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Introduction

**Timon Beyes, Lisa Conrad,
and Reinhold Martin**

In search of media, one sooner or later arrives at the question of organization. The relation between media and organization is so obvious that it borders on the tautological: after all, media organize things into patterns and relations. As Cornelia Vismann (2008) has shown in her media history *Files*, these seemingly innocuous everyday recording, storing, and circulation apparatuses are at the heart of the legal and administrative systems as we know them. Their techniques have come to shape the architecture of digital machines and data processing, in which we thus find traces of more or less bygone administrative practices. Media can therefore be understood as “civilizational ordering devices” (Peters 2015, 5), and if the civilizational encompasses all kinds of sociotechnical ordering, then “[media] are fundamental constituents of [any form, or any process of] organization” (Peters 2015, 19). It seems hard to find a more clear-cut claim to relevance for thinking media through organization, and organization through media. But this quasi-tautological loop is in need of further scrutiny. It covers up a complex field—perhaps a battlefield—of relations that indeed constitute matters of great concern. In fact, if media are busy ordering social or sociotechnical relations, then they are invested with power and domination, control and surveillance, disruption and emancipation (Lovink and Rossiter 2018).

This intimate relation of media and organization therefore is as old as the hills (Beyes, Holt, and Pias 2019). Yet digital media

- x technologies actualize it and perhaps exacerbate its potentials and conflicts. After all, “digital media traffic less in content, programs, and opinions than in organization, power, and calculation” (Peters 2015, 7). They forcefully remind us that “organization is the message,” to quote the title of Lisa Conrad’s contribution to this book. They enable and call for new “propositions on the organizational form,” as Geert Lovink and Ned Rossiter make clear in their afterword to this volume.

If technological media are amenable to, or support, or condition different organizational forms, however, then this implies that they can let themselves be somewhat formed, or formed in somewhat different ways. The relation between media and organization is quasi-tautological because it is recursive. Indeed, “media organize,” as Reinhold Martin (2003) has concretized the claim that media determine our situation (because how could they determine it if not through organizing it?) and as his chapter in this book further elaborates. In some ways, media determine organization. But at the same time, media are organized, and organization in some ways determines media. “Organizing media,” to pick up the title of Timon Beyes’s contribution to this volume, thus needs to be read in its twofold meaning: media technologies condition life through their organizational effects (at least in the Western world, to return to Vismann [2008, xii, emphasis original], “a life without files, without any recording, a life *off the record*, is simply unthinkable”); at the same time, to take place, to disappear or to be transformed, media technologies are necessarily predicated on organizational constellations (how files have been and are administered—processed, circulated, archived—shaped their trajectories as media). This recursive loop between media and organization is then quasi-tautological because it touches upon the understanding of media themselves: as “not only the conditions of possibility for events” but “in themselves events: assemblages or constellations of certain technologies, fields of knowledge, and social institutions” (Horn 2007, 8).

This book is dedicated to this “knot” of media and organization. It does not claim to untie this knot, for that would be a grandiloquent, impossible project. But it endeavors to disentangle important threads, both conceptually and empirically (as if the two could be held distinct). In this sense, while each of the following texts can be read independently from the others, they have been developed in joint discussion and are meant to hang together and cohere as a joint response to the question of media as/and organization.

In “Media Organize: Persons,” Reinhold Martin shows how such “media organizing” takes place through the sociotechnical processes of ordering things, knowledge, and people into—discursive, institutional, social, political, biological—*bodies*. Through the figures of the person, the machine, and the circle, Martin traces how media shape, solidify, and perform corporate bodies, personalizing corporate forms and affects and binding people to its causes. In “Organizing Media: Security and Entertainment,” Timon Beyes discusses sculptural works by the artist Simon Denny to coax out their performance of different yet entangled modes of—protocological, bureaucratic, and entrepreneurial—ordering. These modes shape a contemporary organizational nexus of persistent consumer and citizen surveillance in the name of security and consumption, the “security–entertainment complex.” In “Organization Is the Message: Gray Media,” Lisa Conrad takes a closer look at how media research can engage with the concept of organization by considering the “gray medium” of enterprise resource planning software. Distinguishing between media as organizing mechanisms, as themselves entangled with and predicated on institutional and organizational conditions, and as implicated in the normative question of the “good organization,” Conrad seeks to find a more affirmative ground on what organization and media can do to each other than the comparably dark analyses of Martin and Beyes. In their “Afterword: Propositions on the Organizational Form,” Geert Lovink and Ned Rossiter resolutely call for experimenting with organizational forms (rather than, we might surmise, merely dwelling

- xii on their oppressive effects). Instead of endorsing or analyzing the short-termism and weak ties of social media, the question of organization here resurfaces as an activist one of “sovereign media,” directed at newly found commitments that are in need of more stabilized capacities for decision-making and action.

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