gender studies</i>	How do actors create their own selves?	Key role of citation in the constitution of actors through texts	Identity, gender, social roles	Gendering Enforcement of political projects by voicing / silencing
Performativity as bringing theory into being	Barnes (1983) Pickering (1995) <i>Social Studies of Sciences</i> Callon (1998); MacKenzie and Millo (2003) <i>Economic sociology</i>	How do theories shape realities?	The 'performativity of economics thesis'; influence of expert bodies of knowledge	Expert bodies of knowledge, science, actor networks	Scientific disciplines Embodiment of influential theories within social reality
Performativity as socio-materiality mattering	Barad (2003, 2007) <i>Gender studies &amp; post-humanism</i> Latour (2005) <i>Actor-Network Theory</i>	How do things constitute reality through actors' practices?	Vocabulary to analyse the constitution of boundaries between social and material entities (intra-objects, intra-action, agential realism, agential cuts)	Gender, Socio-material entities	Constitutions of actors, meanings and roles through socio-material practices

**Table 2. OMT borrowing of foundational perspectives**

<b>Foundational Perspectives</b>	<b>Illustrative OMT papers borrowing the perspective</b>	<b>Description of the main thesis and <i>domain of use</i> in OMT</b>	<b>Main areas of concerns and/or debates in OMT</b>
Performativity as doing things with words	Ford and Ford (1995)	Role of speech-acts and various types of conversations in intentional <i>organizational change</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Relatively little engagement with Austin as a core / sole perspective</li> <li>▪ Lost post-structural insights from Austin in the critical discourse analysis re-interpretation of performativity</li> </ul>
	Kornberger and Clegg (2011)	Performative role played by the <i>discourse of strategy</i>	
Performativity as searching for efficiency	Cooper and Burrell (1988); Jones (2003)	Mobilization of Lyotard's thesis and ideas to advance the <i>analysis of post-modernity</i> in OMT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Focus on educative systems as the main empirical domain of application</li> <li>▪ Tendency to conflate the non-performative and anti-performative stances</li> <li>▪ Contradictions between CMS scholars' 'performative' behaviours in educative systems and their anti-performative stance</li> </ul>
	Cowen (1996); Dey and Steyaert (2007); Parker and Jary (1995)	Critical analysis of current transformations in <i>educative systems</i> through the notion of performativity	
	Fournier and Grey (2000)	Characterization of CMS as reconsidering the alignment between truth, knowledge and the search for efficiency, i.e. ' <i>anti-performative</i> ' stance	
Performativity as actors' constituting the self	Borgerson (2005); Ozturk and Rumens (2014); Parker (2001); Tyler and Cohen (2010)	<p><i>Gender issues</i> in the workplace in relation to office space and artefacts</p> <p>How <i>masculinity is performed</i> in the workplace</p> <p>Need for '<i>queering</i>' <i>organization theory</i> itself</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Little works actually engage with Butler</li> <li>▪ Empirical focus on identity and gender despite the broader potential uses of performativity through citation in Derrida</li> <li>▪ Untapped uses of Butler's assumptions to challenge and question more radically ontological assumptions in OMT</li> </ul>
	Harding (2003); Harding et al. (2011); Hodgson (2005); Kenny (2010)	Constitution of organizational and managerial <i>roles and identities</i>	
		Role of <i>passion</i> in the workplace	

**Table 2. OMT borrowing of foundational perspectives (Continued)**

<b>Foundational Perspectives</b>	<b>Illustrative OMT papers mobilizing the perspective</b>	<b>Description of the main thesis and domain of use in OMT</b>	<b>Main areas of concerns and/or debates in OMT</b>
Performativity as bringing theory into being	Ferraro, Pfeffer and Sutton (2005) Cabantous and Gond (2011); Cabantous, Gond, and Johnson-Cramer (2010) D'Adderio and Pollock (2014); Gheman, Trevino, and Garud (2013)	Influence of <i>economic language</i> in management Performative praxis whereby theories theory are instantiated within organizational context can help reconsider the analysis of <i>decision-making</i> Analysis of <i>modularity</i> theory is performed through organizational routines Study of the <i>value work</i> whereby a new code of conducts is performed into being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Focus on economics and relative neglected of how alternative theories/body of knowledge are performed</li> <li>▪ Lost opportunity to reconsider managerial and organizational reflexivity about theory and to analyse the academic-practice relationships</li> <li>▪ Lack of analysis of multiple theories struggle to be performed in organizations</li> </ul>
Performativity as socio-materiality mattering	Keever et al. (2012); Leonardi (2010); Nyberg (2009); Orlikowski and Scott (2014)	Influence of discursive-material entities produced by <i>information technology</i> on actors' practices; Shifts in <i>practices of valuation</i> and evaluation (accounting)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Difficulty to assume empirically Barad's radical ontological assumptions</li> <li>▪ Focus on IT as the core empirical domain</li> </ul>

**Table 3. Creative Re-appropriations of Performativity in OMT**

<b>Organizational perspectives</b> <i>Seminal publications</i>	<b>Underlying foundational perspectives</b>	<b>Illustrative papers in OMT</b>	<b>Description of the main thesis and <i>domain</i> of use in OMT</b>	<b>Main areas of concerns and/or debates in OMT</b>
Performativity as constitutive communication <i>Ashcraft, Kuhn, and Cooren (2009)</i> <i>Taylor (1993)</i> <i>Taylor and Van Every (2000)</i>	<i>Performativity as doing things with words</i> (Austin) <i>Actor-Network Theory</i> (Latour, 1986)	Cooren (2004)  Stohl and Stohl (2011) Schoeneborn and Scherer (2012)  Christensen, Morsing and Thyssen (2013)	Mobilize Searle's notion of speech act to show the <i>power (and agency) of texts</i> in organizations, and to reconsider the constitution of organizations  Extends CCO approach to analyze how <i>clandestine and terror organizations</i> are constituted through third-party communication  Apply CCO to reconsider the notion that gaps in <i>Corporate Social Responsibility discourses</i> and practices are necessary forms of organizational hypocrisy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Clear and sincere anchoring in Austin and Searle approaches</li> <li>▪ Aims at redefining organizations as flows of communicative events</li> <li>▪ Bounded empirically by its focus on 'communication events'</li> </ul>
Performativity as the expression of routine <i>Feldman (2000)</i> <i>Feldman &amp; Pentland (2003)</i>	<i>Actor-Network Theory</i>	D'Adderio (2008)    Labatut, Aggeri, and Girard (2012)	Explicit mobilization of Callon's view to theorize whether routines perform into being ( <i>routines-as-expressions</i> ) the set of behaviours they are supposed to simply describe ( <i>routines-as-representations</i> ). Acknowledgement of routines' <i>material</i> dimension  Study the emergence of new routines/practices with a focus on the disciplinary power of <i>technology</i> , and the <i>sources</i> of the ostensive dimension of routines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Distant and loose anchoring in a foundational performativity perspective yet progressive re-bridging with it</li> <li>▪ Potential to explore the specific roles played by routines in the organizing of multiple forms of performativity</li> </ul>



**Table 3. Creative Re-appropriations of Performativity in OMT**

Organizational perspectives <i>Seminal publications</i>	Underlying foundational perspectives	Illustrative papers in OMT	Description of the main thesis and domain of use in OMT	Main areas of concerns and/or debates in OMT
Performativity as making critical theory influential <i>Spicer, Alvesson, and Kärreman (2009)</i>	<i>Performativity as efficiency</i> (Lyotard) <i>Performativity as actors' constituting the self</i> (Butler) <i>Performativity as doing things with words</i> (Austin)	Alvesson and Spicer (2012)  Wickert and Schaefer (2014)	Mobilize the concept of critical performativity to investigate <i>leadership</i> and develop a critical / non-functionalist approach to leadership  Use the case of Corporate Social Responsibility to explain how to make critical theory influential by developing a “ <i>progressive understanding of performativity</i> ” that would allow critical management scholars to have more influence on managerial practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Conflation of multiple distinct views on performativity that are not always made explicit (e.g., Lyotard vs. Butler)</li> <li>▪ Neglect of important dimensions of its claimed foundational authors such as materiality</li> <li>▪ Useful to explore the potential subversive use of critical works</li> </ul>

## Appendix One

### Figure 1

In order to construct Figure 1, we searched the Business Source Complete EBSCO database for the term ‘performativity’ in the ‘Full Text’ fields in papers published up to 2013 in the eleven leading OMT journals listed in the table below. We excluded book reviews. We then performed the same search with the term ‘performative’. Table A1 (below) reports the result of this search. We sorted the publications by year in order to construct Figure 1 that is reported in the review.

**Table A1. Number of OMT papers using the terms ‘performativity’ and ‘performative’**

<b>Journal</b>	<b>Performativity (Full text)</b>	<b>Performative (Full text)</b>
<i>Academy of Management Journal</i>	4	0
<i>Academy of Management Review</i>	7	15
<i>Administrative Science Quarterly</i>	1	1
<i>British Journal of Management Review</i>	10	18
<i>Human Relations</i>	10	10
<i>Internat. J. of Management Reviews</i>	3	8
<i>Journal of Management</i>	0	1
<i>Journal of Management Studies</i>	13	22
<i>Organization Science</i>	4	19
<i>Organization Studies</i>	6	10
<i>Organization</i>	12	10
	<b>70</b>	<b>114</b>

### Critical and historical review of illustrative OMT papers on performativity

As our aim is to *critically review* how OMT scholars have used the terms ‘performativity’ and ‘performative’, we focused on papers that: (1) use one of these two words explicitly; (2) clearly engage with one or these two terms, that is use the notion of performativity or of the performative to make a central point in their argument; and (3) represent the diversity of approaches to performativity.

To do so, we restricted the search in the EBSCO database for the papers using either or both of these two terms (‘performativity’ OR ‘performative’) in the Abstract or Author

supplied abstract field. We restricted our search to the same 11 leading OMT journals listed above. The search returned 46 papers, as Table A2 shows. We read all these papers and selected a subset of the ones that met our criteria to analyze what scholars do with performativity.

**Table A2. Number of OMT papers using the terms ‘performativity’ OR ‘performative’ in the Abstract**

<b>Journal</b>	<b>Performativity OR Performative (Abstract)</b>
<i>Academy of Management Journal</i>	0
<i>Academy of Management Review</i>	2
<i>Administrative Science Quarterly</i>	1
<i>British Journal of Management Review</i>	1
<i>Human Relations</i>	12
<i>Internat. J. of Management Reviews</i>	2
<i>Journal of Management</i>	0
<i>Journal of Management Studies</i>	0
<i>Organization Science</i>	8
<i>Organization Studies</i>	4
<i>Organization</i>	16
	<b>46</b>

## Footnotes

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<sup>1</sup> *Academy of Management Journal, Academy of Management Review, Administrative Science Quarterly, British Journal of Management, International Journal of Management Reviews, Journal of Management, Journal of Management Studies, Organization, Organization Science, Organization Studies and Human Relations.*

<sup>2</sup> This distinguishes our approach from prior works that have considered Goffman as a specific approach to performativity, such as Darr and Pinch (2013) or Diedrich et al. (2013). It is noteworthy however that for certain research traditions (e.g., Science, Technology and Society), the concept of performativity has nothing to do with Goffman's notion of performance:

[STS] is about performativity. It is arguing that *realities* (including objects and subjects) and representations of those realities are being enacted or performed simultaneously. It is, as I noted above, post-structuralist in inclination, albeit in a particular and materially-oriented mode. This means that it is also profoundly non-humanist (beware, performance here has nothing to do with Erving Goffman's sociology). Shift the verb from making to doing – to doing *realities* – and we catch what is at stake. To put it in formal language, what is at stake is not simply epistemological. We are also in the realm of *ontology*. (Law, 2008: 624; italics in original)

<sup>3</sup> Our typology overlaps and expands Guérard et al.'s (2013) prior classification of performativity work.

<sup>4</sup> This essay was written for a conference on the theme of "Communication" held by the Congrès International des Sociétés de Philosophie de Langue Française.

<sup>5</sup> See Fotaki (2011), for a brief overview of the importance of this aspect of Butler's work for OMT.

<sup>6</sup> Although Callon does not refer explicitly to Austin (1962) in his 1998 book, he does so in subsequent works.

<sup>7</sup> This result secured one of its inventors – Myron Scholes – the Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel in 1997.

<sup>8</sup> Feldman's perspective on performativity has been interpreted as close to Goffman's legacy (Pentland & Rueter, 1994).