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THE COMMUNICATIVE CONSTITUTION OF ORGANIZATIONALITY

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(1) What is Organizationality?

In the history of organization studies as a field, we can distinguish three basic orientations (see Schoeneborn, Kuhn, & Kärreman, 2019): studying organization as either a noun, verb, or adjective. In the field's historical origins, scholars have traditionally been concerned with studying *the* organization as a (formal) *entity or noun* (as exemplified by metaphorical imaginations of the “organization as machine”, “organization as organism”, “organization as brain”, etc.; see Morgan, 1986). Over the past 30 to 40 years, we can also observe a growing interest in grasping organization and organizing primarily as a *process or verb* (as implied in imaginations of “organization as flux” or “organization as becoming”, etc.; see also Morgan, 1986; Weick, 1995; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). Recently, however, organizational scholars have directed their attention increasingly also to studying organization as an *attribute or adjective* of a broad range of social collectives (e.g., social movements, communities, networks, etc.). In this “adjectivic” orientation of organizational scholarship (Schoeneborn et al., 2019), the core question becomes which degree of such “organizationality” a social collective can accomplish. Importantly, this theoretical move allows organizational scholarship to gain a clearer positioning within the broader spectrum of the social sciences (see Ahrne, Brunsson, & Seidl, 2016).

The notion of organizationality initially goes back to an article by Dobusch and Schoeneborn (2015). Based on a study of the hacktivist collective Anonymous, the authors suggest considering organization as a matter of degree; in other words, a social collective like Anonymous may exhibit higher or lower degrees of organizationality at different points in time. For instance, Anonymous tends to have low degrees of organizationality (e.g., open boundaries that, in principle, allow various individual actors to conduct hacker operations on its behalf; Coleman, 2014). Yet, the social collective can situationally mobilize higher degrees of organizationality (e.g., when it exposes an individual hacker's identity as a means of exclusion and boundary-drawing, thus temporarily exhibiting “classical” elements of organization, such as membership, hierarchies, or sanction mechanisms; see Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011). In this chapter, we argue that the notion of organizationality can serve as an umbrella term that can encompass various streams of recent organizational scholarship that are all united by an adjectivic understanding of organization as a matter of degree.

Another prominent example of adjectivic conceptualizations of organization is Ahrne and Brunsson's notion of "partial organization" (2011). In their article, the authors propose to understand organization as "decided order" (i.e., a particular type of social order that is created as a result of interconnected processes of decision-making), while partial organizations are decided orders that lack one or more of classical elements of organization (i.e., membership, hierarchies, rules, monitoring and sanction mechanisms). One example of partial organization is a customer loyalty club (such as the IKEA Family Club) that is primarily based on membership but that lacks the other typical elements of organization (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011, p. 87). Also, the notion of partial organization can be used as a theoretical lens to examine various social formations beyond formal organizations (e.g., families, networks, or markets; see Ahrne & Brunsson, 2019) and to assess their organizational character. In that way, the notion of partial organization helps develop a broader "zoology" of organizational forms than the field of organization studies would be traditionally concerned with if it were to restrict itself first and foremost to formal exemplars of organization (see Du Gay & Vikkelsø, 2016).

In a similar spirit, a number of further studies have been conducted to trace and explore phenomena of organization beyond the boundaries of formal organization (e.g., Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Cnossen, this volume; Mumby, 2016, 2018; Nielsen, 2018; Wilhoit & Kisselburgh, 2015). They focus on a broad set of empirical phenomena such as digitally facilitated social movements (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012), social media hypes (Mumby, 2018), or bike commuter collectives (Wilhoit & Kisselburgh, 2015). Bennett and Segerberg (2012), for instance, study how the organizing activities during the Arab Spring movement, facilitated by mobile digital media and what they refer to as the "logic of connective action", have led to the emergence of new forms of organization out of communicative processes. Similarly, Mumby (2018) describes the case of an emergent and eruptive process of organizing that developed as a social-media hype around a good-looking cash desk employee at the US retail chain Target.

Strikingly, many of these works do not originate from the "core" area of organization studies but from adjacent disciplines such as political or organizational communication studies. In this chapter, we aim to explain why a communication-centered understanding of organizational phenomena goes especially well together with the notion of organizationality (i.e., as a gradual understanding of organization). These considerations build the basis for comparing two empirical cases of organizationality in particular: the case of the hacktivist collective Anonymous (cf. Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015) and the case of coworking spaces (cf. Blagoev, Costas, & Kärreman 2019). Our transversal analysis of the two cases demonstrates how communication can serve as an explanatory lens for the emergence of organizationality in distinct forms. We conclude the chapter with reflections on future trajectories of research at the intersection of communication and organizationality.

(2) Value-added of a Communication-Centered View on Organizationality

In this section, we elaborate on three reasons why communication-centered perspectives lend themselves particularly well to studying organizationality. First, communication-centered views in organization studies, especially those that consider communication as constitutive of organization (CCO; e.g., Ashcraft et al., 2009; Cooren et al., 2011), offer a *low-threshold understanding of organization* (see Schoeneborn & Vásquez, 2017; Vásquez, Kuhn, & Plotnikof, this volume). Rather than understanding organization only in the formal sense (i.e., by referring to exemplars of a state bureaucracy or incorporated business firm), a CCO perspective advances a broader understanding of organization as occurring in communication. Thus, it invites us to consider

forms of organization that emerge beyond the boundaries of formal organization (e.g., Mumby, 2016). In this view, organization is an inherent by-product of human (and non-human) interaction (e.g., Cooren, 2000). In other words, organization, if broadly understood as co-orientation toward a common reference point through language use (Taylor & Van Every, 2000; Schoeneborn, Vásquez, & Cornelissen, in press), tends to emerge in instances of communication of various kinds. These include not only interactions that we would conventionally consider as *organizational* communication, but also conversations on the interpersonal level (e.g., the talk among friends who help each other with a sizable task) or on the societal level (e.g., media reports about recent terrorist attacks that are attributed to the same perpetrators). In that sense, CCO scholarship and work on organizationality share a common interest in organizational phenomena that transcend the boundaries of formal organization.

However, embracing a CCO view that understands organization as ultimately consisting of something as loose and ephemeral as communication raises the “composition problem” (Kuhn, 2012): how do various and dispersed communication episodes get interconnected over time and space so that they constitute a (more or less) coherent organizational phenomenon (see also Cooren & Fairhurst, 2009; Blaschke et al., 2012)? In that regard, CCO scholars and researchers of organizationality share a common interest in how different degrees of “decided order” (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011), “coordinated action” (Wilhoit & Kisselburgh, 2015), or “connective action” (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012) arise and become stabilized over time. The answers to this question vary though, not least depending on which tradition of CCO scholarship researchers draw on (for an overview, see Schoeneborn et al., 2014).

Second, CCO scholarship emphasizes that *the* main constitutive element of organization is a particular type of process, that is, communication (understood here as a dynamic process of negotiating and transforming meanings; see Ashcraft et al., 2009). It follows that CCO scholarship considers organizational phenomena first and foremost as *processual entities* (Blaschke et al., 2012). In this understanding of what an organization is, organizational phenomena only exist from one communicative episode to the next (Taylor & Cooren, 1997) “for another next first time” (Garfinkel, 2002, p. 182), making them necessarily precarious accomplishments.

We argue that this inherently processual focus of CCO scholarship can help capture the dynamics that lead to higher or lower degrees of organizationality. For instance, in their application of the notion of partial organization to CSR standards, Rasche, de Bakker, and Moon (2013) have called for studying dynamic trajectories of partial organization over time (see also Rasche & Seidl, 2019). Similarly, Schoeneborn and Dobusch (2019) have demonstrated that social collectives such as Anonymous can vary situationally between lower degrees of organizationality (e.g., behaving like a loose and dispersed network that can hardly be inhibited) and higher degrees of organizationality (e.g., by expelling a member and thus mobilizing typical elements of full-fledged exemplars of organization). In the same context, a communication-centered view can help explain why and how degrees of organizationality can vary over time. Accordingly, CCO scholarship can provide research on organizationality with an explanatory lens on the particular communicative mechanisms that lead to less or more organizationality.

These considerations directly point us to a third important argument: CCO scholarship rests on the assumption that communication tends to have *performative* and, in that sense, “world-creating” capabilities. The idea of the performativity of language use (Gond, Cabantous, Harding, & Learmonth, 2016) has its roots in speech act theory, following the tradition of Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) (see also Butler, 1990). Accounting for the performativity and action-like character of language use can also help explain how something as ephemeral as communication can lead over time to something more manifest, consequential, and binding, such as

organizational phenomena (Ford & Ford, 1995). Accordingly, acknowledging this two-sided character of communication—in which (a) the open-ended and fluid character of meanings are negotiable through communication and (b) there are possibilities to fix meanings and create bindingness through communication (see also Vásquez, Schoeneborn, & Sergi, 2016)—offers particular promise to explain how phenomena of organizationality are maintained over time in the very interplay of fluidity and stability (see Schreyögg & Sydow, 2010).

In the following, we demonstrate the usefulness of a communication-centered lens by discussing two empirical studies on organizationality: (a) the hacktivist collective Anonymous (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015) and (b) the coworking space *betahaus* in Berlin (Blagoev, Costas, & Kärreman, 2019). We chose these two cases for two main reasons: first, they stem from very different contexts, allowing us to illuminate the diversity of contexts in which organizationality can emerge. Second, both studies involved members of the author team of this chapter, which allows us to draw on the rich empirical data the two studies were based on. After presenting the main contours of both case studies and the organizationality they reveal, we discuss which insights can be derived from a comparative analysis of similarities and differences across the two cases.

(3) Exemplary cases of Organizationality—and Transversal Insights

a. *The Organizationality of Hacktivist Collectives: The Anonymous Case*

The first case we present is a study on the “hacktivist” (a neologism that combines the terms hacker and activist) collective Anonymous.¹ Anonymous is a network of hackers who are loosely held together by particular ideals (though they may vary across time and geography), such as propagating free software, open access to knowledge, or Internet freedom more generally (Beraldo, forthcoming; Coleman, 2013). On the one hand, Anonymous has a rather fluid character, for instance, by leaving the boundary open, in principle, regarding who can conduct hacker activities on its behalf and thus contribute to the collective endeavor (Coleman, 2014). On the other hand, and despite this fluidity, Anonymous exhibits quasi-organizational features by sparking coordinated action or effectively expelling individual “members” who violate specific rules or norms. The most typical example of such coordinated action is what Anonymous activists call “operations” (or #ops), that is, a project-like collaborative organizing of and often mobilizing for attacks (e.g., DDoS = distributed denial-of-service attacks to shut down a website) against certain religious groups, corporations, or other targets.

Operations attributed to Anonymous are usually launched by postings on public image boards such as 4Chan or forums such as AnonNews, which are open to anonymous postings and highly ephemeral; 4Chan, for example, only hosts a limited number of postings and continuously deletes older posts as new posts are added. Given these circumstances, someone posting calls for a new Anonymous operation on one of these public websites “doesn’t mean every single Anon² is in agreement”, as a press release posted on AnonNews emphasized in an attempt to denounce another posting on the very same platform. Hence, in our earlier research (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015) we asked the question: how are social collectives (like Anonymous) able to accomplish and maintain organizationality despite the fluidity inherent to their ephemeral and anonymous setup?

As shown in our research (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015), Anonymous exhibits all three layers of organizationality (which, in turn, can be seen as a “minimum definition” of organization): first, the hacktivist collective features episodes of *interconnected decision-making*. The project-like hacker operations as such usually comprise a sequence of decision-making episodes

through which hackers coordinate who is supposed to be attacked, as well as when and how. This coordination usually occurs both via public digital media channels (e.g., pertinent Twitter and Facebook accounts or collaborative web-authoring tools such as etherpads) and via private media channels (e.g., private and in some cases encrypted chat rooms). But episodes of decision-making do not only get interconnected *within* single hacker operations but also *across* different ones. For example, social media channels such as @YourAnonNews, with 6.8 million followers on Twitter (as of December 2020),³ historically shared calls for Anonymous operations that turned out to be “real” in the sense of leading to actual hacktivism. This history of contributing to operations perceived as successful, or at least consequential, attracts followers and increases credibility of future calls for operations shared on these channels. This interconnecting takes place at minimum by orienting hacker operations toward the same reference point, that is, Anonymous as a social address.

This leads us directly to a second important layer of organizationality, that is, *collective actorhood* (see also King, Felin, & Whetten, 2010). To some degree, the anonymity of (individual) contributors to Anonymous’s operations strengthens the (collective) actorhood of Anonymous. Operations may be conducted by an individual anonymous hacker, e.g., a live website hack during a radio interview, or by a great number of participants running software programs on their computers in distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks on websites. In both these examples, the combination of contributor anonymity and public attribution of these acts to the collective social address of Anonymous constitutes the collective actor (cf. Bencherki & Cooren, 2011; Savage, Cornelissen, & Franck, 2018), which is externally reinforced by third parties corroborating said attributions by reiterating respective claims (e.g., press reports by journalists).

Third, as noted further above, Anonymous is a fluid social phenomenon in the sense that individual hackers can contribute to the organizing activities without having to subscribe to formal rules or attain formal membership status; in other words, fixed membership is replaced here with fluid contributorship (Bencherki & Snack, 2016; Grothe-Hammer, 2020). Importantly, as soon as a social collective relies on a contributorship-based (rather than membership-based) mode of organizing, its boundary is drawn in a different way. The boundary is not drawn by making decisions on which individuals are considered as “inside” or “outside” the organization (as traditional forms of membership negotiation would imply; see Luhmann, 2019, or McPhee & Zaug, 2000). Rather, it is drawn based on distinctions between what types of contributions count as belonging to the social endeavor and which ones do not (see Bencherki & Snack, 2016; Grothe-Hammer, 2020).

This setup makes Anonymous’s identity and boundary inherently precarious: “If anyone can speak on behalf of Anonymous, who *cannot*?” (Schoeneborn & Dobusch, 2019, p. 326). Empirically, we can observe that the social collective’s boundary is maintained via *identity claims*, that is, communicative practices which attempt to demarcate what an entity is or does. Across different operations we find a particular need to carefully craft, prepare, and “stage” identity claims in such a fluid organizational arrangement—especially in situations where the “open organizing” character of Anonymous leads to communicative contestations of what Anonymous is or should be. In such contexts, Anonymous is able to gain (at least temporarily) the status of a collective actor (i.e., that attacks other actors and maintains a relatively clear boundary around the social phenomenon). In other words, the organizationality lens allows us to study how phenomena like Anonymous are able to oscillate between a rather fluid, social-movement-like character and a tighter, quasi-organizational character. In this regard, the concept of organizationality offers potentials to theorize the very oscillation between movement and organization and consider them as temporary states rather than separate social forms. In so

doing, it contributes to research at the intersection of social movement research and organization studies (e.g., Bennett & Segerberg, 2012).

One example of identity claims that allow the temporary accomplishment of organizational actorhood status is the carefully crafted and staged practice of *doxing* (i.e., compiling documents and personal information for exposing of another hacker's identity). For instance, when one hacker announced (in 2011) a collaborative hacker attack against Facebook, it led to public contestations of whether or not such an attack should "count" as being part of Anonymous. In such contestations, the practice of doxing served as an effective means of proving that those hackers who revealed the other hacker's actual identity were more skilled, and thus need to be seen as the "real" contributors to Anonymous. Accordingly, in the case of the operation targeting Facebook (#OpFacebook), the practice of doxing and exposing the initiator's personal identity (including home address, phone number, etc.) successfully settled the debate. By literally "naming" the individual responsible for the operation, a communicative boundary was drawn and made clear that this particular hacker operation should be considered as being outside (rather than part of) the collective: anyone can speak on behalf of Anonymous, as long as he or she remains anonymous. In sum, the Anonymous case allows us to exemplify how organizationality can be constituted through three communicative practices that are closely intertwined: interconnected decision-making, acting on behalf of a collective actor, and performing identity claims. Furthermore, although Anonymous lacks a specific and confined physical location, the label Anonymous as a social address, combined with pertinent digital channels on which one can find Anonymous-related communication, serves as an important substitute in that it provides a reference point toward which hacker operations are oriented (see also Beraldo, forthcoming). Finally, while the fluidity and a rather low degree of organizationality seem to be a "design principle" of Anonymous (Coleman, 2014), in practice the social collective tends to oscillate temporarily between low and high degrees of organizationality (see also Schoeneborn & Dobusch, 2019).

b. The Organizationality of Coworking Spaces: betahaus in Berlin

betahaus is one of the most popular and largest coworking spaces in Berlin.⁴ Coworking spaces (Blagoev, Costas, & Kärreman, 2019; Garrett, Spreitzer, & Bacevice, 2017; Spinuzzi, 2012) represent a relatively new form of organizing so-called independent work, that is, work which occurs largely outside the boundaries of formal organization and traditional employment (e.g., Petriglieri, Ashford, & Wrzesniewski, 2019). At first sight, *betahaus* simply provides an open architectural infrastructure of shared, "on demand" workspaces: everyone is welcome to rent a desk flexibly from a single day to a whole year. Doing so also provides access to separate meeting rooms, Wi-Fi Internet, and other basic office facilities, such as a mailbox, printers, and photocopiers. In addition, *betahaus* usually serves as a platform for various socializing events, such as parties and breakfasts, as well as workshops. Yet, attendance at such events is non-mandatory and everyone is, at least in principle, "free to come and go as they wish". This openness of the *betahaus* community was also communicatively reinforced by actors at *betahaus* who often described the coworking space as an "open society", a "culture of openness", or "open space". Such communicative practices suggested a non-binding and fluid character which one interviewee likened to a hotel:

If you had your own office, then you would indeed have to empty the trash and stuff like this ... it's a bit ... it has something of a hotel, when I think about it now. You come and use it when you need it or stay a bit, and then you go again.

*Doris*⁵

A closer look at the communicative dynamics within betahaus reveals how the latter can assume an organizational character to varying degrees, depending on its ability to pattern the work activities of its members. On the most fundamental level, betahaus is an open community for independent workers without a traditional organizational affiliation. These independent workers, though engaged in entirely unrelated activities and occupations, end up sharing the same office space. As a result, the coworkers' initially independent decisions could become interdependent. Over time, the community came to exhibit features of *interconnected decision-making*, the most fundamental layer of organizationality (cf. Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015). For example, actors at betahaus engaged in episodes of interconnected decision-making when it came to organizing joint activities and events on behalf of the coworking space. Such events entailed, for instance, the weekly betabreakfast but also larger events such as the "People at Beta" festival. On a more subtle level, interconnected decision-making at betahaus also entailed the shared routines and tacit forms of social control through communicative practices that emerged within the coworking space (cf. Barker, 1993). For example, betahaus coworkers developed a particular temporal routine. People arrived at work pretty much the same time in the morning every day (between 9 and 10 a.m.), and at 6.30 p.m. the coworking space was almost always empty (apart from the days when workshops took place followed by parties). This temporal routine was enforced communicatively: When someone came in at an unusual time, people would ask them why they were late (or early). In addition, interviewees reported how the sheer material co-presence at the coworking space had a disciplining effect on their work:

I just find it hard to motivate myself at home. [...] And here ... there are so many people, this also motivates me and, in the end, in the phases when I sit in front of the computer, I am much more concentrated and efficient.

Sandra

The coworking space, thus, served as a platform for inter-connecting a large number of independent workers' everyday decisions to go to work, be productive, and share a daily routine with other fellow coworkers without necessarily working on the same tasks.

In addition, betahaus also acquired some degree of *collective actorhood* by virtue of the internal communicative dynamics within the space and external attribution. For instance, on multiple occasions coworkers decided to appear and act on behalf of betahaus as a collective actor, for instance, in terms of supporting certain social causes (e.g., hosting the "Decolonizing Berlin" conference in September 2020 aimed at, e.g., changing Berlin street names to promote a culture of remembrance about Berlin's colonial past) or when participating in popular city-wide events:

Three weeks ago, someone had the idea to put on a stage for Fete de la Musique, and they [the space operators] picked it up and asked the startups: "Hey can you support us with a small amount? Or just by doing something?" And then there was a really cool stage with a solid music program.

Nigel

It is also important to note that betahaus is portrayed as both a local actor and a participant in a global coworking space network. betahaus coworking spaces have already opened their doors in Hamburg, Barcelona, Sofia, Tirana, and Milan, with each "branch" being openly accessible for users of the other ones.

Appearing and behaving as a collective actor also strengthened the sense of *identity* that betahaus provided its members with. Identity claims were communicated both in a centralized and in a decentralized manner. For example, the betahaus website communicated some central features of identity—the idea of providing a fixed point, a stable place in the fluid and non-binding world of independent work:

To express our idea of a new workplace, we first came up with terms from the area of software development, such as “beta version” or “beta phase”. They best describe the way we’d like to design and develop the betahaus: as an open-ended process. [...] *“Perpetual beta”: the betahaus is never really complete but keeps on evolving.* [...] Finally, the word “betahaus” was created [...]: a real place in the digital world; a fixed point and physical home for creative professionals and other “digital Bohemians”.

betahaus, 2015

In a more decentralized manner, people working at betahaus also continually engaged in communicating identity claims. To them, the most important point of distinction was demarcating a boundary between betahaus—which at the end of the day looked a lot like an open-plan office, but more colorful—and traditional employment:

Coworking is definitely a little bit different than when you rent an office Ok, you sit in an open-plan office [...] But actually, what you get here, especially at betahaus, you just get more, you get a *community*.

Norbert

Coworkers particularly stressed the absence of hierarchy as well as the egalitarian feel of betahaus as a distinguishing identity feature:

First and foremost, it is a *non-hierarchical togetherness* because ... at almost all companies you have superiors, who always have a special status ... even in the open-plan office, [...] it is a hierarchical structure. Here you are equal among equals.

August

Coworkers found this distinction important and attractive, as it enabled them to “just be themselves” at work:

And unlike the classic corporate office people are not pigeonholing you. [...] *Here you can just be yourself.* You don’t have to fulfil any clichés in order not to be frowned at.

Sandra

Overall, the betahaus coworking space became a recognizable, physical reference point (a “social address” in the terminology of Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015) in Berlin’s large scene of independent workers and entrepreneurs. Many of them chose to come and work at betahaus, because doing so provided them with an identifiable affiliation within the scene, something that is important for independent workers who often have to cope with precarious working conditions and feelings of social isolation (e.g., Petriglieri et al., 2019). Above and beyond a sense of affiliation, betahaus also provides independent workers with a flexible degree of organizationality, including elements of interconnected decision-making, collective actorhood, and identity. Indeed, the sheer “co-habitation” in the shared physical space seemed to facilitate

the emergence of shared routines, rituals as well as forms of discipline and control. In that sense, *betahaus* functioned as a sort of “surrogate organization” (Petriglieri et al., 2019), a platform that provided independent workers with varying and customizable degrees of organizationality by mobilizing a material infrastructure of shared office space.

c. Comparative Analysis and Discussion

In the next step, we compare and contrast the two selected cases of organizationality—to identify shared and recurrent patterns across the cases as well as potentially theoretically relevant differences. Table 8.1 provides a summary and overview of these cross-case observations. As we have seen in the description of the two cases, both exhibit the three layers of organizationality: (1) interconnected decision-making, (2) collective actorhood, and (3) identity claims—even if they manifest themselves in different ways.

First, in terms of interconnected decision-making, Anonymous appears to operate primarily in project-based form, with interconnecting decisions both within the project (i.e., to make the hacker operation happen) and across projects (via the label Anonymous as the joint reference point). Somewhat similarly in the *betahaus* case, organizationality is partly accomplished through project-like activities that emerge among the freelancers sharing the same space. However, on top of this, one can also observe day-to-day routine-like patterns that emerge among users of the coworking space. Such patterns, in turn, intensify the character of a quasi-organization or “surrogate organization” (we will come back to this notion at the end of this section). Second, in terms of collective actorhood, it is noteworthy that in both cases a clearly identifiable label or “social address” serves as the main reference point through which collective actorhood has the chance to arise. In the Anonymous case, hacker operations are enacted “on behalf of” Anonymous, thus charging the social address with actorhood. In the *betahaus* case, even if more strongly bound to local physical place, the brand name and social address *betahaus* serves as reference point that connects different activities (e.g., given the fact that users of the *betahaus* Berlin coworking space can check into other coworking spaces in the *betahaus* network, such as in Hamburg). Third, in terms of identity claims, both cases draw on an interplay of assertive (i.e., low-performativity) speech acts—to define who they are or what they do—and declarative (i.e. high-performativity) speech acts—to perform collective identity, not least by defining what or who they are not (see Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015). In the Anonymous case, the collective tends to mobilize highly performative speech acts (e.g., publicly revealing a hacker’s personal identity) to distance itself from certain hacker attacks that were perceived as misaligned with the collective identity. At *betahaus*, coworkers especially distanced themselves from traditional employment and its associated “look and feel” in terms of office space.

Apart from the three layers of organizationality, we identified a number of further striking similarities between the two cases. First, regarding the role of the social address, in both cases the clearly identifiable label or brand name is what holds together the diverse contributions to the organizational endeavor. At the same time, the social address allows for scalability in the sense that new contributions can be added fairly easily to the existing setup, for instance, by endorsing new hacker attacks that contribute to Anonymous as an organizational endeavor, or by adding new, in principle independent, coworking spaces to the *betahaus* network. Second, regarding the role of contributorship, both cases in principle leave the boundary open in terms of who can add activities to the organizational endeavor—as long as these contributions are largely in line with shared values among contributors. In the *betahaus* case though, the “open organizing” character (Dobusch, Dobusch, & Müller-Seitz, 2019) is restricted by the fact that only a certain number of people can be simultaneously present at the coworking space (due

Table 8.1 Comparative analysis of the two exemplary cases of organizationality (Anonymous and betahaus)

	<i>Case A: Anonymous</i>	<i>Case B: betahaus</i>
I. Three layers of organizationality		
(1) Interconnected decision-making	Interconnecting of decisions within and across (project-like) hacker operations	Emergence of day-to-day routines as well as project-like activities among otherwise disconnected freelance workers
(2) Collective actorhood	Hacker operations are enacted on behalf of Anonymous, thus contributing to its collective actorhood	Organization of internal events and participation in external, city-wide events on behalf of betahaus as collective actor
(3) Identity claims	Interplay of assertive speech acts that aim to define what Anonymous is or does—and declarative speech acts that “perform” its identity	Interplay of assertive speech acts that aim to define betahaus as part of the larger “openness” movement—and declarative speech acts that distinguish it from traditional, “hierarchical” office spaces/forms of work
II. Further similarities across the cases		
(4) Role of the social address	Clearly identifiable label/social address as necessary condition for organizationality (while also allowing for scalability)	
(5) Role of contributorship	Boundaries are drawn mainly by self-recruited/voluntary contributions compatible with the organizational endeavor (and, in case B, if space permits)	
(6) Role of material configurations	Pertinent channels in digital media/confined physical space serve as “material anchors” for co-orientation	
III. Further differences across the cases		
(7) Global vs local scope	Global/dispersed with regard to location of contributors	Local physical space that hosts contributors
(8) Temporality	Oscillation between high and low degrees of organizationality	Trend toward adding more layers of organizationality (while remaining optional and “customizable”)
(9) Strategy vs emergence	Organizationality as strategic/intentional act	Organizationality/“surrogate organization” as emergent and customizable “side-product”

to its limited size) and that users need to pay in advance to make use of the space. At the same time, sheer co-presence is insufficient for organizationality to arise quasi-automatically. Rather, and just like in the Anonymous case, the collective depends on self-recruited and voluntary contributions to the common endeavor to recurrently constitute organizationality. Third, regarding the role of material configurations, in both cases organizationality becomes more tangible through materially visible places where one can “find” betahaus or Anonymous. In the betahaus example, this tangibility is rather straightforward with carefully designed office buildings that are accessible for their users. In the Anonymous example, where such clear physical space is lacking, tangibility is accomplished through pertinent digital media channels where Anonymous hackers would typically make their announcements. Hence, across both cases, we

can perceive the importance of such “material anchoring” (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015) that can provide some degree of stability in otherwise rather fluid organizational settings.

Finally, the cross-case comparison also allows for an identification of noteworthy differences between Anonymous and betahaus. A first difference refers to the global vs. local scope of contributors and their activities. While in the betahaus case one needs to be physically present in the coworking space in Berlin (or other subsidiaries) to add to its day-to-day activities and routines (even if these freelancers may engage in dispersed activities for their respective employers for the rest of the day), the Anonymous case is an example of a global and dispersed scope of contributors and their activities to further the common cause. Second, in terms of temporality, the Anonymous case has been described as alternating or oscillating between phases of lower degrees of organizationality (e.g., appearing to serve as a rather loose network in between hacker operations) and higher degrees of organizationality (e.g., when the collective on certain occasions is quasi-organizational, as in the #OpFacebook case mentioned above); accordingly, Schoeneborn and Dobusch (2019) have mobilized the metaphor of an “accordion” to describe such back-and-forth movements between different degrees of organizationality. In contrast, the betahaus case can be seen as part of a process that adds further organizationality and routines over time (and, in that way, might be comparable to the trajectories described by Rasche et al., 2013, or Rasche & Seidl, 2019). At the same time, because working at betahaus as such does not contribute to its organizationality (but only if these activities are oriented toward betahaus as the joint social address), the latter remains customizable for the individual user (i.e., the freelancers who work at betahaus can choose whether they want to engage in activities for their varying other employers and/or in activities for betahaus). This leads us directly to a third and final point. Whereas the rather fluid organizational setting of Anonymous seems to be a deliberate organizational design choice (cf. Coleman, 2014), in the betahaus case the organizationality seems to emerge without being strategically planned for; instead, it appears as a fluid and continuously evolving “surrogate organization”, a customizable “by-product” of co-habiting in the shared coworking space.

(4) Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, we have outlined and compared two exemplary cases of organizationality, the hacktivist collective Anonymous (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015) and the coworking space betahaus (Blagoev et al., 2019). We have also used the two cases to make the (somewhat abstract) concept of organizationality more tangible by embedding it into concrete contexts. While the two cases appear to be very different at first glance, they exhibit similarities regarding some of the key elements that need to be in place to enable the emergence of organizationality even in fluid or informal settings, such as a clearly identifiable social address, open but clear boundaries for a steady influx of new contributions, and material anchoring in concrete (digital) channels or (physical) spaces. Also, we have shown that across both cases communication plays a constitutive role in creating organizationality through the performance of communicative practices that are oriented toward a joint social address (e.g., Anonymous or betahaus). However, the specific communicative practices differ, depending on the two case contexts.

Taken together, the concept of organizationality allows us to not only better understand how organization emerges from other forms of sociality but is also able to capture temporarily changing degrees of organizationality over time. To some degree, this is of fundamental importance for research that routinely classifies social actors as either “organizational” or something else entirely. Organizationality as a concept enables—but also requires—acknowledging organization as a continuous communicative accomplishment. The exceptionally fluid and

informal contexts of the admittedly extreme illustrative cases of Anonymous and betahaus, in turn, showcase that organizationality happens also in-between and beyond the set of traditional organizational building blocks commonly dealt with in the literature (e.g., Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011). Moreover, as emphasized further above, we believe the concept of organizationality adds to previous research at the intersection of social movement research and organization studies (e.g., Bennett & Segerberg, 2012) a theorization of how social collectives are able to oscillate between both movement and organization as different temporary social states rather than definite and separate social forms.

More generally, for future research, we see the identified similarities and differences between the two cases as a chance for further theoretical and empirical inquiries into the heterogeneity of organizationality (similar to the rich “zoology” of partial organization offered by Ahrne & Brunsson, 2019) and the boundary conditions under which organizationality can be accomplished. For instance, the importance of material anchors seems to be similarly pronounced in other empirical investigations of organizationality, such as the digital platforms that support the organizationality of crowdfunding collectives (Nielsen, 2018), or how mobile technologies facilitated the organizationality of the Arab Spring movement (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012), or the ways in which the materiality of bike riding and equipment helps constitute the organizationality of bike commuter collectives (Wilhoit & Kisselburgh, 2015). In turn, the two exemplary cases, Anonymous and betahaus, differed quite significantly in terms of the temporal trajectories toward higher and/or lower degrees of organizationality, as we have seen. Here, our elaborations call for studying the dynamic developments of organizationality (between partial and complete organization) over time (see also Rasche & Seidl, 2019).

Research on organizationality is still in its infancy. Nevertheless, it can provide the field of organization studies with opportunities for developing new theoretical vocabularies that can help gain a deeper scholarly understanding of the heterogeneous and dynamic landscape of organizational phenomena beyond the boundaries of formal organization (for a similar research impetus, see Ahrne & Brunsson, 2019). As our chapter aimed to show, in this regard communication-centered perspectives can help rethink what organization *is* and to identify (new) forms of organizationality that arise from communication. At the same time, the concept of organizationality helps to further develop CCO scholarship, which has been primarily focused on studying exemplars of formal organization, by elucidating the communicative constitution of a much broader spectrum of organizational phenomena beyond the boundaries of formal organization as such.

Notes

- 1 We draw here on research that was published in more extensive form in a prior publication of ours (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015).
- 2 The label used in the community to signify Anonymous activists.
- 3 Cf. <https://twitter.com/YourAnonNews> (accessed 20 December 2020).
- 4 The following draws on an ethnographic study of the Berlin-based coworking space betahaus (Blagoev et al., 2019).
- 5 All names have been replaced by pseudonyms to protect the identities of those involved in the study.

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