



CARNE – FLESH AND ORGANIZATION

CALL FOR PAPERS FOR THE 35TH STANDING CONFERENCE ON ORGANIZATIONAL SYMBOLISM

**UNIVERSITA' DEGLI STUDI DI ROMA LA SAPIENZA,
ROME
10TH-13TH JULY 2017**

“Flesh, we believe – more than bodies - is at stake in our posthuman times, in the sense that it is *flesh* that is subject to increased control either in the laboratory or the marketplace and is caught up in processes of modification that seek to master and profit from it.” (Diamanti *et al.*, 2009: 4)

The XXXV SCOS Roma conference theme of ‘*Carne* - Flesh and organization’ is inspired in no small part by our 2017 venue. One historical narrative of the culture of Ancient Rome tells us that its gladiatorial contests and *damnatio ad bestias* (being thrown to wild animals, usually lions) and the sacrifice of beasts themselves served a variety of different purposes. These included honouring the dead and making sacrifices to the gods; reminding those not involved in the warrior state’s military expansion of the violence, bloodshed and killing (*carnage*) carried out and experienced by Rome’s frontier armies; a confirmation of the power of the state and its ability to mete out justice; and the sheer entertainment of the spectacle. Whatever their function, however, these events seem to us to circuit very profoundly around the flesh and its vulnerabilities, with the horrific murder of thousands of men and animals taking place in what Hopkins (1983: #13) vividly describes as “a welter of blood”. But Rome is a triumph of the arts which celebrate the flesh as well; a culture of sensuous indulgence, carnal desires and bodily experiences.

Our theme also takes off from the longstanding use of the notion of flesh in academic investigations of the more or less porous boundaries between the self, others and the world around us. Flesh, these works suggest, is ontologically slippery and definitionally elusive. For Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1964), flesh reconnects the viewing and the visible, the touching and the touched, the body and the world. Perception itself is a fleshly - auditory, visual, gustatory, haptic, olfactory - activity. Moreover, as Antonio Strati (2007) points out in his discussion of the connections between practice-based learning and ‘sensible knowledge’ in organizations, when we perceive others, we always perceive them as fundamentally corporeal. Equally, the world acts upon our flesh, so that what or whom we touch, see, smell, taste and hear may touch, see, smell, taste and hear us. Elsewhere, Michel Foucault locates modern western *scientia sexualis* as having its origins in the earliest years of Christianity and its confessional regime which seeks to unearth “the important secrets of the flesh” (1977: 154) as the deepest truths of the human subject. In this reading, flesh is the natural body, always and irrevocably bound to sin and to death.

Cherrie Moraga (2015: 19), on the other hand, identifies a theory in the flesh as “one where the physical realities of our lives - our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings - all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity”. In a very different feminist analysis, Judith Butler (1990: 96, 33) defines gender as the “styles of the flesh” which “congeal over time”; whereas Vicki Kirby (1997) takes her and other feminist poststructuralists to task in *Telling Flesh* for their overstatement of the cultural inscription of the body, and argues that “once you are seriously displacing the nature/language opposition,

you have to be arguing that nature, far from being written on, and insofar as it cannot be said to 'lack language', 'must be articulate' (page 90).

Elsbeth Probyn (2001), on the other hand, provides a dazzling array of ways to understand skin both materially, metonymically and metaphorically – it protects and is vulnerable, it can be bruised and breached, it is porous, it expands and retracts, it devours and is devoured, it has colour, texture and sensation.

'*Carne* - Flesh and organization' also resonates with themes of SCOS conferences past, like organizational wellness (Cambridge, 2003), excess and organization (Stockholm, 2005) and the animal (Uppsala, 2016). But organization studies scholars have perhaps been somewhat neglectful of flesh in our various endeavours; whilst for the last three decades or so we have paid a great deal of attention to the body, we have largely overlooked flesh. Yet, as our opening epigraph implies, flesh can be connected to organization/s and organizing in manifold different ways. Possible contributions to SCOS XXXV could therefore include but are certainly not limited to:

- The pleasures of the flesh: carnality, sensuality, excess and indulgence in, of and as provided by organizations (and their opposites).
- 'Fleshworkers' – cosmetic surgeons, masseuses, cosmetic surgeons, tattooists, make-up artists, slaughterhouse workers, morticians, laboratory scientists etc. - and the markets for their services.
- The resurging significance of the provenance of meat and fish in western eating habits and its cultural, symbolic and economic implications.
- Vegetarianism, veganism, 'clean' and raw food diets, the markets around and commodification of these practices.
- Researching the flesh, bodily, sensory, fleshly, aesthetic or sensible knowing and/ or methods, the ethics of fleshly research. Organizing (and researching) in meatspace and virtual space, 'in the flesh' and online.
- Bodily changes, wounding, scarring and dysmorphia in organizations.
- Flesh-eaters and the undead: cannibals, vampires and zombies as organizational metaphors.
- The organization of organ donation and the global black market in body parts.
- The global meat industry and its manifold discontents: eg, the certification and marketing of halal meat, the UK horse meat scandal.
- (Re)incarnation and incorporation in and of organizations.
- Pro-ana, pro-mia and fat acceptance organizations.
- Psychoanalytical and psychological perspectives on the organized, the organization and processes of organizing.

- Organizational metaphors of the flesh: eg, the ‘lean organization’, a ‘meaty question’, ‘fleshing out an argument’, a ‘meat market’, ‘dead meat’ etc.
- The use of animal skin for clothing and furnishings and the complex global differences of necessity versus excess.
- The ethics and politics of organizing as understood through Agamben’s *zoë* (bare life) and *bios* (qualified life) ... and so on.

Open stream and workshops

SCOS 2017 will also have an open stream allowing for the presentation of papers of more general interest to the SCOS community; and we are open to suggestions for workshops or similar events in line with the proposed theme. Outlines of workshops should be the same length as a paper abstract and should indicate resources needed, number of participants, time required, approach to be taken and objectives. Please identify ‘Open stream’ or ‘Workshop’ on your abstract as appropriate.

Conference organizing team

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Abstract submission

Abstracts of no more than 500 words should be submitted as e-mail attachments (all common formats accepted) by Friday 2nd December 2016 to the organizers at scosxxxv@gmail.com. Informal enquiries can be submitted to the same address.

References

- Butler, J. (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall.
- Foucault, M. (1977) ‘Power and sex’, *Telos*, 32: 152-161.
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- Hopkins, K. (1983) ‘Murderous games: gladiatorial contests in Ancient Rome’, *History Today*, 33 (6). Online. Available [here](#).
- Kirby, V. (1997) *Telling Flesh: The Substance of the Corporeal*, New York and London: Routledge.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962) *Phenomenology of Perception*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Moraga, C. (2015) ‘Introduction. Entering the lives of others: theory in the flesh’. In C. Moraga and G. Anzaldúa (eds) *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, fourth edition, Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, p. 19.
- Probyn, E. (2001) ‘Eating skin’, in S. Ahmed and J. Stacey (eds) *Thinking Through the Skin*, London and New York: Routledge, pp. 87-103.
- Strati, A. (2007) ‘Sensible knowledge and practice-based learning’, *Management Learning*, 38 (1): 61-77.