

# **Sociomaterial struggles at the frontline of strategy:**

A postphenomenological view of practice and power

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## ABSTRACT

An important line of inquiry aligned with the ‘strategy as practice’ domain considers how strategy work is an exercise in power. Applying a lens influenced by—among others—Foucault, such work shows how actors shape their identities through and in relation to strategic discourses. Upper echelon managers discursively construct themselves *as strategists*, holding power over the subjectivities of those involved in implementing strategy. These discourses thus also work to shape the roles, identities and actions of these lower echelon actors to align with strategic intent. In turn, these same actors then construct their own identities in relation to these dominant discourses. Some studies build upon this position by attending to the role of technologies (e.g., accounting systems) in these flows of power, highlighting how such systems impose ways of working and thinking, and so define identities. However, such studies tend to dichotomise control and resistance, and tacitly view technology as an embodiment of pre-existing managerial intent. This under-emphasises the relational, co-productive nature of power and of technology’s role therein.

This thesis aims to develop such an emphasis. I adopt a strong view of sociomateriality which sees the social and material as ontologically entangled. This is informed by Heideggerian conceptualisations, and also by ideas from ‘postphenomenology’, a school which further develops Heideggerian thought while also considering Foucauldian power in relation to technology use. Working with these ideas allows me to conceptualise human and technology as co-constitutive of (and within) the struggles that take shape as power flows through an organisation.

Adopting this position, I examine ‘*sociomaterial struggles*’ in a study of frontline practitioners in a subsidiary company of a multinational health technology firm. Over 10-months, I collected their self-reported accounts of working with a new software suite as part of a ‘digital customer engagement strategy’. Analysing these accounts as ‘narratives of practices’, I show how the sense of self of each practitioner was first threatened and then (re)claimed through their individual, idiosyncratic relations with the technology—specifically, relations that set up struggles over subjectivities through a play of *technology mediated objectivities*, *technology mediated intersubjectivities*, and *technology mediated subjectivities*. Their stories weave together to reveal how the praxis that unfolded through these struggles shaped the local work of strategy. Overall, my thesis extends our understanding of how strategy is accomplished, attending to workers’ involvements with novel managerial ‘technologies of control’. It also contributes to theory, specifically to theorising power/resistance in strategy on the basis of a strong sociomaterial ontology.

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## CONTENTS

Abstract.....	i
Acknowledgements.....	ii
List of tables and figures.....	v
INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW .....	1
A. Framing this thesis .....	2
B. Contents and structure .....	6
CHAPTER 1: SITUATING THE RESEARCH WITHIN THE DOMAIN OF STRATEGY AS PRACTICE .....	9
1.1. Introduction: SAP's emergence within strategic management.....	10
1.2. The 'practice turn' in the social sciences .....	14
1.3. An overview of approaches and themes in SAP.....	15
1.4. Participating in the accomplishment of strategy.....	19
1.5. The 'material turn' in strategy as practice.....	23
1.6. Blurring boundaries: strategy as a human–technology co-accomplishment.....	28
1.7. Power in the practice of strategy .....	32
1.8. Struggles and the shaping of subjectivities.....	36
1.9. Technologies of control in strategy accomplishment.....	38
1.10. The research opportunity .....	40
CHAPTER 2: HEIDEGGERIAN VIEWS OF SOCIOMATERIALITY – A CRITICAL ACCOUNT .....	42
2.1. Introduction.....	43
2.2. Phenomenological philosophy and Heidegger.....	44
2.3. Exemplars of Heideggerian philosophy in SAP.....	47
2.4. Introducing views of sociomateriality in organisation studies.....	54
2.5. Spatiality of the 'world': The structure of equipment.....	56
2.6. Spatiality of 'being-in' (-the-world): The structure of care .....	59
2.7. Heideggerian contributions to theorising sociomateriality.....	62
2.8. Problematising anthropocentricity and (a lack of) the social.....	66
CHAPTER 3: TOWARDS A POSTPHENOMENOLOGICAL VIEW OF SOCIOMATERIAL STRUGGLES.....	75
3.1. Introduction.....	76
3.2. The postphenomenology of technology.....	76
3.3. Technological and composite intentionality.....	79
3.4. Amplifications–reductions within the spatiality of being-in-the-world-with-others.....	83
3.5. Mediating objectivities, subjectivities and intersubjectivities by 'tuning' care.....	89
3.6. Struggling over subjectivities: A postphenomenological framing.....	93
3.7. Presenting the empirical research question.....	100

CHAPTER 4: METHODS – A CASE OF STRATEGY THROUGH CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT SOFTWARE .....	102
4.1. Introduction.....	103
4.2. Research approach and methodology .....	103
4.3. Overview of the case .....	106
4.4. Further guiding principles .....	110
4.5. Data collection.....	115
4.6. Data analysis .....	123
4.7. A relational framework derived from abductive analysis.....	128
4.8. Presentation of findings as textwork .....	130
CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS – SHAPING SUBJECTIVITIES IN RELATION TO TECHNOLOGY’S MEDIATIONS .....	134
5.1. Introduction.....	135
5.2. Prologue: The ‘modules’ of the CE software .....	136
5.3. James’ story: Rejecting the technology to own the potentiality it offers.....	139
5.4. Hannah’s story: Seizing an alternative script following a denial of self-as-manager.....	149
5.5. Sarah’s story: Subject positions under tension at the corporate-local interface .....	159
5.6. Caitlyn’s story: ‘Re-placing’ the technology to defend the ‘local’ self .....	175
5.7. Summary of findings.....	191
CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION .....	194
6.1. Introduction.....	195
6.2. Struggles over subjectivities as individuated phenomena .....	196
6.3. Enriching the picture of technological mediation in sociomaterial struggles.....	200
6.4. Implications for considering technologies in the power relations of strategy.....	205
6.5. Circling back to theory: Struggles for selfhood from ‘within’ the spatiality of care.....	213
6.6. Relating to other theoretical stances on (socio)materiality in strategy .....	216
6.7. Broader relationships with Heideggerian thinking.....	220
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION.....	231
7.1. Overview .....	232
7.2. Review, contributions and limitations.....	232
7.3. Future postphenomenological elaborations .....	238
7.4. Some open questions and opportunities.....	243
7.5. Closing thoughts on managerial practice.....	246
APPENDIX .....	250
A. Economics-oriented theories in strategic management .....	251
B. A note on hot spots vis-à-vis coding.....	252
C. The four concepts of the narrative theory of technological mediation.....	254
REFERENCES.....	255

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Fleming and Spicer's (2007, 2014) faces of power .....	33
Table 2: Action, intentionality and strategy: Tsoukas' (2015) Heideggerian framework.....	52
Table 3: Sandberg and Dall'Alba's (2009) 'practice world' concepts .....	53
Table 4: Ihde's typology of human-technology-world relations .....	80
Table 5: Narratives of practices according to Balogun et al.'s (2003) criteria .....	106
Table 6: Summary of data sources .....	116
Table 7: Information on primary participants .....	117
Table 8: Economics-oriented theories in strategic management.....	251
Table 9: The four concepts of the narrative theory of technological mediation .....	254

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Framework for articulating the struggles over subjectivities in the findings .....	129
Figure 2: An adjacent contribution that extends the phenomenological view of SAP .....	228

## **INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW**

## A. Framing this thesis

Across industries and management settings, we are seeing a growing interest in new digital technologies and their applications. Corporate strategy discourses are replete with visions of the bright futures that can be seized through digital transformation, and by realising the power of big data, artificial intelligence, and cloud computing. This is also reflected in burgeoning attention from strategy scholars, as exemplified by recent calls for proposals and submissions for Strategic Management Society conferences<sup>1</sup>. However, at the same time, government advisory bodies, policy and advocacy groups, as well as philosophers of technology caution us to consider the ethical implications of such technologies<sup>2</sup>. In the case of AI for example, red flags have been raised that bring attention to the potential for breaches of the principles of ‘respect for human autonomy, prevention of harm, fairness and explicability’ (High-Level Expert Group on Artificial Intelligence, 2019, p.2).

Motivated by these concerns—and also by my personal experiences working for, and within, large organisations over many years as a practitioner—this thesis gives critical attention to the use of such technologies in organisational strategy. My time in industry has led me to a view that corporate visions for technology can tend towards idealism. My sense is that digital transformation ‘strategies’ often tend towards what McCabe (2010) calls a ‘managerial agenda’. Senior managers assume that new technologies, if implemented ‘correctly’ by staff will lead to competitive advantage and greater value for customers. The focus here is on how to get the organisation to *perform* these managerially led aspirations for digital change for the corporate good.

However, this focus simplifies the challenges that are made present for workers tasked with delivering technological change, reducing their lived concerns to the ‘usual’ and quite normal ‘problems’ of implementation that can (and should) be handled through appropriate training, incentives, and performance management. Workers and the technologies deployed are thus positioned as instruments of managerial intent (cf. Alvesson & Wilmott, 1995). In this thesis, I challenge this managerialist, instrumentalist view of digital transformation, opening up a critically leaning agenda that seeks to understand the ‘limits to managerial power’ (McCabe, 2010, p.157), to reveal something of what *actually happens in practice* when new technologies are strategically

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<sup>1</sup> See for example: <https://www.strategicmanagement.net/milan2022/call-for-proposals/call-for-proposals>; <https://www.strategicmanagement.net/berkeley/overview/overview>.

<sup>2</sup> See for example: <https://algorithmwatch.org/>; Coeckelbergh (2020, 2022); High-Level Expert Group on Artificial Intelligence (2019); Sattarov (2019); Verbeek (2011).



enrolled into organisations, and to show how these are *experienced and used* by those practitioners who are tasked with the hard work of strategy realisation that takes place at the ‘coalface’ of the organisation. To support this work, I align with the strategy as practice (SAP<sup>3</sup>) perspective, and I will now briefly frame how my work sits within this scholarly domain.

Over the last two decades, a substantial body of work has been generated that views strategy as a form of human practice. Rather than studying strategy as a ‘thing’ that an organisation ‘possesses’, scholars within this ‘strategy as practice’ (SAP) domain think of it in terms of (stated very loosely) the doings, sayings (and also cognitions) of strategic actors (cf. Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2003). One growing line of SAP inquiry emphasises the parts played by those—such as ‘middle managers’ or ‘frontline workers’—who sit hierarchically ‘below’ the upper echelons who traditionally ‘formulate’ strategy (e.g., Balogun & Rouleau, 2017; Laine & Vaara, 2015; Rouleau et al., 2015; Weiser et al., 2020). Applying a lens influenced, at least in part, by Foucault’s view of power, notable works that engage with such inquiry show how these actors shape their identities in relation to upper management strategic discourses, and so distance themselves from top-down strategy, set up possibilities for resistance, and thus become empowered in their own right. (e.g., Laine & Vaara, 2007; McCabe, 2010).

Further to this, some extant works have considered how technologies—such as management accounting systems—are enrolled into managerial systems of strategic control (e.g., Vaara, 2008; Ezzamel & Willmott, 2008). However, there remains a tendency here to assume a control–resistance binary (see also Harding et al., 2017; Wenzel et al., 2019) such that managerial intent (embodied within the technology) imposes a dominant understanding of the world, suppressing other understandings, and leading to oppositional behaviours and acts. At the same time, the technology here is seen to play a relatively neutral or passive role as an ‘instrument’ of human intent. This is indicative of another binary: the social–material or human–technological binary.

However, such dichotomous positions (control–resistance and human–technological) under-emphasise the *productive and relational* nature of power—the manner through which it can generate new subjects and objects (e.g., Fleming & Spicer, 2007, 2008, 2014; see also Harding et al., 2017; Wenzel et al., 2019), through the entanglements of the social and material that characterise

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<sup>3</sup> Several different acronyms and abbreviations have been used to represent ‘strategy as practice’ over the years. In this thesis, I adopt the acronym ‘SAP’ given its use throughout the Cambridge Handbook of Strategy as Practice (Golsorkhi et al., 2015). This acronym has also been used when distinguishing ‘strategy as practice’ from ‘strategy process’ research, with some authors using SP to denote the latter domain (e.g., MacKay et al., 2021; Tsoukas, 2015).

organisational life (Orlikowski, 2007; Orlikowski & Scott, 2008). Therefore, while it is recognised that technologies (of ostensible ‘control’) can work to discipline the subjectivities of strategic actors (for example, by imposing performance measures), we still know little about how such actors *relate to* (and with) these technological impositions. That is, at the level of the practitioner, what underlying efforts to make sense of, and shape subject positions take place, such that resistant behaviours take on the form that they do in practice?

My thesis considers this question by adopting Fleming and Spicer’s (2007, 2008) notion of the *struggle*. Viewed this way, human subjectivities are seen to flow from struggles over ‘who [or what] controls the means of identity construction’ (Fleming and Spicer, 2007, p.60). Control and resistance are thus ‘simply’ *manifestations of such struggles* which then become the proper objects of research inquiry. However, giving analytical consideration to the part played by technologies in these struggles, requires interrogation of how human actor and technology are ‘entangled’ through (and mutually generative of) these struggles. Therefore, a ‘strong’ view of sociomateriality is of value, one that sees the social and material as ontologically inseparable (i.e., not as discrete entities), such that human subjectivity emerges from the relationship. Such a view would allow us to consider how *resistant and empowered subjects* (Harding et al., 2017; Wenzel et al., 2019) are constituted through (as a ‘product’ of) the human–technology relations that frame struggles.

However, strong views of sociomateriality have been somewhat neglected in SAP (Laine & Parkkari, 2015). So, to develop a suitable position, I engage with two streams of literature. The first, within the information systems (IS) field, works from Heidegger’s ontology of being-in-the-world to offer rich ‘posthuman’ frameworks for analysing technology (Introna, 2014; Lamprou, 2017; Riemer & Johnston, 2012, 2014, 2017, 2019). The second is a contemporary school of the philosophy of technology referred to as ‘postphenomenology’ which builds upon Heidegger – while also intersecting with Foucault on issues of power – to consider how technologies act to *mediate* ‘between’ human beings and their experiences of (and actions within) the world (e.g., Verbeek, 2005, 2011a; Rosenberger & Verbeek, 2015). Developing points of intersection between these two literatures, I will conceptualise technologies in terms of how their presence within the lifeworlds of human actors can ‘tune’ their orientations towards the world, others and themselves. Struggles for ‘who’ they are as subjects (struggles for the self) take place ‘within’ this *sociomaterial* framework characterising the flows of power/resistance that take on form.

Adopting this conceptual position, I abductively examine such *sociomaterial struggles* in an empirical study of frontline practitioners in a sales and marketing subsidiary company of a

multinational health technology firm. Over a 10-month period, I collected their self-reported accounts of working with a new software suite implemented as part of a corporate ‘digital customer engagement strategy’. Analysing these accounts as ‘narratives of practices’ (Rouleau, 2015; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011), and drawing on postphenomenological concepts, my findings show how the sense of self of each practitioner was first threatened and then (re)claimed through their individual, idiosyncratic relations with the technology – specifically, relations that set up struggles for selfhood through a play of *technology mediated objectivities*, *technology mediated intersubjectivities*, and *technology mediated subjectivities* that took shape over time. The stories of these individuals weave together to reveal that the praxis unfolding through these struggles and shifting relations shaped strategy as it was performed as a *local accomplishment*.

Overall, my thesis extends our understanding of the role of frontline workers in strategy, attending to workers’ involvements with novel managerial technologies of control. It reveals how such technologies are enrolled into their lifeworlds and how struggles to retain a purposive sense of identity are idiosyncratically established, offering a nuanced sense of how resistance and empowerment emerge when individual practitioners engage in their everyday, technology mediated strategy work. Such fine-grained, individual-level case analysis of power-resistance dynamics has long been embraced, more broadly, in organisation studies as exemplified by Foucauldian feminist theory-inspired work (e.g., Kondo, 1990; McCabe, 2004; Thomas & Davies, 2005a, 2005b; Trethewey, 1997), but have been given little attention in SAP. By giving analytical attention to struggles, these findings also unsettle some extant views of how strategic aims are realised through frontline work by revealing subtle asymmetries between strategy *as intended* (and as inscribed into technology) and strategy *as it accomplished* (cf. Balogun, Best, et al., 2015). In doing so, it also contributes to how we think of ‘consequentiality’ in strategy work (cf. Jarzabkowski et al., 2021), showing how the consequentiality of praxis *for strategy* is entangled with consequentiality *for those involved* in this praxis. This brings themes of practice and power into closer critical dialogue in SAP (Clegg & Kornberger, 2015).

My work also contributes to theory, specifically to theorising power and resistance in strategy, by offering a sociomaterial conceptualisation of the struggles that take form through the postphenomenological mediations of digital technology. This also extends extant phenomenology-informed theorising on sociomateriality to give greater epistemological ‘voice’ to the material from ‘within’ the sociomaterial (cf. Introna, 2014; Lamprou, 2017; Riemer & Johnston, 2012, 2014, 2017, 2019). More broadly my work also responds to previous calls for attention to be given to

technologies in SAP (see Section 1.5; e.g., Dameron et al., 2015; Jarzabkowski, Spee, et al., 2013), as well as for stronger links to be made between themes of power, sociomateriality and discourse (Balogun et al., 2014). It also joins growing interest in the everyday work of accomplishing strategy (e.g., Balogun, Best, et al., 2015; Jarzabkowski et al., 2015).

## **B. Contents and structure**

With this framing in mind, my thesis is structured as follows. In Chapter 1, I provide a brief overview of SAP's emergence from within the larger field of strategic management, describing its heritage in the 'practice turn' as well as some of the main approaches adopted and main empirical themes considered. I will then dive more deeply into three streams of SAP literature which together, at their point of intersection, inform the positioning of the research. The first stream emphasises the importance of organisational actors *other* than those who formally formulate strategy, notably actors who work at the frontline (e.g., Balogun, 2003; Balogun, Best, et al., 2015; Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Beck & Plowman, 2009; Lüscher & Lewis, 2008; Knott & Thnarudee, 2022; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011). The second stream highlights growing interest in 'materialities' in SAP (e.g., Dameron et al., 2015; Lê & Spee, 2015), where there is still a notable gap in our understanding of how technologies are used. Based upon these first two streams, I suggest that strategy can usefully be viewed as a *human–technology co-accomplishment*. The third stream of literature introduces the power perspective on strategy work (e.g., McCabe, 2010; Hardy & Thomas, 2014; Laine & Vaara, 2007). I review studies that indicate how management accounting systems (Ezzamel & Willmott, 2008; Mantere & Vaara, 2008; Whittle & Mueller, 2010) are instituted by senior management to control and monitor strategy implementation. From this, I question how technologies might play such a role from *within* flows of strategic power, *co-constituting* the struggles that shape how strategy is accomplished at the frontline. At this point, I pose the thesis' first—and theoretical—question, which opens up the conceptual space for my empirical research:

**Research question 1:** With regard to struggles 'accompanying' frontline strategy work, how can a relational, non-neutral role for technologies be conceptualised?

It should be noted from the start (as will be elucidated in Chapter 4 on methods) that, in addressing this question, much of my engagement with theory took place as part of an abductive process of 'plugging data into theory into data as they constitute each other' (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014, p.717). Thus, although I follow a linear logic in my chapters, that is first presenting theory as a foundation for the findings, these steps were—in practice—entangled. I will re-emphasise this

point in a number of different places in this thesis. So, first in Chapter 2, I critically engage with a broader corpus that has grappled with varied notions of sociomateriality—that is with the relationships between humans and materialities that structure organisational life (Orlikowski, 2007; Leonardi, 2011). Some scholars working in this vein have applied concepts from Heidegger’s ontology of being-in-the-world to theorise a ‘posthuman’ stance on sociomateriality (e.g., Introna, 2014; Lamprou, 2017; Riemer & Johnston, 2017). This considers how the human and material are co-agentially and co-constitutively bound together through humans’ concerned practices (cf. Chia & Holt, 2006). Accordingly, I first outline Heidegger’s ontology as it specifically pertains to the spatiality of being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1962, working also from Heideggerian scholars: e.g., Cerbone, 2013; Dreyfus, 1991; Gelven, 1989; Kaufer, 2013; Malpas, 2006; Polt, 2010; and Schatzki, 2010, 2007/2017). I then describe how the principles underpinning this spatiality have been adopted by Heideggerian theorists of sociomateriality (Introna, 2014; Lamprou, 2017; Riemer & Johnston (2012, 2104, 2017, 2019). Based upon this, I indicate what this view contributes, but then argue that it imposes conceptual limits on the part played by material artefacts—by placing too-great an emphasis on human-centred purposiveness—while at the same time under-representing the social. To support these arguments, I refer to other elements of Heidegger’s thinking that have not been accounted for in extant (sociomateriality) theorising.

In Chapter 3, I then attempt to ‘strengthen’ the posthumanism of these accounts, and address their inadequacies by introducing ideas from postphenomenology (e.g., Ihde, 1990; Verbeek, 2005). I draw specifically on the concept of *technological intentionality* to describe how tools and technologies shape the co-constitutive relations between humans and the world; that is how the world is *made present* to the human, and how the human can then be said to *be present* in this world (Verbeek, 2005; 2011a, 2015). By considering points of convergence with Heidegger’s ideas, I develop a conceptualisation of sociomateriality that considers how technology co-constitutes human experience and praxis by ‘tuning’ the phenomenological spatiality of being-in-the-world. By de-centring the human while acknowledging the social, this allows the non-neutral ‘role’ of technology to be revealed in SAP inquiry. I then work further with postphenomenology that sits at the intersection of Foucauldian thinking and mediation theory (e.g., Verbeek, 2011a, 2011b), to conceptualise human–technology entanglements as co-constitutive of (and within) relations of power, leading me to the notion of ‘sociomaterial struggles’. This notion permits me to pose the thesis’ second—and exploratory, empirical—research question:

**Research question 2:** What are the forms and implications of these ‘sociomaterial struggles’?

I divide this into two sub-questions:

- a. How are subjectivities (re)shaped through these ‘sociomaterial struggles’ in frontline strategy work?
- b. How are these (re)shapings implicated in what is locally accomplished *as* strategy?

On the basis of this question, I investigate how a Customer Relationship Management (CRM)-based software suite becomes enrolled (as an embodiment of a new ‘digital strategy’) into the relations of power that span the ‘blurry’ strategy formulation–implementation boundary (Leonardi, 2015) between the headquarters of a multinational firm and one of its local operating subsidiaries. Chapter 4 details the overall research approach, the case study, the data collection and abductive analysis procedures, and the framework which was derived from this analysis. The findings, presented in Chapter 5, follow the stories of four individual practitioners to reveal how their subjectivities were threatened and then (re)claimed through their relations with the technology as they worked to accomplish strategy at the frontline. Together these stories emphasise how, during the everyday praxis of such strategy work, subjectivities were in flux through the relations of power established through—and mediated by—the technology.

These findings are then discussed in Chapter 6 in relation to the empirical research question stated above to re-engage with the relevant SAP (and some of the wider) literature introduced in Chapters 1 and 2. I thus consider how my work both extends and challenges extant thinking on power in strategy work and the ‘role’ of technologies of control therein. I also relate my postphenomenological position on sociomateriality to extant views, and situate this beside wider Heideggerian thinking in SAP. In Chapter 7, I conclude with a review of the work and its contributions and limitations, suggesting future opportunities for further inquiry, and offering some thoughts on implications for managerial practice.

## **Chapter 1:**

### **SITUATING THE RESEARCH WITHIN THE DOMAIN OF STRATEGY AS PRACTICE**

### **1.1. Introduction: SAP's emergence within strategic management**

This introductory section offers a brief overview of the main traditions within the strategic management field. My aim here is not to review this vast corpus, but rather to offer a simple tracing of the backdrop against which the SAP domain emerged. Following this, in Section 1.2, I will introduce the 'practice' turn in the broader social sciences, a 'turn' which provided an inspiration for SAP scholarship. In Section 1.3, I will provide an overview of some of the SAP domain's main themes and approaches which provides the background for a more focal review of the themes that will situate my research (Sections 1.4–1.9).

Within the field of strategic management, research has been dominated by microeconomics-based views of the firm, its competitive environment and the 'content' of strategy. This heritage can be seen in the vast library of hypothetico-deductive studies that objectify strategic phenomena for statistical study, and in the generally positivist array of theories that have been applied. These include theories of industrial organisation and market power theory (e.g., Porter, 1980; Tirole, 1988), transaction cost economics and social exchange theories (e.g., Macneil, 1973, 1980; Williamson, 1973, 1981), the resource-based view of the firm (Barney 1991), and related notions such as dynamic capabilities (e.g., Teece et al., 1997), the competence-based view (e.g., Rumelt, 1984), and the knowledge-based view (e.g., Kogut & Zander, 1992)<sup>4</sup>. These approaches to research tend to think of strategies (or elements thereof) as objective entities, the 'content' of which can affect organisational performance. However, the social work actually performed by those involved in trying to create, implement and realise strategy is largely ignored by this tradition.

However, despite this 'mainstream' dominance of economics, the intellectual roots of strategic management can also be traced back to sociology (e.g., Hannan & Freeman, 1977, 1984; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967) and psychology (e.g., Cyert & March, 1963; Quinn, 1980); (see Ramos-Rodríguez & Ruíz-Navarro, 2004 for review). In particular, building on the early studies of strategy work by Mintzberg, Waters and Pettigrew (Mintzberg, 1973; Mintzberg & Waters, 1985; Pettigrew, 1973), some streams of scholarship have continued to largely eschewed economics-based epistemologies, seeking to open the 'black box' of strategy and its 'content' (Golsorkhi et al., 2015, p.1). Such works pay closer attention to the processes, behaviours, cognitions and activities of strategy making within organisations.

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendix A (Table 8, p.251) for a tabulation of the main tenets and exemplar studies of each of these theoretical approaches.



Thus, broadly<sup>5</sup>, the extensive literature that falls within the domain of *strategy process* has focused on ‘humaniz[ing]’ the strategic management field (Schmid et al., 2010, p.144) to understand how individual and collective behaviours shape how organisations decide on, create, and implement changes in strategy (Bourgeois & Brodwin, 1984; Chakravarthy & Doz, 1992; Mintzberg, 1994; Pettigrew, 1992; Van de Ven, 1992). Research foci<sup>6</sup> here include formal systems and processes for strategic planning (e.g., Armstrong, 1982; Premkumar & King 1991; see Wolf & Floyd, 2017 for review), cognition in decision-making (e.g., Mezias et al., 2001; Schwenk, 1984), awareness and diagnosis of strategic issues (e.g., Chattopadhyay et al., 2001; Dutton et al., 1983; Dutton & Duncan, 1987; Hambrick, 1981; Shaver & Liao, 2008), deliberate and emergent aspects of strategy (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985), the effectiveness of information systems in planning (e.g., King, 1988; Premkumar & King, 1991), scenario-based approaches to planning (e.g., Godet & Roubelat, 1996; Schnaars, 1987), sensemaking and sensegiving in strategic change (e.g., Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991), strategic mission setting (e.g., Campbell & Yeung, 1991; David, 1989), and the role of boards and top management teams (e.g., Hambrick, 1981; Finkelstein & Mooney, 2003; Lubatkin et al., 2006).

Strategy researchers in the process domain have also given significant attention to the varied contexts that shape decision-making, planning, implementation and change. Thus, for example, studies have explored diverse settings such as entrepreneurial firms (e.g., Miller & Friesen, 1982), small businesses (e.g., Sadler-Smith et al., 2001; Scott & Bruce, 1987), international expansion contexts (e.g., see Cuervo-Cazurra, 2010 for review), manufacturing (e.g., Bolwijn & Kumpe, 1990), strategic alliances (e.g., Dyer, 1997; Hamel, 1991; also see Walter, 2010 for review), and public sector organisations (e.g., Patel, 2010). Further, and cutting through some of this complexity, Mintzberg et al. (1998) conduct an extensive survey of the corpus to articulate ten ‘schools’ of ‘strategy formation’ processes: 1) design: processes of strategy conception; 2) planning: formality of strategy process; 3) positioning: analytical processes, 4) entrepreneurial: visionary processes, 5)

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<sup>5</sup> The term ‘broadly’ is used with cautious purpose here to reflect the challenges inherent in giving simple specifications of domains of scholarship. Specifically, as noted by Van de Ven (1992, p.169): ‘the body of strategy process research is diverse and cannot be contained within any single paradigm.’ Also, the boundaries between strategy research domains are not, of course, always easily distinguishable, indeed drawing such boundaries may not always be meaningful or useful. For example, many scholars have sought to understand both strategy ‘content’ and ‘process’ as interrelated aspects of strategic management (Burgelman et al., 2018).

<sup>6</sup> In keeping with my earlier points above, this is in no way intended as a thorough or fully representative survey of the vast strategy process literature. Rather it aims to set the scene as part of a discussion of the emergence of the SAP field.

cognitive: mental processes; 6) learning: processes of strategy emergence; 7) power: processes of negotiation; 8) cultural: collective processes, 9) environmental: reactive processes; and 10) configuration: processes of transformation.

Looking out further than strategy as ‘content’ or ‘process’, a sub-corpus within managerial and organisational cognition (MOC) studies has considered *cognition* in strategy making (for reviews see Kaplan, 2011a; Narayanan, 2011). This clearly also intersects with the studies of cognition in decision-making processes noted above (e.g., Meziar et al., 2001; Schwenk, 1984; also note Mintzberg et al.’s (1998) ‘cognitive school’). Founded upon the seminal insights of Porac et al., (1989)—who showed that market spaces can be viewed as cognitive constructions of competitive rivalry—this stream of literature has considered how beliefs and actions about competitors and strategy could be shaped by, captured in terms of, or derived from mental modes or cognitive frames (e.g., Hodgkinson, 1997; Hodgkinson & Johnson, 1994; Huff, 1990). Such cognitive representations can be associated with strategic outcomes (e.g., Kaplan et al., 2003; Osborne et al., 2001; Szulanski et al., 2004; Tripsas & Gavetti, 2000), and differences in cognitions may lead to ‘framing contests’ where different groups of organisation actors try to mobilise action in their favour during strategy making (Kaplan, 2008). There is also a growing interest in ‘hot’ or affective aspects of cognition in strategy, a line of inquiry that emphasises the role of emotions in strategy work (e.g., Brundin et al., 2022; Brundin & Liu, 2015; Cofrancesco & Spiker, 2019).

SAP emerged in association with these (social, processual and cognitive) interests in opening the ‘black box’ of strategy and in broadening scope beyond economic theory (Golsorkhi et al., 2015, p.3). SAP scholars (e.g., Golsorkhi et al., 2015; Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Vaara & Whittington, 2012; Whittington, 2006) indicate that the seeds of this approach to strategy were sown by works connected with the process tradition just discussed (e.g., Eisenhardt, 1989b; Langley, 1989) as well as with critical management studies that called for a move away from positivist traditions towards a critical analysis of power, subjectivity and discourse in strategy (Knights & Morgan, 1991). Such moves fertilised the early notion of an ‘activity-based view’ of strategy, with a focus upon the micro-activities that constitute strategy as a form of social practice (Johnson et al., 2003). The aim was to refresh how strategy as a phenomenon was portrayed—moving further past the idea that ‘strategy’ can be objectified for positivistic scientific study, towards constructivist notions of strategy as a social, enacted, and political form of human praxis. In order to move strategic management research in a different direction, pioneering SAP scholars thus sought to ‘reinststate the actor’ (Jarzabkowski, 2005; p8). They recognised that strategy arises from micro-level interaction

between multiple, skilled, and knowledgeable actors across an organisation but also embedded within a wider set of societal and cultural practices (e.g., Johnson et al., 2003; Whittington, 2006).

Thus, while SAP scholars recognise an indebtedness to strategy process research as an intellectual foundation (e.g., Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Vaara & Whittington, 2012; Whittington, 2006)—indeed, there are clear points of overlap, intersection as well as integrative opportunities between the two domains (Burgelman et al., 2018)<sup>7</sup>—the SAP field has established a presence in its own right with features that have been argued to distinguish it from other strategy traditions. For example, Vaara and Whittington (2012) suggest that SAP is distinctive in that it: 1) primarily draws on sociological theories of practice<sup>8</sup>, 2) has moved the focus from ‘firm performance’ towards how strategic actors ‘perform’ their roles and towards a broader understanding of what constitutes ‘outcomes’ (see also Jarzabkowski et al., 2016, 2021), 3) has widened the types of organisations (and organisational actors) studied, and 4) has continued a move towards applying novel qualitative methodologies and methods to get closer to practice.

The validity of these distinctions may, of course, be open to debate—a debate that is outside the scope of this current review. However, in terms of setting up my research position, the idea behind the first of Vaara & Whittington’s (2012) points above deserves more detailed consideration. Overall, SAP is characterised by a practice-based reorientation of thought that has frequently been connected with a broader ‘practice turn’ in the social sciences (e.g., Golsorkhi et al., 2015; Whittington, 2006). Indeed, Chia & MacKay (2007) argue that practice-philosophical and practice-

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<sup>7</sup> I recognise that there are intersections with other areas of interest in strategy and management, such as work on routines (e.g., Pentland & Feldman, 2005) and microfoundations (e.g., Barney & Felin, 2013). However, to contain the scope of this brief literature review, a specific discussion of such broader domains is omitted. See Feldman (2015), and Vaara and Whittington (2012) for commentary on these intersections. Similarly, I also acknowledge scholars who make strong connections between cognitions/emotions and SAP (e.g., Brundin & Liu, 2015; Hodgkinson & Clarke, 2007; Kaplan, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> This is not to suggest that SAP does not also utilise economics-based theories (nor that traditional strategy research has ignored social theory). Interestingly, for example, some scholars have sought to bridge the epistemological divides between SAP and traditional strategic management research. Indeed, Wenzel et al. (2021) adopts a practice perspective on organisational routines to ‘unravel the “dynamics” of dynamic capabilities’ (ibid, p.395). Regnér (2015) identifies synergies between the RBV (and other capabilities-based perspectives) and SAP, reviewing work that sits at this intersection. Relatedly, Knott (2009) integrates resource-based theory with practice-focused insights to enhance the utility of a strategy tool, the value-rarity-imitability-organisation (VRIO) model. In addition, other theories that have traditionally been associated with positivistic research in management have also been considered by SAP researchers. For example, Smets et al., (2015) discuss links between SAP and institutional theory, and Lê and Jarzabkowski (2015) apply conflict theory to the qualitative analysis of strategy episodes. Further Laamanen et al. (2015) propose a range of quantitative approaches to SAP inquiry that may enhance the more common use of qualitative data, while remaining true to a practice-based programme.

theoretical thinking offers SAP the opportunity to clearly differentiate itself from ‘strategy process’ as a school of ‘post-processual’ scholarship. Therefore, before taking a more detailed look at SAP’s approaches and themes, a brief review of this ‘turn’ is required to fully appreciate this heritage. This now follows.

## 1.2. The ‘practice turn’ in the social sciences

The philosophical and theoretical foundations of the ‘practice turn’ in the social sciences are richly presented by the works of scholars including Ortner (1984), Reckwitz (2002), Rouse (2006), Schatzki (1996, 2002), Schatzki et al. (2002), and Turner (1994), and have been extensively reviewed by Nicolini (2012), so they will not be covered in depth here. However, in brief, this ‘turn’ was a redirection of thought away from the dominant Western philosophies of Descartes, Newton, and Kant—the inspirations for modern science, rationalism and positivism (see Nicolini, 2012, pp.28-29 for discussion)—and towards the thinking of philosophers such as Marx and Engels (1846/1970), Heidegger (1962), Wittgenstein (1951/2009) and Foucault (1977). Whereas the former group essentially demoted practice to the ‘practical application of a-practical, purely theoretical insights’ (Nicolini, 2012, p.28), the latter reinstated human activity as the primary epistemological category for any analysis of the social world, ontologically prior to any sense of ‘scientific’ theory (pp.28-29). Indeed, from the perspective of practice, a ‘theory’ is not a testable truth that represents an objective world but is, instead, a phenomenon that can only be understood in terms of how it is performed *through* practice (e.g., Barad, 2003; Rouse 1996). Inspired by practice-based philosophies, a variety of views and research approaches to social practice have been formulated. Exemplars include Bourdieu’s (1990) idea of ‘habitus’ in the production of practice; Giddens’ (1984) structuration theory; Marx-inspired activity theory (e.g., Engeström et al., 1987, 1999, 2001; Leont’ev, 1978, Vygotsky, 1978), Schatzki’s ideas on practices as teleo-affective arrangements (e.g., 2002), as well as Garfinkel’s (1967) ethnomethodology.

This practice turn has exerted wide influence across management, organisation and work studies (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011; Nicolini, 2012; Whittington, 2011). Indeed, practice-based thinking spans domains as diverse as organisational knowledge and learning (e.g., Gherardi, 2006; Harris, 2017; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Nicolini, 2011), technology and information systems (e.g., Leonardi, 2011; Orlikowski, 2000; Riemer & Johnston, 2017; Scott & Orlikowski, 2014; Suchman, 2007), leadership (e.g., Carroll et al., 2008; Küpers, 2013; Raelin, 2011, 2016; Ropo & Salovaara, 2019), markets and marketing (e.g., Keller & Halkier, 2014; Kjellberg & Helgesson, 2007; Storbacka

& Nenonen, 2011; Venter et al., 2015), accounting (e.g., Ahrens & Chapman, 2007; Lodhia & Jacobs, 2013; Quattrone, 2009; Quattrone & Hopper, 2006), innovation and entrepreneurship (e.g., Chalmers & Shaw, 2017; Dougherty, 2004, 2017; Johannisson, 2011), project management (e.g., Bjørkeng et al., 2009; Blomquist et al., 2010; Clegg et al., 2018; Hällgren & Söderholm, 2011; van der Hoorn & Whitty, 2015), and human resources (Vickers & Fox, 2010). Thus, in addition to ‘strategy as practice’, we now also see terms such as leadership as practice (e.g., Carroll et al., 2008), entrepreneurship as practice (e.g., Thompson et al., 2020), projects as practice (e.g., Hällgren & Lindahl, 2017), governance as practice (e.g., Brunet, 2019), and management accounting as practice (e.g., Ahrens & Chapman, 2007). This ‘bandwagon’ of emerging research streams (Corradi et al., 2010) all seek to differentiate themselves from dominant traditions in their fields by foregrounding *practice*.

### **1.3. An overview of approaches and themes in SAP**

#### **1.3.1. Approaching ‘practice’ in SAP**

However, and notwithstanding its intellectual roots in the practice turn (Golsorkhi et al., 2015; Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Vaara & Whittington, 2012; Whittington, 2006), SAP has not been limited to research that is explicitly grounded in formal philosophies and theories of practice. Rather, the notion of ‘practice’ may be approached in a variety of ways. Orlikowski (2015) articulates three such modes of approach: practice as a *phenomenon*, practice as a *perspective*, and practice as a *philosophy*.

In the first mode, researchers consider “what happens ‘in practice’ as opposed to what is derived or expected from ‘theory’” (Orlikowski, 2015, p.33). There is a commitment to understanding what *actually happens* in strategy rather than to explaining what *seems to be happening* according to researchers’ frameworks, propositions, or theories. Research that accords with practice-as-phenomenon is thus primarily empirically grounded and aims to get close to the action, to provide rich descriptions of situated praxis that are not explicitly grounded in practice theory or practice ontology. Relatedly, Nicolini (2012) indicates that he would consider this approach to be consistent with what he calls a ‘weak programme’ of practice-based research (ibid, p.12). He associates this programme with some early, ‘first generation’ SAP studies which, based on a founding interest in what managers *do* in strategy (Johnson et al., 2003; Whittington, 1996), attended ‘in fine detail to the day-to-day internal life of strategy processes by describing, often with a sense of awe and admiration, meetings, workshops, strategy making sessions, and other

micro-activities' (Nicolini, 2012, p.21). Thus, while paying attention to the mundane, often neglected aspects of routine praxis is clearly important—and indeed helps differentiate SAP from traditional strategy research—the “mere ‘a-theoretical’ cataloguing of what practitioners do [...] sheds little light on the meaning of the work that goes into it, what makes it possible, why it is the way it is, and how it contributes to, or interferes with, the production of organizational life” (ibid, p.13).

This issue begins to be addressed in Orlikowski's (2015) second mode, which approaches practice as a *perspective*. Here, inquiry is conceptually grounded *in practice*, extending beyond the empirical characterisation of everyday activity. There is a commitment to practice theories, and so this mode more strongly connects with the practice turn. The third mode, engaging with practice as a *philosophy*, goes even further than this. It involves not only making an empirical and theoretical commitment to practice, but also accepting practice as having *ontological primacy* (Orlikowski, 2015; Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011). That is, practices *constitute* social and organisational reality. This mode is most deeply rooted in the practice turn, and aligns sharply with what Nicolini (2012) calls the ‘strong programme’. By taking practice-based ontologies seriously, this programme ‘strives to explain organizational matters in terms of practices instead of simply registering them’ (ibid, p.13).

Thus, some SAP scholars have engaged with practice more fully, articulating strategy from the explicit position of a practice-based ontology or implicitly through a coherent, practice-based theoretical lens grounded in such an ontology. For example, activity theory has been used as a lens to conceptualise strategy as a collective, goal-oriented system of human activity that is integrated by virtue of its practices (e.g., Jarratt & Stiles, 2010; Jarzabkowski, 2005; Jarzabkowski & Wolf, 2015). Giddens' structuration theory has been adopted to emphasise the recursive and adaptive associations between agency, action and structure in strategic praxis (e.g., Jarzabkowski, 2008; Mantere, 2008; Paroutis & Pettigrew, 2007; see Whittington, 2015 for review). Bourdieu's praxeology and Heidegger's phenomenology have been drawn upon to show how strategic praxis arises in accordance with the socially and culturally inherited, habituated dispositions and tacit understandings of organisational actors (e.g., Chia & Holt, 2006; Chia & Rasche, 2015; Gomez, 2015; Tsoukas, 2015). Other SAP scholars have developed cases for Wittgensteinian (Mantere, 2015) or Foucauldian (e.g., Allard-Poesi, 2015, McCabe, 2010; Laine & Vaara, 2007) perspectives on strategy practice. As will become clear as my work unfolds, my research thesis will align with Nicolini's (2012) strong programme.

### 1.3.2. *Empirical themes in SAP*

Rather than explaining the macro-level, objective factors involved in conferring strategic advantage (as in the economic tradition of strategy), the scholars who paved the way for SAP became interested in understanding the interplay between strategy *practitioners* (the actors involved in making or influencing strategy; see also Section 1.4 below on strategy participation), their *practices* (the 'social, symbolic and material tools through which strategy work is done'; Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009, p.70), and their *praxis* (the underlying streams of activity that accomplish strategy over time). (See Whittington, 2006; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Vaara & Whittington, 2012).

Empirically, SAP scholarship can thus be defined in terms of a common focus on what strategic actors do, what they say, and what they use, while also attending to the situated, contextual nature of their work (e.g., Chia, 2004; Johnson et al., 2003; Whittington, 2006). Aligned with these common interests, over the last two decades, the SAP field has spread its branches into a variety of (somewhat inter-related and overlapping) topic areas which include (Burgelman et al., 2018; Golsorkhi et al., 2015; Vaara & Whittington, 2012):

- 1) The *formal strategic practices* used in strategy work, together with their enabling and constraining effects. A particular emphasis here has been placed on those practices that relate to strategic planning; for example, strategy meetings and workshops (e.g., Hodgkinson et al., 2006; Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2008; Kwon et al., 2014; Liu & Maitlis, 2014; Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2011; see Seidl & Guerard, 2015 and Langley & Lusiani, 2015 for reviews; see also Whittington & Cailluet, 2008).
- 2) *Sensemaking in strategy*: Inspired by the thinking of Weick (1995), and Gioia & Chittipeddi's (1991) seminal paper on strategic change, SAP scholars have shown significant interest in understanding how people *make sense of* strategy and also '*give*' sense to others. These works emphasise strategy's socially negotiated character, for example, the role of politics and framing contests in sensemaking (e.g., Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Kaplan, 2008; Mueller et al., 2013; see Cornelissen & Schildt, 2015 for review).
- 3) *The discursive aspects of strategy*: Following Knights & Morgan's (1991) influential paper on the historical emergence of strategic management discourse, various SAP scholars have attended to strategy as a form of discursive practice that may be subject to ambiguity and struggles over meaning, which has implications for collaboration, negotiation and participation in strategy

work (e.g., Laine & Vaara, 2007; Mantere & Vaara, 2008; Leitch & Davenport, 2007; see also Balogun et al., 2014 for review).

- 4) *The role of materiality in strategy*: This theme focuses on the artefacts, tools, technologies and 'built spaces' that may play a role in, or shape, strategy practice (e.g., Demir, 2015; Jarratt & Stiles, 2010; Kaplan, 2011b; Werle & Seidl, 2015; see Dameron et al., 2015; Lê & Spee, 2015 for reviews).
- 5) *The roles and identities of strategy practitioners*: Work aligning with this theme is interested in, for example, the range of different actors involved in strategy work (middle managers, consultants, and frontline workers, as well as senior managers and boards; also see Rouleau et al., 2015 for review). Also inspired by Knights & Morgan's (1991) work, this stream also considers how strategic actors' identities and subjectivities are shaped through their strategy work. Exemplars include: Balogun & Johnson (2004); Balogun, Best, et al. (2015); Beech & Johnson (2005); Dameron & Torset (2014); Laine & Vaara (2007).
- 6) *Strategy, criticality and power*: Relatedly, SAP research has also considered more critical themes—issues of power and organisational control, whereby strategy discourses are deployed to legitimise and resist ideas and positions (e.g., Hardy & Thomas, 2014; Kornberger & Clegg, 2011; McCabe, 2010; see also Clegg & Kornberger, 2015 and Blom & Alvesson, 2015 for reviews).
- 7) Strategy work in *different organisational contexts*: This theme recognises the importance of understanding the situated nature of practice. Thus, SAP research has built upon the 'process' tradition's interest in expanding the types of organizations studied in strategy. That is, by looking beyond the profit-making firm to consider, for example, universities (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008), museums (Balogun, Best, et al., 2015), and orchestras (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2003), while also rethinking notions of strategy-related 'outcomes' and 'consequences' (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Vaara & Whittington, 2012; Jarzabkowski et al., 2021).

My primary aim in offering this brief overview of themes is to highlight the distinctiveness of SAP's interests within the strategic management field. Although a comprehensive survey of *all* these themes (and others that might be carved out of the SAP corpus) is beyond the scope of this introductory review, in the remainder of this chapter I will cover literature that spans themes 3–6. As will become clear, this intersection of themes creates the space for my thesis' core interest: the role of digital technologies in the flows of power that characterise strategy accomplishment. Thus, section 1.4 reviews literature on the participation of different organisational actors in strategy,



Sections 1.5 and 1.6 focus on the role of materialities, and Sections 1.7 and 1.8 consider issues of power and the construction of subjectivities. Section 1.9 connects technology with power which finally leads me to describe (in Section 1.10) the research opportunity that I go on to pursue in the chapters which follow.

#### **1.4. Participating in the accomplishment of strategy**

SAP has, of course, given a great deal of attention to senior managers, given an interest in the formal practices of strategising or ‘making strategy’ (Tsoukas, 2015, p.61). Research has thus considered, for example, the practices of strategy formulation and the production of plans (e.g., Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2017; for review see Langley & Luisiani, 2015); the workings of strategy meetings and workshops (for review see Seidl & Guérard, 2015); keynote speeches on strategy (Wenzel & Koch, 2018), and the use of tools and technologies in strategy-making (for reviews see Dameron et al., 2015; Lê & Spee, 2015). However, there is also a growing body of SAP literature which considers strategy participation as it extends *beyond* senior management, encompassing multiple levels and functions across an organisation (for reviews, see Balogun & Rouleau, 2017; Laine & Vaara, 2015; Rouleau et al., 2015; Weiser et al., 2020). The majority of such works inquire into the practices of middle managers, in particular how they take part in—and make sense of—strategic change. Thus, middle managers are seen to play a significant role in shaping how strategy is interpreted, translated and enacted as it diffuses across organisations (e.g., Balogun, 2003; Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005; Beck & Plowman, 2009; Jarzabkowski & Balogun, 2009; Lüscher & Lewis, 2008; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011; Smith et al., 2010). They also exert influence over strategy when involved in informal and formal planning interactions with senior managers (e.g., Besson & Mahieu, 2011; Fauré & Rouleau, 2011; Hoon, 2007; Jarzabkowski, 2008; Jarzabkowski & Balogun, 2009; Vilà & Canales, 2008). To achieve all this, middle managers may need to negotiate their political positions within organisations, establish their strategic identities, and resist the influence of others (e.g., Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Hope, 2010; Laine & Vaara, 2007; McCabe, 2010; Vickers & Fox, 2010).

This broader view of participation in strategy practice also connects with earlier ‘process’ work that challenged the distinctions between strategy formulation and implementation. This work drew attention to the idea that strategy is not only that which is *intended* (by senior managers) but also that which *emerges* (e.g., Burgelman, 1983, 1991, 1994; Dutton et al., 1997; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, 1996, 1997, 2000; Mintzberg & Waters, 1985; Wooldridge et al., 2008; Wooldridge & Floyd,

1990). This emergence is a consequence of, for example, the various acts of coordination that occur across organisational levels and functions. It takes shape as the specific skillsets, beliefs and interests of different individuals across different teams are drawn upon in practice, and as the relevance and contexts for situated decisions and actions shift and are negotiated. Thus, the strategy that ultimately comes to fruition will include elements of both intention and emergence, and middle managers and others outside the upper echelons play a key processual role in integrating the goals, ideas and activities through which this all takes form (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1997; Wooldridge & Floyd, 1990). Strategic success here (however, that might be defined) is a complex balance between middle management control and autonomy, and of coordination and cooperative processes (e.g., Anderson, 2004; Marginson, 2002).

This processual thinking has been further extended by SAP work that shows how strategy is not implemented but is *enacted* (see Burgelman et al., 2018 for discussion of such ideas at the strategy process/practice intersection<sup>9</sup>). This emphasises how a strategic formulation (plan or intent)—even when articulated and communicated well—is still subject to being transformed by the practices that constitute its own apparent implementation (Weiser et al., 2020, p.979). For example, Mirabeau & Maguire (2014) show how the autonomous practices of middle managers lead to the emergence of new initiatives that themselves are then taken up as part of formal strategy. And Jarzabkowski et al. (2019) reveal how middle managers and operational employees question their praxis in light of espoused strategic aims, reinforce unintended consequences through their actions, and enact breakdowns in strategy implementation.

These broader notions of strategy emergence and enactment are of increasing relevance in contemporary organisations where the conventional notion of hierarchical, top-down, bureaucratic management systems is de-emphasised (cf. Brès et al., 2018). Modern organisations are becoming increasingly customer/client-oriented, requiring operational flexibility (e.g., Sharma & Good, 2013). They may deploy flatter managerial structures (e.g., Carney, 2004). They may span multiple, semi-autonomous division, business units or geographic operating units (e.g., Rouleau & Balogun, 2011; Laine & Vaara, 2007). And they may encourage some level of pluralism (cf. Denis et al., 2001, 2007; Jarzabkowski & Fenton, 2006), with matrix-management processes and cross-functional teams, and preferences for flexibility and innovation over and above managerial conformism (Fleming &

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<sup>9</sup> The idea of enactment is, of course, also emphasised in views of strategy that draw on Weick's (1995) sensemaking (for review, see Cornelissen & Schildt, 2015), and on notions of performativity (e.g., Cabantous et al., 2018; Vargha, 2018).

Spicer, 2008). On this basis, strategy is a phenomenon that unfolds as a consequence of a complex array of practitioners, practices and praxes that are spatially and temporally distributed across an organisation and beyond (e.g., Arnaud et al., 2016; Demir et al., 2015; Floyd & Lane, 2000; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007, 2019; Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Knott & Thnarudee, 2022; Whittington 2006).

In accordance with these ideas, recent inquiries have specifically focused on the role of workers through whom strategy is 'realised' at the 'frontline' (Balogun, Best, et al., 2015). From this perspective, scholarly attention is drawn to the situated actions and interactions of those actors who engage with the 'end-target' of an organisation's strategic aims, such as practitioners with client- and customer-facing roles (e.g., Balogun, Best, et al., 2015; Jarzabkowski et al., 2015; Rouleau, 2005; Smets, Jarzabkowski, et al., 2015; Vargha, 2018; see also Ambrosini et al., 2007). In this vein, for example, Rouleau (2005) studies managers in a fashion outlet. She shows how, in their day-to-day interactions with clientele, these practitioners are tacitly conscious of strategic issues surrounding their product range, enacting strategy in their routines and conversations without specifically speaking about strategic issues. Vargha (2018) shows how strategy, in being translated into frontline practice, is accommodated into 'strategy scripts' that are enacted in the day-to-day activities of banking salespeople as they interact with customers. This study specifically considers the role of technology in this process, and for this reason, I return to it for more specific discussion later, together with studies by Demir (2015) and Arnaud (2016). Similarly, Balogun, Best, et al. (2015) show how museum guides bring the strategic goals of the organisation into being through their interactions with their audiences. And Jarzabkowski et al. (2015) investigate the practices of financial reinsurance dealmakers whose frontline practices 'are consequential to a firm's or even an entire market's success or failure' (ibid, p.528). Both of these last two studies, in different ways, vividly demonstrate how frontline strategy work is a local, situated performance that draws on coordinated sets of discursive, material and bodily resources to realise and instantiate strategy.

Together, these frontline studies point even further away from the view of strategy as a 'thing' that is specifically articulated (planned or formulated) and then systematically put into action (implemented). Instead, strategy is always already an ongoing "'practical' accomplishment [that is] performed in social relations and affiliations that go beyond the managerial end purposes of the strategy' (Rouleau, 2015, p.466, emphasis added). A strategy, of course, can be designed, negotiated, translated, adapted, and acted upon (or otherwise) as it diffuses through an

organisation. But, according to this thinking, ultimately, strategy is *what it is (or becomes)* only in terms of what is accomplished and re-accomplished through the unfolding, locally situated work that takes place close to the frontline. This stance on strategy resonates with the work of Robert Chia and his colleagues which I will introduce in more detail in Chapter 2. This work emphasises that strategy is not a transcendent phenomenon that provides an ontologically independent ground for unifying organisational decisions and actions. Instead, strategy can be immanent in any and all organisational practices, and is materialised through the purposive, situated practical work of coping within the world (Chia & Holt, 2006; 2009; Chia & MacKay, 2007; Chia & Rasche, 2015; see also Sandberg & Dall'Alba, 2009; Tsoukas, 2015). Accordingly, at the frontline, practitioners engage in complex patterns of action to cope with practical situations as they unfold, drawing on local arrays or bodily, discursive and material resources.

This view of strategy as a practical accomplishment opens the door to new ways of thinking about *how*, *who*, and *what* is 'consequential' for strategy (cf. Jarzabkowski et al., 2021). Traditionally, SAP research has focused on 'consequentiality' (ibid) in terms of strategic performance or processes. In the former sense practitioners, practices and praxis are consequential in relation the 'strategic outcomes, directions, survival, and competitive advantage of the firm' (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007, p.8; see also Johnson et al., 2003). In the latter case, the consequentiality of formal processes that are deemed by practitioners and the academy as *being* strategic are emphasised (e.g., planning activities, strategic change or implementation processes; Jarzabkowski et al., 2021, p.3). While focusing on strategic performance and process has helped legitimise SAP research in relation to the broader strategy field, Jarzabkowski et al. (2021) call for a reinvigoration of the agenda to consider practices that are 'not strategic per se', but are seen to have 'strategic character ... [as] defined in situ by the researcher' through deep immersion in the field (ibid, p.7). Thus, everyday practices which may seem mundane on the surface (such as the bodily actions of reinsurers and museum guides; Jarzabkowski et al., 2015, and Balogun, Best, et al., 2015, respectively) may—in specific contexts, or as recurring, responsive patterns of habituated action over time—*become* strategically consequential (see also Clegg & Kornberger, 2015).

This broadens the scope of what we think of as worthy of holding the title '*strategic*', and indeed—more fundamentally—of what *constitutes strategy*. This is also in keeping with an emerging interest in the consequentiality of the 'everyday' within social studies more broadly (Holmes and Hall, 2020; Jacobsen, 2009), where 'exploring the minutiae of daily experiences [...]' also highlights their cultural, ethical, social and political significance (Hall & Holmes, 2020, p.3),

opening up opportunities to '*make the mundane remarkable*' (Back, 2020, p.xviii, emphasis in original). I will return to this idea of the 'everyday' work of frontline strategic actors later in this chapter, specifically by relating it to digital technologies of 'control'. Working towards this end, I will now consider the 'material turn' in SAP.

### 1.5. The 'material turn' in strategy as practice

SAP to-date has placed significant emphasis on strategy discourse: how strategy is discussed, communicated and negotiated (e.g., Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Dameron & Torset, 2014; Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008; Johnson et al., 2010; Rouleau, 2005; Rouleau and Balogun, 2011), often within spatially bounded contexts such as meetings and workshops (see Seidl & Guérard, 2015 for review). In contrast to such *discursive* aspects of strategy practice, until quite recently, the *material* elements have been relatively neglected (Arnaud et al., 2016; Dameron et al., 2015; Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Vaara & Whittington, 2012). Viewing this through the philosophical lens of practice (Orlikowski, 2015), this neglect seems quite surprising. Indeed, drawing on the work of Heidegger and Wittgenstein, Schatzki (2005, 2006, 2012) argues that all social phenomena should be viewed as bundles of practices *and material arrangements*, and it is well established that material artefacts play a vital part in shaping, configuring and, indeed, constituting praxis and organisation (Barad, 2007; Carlile et al., 2013; Orlikowski, 2007; Orlikowski & Scott, 2008; Latour, 1996, 2005; Pickering 1995).

Notions of the relations between the human and the material in constituting practice have inspired a 'material turn' in some management domains, especially in the intersecting fields of finance, accounting and information systems research (e.g., Ahrens & Chapman, 2007; Leonardi, 2011; Pinch & Swedberg, 2008; Quattrone & Hopper, 2006). This turn is now increasingly shaping SAP inquiry. With a focus on the role of materialities in strategy work, Dameron et al. (2015) provide a useful categorisation of five types of 'material' that can be considered in SAP research: 1) strategy tools, 2) strategy objects and artefacts, 3) strategy technologies, 4) built spaces, i.e., architecture and furnishings, and 5) human bodies. For the purposes of this introductory review, I will expand briefly on the first three categories, as they have greatest relevance for my research.

An emerging collection of work has focused on the analytical tools ('strategy tools'; Dameron et al., 2015) that strategists deploy in their decision-making. These may include well-established tools, such as SWOT, PEST, Ansoff grids, scenario planning frameworks, strategy and process maps and BCG matrices (e.g., Fenton, 2007; Jarratt & Stiles, 2010; Jarzabkowski, Spee, et al., 2013; Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2015; Paroutis et al., 2015; Wright et al., 2013), as well as the tools that are

developed *de novo* to consider complex or wicked problems (Burke & Wolf, 2021). Emerging SAP interests here focus on understanding how these tools are actually used in practice—as opposed to their “intended ‘textbook’ purposes” (Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2009, p.223; see also Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2015). Thus, work has considered how the features and affordances of these tools shape how strategy work unfolds, how as tools-in-use they shape the nature and outcomes of strategic decision making, and how they enable and constrain strategic interactions across organisations (e.g., Jarratt & Stiles, 2010; Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2015; Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2009).

Other SAP scholars have considered how concrete material artefacts (‘strategy objects and artefacts’; Dameron et al., 2015) are developed and applied in strategy work. A dominant SAP interest in this category has been the use of strategic planning documents (e.g., Giraudeau, 2008; Jarzabkowski, 2011; Kaplan, 2011b; Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2011; Vaara et al., 2010). Such work goes beyond thinking of strategic plans as ‘simply’ acting as resources for strategy discourse, but also considers them as material in their own right; that is, as playing an active role—as concrete artefacts—in shaping strategic praxis (Jarzabkowski, Spee, et al., 2013). Wider work has also investigated more mundane objects such as cardboard cubes (Whittington et al., 2006) and Lego bricks (Heracleous & Jacobs, 2008) and the material role they play in episodes of strategising. While these cited studies have each tended to focus on a singular form of artefact as a mediator of localised strategising episodes, more recent work has become interested in how multiple artefacts interact during strategy practice (Werle & Seidl, 2015), how different artefacts facilitate strategy work across multiple, physically separated sites of praxis (Demir, 2015), or how a multiplicity of different artefacts are used to replicate the routines that support strategy implementations (Friesl et al., 2018).

Significant potential also lies in the category of ‘strategy technologies’ (Dameron et al., 2015). Technologies are recognised as intrinsic aspects of modern organisations (Leonardi & Barley, 2010; Orlikowski & Scott, 2008; Suchman, 2007), where they mediate ‘almost all social action’ (Leonardi, 2015, p.S17). However, the use of technologies in strategising practice still remains largely unexplored (exceptions include Laine and Parkkari’s 2015 work on IT in strategy participation, and studies of how PowerPoint software supports interaction, collaboration and negotiation in strategy work; Burke & Wolf, 2021; Kaplan, 2011b; Knight et al., 2018). As Leonardi (2011) suggests, in the face of growing interest in the use of strategy tools more broadly (see above), this sparsity of technology-focused SAP scholarship is interesting, given that ‘[such tools] are really little more than abstract frameworks that are made concrete through the use of various

information and communication technologies' (p.17). The technologies that support strategy work thus warrant specific scholarly attention. However, notwithstanding the aforementioned studies of PowerPoint, as well as work that has a more general technological leaning (e.g., Demir, 2015), 'we still lack systematic studies of technologies and how their features impact strategizing' (Dameron et al., 2015, p.54). In consideration of this lack, my work in the following chapters aims to offer further theoretical and empirical insights into technology and its role in strategy.

Lê & Spee (2015) offer a categorisation of empirical traditions that have *or could* inform SAP inquiry into the role of materialities (including technologies) in SAP: the sensemaking approach, the communication approach, the technology approach, and the positivist approach<sup>10</sup>. The first approach originates from the work of Weick (1995). It emphasises the connections between materiality and knowledge in the processes of interpretation, coordination, and organisation (Brown & Duguid, 2001). Artefacts might thus be considered as *epistemic objects* where knowledge itself is embedded in these materials (e.g., McGivern & Dobson, 2010) or as *boundary objects*, where they can be used to construct as well as span organisational boundaries (e.g., Bechky, 2003). Drawing on these ideas, in SAP research, strategic artefacts have been studied in terms of their roles in collaboration, as well as in constructing and controlling the scope of strategic interests (Kaplan, 2011b; Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2009; Werle & Seidl, 2015).

The second approach—the communication approach—considers organisation as an ongoing communicative accomplishment. That is, it emphasises the communicative constitution of organisation (CCO; e.g., Cooren et al., 2006; Cooren, 2012, 2018, 2020). Here there is a productive interaction between the human and material, between talk and text (e.g., Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2011). In SAP research, this approach can thus emphasise the way artefacts (e.g., planning documents) enable and constrain communicative dimensions of praxis. Plans are seen as possessing their own degree of *textual or material agency* that materialises the world of strategy (e.g., Cooren, 2012, 2020; Bencherki et al., 2019; Pälli, 2018; Vásquez et al., 2018). Thus, Cooren (2020) 'think[s] in terms of *materialization* rather than exclusively in terms of materiality' (emphasis in original, p.16). Materialization is thus:

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<sup>10</sup> In addition to Lê & Spee's (2015) categories, I also recognise an emerging, related stream of work interested in the role of the visual and pictorial in discourse and meaning-making (e.g., Bourgoin & Muniesa, 2016; Höllerer et al., 2019; Knight et al., 2018; Stiles, 2011, 2014). There is also an interesting line of inquiry that may be seen to intersect with SAP which considers new media and strategy (Gulbrandsen et al., 2020).

[the] ways by which various beings (e.g., a procedure, a mission statement, an organizational chart, a strategic plan, a CEO, a spokesperson, an organization, an idea, etc.) come to appear and make themselves present throughout space and time. (p.2)

Some extant SAP research in this tradition has positioned materials such as planning texts and their enabling software (e.g., PowerPoint) as specific *genres of communication* (e.g., Cornut et al., 2012; Kaplan, 2011b; Schoeneborn, 2013). Defined as ‘conventionalized discursive actions in which participating individuals or institutions have shared perceptions of communicative purposes as well as those of constraints operating on their construction, interpretation and conditions of use’ (Bhatia, 2004, p.87), they can be viewed analytically as constitutive aspects of strategy practice (Cornut et al., 2012). Other scholars have considered how CCO can be applied to theoretically extend notions of the performativity of strategy – that is how communicative praxis in strategy work (bound together with its theories, texts, tools and technologies) *brings into being* the reality which it seeks to characterise or represent (Vásquez et al., 2018). Strategy communication practices thus *materialise* strategic concerns which strategic actors become oriented to (Bencherki et al., 2019).

Third, Lê & Spee (2015) situate the technology approach within the field of science and technology studies (STS). Where, based on a ‘growing dissatisfaction with the extant focus solely on technologies and their properties [...] as this did not explain their use’ (ibid, p.586). Studying *technologies-in-use* (a theme also adopted by some organisation scholars, e.g., Orlikowski, 2000; Orlikowski & Barley, 2001), STS researchers started to look beyond the human-centric view, where technologies were simply instruments of human agency to consider how the human and technological are intertwined or co-agential in practice. I will expand upon this below. Finally, in the positivist approach (Lê & Spee, 2015), studies seek to ‘identify [generally cause–effect] relationships between physical stimuli or conditions on human emotion, cognition and behaviour’ (ibid, p.588). I will expand on these last two approaches a little more in the context of another categorisation of materiality in SAP by Dameron et al. (2015).

Dameron et al. (2015) propose three ways of looking at the *relationship* between the human and material: the ‘weak’, ‘moderate’ and ‘strong’ views<sup>11</sup>. Each view makes a different set of ontological and epistemological assumptions, with this variation somewhat paralleling the span of difference between Nicolini’s (2012) weak and strong practice-based programmes (Section 1.3 above). In the case of the ‘weak’ view of materiality, studies focus on materials as ‘objects’ with

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<sup>11</sup> See also Jones (2014) for a similar categorisation applied within the context of IS scholarship.



distinct properties that impact human activity. Dameron et al. (2015) thus think of 'materiality as mere physicality' (p.56). Studies that follow this approach tend to adopt the positivistic approach referred to above (Lê & Spee, 2015). They are strongly represented in fields such as consumer psychology and marketing, specifically exemplified by work that seeks to explain how material stimuli shape consumers' cognitions and behaviours (e.g., Bawa et al., 1989; Bitner, 1992; Hughes & Fill, 2007; Sayed et al., 2004). Although these approaches are uncommon in SAP studies (Dameron et al., 2015; see also Lê & Spee, 2015), examples do exist. For instance, Jarzabkowski, Giulietti, et al. (2013) conducted surveys of strategists to quantitatively analyse the factors that drive strategy tool adoption. And Wright et al. (2013) applied repertory grid methods to consider practitioners' perceptions of the utility of commonly used strategy tools. In such cases, strategy tools are viewed as being *used* by strategic actors based on *objective features* such as tool or user characteristics (Lê & Spee, 2015, p. 589).

In the 'moderate' view of materiality, human and material, subject and object are seen as interrelated but still discrete entities (Dameron et al., 2015). This view often invokes the idea that materials have affordances that enable and constrain human agency and strategic praxis (e.g., Demir, 2015; Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2015; Kaplan, 2011b). It is inspired by works with the technology approaches (Lê & Spee, 2015, see above) which have focused on technologies as they are actually used in situated practice—as technologies-in-use. For example, Jarzabkowski and Kaplan (2015) frame strategy tools as *tools-in-use* to consider how the agency of actors and the affordances of these tools interact in practice to influence the selection and application of tools, and the generation of the outcomes associated with such tool use. They thus take into account the premise that strategy tools are not necessarily used (in situated praxis) in the manner they are notionally designed.

This thinking moves towards the idea that tools are not neutral objects used 'objectively' by human agents to guide their thinking and action, but are active in shaping strategy work. Further, in their use, tools are adapted to suit human purposes, according to specific needs and circumstances. Their use is therefore not simply related to procedural practices of rational, analytical strategy making, but also to interpretative and political processes (Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2015, p.551). Extending this notion of tool/technology use slightly further, some organisation scholars emphasise a closer intertwinement of human and material, indicating that agency is *distributed* between humans and materials. This is captured in Leonardi's (2011) notion of 'imbrication' as applied to technology use in organisations, reflecting how 'human and material

agencies are effectual at producing outcomes [...] only when they are joined together'. However, he also notes that 'their interdependence does not belie their distinct characters' (ibid, p.151).

Finally, in a move that disrupts this human–material distinction, the third, 'strong' view positions human and material as *mutually constitutive* (Dameron et al., 2015). It emphasises the ontological relationality which is performative of 'subjects' and 'objects' in strategy work (e.g., Kornberger & Clegg, 2011). While representative of the CCO approach above, this thinking has also largely been inspired by philosophers and theorists in the STS field – thus also intersecting with Lê & Spee's (2015) technology approach to materiality. Accordingly, this view is reflected in Barad's (2003, 2007) notions of 'intra-action' and 'posthumanist performativity'; Pickering's (1995) 'mangles of practice'; Latour's 'actor-networks' and 'hybrids' (e.g., 1993, 2005); Suchman's (2007) 'human–machine reconfigurations'; Haraway's (1991, 1997) 'cyborgs' and 'materialized refigurations'; Bennett's (2010) 'assemblages'; Bijker's (1995) 'sociotechnical ensemble'; and Feenberg's (1999) technological 'ambivalence'. Together, relational ideas from STS provide foundations for notions of the 'sociomateriality' in organisation theory, defined in terms of the ontological entanglement of the social and material in practice (Orlikowski, 2007; Orlikowski & Scott, 2008). This broad sort of position is adopted by Laine and Parkkari (2015) to show how strategic agency and participation is 'dispersed to humans, IT, and physical settings' (ibid, p.37).

As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, and will become clearer in Chapter 2 and 3, I will adopt a strong view of materiality (Dameron et al., 2015) aligned with the technology approach (Lê & Spee, 2015). Specifically, this will be grounded in the 'postphenomenological' school of the philosophy of technology. Taking this stance, human and technology, subject and object, and the social and material will be considered as ontologically entangled in a manner which is also in keeping with the strong view of practice (Nicolini, 2012) described in Section 1.3 above.

### **1.6. Blurring boundaries: strategy as a human–technology co-accomplishment**

In this section I bring together themes reviewed in Section 1.4 (on participation in strategy) and 1.5 (on the role or materialities) to consider how human and technology are intertwined (co-participatory) in the everyday work that accomplishes strategy. As indicated in Section 1.4, extant discussion of strategy participation blurs any distinction between strategy formulation and implementation. This is not to say that managers do not think in these distinctly processual terms, or that distinctions between the two are not to some extent captured (or targeted) within organisational routines and practices. However, when we think of strategy as an accomplishment

in the way presented, formulation and implementation can be seen as somewhat derivative labels of what *becomes strategy*. At best here—and as long recognised by scholars such as Mintzberg (Mintzberg, 1978; Mintzberg & Waters, 1985)—only an analytical line can be drawn between formulation and implementation (cf. Bourgeois & Brodwin, 1984).

This ‘blurring’ of the formulation/implementation boundary has been considered by Leonardi (2015) specifically in the context of the part played by materialities. It is recognised that materialities (tools, artefacts and technologies; Dameron et al., 2015) play a key role in spanning organisational levels and functions, enabling and constraining interactions across boundaries (e.g., Bechky 2003; Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2009; Carlile, 2002). For Leonardi (2015), however, these materialities do not so much span as *blur* or even *disrupt* such boundaries. Thus, in the case of strategy, ‘formulation’ and ‘implementation’ are not spatiotemporally distinct, but are sociomaterial entanglements that enact each other. He illustrates this by describing how the senior managers in a plumbing fixture firm set the agenda for a strategy that was then ostensibly ‘passed down’ to middle managers for execution. This strategy was ‘based on a belief that the company could predict future trends and create a new market for those trends with new product offerings’ (ibid, p.S19). However, these specific data requirements were only determined once middle managers took the reins, and senior managers then refused to fund the material means (a specific technological artefact referred to as a ‘briefing book’) to obtain these data. As Leonardi (2015, p.S19) summarises the challenge: ‘the feasibility of implementing the [strategy], and consequently having the strategy in the first place, was contingent upon a technology that was created after the making of strategy had officially ended.’ He concludes with a thought-provoking challenge:

To materialize a strategy is to focus on the materiality through which the strategy is enacted. For scholars of strategy, a fruitful avenue of exploration would be to examine how and under what conditions the [tools and] technologies designed to implement a strategy actually contribute to the making of that very strategy they are designed to implement. (2015, p.S20)

This opens up interesting avenues for inquiry into how not just the human, but also the material shapes strategy *as it is accomplished*. While extant studies of materiality in SAP have tended towards a focus on just one side of the blurry boundary (i.e., the artefacts, tools and technologies of formal strategising (e.g., Dameron et al., 2015; Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2015; Kaplan, 2011b, Knight et al., 2018), a range of recent studies have also emphasised the tools and technologies that practitioners work with at the frontline (e.g., Arnaud, 2016; Demir, 2015, Vargha, 2018). I introduce these below.

Arnaud et al. (2016) consider how materialities contribute to strategy enactment by the regional branch managers of a French bank. These practitioners developed their own 'mundane' textual tools (ibid, p.46) which supported or accommodated the localisation of a national strategy, translating strategic aims into their daily practice. These included, for example, templates to help employees perform tasks relevant to strategy ('operating texts'), modified versions of texts from headquarters to support the reconfiguration of the workplace environment to reshape local practices ('geosocial texts'), and work schedules to coordinate activities and improve operating efficiency ('timing texts') (ibid, pp.46-47). Arnaud et al.'s (2016) analysis showed how enacted strategy is 'written into' such materialities, helping employees make sense of strategy within the local, situated contexts of their work, thus promoting local support for strategy while also helping to satisfy senior managements objectives.

Also working from an SAP position, Demir (2015) describes how strategic actors across organisation levels within a group of affiliated Swedish banks 'instilled strategic behaviour' (ibid, p.5137) by controlling and designing tools and technologies to bridge between corporate goals and the local operations of customer-facing advisors. Managers made material adaptations to a customer analysis technology that was routinely used by these advisors as they analysed their local customer base, affording new opportunities for action that accorded with strategic aims. Through these local human-material accomplishments, strategic activities became integrated into everyday work.

Vargha (2018) specifically calls for SAP research that "broaden[s] our scope of technologies considered relevant in strategy-making from 'strategy tools' used in formulating and communicating high-level strategy" with attention instead being given to 'production technologies' (p.491) that are intended to provide structure to how high-level strategy is accomplished. In this study, Vargha (2018) formalises the ideas that strategy is a local enactment by drawing on Callonian and Butlerian theories of performativity (e.g., Butler, 1990, 1993, 2010; Callon, 1998; 2007, 2010; Callon & Muniesa, 2005). She studies frontline, customer-facing employees in the banking sector to consider how a Customer Relationship Management technology *performs* the market it was designed to represent. Her analysis shows how banking employees encountered the strategic assumptions about their customers through their involvements with the technology in their routine work. This made the *assumed* world of the strategy *real* to the practitioners as they acted within it and engaged with customers in relation to it. This has epistemological implications for how we think about strategy. Moreover, is also has

ontological implications for *what strategy is in being accomplished* (cf. Alcadipani & Hassard, 2010; Law 2008; Law & Singleton, 2005; Mol, 1999, 2008; Mol et al., 2002 on related, STS-based notions of the ontological multiplicity of entities and practices). It thus extends Leonardi's (2015) provocation on how the technologies that ostensibly implement strategy may have a role in enacting it. Indeed, as Vargha (2018, p.491) concludes:

production technologies which have nothing to do with official strategy-making, and which are brought in to 'implement' strategy, may in fact be bringing the strategy's world into existence, even as they are fabricating the company's products and services.

SAP work in this vein intersects with practice-focused inquiries in the accounting literature. For example, in their study of a government-owned railway company, Skærbæk and Tryggestad (2010) show that accounting devices—rather than being adopted *into* the strategy as subordinate instruments—changed the way strategy was framed. In doing so, the strategy was essentially *adapted to* the devices as new concerns emerged and were transformed through the accounting calculations. This shifted the attention away from the 'strategic centre' of the top management team towards other parties who *became* strategic. Similarly, Ahrens and Chapman (2007) provide an account of management accounting control tools in a restaurant chain, demonstrating the chains of practices that interlink materialities such as budgets and food menus. They show how these daily activities shape the strategic and financial objectives of the company as much as the espoused objectives shape these same activities. In keeping with this, Erp et al.'s (2019) study of the use of management accounting systems in the public nursing home sector in the Netherlands shows how such technologies are not stable entities that direct practices toward the attainment of pre-defined goals. Instead, these systems—through the human interactions they shape—produce new and unintended strategic opportunities<sup>12</sup>.

These accounting studies add further weight to the idea that strategy is both a social and material (technological) accomplishment that blurs boundaries and levels, and so belies traditional notions of implementation *vis-à-vis* formulation. They also further illustrate how both human actors and technologies are entangled, co-agential participants: neither is neutral in how strategy plays out at the frontline. While some level of managerial oversight of strategy 'implementation' may be supported by various forms of control systems, these same technologies, when enrolled into local practices are adopted and adapted in unforeseen ways, presenting new affordances, and

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<sup>12</sup> For broader discussion of how management accounting and control systems are performative of practice, see Vosselman (2014).

prompting emerging patterns of actions and interactions. Some of these patterns may seem to reinforce strategic aims, others may diverge from them, still others may become strategically salient in their own right.

Moreover, these ideas also steer attention towards questions of *how* technologies and other materialities are enrolled into, and constitute, mechanisms of power. From the above discussion it is clear that such technologies do not *control* strategy in any deterministic way (nor do their managerial designers, instigators, or implementers). Instead, as co-constitutively entangled within emerging patterns of action, they should be thought of as being mobilised and remobilised within a dynamic flow of power, reconstructing sociomaterial agencies. I will develop these ideas further in the remainder of this chapter. In Sections 1.7 and 1.8, I will introduce the *power perspective* on strategy and related thinking on subjectivities. These intersect with, and have influenced, SAP inquiry. In the final section of Chapter 1, I will then review relevant works that specifically focus on the ‘power’ of technologies in strategy.

### **1.7. Power in the practice of strategy**

The corpus on power is vast and covers many different perspectives on the nature of power and its relevance for strategy and organisation (Carter et al., 2010; see also Fleming & Spicer, 2014 for a broader review of power, management and organisation). While recognising this wider literature—particularly work from the strategy process school, (e.g., Bower, 1970; Burgelman, 1983; Pettigrew, 1973)—in this section, I focus on key studies that have specifically informed critical studies in the SAP domain. These are largely based on Foucault-informed theorising that is typically associated with the seminal work of Knights & Morgan (1991), but that can also be traced to those whose work intersects with strategy from broader management and sociological fields (e.g., Miller and O’Leary 1993, 1994; Rose & Miller 1992). Such Foucauldian SAP inquiries direct attention to how power and the practice of strategy ‘are necessarily coterminous’ (Clegg & Kornberger, 2015, p.389).

Knights & Morgan’s (1991) work prompted strategy scholars to think about their subject matter in a different way. They argue that the discourses of strategy work are exercises in power. Moreover, such discourses position the practitioner as a strategic actor, thus as a subject who holds power over the subject positions of others by virtue of these discourses. In these terms, the strategist *as a strategist* garners a specific empowered identity. To differentiate this Foucauldian view (*as power over subjectivities*) from other notions of power, Fleming and Spicer (2007, 2014)

position it as ‘subjectification’<sup>13</sup>, one of the ‘four faces’ of power that they describe (summarised in Table 1). Subjectification differs from the other faces in that:

the focus is not on decision-making and non-decision-making, or the ideological suppression of conflict, but the constitution of the very person who makes decisions. [...] According to Foucault, power is achieved through defining conditions of possibility underlying how we experience ourselves as people. Power, therefore, produces the kinds of people we feel we naturally are (Fleming & Spicer, 2007; p.23).

According to this notion, power ‘constitute[es] what the person is: their lived sense of identity and selfhood’ (Fleming and Spicer, 2014, p.244). In this vein, early studies in the strategy space applied Foucault’s ideas to emphasise how managerial practices exercised control by shaping the identities of employees. Knights and Morgan’s (1991) view of strategy is clearly one such work. Others include Townley’s studies (1993a, 1993b, 1997) of human resource management (HRM) practices, which demonstrate how HRM establishes disciplinary power by dividing, ranking and monitoring employees who then internalise these discourses, constructing new identities for themselves that accord with strategic corporate expectations. And similar themes are considered by Hopper and Macintosh (1997) in relation to management accounting and control systems (see also McKinlay & Starkey, 1997 for other early examples of Foucauldian thinking in management and organisation).

**Table 1: Fleming and Spicer’s (2007, 2014) faces of power**

*Adapted from Fleming & Spicer, 2014, p.241*

Faces of power	Description	Theoretical roots
Subjectification	Attempts to shape sense of self, experiences and emotions	Foucault (1977)
Coercion	Direct mobilization of power	Dahl (1957)
Manipulation	Attempts to ensure action and discussion occurs within accepted boundaries	Bachrach and Baratz (1962)
Domination	Attempts to make relations of power appear inevitable and natural	Lukes (1974, 2021)

<sup>13</sup> In deploying this term, I also recognise here the wider work of critical, feminist theorists who have analysed Foucault. For example, McLaren (1997, 2002) discusses subjectification in relation to Foucault’s later work on the ‘care of the self’ in which he describes how subjects have a role to play in their own self constitution from *within* relations of power. ‘Subjectification’ thus balances Foucault’s earlier work which focused on how the subject is constituted by systems of control (‘subjection’). Allen (2011, 2013) makes a similar point without using the term ‘subjectification’. McLaren’s (1997, 2002) and Fleming and Spicer’s (2007, 2014) depictions both converge towards the same idea that the constitution of selfhood/identity occurs at the power-resistance interface (i.e., the ‘struggle’, as I introduce later).

However, building further on Foucault's theories (e.g., Foucault, 1977, 1979, 1982), McCabe (2010) cautions against any deterministic, taken-for-granted view that strategic power is wielded managerially (as, he argues, is a tendency in SAP inquiry; see also Ezzamel & Willmott, 2008; Kornberger & Clegg, 2011). He emphasises the importance of exploring the *actual* praxis of power as 'power is not only exercised by those deemed to be powerful but also by those on the receiving end of strategic designs' (ibid, p.2). To undertake such an exploration, McCabe adopts a *relational* view of power. In this sense, power is not a *possession* of individuals or groups or actors, but is embedded in and constitutive of the practices of strategy and organisation. It is ever-present but constantly flowing and fluxing through the actions and interactions that sustain organisational worlds. He shows that while 'strategy is a manifestation of the managerial claim to power' (ibid, p.22) this claim extends beyond the praxis of senior or middle management. To sustain a managerial claim, 'leaders always need to enrol others to exercise power in the intended way' (ibid, p.20); they thus, by necessity, relinquish this claim. Further, this always leaves power open to acts of resistance, where power is redirected and remobilised by those who might ostensibly be the targets of strategic power (see also Balogun et al., 2011; Vaara, 2010),

Hardy and Thomas (2014) also adopt a Foucauldian approach to consider this further. They show how certain flows of power become intensified through material and discursive practices, resulting in the enactment and stabilisation of new 'subjects' and 'objects' of strategy. Indeed, they claim that such intensification is necessary for a strategy to diffuse through an organisation. However, in support of McCabe (2010), intensification is not deterministic, and resistance as well as control is operative within relational structures of power, such that both are mutually implicated in strategy accomplishment as meanings are contested and negotiated. They show how resistance itself can be manifest as the intensification of the power of *alternative practices* that only exist in relation to the 'dominant' top-down practices.

Further, Laine and Vaara (2007)'s examination of power (which draws on both Foucault and wider critical discourse theory) considers how strategy actors spanning levels and functions engage in identity work characterised by 'discursive struggles'. These struggles:

not only deal with competing views concerning organizational strategies, but also involve more fundamental questions related to the subjectivity of the actors involved. These include their right and opportunities to engage in organizational decision-making, their autonomy as organizational actors, and ultimately their identity as respected and important organizational members (Laine & Vaara, 2007, p.36).



I describe the theoretical basis for the notion of 'struggle' in the next section. However, it is sufficient to say here that, by examining organisational discourses relating to strategic development within a European engineering and consulting firm, Laine and Vaara (2007) show that discursive struggles 'assign' subjectivities to organisational actors that both empower and disempower. Through these struggles, actors across levels and functions dialectically shape subjectivities both for themselves and others. In their study, senior management drew on the apparent legitimacy of conventional 'top down' strategy discourse in an attempt to gain some level of control (ibid, p.51). However, the hierarchical, 'hegemonic' ideals invoked through these practices led to alternative discourses being established among middle management and frontline project engineers in a manner that reflected their quite different social and material contexts for action. Middle managers adopted entrepreneurial discourses to establish themselves as 'more progressive' than senior management, and so structured their own legitimacy as strategists in their own right. Meanwhile engineers' identities as skilful, well-trusted, customer-facing professionals were threatened by managerial discourse. They constituted themselves *as resistant* by mobilising discourse that was critical of management, and that emphasised their own unique, differentiating skillsets as frontline workers, and constructing themselves as central but under-recognised, almost 'heroic' agents of successful strategic development. 'Resistant' subjectivities here are not necessarily oppositional but also 'generative' (Thomas & Davies, 2005a) as new, alternative identities are forged in relation to each other.

Although not directly related to power, this generativity is also demonstrated by Dameron & Torset (2014) who introduce the idea that subjectivities can be constructed through coping with the *tensions* of strategic praxis (tensions being defined as 'elements that seem logical individually but inconsistent and even absurd when juxtaposed'; Smith & Lewis, 2011, p.382). By viewing tensions as 'discursive resources through which practitioners build their agency and identity' (Dameron & Torset, 2014, p.294) they show how strategy discourse is 'the art of balancing [such] tensions' (ibid, p.310), whereby strategic actors construct their sense of identity *as strategists* in relation to them.

Through relations of power that flow through organisations, strategy is thus marked by political contests over what (and how) entities are strategically meaningful to the organisation, and who (and how) subjects orientate around and towards these 'strategic' objects of meaning. From a Foucauldian perspective, the subjects and objects of strategy – as they pertain to the domains of management practice and scholarship – do not pre-exist strategy discourses but are themselves constructed and reconstructed through such discourses (see Ezzamel & Willmott, 2004; 2008).

Strategy as power is *productive* of subjects and objects; notions of power and performativity thus go hand-in-hand (see Cabantous et al., 2018; Kornberger & Clegg, 2011).

### 1.8. Struggles and the shaping of subjectivities

Adopting a critical theoretical stance on strategy as power, these studies above (Hardy & Thomas, 2014; Laine & Vaara, 2007; McCabe, 2010) indicate that strategy might best be defined in terms of the (manifold, ambiguous and political) flows of power that constitute its accomplishment. Such thinking indicates that resistance does not sit ‘outside’ power, but is instead subsistent *within* relations of power (see also Ezzamel and Willmott, 2010; Thomas and Davies, 2005a). Said differently, power and resistance are always co-implicated (Foucault, 1980)—they ‘thus operate together in a web of relations in which power is never complete and possibilities for resistance always exist’ (Thomas & Hardy, 2011, p.326). To resist is to be empowered rather than repressed, as it generates new meanings and opportunities (Rouse, 1994).

This issue of the duality of power and resistance has long been a point of theoretical debate in the broader management and organisation literature. According to Mumby (2005):

the field of critical organization studies has evolved around an implicit binary opposition that privileges either organizational control processes or employee resistance to such mechanisms of control. This dichotomy is by no means rigid or absolute but reflects a tendency of critical scholars to engage in a process of deferral (in the Derridian sense<sup>14</sup>), whereby a dominant pole is adopted as a way to frame and marginalize its opposite. Such an approach has the dual effect of reifying the preferred pole and subsuming the deferred pole beneath that which is privileged (ibid, p.2).

On this basis, Mumby (2005; see also 2004) articulates a ‘dialectic’ view where resistance is seen as a set of practices ‘that are simultaneously enabling and constraining, coherent and contradictory, complex and simple, efficacious and ineffectual’ (2005, p.20). Both those who control and those who resist are intertwined within ‘local process[es] of self-formation that [are] always ongoing, always tension filled’ (ibid). From this dialectic stance, the aim is not towards a synthesis but towards accepting these tensions and understanding how they create possibilities for change. As noted by Thomas et al. (2011): ‘organization and change emerge at the *interstices* of power and

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<sup>14</sup> Mumby (2005) is alluding here to Derrida’s poststructuralist notion of *différance* (Derrida, 1968/1982): a deliberate misspelling of the French word, *difference*. As elegantly captured by Jackson & Mazzei (2012, p.18): ‘Because there is no one-to-one correspondence between the words we use and the meanings they intend, Derrida’s concept of *différance* refers to the continual deferral of meaning in the play of language. Meaning is always deferred, incomplete, and lacking origin’.

resistance among senior and subordinate groups, whether they are senior and middle managers, managers and employees, or change agents and change recipients' (p.36, emphasis added).

Fleming and Spicer (2007, 2008) further develop this theorising to *transcend* the dichotomy of control and resistance that is still inherent in these dialectics. Tracing historical ideas on power through the works of Machiavelli (1515/1997, 1517/1983), Hobbes (1651/1985), Hegel (1807/2005), Marx and Engels (1848), Jaspers (1932/1970), Simmel (1955), Arendt (1958, 1970), and Bourdieu (1983, 1984), among others, Fleming and Spicer suggest that the concept of 'struggle' best captures the interplay of political tensions that subsist within power structures. A struggle is:

a multidimensional dynamic that animates the interface between power and resistance. This is a process of ongoing, multiple, and unpredictable calls (power) and responses (resistance) in which power and resistance are often indistinguishable. The interface is one of mutual constitution in which power is never without resistance and vice versa (Fleming & Spicer, 2008, pp.305-306).

Thus, conversely, 'power and resistance are manifestations of [the] more basic and fundamental process of struggle' (ibid, p.305). In relation to *subjectification* as the Foucauldian face of power (Table 1), Fleming and Spicer (2007, pp.57-60) theorise that struggles over subjectivities can take place where the 'focus of this struggle is on who controls the means of identity construction' and where identities flow from the productive interface of power-resistance (Alvesson & Wilmott, 2002; Thomas & Davies, 2005a, 2005b). Here, it is the actors' 'understandings of their self-identities [that] provides [the] arena for resistance' (Thomas & Davies, 2005a, p.686).

This notion of struggle as the shaping of subjectivities opens up critical inquiry into how flows of power-practices actually constitute those who are 'seen' (or enacted as) as empowered (or powerful), and those who are 'seen' (or enacted as) as resistant, and—moreover—discloses the conditions within which they can each even hold such a status. Similar relational, generative views have been articulated by Harding et al. (2017). Inspired by the theories of Karen Barad and Judith Butler (e.g., Barad, 2007; Butler, 1990, 2010), these authors take a performative view of such struggles for identity. They show that *resistors* are not pre-given subjects who proceed their acts of resistance; "resistance/resistants are performatively constituted and coemergent in saying 'no' to a power that would deny identity and self-hood" (ibid, p.1226). 'When the 'I' is jeopardized, a resistant that resists may take its place" (ibid, p.1227).

### 1.9. Technologies of control in strategy accomplishment

The SAP research to date that has embraced such Foucault-informed notions of strategy as power and struggles over subjectivities, has generally prioritised discourse over (socio)materialities (and technologies more specifically). Thus, Laine & Vaara (2007) examined subjectivity in strategy discourse from their ‘discursive struggle perspective’, and McCabe (2010) captures how managers struggle over the ambiguity and contradictions inherent in their strategy discourses. Hardy & Thomas (2014) show how the power effects of strategy are intensified through discourses. While they do recognise in their analysis that discourse is not just linguistic but is also embedded in materialities, they do not carve out tools and technologies for specific attention. However, such attention is required. Indeed, according to the philosopher of technology, Mark Coeckelbergh, ‘to this [Foucauldian thinking] we must add the idea that self, identity [... subjectivities] are produced and performed not only through language but also through *technological practices* (Coeckelbergh, 2022a, p.115, emphasis added). As I will introduce later in Chapter 3, Foucault’s notion of discourse can be expanded to take explicit account of the technological.

Following a long-standing dominance of discourse-focused inquiry, SAP scholars have called for closer attention to be given to materialities (see Section 1.5 above; e.g., Dameron et al., 2015; Jarzabkowski, Spee, et al., 2013), as well as for stronger links to be made between discourse, power *and materiality* (Balogun et al., 2014). This also invites deeper examination of the role played by technologies—given their role in strategy accomplishment as described above in Section 1.6—within these relational power structures. Although the literature that specifically considers these issues seems relatively sparse, I point to three key works which I will now briefly review: Mantere and Vaara (2008), Ezzamel and Willmott (2008), and Whittle and Mueller (2010). However, it must be noted that even these examples primarily focus on the *language* of discourse; they were not designed to explicitly examine the role of technologies *per se*.

First, as part of a larger Foucault-inspired study on the practices that enable or constrain participation in strategy, Mantere and Vaara (2008) suggest how technological systems can be applied to govern how organisational actors engage in strategy accomplishment. Using an empirical example of an insurance firm’s use of a balanced score card-based system ‘as the vehicle for its strategy formulation and implementation’, they describe discursive practices of ‘technologization’ that controlled participation by ‘provid[ing] the rules to be followed’ (p.354). Thus, the system was defined and managed by dominant actors: top management and system

experts. It restricted lower-level workers' access to information. It legitimised and standardised their particular ways of thinking, and defined their roles. It limited the ability of stakeholders to bring up new issues, and constrained their actions by establishing performance measurements. Thus, the *materialities* of the system were enrolled into existing power structures, reinforcing the empowered identities of senior management, a context where the technology also became an *object of power*, just as those subjects whose actions were constrained by it were 'treated as objects' through the technology (ibid, p.350, emphasis added) and so lost some of their agency.

The other two studies consider technology-based management accounting systems (Ezzamel & Willmott, 2008; Whittle and Mueller, 2010). Similar to the accounting studies discussed in Section 1.6 above, they both accept that such tools and technologies can be performative of strategy, reasoning that they are not neutral tools in the hands of purposeful human agents but have a sociomaterial *co-agency*. They extend this thinking, however, by specifically considering how technological systems play a role in accomplishing strategy as a *component* of flows of power<sup>15</sup>. Ezzamel and Willmott (2008) studied the rollout of a new strategy by the top management of a global retailer referred to as StitchCo. Here, the management accounting system played a vital (agential) role by collating and presenting key metrics introduced to facilitate and monitor the operationalisation of the strategy. It was viewed as a material *embodiment* of managerial discourse on strategy (ibid, pp.197, 198, 207, 213). Through the technology, management exerted a *calculative agency* (Callon & Muniesa, 2005) that constructed new objects of strategy through these metrics. These metrics thus became 'endowed with 'truth'-like qualities' that defined the meaning of the strategy (ibid, p.206). The objective of this 'regime of truth' was to inject disciplinary power into the business (ibid, p.207), a mechanism of control to align employees' orientations and actions with the new strategic agenda.

Similarly, but drawing on actor network theory (ANT) rather than Foucauldian theory, Whittle and Mueller (2010) studied how a team of consultants worked with a management accounting system while employed within a UK telecommunications firm. The accounting technology, in this case, played its performative role by being enrolled into power-laden networks of both human and non-human actants. Within these networks, it exerted control by limiting the power of the consultants to 'sell' their ideas, while at the same time offering opportunities to justify their agenda. The technology became a 'macro-actor' that shaped which ideas became—or failed to

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<sup>15</sup> See also Visser & Davies (2021) for a Baradian (e.g., Barad, 2007) account of how power and performativity are entangled.

become—strategic. Said differently, as an actant within these agential networks, it both constructed and deconstructed, and held and withheld power.

### 1.10. The research opportunity

While important SAP works such as Ezzamel and Willmott (2008) and Laine & Vaara (2007) accept the position that power and resistance are always co-implicated, they under-emphasise the *generativity of power* as it is captured in Fleming and Spicer's (2007, 2008) notion of the struggle (Section 1.8). They tacitly adopt a dialectic view (Mumby, 2005; see Section 1.8 above) which tends to retain a level of dichotomy between control and resistance, presenting them as pre-defined, distinct and mutually exclusive (although interdependent) positions of power (Harding et al., 2017; Wenzel et al., 2019). Here, managerial intent (discursively and/or through technology) imposes a controlling, dominant understanding of the world that then suppresses other understandings (Mumby, 2005; Putnam et al., 2005). Resistance, in these terms, is then viewed as a behavioural defiance of these dominant positions (ibid). At the same time, this stance assumes a quite passive role for the technology itself, consistent with a relatively weak view of materiality (cf. Dameron et al., 2015) that emphasises the human agent over and above the technology in a rather Cartesian manner. Here the technology is an instrument deployed, almost monolithically, by purposeful human strategists to support strategy implementation. This belies their organisational entanglement (Orlikowski, 2007; Orlikowski & Scott, 2008).

Because of this current leaning—and while we know that technologies (of 'control') work to discipline the subjectivities of strategic actors (by imposing metrics that shape behaviours, for example)—we still know little about how such actors *relate* to (and with) these technological impositions and how struggles to understand (and shape) their subject positions become manifest through their immersive, everyday work as they relationally cope with such technologies. Said differently, there is value in dissecting how the human actor and technology are 'entangled' as co-constitutive 'participants' in these struggles. There is a need to embrace the *sociomaterial* enactments of power that then constitute subject positions of empowerment and resistance. A strong sociomaterial ontology that emphasises the relationality *between* human and technology, from which subjectivities and objectivities are then viewed as derivative phenomena, would seem to be a requirement for this. This problematisation prompts me to pose the thesis' first—and theoretical—question, which will then open up the conceptual space for my empirical research:

**Research question 1:** With regard to struggles ‘accompanying’ frontline strategy work, how can a relational, non-neutral role for technologies be conceptualised?

I will address this question over the next two chapters by moving transiently away from my thesis’ focus on strategy as practice, to engage with two other streams of literature. This sideways step will allow me to develop—and then introduce into SAP—a conceptualisation of the ‘struggle’ that is grounded upon such a strong view of sociomateriality. The first stream, within the IS field, draws upon Heidegger’s phenomenology to articulate ‘posthuman’ frameworks for analysing human involvements with technology (Introna, 2014; Lamprou, 2017; Riemer & Johnston, 2012, 2014, 2017, 2019). Chapter 2 thus aims to review and also *to critique* this work. I will outline what has been theoretically achieved by these scholars—to reveal what their thinking can tell us about how subjectivities are shaped through human–technology relations—but then also problematise their thinking by showing how it under-represents the relational role of technology and also how it under-specifies the social nature of these technological relations.

The second stream relates to ‘postphenomenology’. This is a school of philosophical thought—one that is consistent with a Heideggerian ontology—that was developed specifically to attend to the part that technologies play in structuring the human lifeworld (e.g., Ihde, 1990; Verbeek, 2005). Importantly, it also considers technologies in the context of power (Verbeek, 2011a). Thus, in Chapter 3, I will address the problems raised in Chapter 2 by integrating postphenomenological ideas to conceptualise technologies as *non-neutral mediators* within the power flows that shape subject positions. From this perspective, technologies of control are no longer ‘just’ embodiments or instruments of a pre-given human agential (managerial) position of power (cf. Ezzamel & Willmott, 2008) over and against which human resistance is mobilised. Rather, they are *relational mediators* of the idiosyncratic challenges and claims to subjectivities that then *become manifest as* positions of resistance and empowerment. This thinking will then provide the basis for my empirical research question and inquiry into the power laden sociomaterialities of strategy accomplishment (Chapter 4 onwards).

## **Chapter 2:**

### **HEIDEGGERIAN VIEWS OF SOCIOMATERIALITY – A CRITICAL ACCOUNT**



## 2.1. Introduction

As presented in the last chapter, there is growing interest in materiality in SAP. However, potential research paths are still being explored, and there has been discussion of the philosophical and theoretical approaches that might fruitfully be adopted (Dameron et al., 2015; Lê & Spee, 2015). Heidegger's phenomenology shows promise, in that it places emphasis on how materials are constitutive aspects of human practice (Lê & Spee, 2015). As noted by Kaplan (2011b) in her study of PowerPoint use by strategists, a 'technology is not simply an object but rather is implicated in a set of practices.' She raises Heidegger's (1962) notion of 'equipmentality'—part of his *existential analytic* of being-in-the-world, and often referred to as his 'tool analysis'—to suggest how an artefact is thus 'absorbed into the practice'<sup>16</sup>. Such solidly practice-theoretical notions indicate that Heideggerian approaches might offer fertile ground for further work in studying materialities (and technologies more specifically) in strategy work (Lê & Spee, 2015). However, further explication of what a such a Heideggerian view might look like—and how it might need extending or adapting—is first required. This explication is the overarching objective of this chapter which is organised as follows.

First, I provide a brief review of Heidegger's phenomenological ontology (Section 2.2) and then discuss how it has been applied within the SAP corpus to-date (Section 2.3). My aim here is to show how (despite its relevance) its specific application to issues of materiality has yet to be considered in any depth. Second, I engage a broader corpus that has grappled with varied notions of 'sociomateriality', that is the complex relationships between humans and materialities (largely technologies) in constituting organisational life (Section 2.4). A number of scholars, working largely from within the IS domain have applied concepts from Heidegger's existential analytic to theorise a strong 'posthuman' stance on sociomateriality (Introna, 2014; Lamprou, 2017; Riemer & Johnston, 2012, 2014, 2017, 2019). Third, I present aspects of Heidegger's existential analysis of being-in-the-world (Sections 2.5 and 2.6) which then frames an account of extant contributions to sociomateriality in the broader IS and organisation studies literature (Section 2.7). Finally, I problematise the residual humanism (and thus under-specified role of the material) and under-representation of the social in these extant conceptualisations (Section 2.8).

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<sup>16</sup> Note that Kaplan (2011b) draws superficially on Heidegger in this example. She does not apply equipmentality as a specific conceptual tool for analysis.

## 2.2. Phenomenological philosophy and Heidegger

Very broadly stated, phenomenology considers lived human experience. It can be thought of either as a disciplinary research field or as an historical tradition within philosophy (Smith, 2018). In the former case, as a field, it has its own methodological approaches to inquiry which seek to capture insights into human consciousness and perception. This work is generally inspired by Edmund Husserl's pioneering idea that we should seek to understand the world not in terms of an objective truth but in terms of how it appears to us in our experience:

This phenomenology [...], has, as its exclusive concern, experiences intuitively seizable and analysable in the pure generality of their essence, not experiences empirically perceived and treated as real facts, as experiences of human or animal experiments in the phenomenal world that we posit as an empirical fact. This phenomenology must bring to pure expression, must describe in terms of their essential concepts and their governing formulae of essence, the essences which directly make themselves known in intuition, and the connections which have their roots purely in such essences. Each such statement of essence is an a priori statement in the highest sense of the word. (Husserl, 1913/2012, p.166)

Husserl's thus proposed that 'essences' of the 'phenomenal world' could be captured by a process of *eidetic reduction*, whereby our everyday trust in objectivity is suspended or bracketed to systematically unpack the underlying properties of phenomena-as-experienced: a shift from the *natural attitude* to the *phenomenological attitude*. To Husserl (1927) this involved personal reflection on one's own 'experiencing gaze':

Every experience can be subject to such reflection, as can indeed every manner in which we occupy ourselves with any real or ideal objects [...] So when we are fully engaged in conscious activity, we focus exclusively on the specific thing, thoughts, values, goals, or means involved, but not on the psychical experience as such, in which these things are known as such. Only reflection reveals this to us. Through reflection, instead of grasping simply the matter straight-out ... we grasp the corresponding subjective experiences in which we become 'conscious' of them, in which (in the broadest sense) they 'appear.' (Section 2, paragraph 2)

These classical Husserlian principles of the phenomenological attitude have been adopted into various contemporary methods of phenomenological research, including Max van Manen's (2014) phenomenology of practice, Giorgi's (2009) descriptive phenomenology, and Dahlberg's reflective lifeworld research (e.g., Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2008; Karin et al., 2007). These methods have been applied to study phenomena in a range of empirical settings including healthcare, psychology, education, and social work.

The second way of thinking about phenomenology is to consider how it has been shaped as a historical movement in Western philosophy (Smith, 2018), one which has broad consequences for ontology and epistemology, and more specifically, important implications for the positioning of my thesis. While its precursors are represented by the ideas of Immanuel Kant, Georg Hegel, and Ernst Mach, this tradition was largely pioneered by Husserl (as per the above discussion) and can then be traced through the works of Martin Heidegger, which it then shaped the thinking of others who further developed this tradition, such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Paul Sartre, as well as those who then took their philosophies in different directions, such as Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas (for a detailed review see Moran, 2000).

The thinking of each of these philosophers developed, at least in part, by way of critical dialogue with the others. However, while diversity and critical debate has defined—indeed shaped—the phenomenological tradition, there is common ground in the general rejection of Cartesian views of being and knowing that conceive of the mind as an inner representation of an external world. Instead, phenomenological onto-epistemologies see that, first and foremost, we can only understand the world from a view that accepts we are *in the world* before we can make any sort of claim to have *stepped back from it* to view it objectively, scientifically, or rationally—a claim that Merleau-Ponty (1962) refers to as ‘the prejudice in favour of the objective world’ (p.6.). Heidegger (1982) goes further to claim that ‘the idea of a subject which has intentional experiences...encapsulated within itself is an absurdity which misconstrues the basic ontological structure of the being that we ourselves are’ (p.63-64).

Husserl thus argued for priority to be given to the world that is revealed through reflection on lived experience, that is the *lifeworld*—the ‘everyday world with which we are entwined and which we take for granted’ (Holt & Sandberg, 2011; see also Dorfman, 2009). However, Heidegger then took these ideas further, by taking a stand against what he saw as Husserl’s transcendental grounding of the self, a tendency to think of the human as a pure source of experience standing outside of *what is experienced*. Husserl’s view was seen as an insufficient departure from traditional notions of the subject as distinct from the object—ideas that Heidegger consider to be the antithesis of the phenomenological stance (Dreyfus, 1991; Moran, 2000). Heidegger then took phenomenology in a more radical ontological direction. He challenged not just the nature of beings, but considered the question of the nature of the *being of beings*; that is, what are the existential conditions that make it possible for a human *to be* the being that it is (Dreyfus & Wrathall, 2005)?

Heidegger primarily addressed this neglected question in his extensive work, *Being and Time* (Heidegger, 1962), developing a new language of terms to differentiate his ontology from Cartesian traditions. His thinking was based on the idea that *to be* is to always already *be in the world*. The basic human condition is thus one of *in-der-Welt-sein* (being-in-the-world), a relational idea of reality that replaces the duality of subject and object (Stapleton 2010). Thus, Heidegger (1962) emphasises that, phenomenologically, we do not primarily encounter the materials that make up the world as detached objects with discernible properties, about which we hold internal beliefs and make judgements, and over and above which we make deliberate decisions on how to act. Rather, he claims:

What we 'first' hear is never noises or complexes of sounds, but the creaking waggon, the motor-cycle. We hear the column on the march, the north wind, the woodpecker tapping, the fire crackling... It requires a very artificial and complicated frame of mind to 'hear' a 'pure noise. The fact that motor-cycles and waggons are what we proximally hear is the phenomenal evidence that in every case Dasein, as Being-in-the-world, already dwells alongside what is ready-to-hand within-the-world; it certainly does not dwell proximally alongside 'sensations'; nor would it first have to give shape to the swirl of sensations to provide a springboard from which the subject leaps off and finally arrives at a 'world'. Dasein, as essentially understanding, is proximally alongside what is understood (Heidegger, 1962, p.207).

Heidegger uses the term '*dasein*' (there-being, being-here or being-there, depending on the translation) here rather than 'human' to differentiate this ontology of *being-in-the-world* from the subject-object dichotomy of Cartesian thinking. Thus, *dasein* is not a subject looking out upon an external world to which meaning is then ascribed, but an entity that is *always already in a meaningful world that constitutes what dasein is*. Given this primary state of being-in-the-world, the idea that humans are—first-and-foremost—detached, thinking subjects breaks down. The 'subjectivity' of the human being, and the 'objectivity' of the world are relationally co-constituted through (indeed derivative of) being-in-the-world (Moran, 2000, p.15). Under these conditions, prior intention is no longer a predicate for our ongoing practical dealings. Instead, we fluidly engage with entities in (or of) the world in an absorbed, non-self-referential manner such that these things withdraw from our direct attention (Dreyfus, 1993). According to Heidegger's (1962) existential analysis of 'equipment'—his 'tool' analysis—*dasein's* world is thus built up of its practical, ready-to-hand involvements with materials, aptly illustrated in his famous hammer example:

Equipment can genuinely show itself only in dealings cut to its own measure (hammering with a hammer, for example); but in such dealings an entity of this kind is not grasped thematically ... In dealings such as this, where something is put to use, our concern subordinates itself to the "in-order to" which is constitutive for the equipment we are employing at the time; The less we just stare at the hammer ... and the more we seize hold of it and use it, the more primordial does our relationship become, and the more unveiledly is it encountered as that which it is—equipment. The hammering itself uncovers the specific "manipulability" ["*Handlichkeit*"] of a hammer . . . we call "readiness-to-hand" [*Zuhandenheit*]. (Heidegger, 1962, p.98)

Based on Heidegger's thinking, 'tools' show up as the *tools that they are* according to the manner in which humans are oriented towards them in their practices, rather than as discrete entities that sit apart from practice. As *dasein*, we are prereflectively disposed to act with tools 'in order to do' something or 'for the sake of' something (Brandom, 2005; Dreyfus & Wrathall, 2005); so, a hammer is only a hammer by virtue of its use in hammering. It is then only when tools stop working or become obtrusive that we start to notice them as 'objects' with properties—the hammer becomes a (broken) piece of wood with a metal head. When this happens, they shift from being *ready-to-hand* to become *present-at-hand*. As I will review in the next section, these premises have been quite influential in theorising strategy practice.

### 2.3. Exemplars of Heideggerian philosophy in SAP

The phenomenological tradition has had wide-ranging influence within the SAP and related organisation studies among scholars seeking to challenge traditional onto-epistemologies (e.g., Chia & Holt, 2006, 2009; Chia & Rasche, 2015; Chia & MacKay, 2007; Sandberg & Dall'Alba (2009); Tsoukas, 2015). I will review some of these below.

Further, beyond this direct influence, it is also recognised that the practice theories which stimulated the 'practice turn' that inspired SAP were themselves strongly influenced by Heideggerian ideas (Holt & Sandberg, 2011; Nicolini, 2012; Sandberg & Dall'Alba, 2009; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2016). This might be most clearly evident in the theorising of Schatzki (e.g., 2002, 2012) which has been drawn upon in a range of studies of strategy and organisational practice (e.g., Hydle, 2015; Jarzabkowski, Spee, et al., 2013; Zundel & Kokkalis, 2010; Schatzki, 2005, 2006).

### 2.3.1. *Strategy as practical coping: Beyond methodological individualism in SAP*

Chia and Holt (2006) draw on Heidegger's (1962) ideas of the present-at-hand (the occurrent) and the ready-to-hand (the available) to structure a view of strategy as 'practical coping'. The authors illustrate the difference between these phenomenological attitudes with reference to using a doorknob:

When we enter through a door ... the doorknob is available unobtrusively to us and it is this unobtrusiveness that characterizes what Heidegger means by 'availableness' [readiness-to-hand]. Unlike this smooth and unobtrusive practical coping that characterizes 'availableness', 'occurrentness' involves a distancing of the individual from the phenomenon apprehended. This takes place especially during a breakdown or disturbance of equipmentality ... Thus, if the doorknob sticks when we try to turn it, the tool becomes conspicuous because we can no longer turn it; if it is absent, it obtrudes into our consciousness because it is not ready-to-hand; and if it catches us as we walk past, it appears obstinately as an unready obstruction ... As the object becomes unavailable (broken, absent or obstructive), we immediately become aware of the boundaries between ourselves and our equipment ... It is only then, in this 'occurrent' mode [presence-at-hand], that thematic representation, deliberate intention and action take over from everyday practical coping (Chia & Holt, 2006, pp.641-642).

Chia and Holt (2006) then apply these principles to distinguish their 'practical coping' view from the traditional views of strategy. They apply the terms 'building' and 'dwelling' to capture these dichotomous positions. They relate building to a 'present-at-hand' position, and dwelling to the 'ready-to-hand', practical coping position. As indicated earlier, the notion of present-at-hand considers the way objects show themselves as 'constituted by properties they possess in themselves' (Dreyfus & Wrathall, 2005, p.4). Here, engagement with these objects is focused on the detached, thematic observation of attributes, rather than practical engagement in their use. Strategy as building is thus to engage in deliberate and purposeful activities based upon deductive analysis of a world external to the strategist. Strategy here accords with a 'transcendent logic' (Chia & MacKay, 2007, pp.228, 231) of *strategy-making*, planning and goal-orientation. In contrast, ready-to-hand suggests that our primary mode of encounter with entities is as 'equipment' – that is, through immersion in their 'use' in a non-thematic, circumspective manner. And so, the dwelling mode views actors as being thrown into a world that is made meaningful through absorbed engagement – that is, through being-in-the-world. Strategy as dwelling accords with a logic of *immanence* (Chia & MacKay, 2007): it is *immanent* in all organisational practices such that it

emerges in a non-deliberate and purposive manner through skilful, practical coping as strategists continuously adjust to their shifting environment.

This depiction of building and dwelling is central to a number of Chia and his colleagues' other works (Chia, 2009; Chia & Holt, 2006, 2009; Chia & MacKay, 2007; Chia & Rasche, 2010)<sup>17</sup>. Further, it has been applied by other strategy and organisation scholars. For example, Burke & Wolf (2021) argue that when well-articulated problems are addressed by strategists using established strategy tools, they work according to the building view. However, when they use *de novo* tools to strategise 'wicked problems' there is an 'integrative relationship [between building and dwelling], where both unfold co-jointly in a complementary and recursive relationship' (ibid, p.383). Hydle (2015) apply building and dwelling to identify distinct temporo-spatial patterns of strategic practice, and Bouty et al. (2019) show how strategy emerges from an interweaving of practical coping actions and unintended consequences. Dameron & Torset (2014) show how strategists discursively shape their identities in relation to praxical tensions and contradictions between building and dwelling. Further, Carroll et al. (2008) apply such ideas to argue for a move from competency-based models of leadership and leadership development towards leadership-as-practice.

By drawing a distinction between building and dwelling, Chia and his colleagues made an important epistemological contribution. As already discussed, SAP was founded upon the idea of viewing strategy as being something that people do and say rather than something that organisations possess (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2003). However, according to Chia & MacKay (2007) and Chia & Rasche (2015), a focus on the doings and sayings of actors can carry with it a bias towards methodological individualism (Ylikoski, 2016) and an empirical focus on active strategy-making practices or 'strategizing' (see Chia & MacKay, 2007; Tsoukas, 2015, p.61). Chia & Mackay, 2007, p.219 articulate three challenges associated with this tendency:

First, there is, at times, a basic lack of clarity about what practice really is in relation to processes and individual activities. Second, because practice, like microprocesses or activities, are conceptually construed as epi-phenomena of individual/organizational agents, the presupposition is that practices are what actors 'do'; individual agents are initiators of practices rather than themselves products of social practice. The tendency, therefore, is for the

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<sup>17</sup> Note that Chia and colleagues also integrate ideas from other philosophers and theorists of practice who were influenced by Heidegger. For example, Chia and Holt (2006) consider Bourdieu's notion of habitus to further develop their dwelling view.

basic locus of analysis in strategy-making to remain the individual, or the individual organization rather than the social practice itself. Third, it is not clear whether the s-as-p approach is seeking to assert itself as a unique perspective in its own right or whether it is merely seeking to extend the strategy process perspective.

Methodological individualism therefore favours the purposeful, intentional and deliberate actions of strategists (Chia & MacKay, 2007; Chia & Rasche, 2015). Practices are thus ‘sometimes treated interchangeably and [...] hence reducible to the actions and intentions of individual agents’ (Chia & MacKay, 2007, p.219). They are ‘simply’ part of a strategist’s toolkit which can be brought to bear during strategising. On this basis, Chia and his colleagues argue for a ‘post-processual’ view (Chia & MacKay, 2007) based upon their idea of strategy as dwelling, such that ‘practices themselves are given primacy over individual agency and intention’ (Chia & Rasche, 2015, p.45). They argue that this dwelling view offers potential for the SAP field to firmly differentiate itself from traditional strategy research perspectives by fully aligning scholarship with the broader ‘practice turn’ in the social sciences.

All this is not to say that Chia and colleagues only see strategy as non-deliberative— active, intentional strategic planning, of course, does occur. The point here is that traditional epistemological views are primarily concerned with strategic praxis as the ability to order, calculate, represent and control; to steer the world towards pre-definable human ends. However, Chia and Holt (2009, pp.140-141) emphasise that this deliberate strategy work can only be understood fully when it is seen as being grounded upon a primordial practical coping:

[T]he practical ability to [...] act strategically does not necessarily presuppose detached planning, distancing, linguistic justification or cognitive representation...Unlike a researcher/observer, the practitioner is not disposed to standing outside his or her situation and to surveying it with a detached eye the way the intellect does. Rather, what preoccupies him or her is how to respond in situ to the changing relationships he or she encounters in a manner that ensures the smooth and productive functioning of his or her everyday world. This is what begins to characterize a dwelling mode of engagement[.]

Overall, Chia and his colleagues’ Heidegger-inspired contribution opens up an alternative onto-epistemological vista on the practice of strategy, one that foregrounds actors’ natural responsiveness to their circumstances— rather than actors’ agency and intent— allowing us to consider how strategies unfold rather than how they are made.



### 2.3.2. *Related phenomenological frameworks for unpacking strategy*

Chia and his colleagues have developed a significant body of work that draws upon the Heideggerian tradition. However, other scholars have also argued for views of SAP based on phenomenological ontology. Two works are specifically reviewed here: Tsoukas (2015), and Sandberg and Dall'Alba (2009) as—unlike the broader onto-epistemological repositioning offered by Chia and his colleagues—they provide frameworks that I consider to be aimed at more granular theoretical and empirical analysis. They thus constitute important (and somewhat incremental) contributions.

In the first example, Tsoukas (2015) directly engages with Chia and Mackay's (2007) post-processual view, agreeing with it, but also suggesting that it requires further development if it is to fully account for *deliberate acts* of strategy work (such as those that might occur in strategic planning meetings, for example). Thus, while accepting that 'strategy *subsists* in each and every mundane and seemingly isolated action we perform' (Chia & MacKay, 2007, p.235, emphasis in original), Tsoukas (2015, p.61) argues that this 'tell[s] only one part of the story'. While a 'strong view' of practice sees practices as having primacy over individual agency and intention, Tsoukas argues that human agency cannot be completely forgotten in strategy work.

To find a balance here, Tsoukas (2015) draws further on Heidegger's equipment analysis to develop a meta-theoretical framework that considers four different modes of strategy work, based on the analytical categories of 1) type of action, 2) type of intentionality, 3) type of language use, and 4) type of strategy-making/strategy research (see Table 2). Thus, based on the idea that all forms of strategy work should be viewed as forms of being-in-the-world, Tsoukas essentially extends Chia and colleagues' idea of strategy as practical coping (dwelling) to also include deliberate coping, detached coping and theoretical coping. To briefly describe these: First, *deliberate coping* refers to how actors 'pay explicit attention to what they do and retrospectively try to make sense of it through articulation or reinterpretation' (p.71). Prior actions of practical coping are thus reframed (through *post hoc* deliberate coping) as being part of a 'deliberate' strategy. Second, *detached coping* refines Chia and colleagues' thinking in relation to the present-at-hand of strategy work. Thus, it considers how 'agents develop thematic awareness about the organization ... to be described in terms of abstract properties' (p.71). This mode of strategy work is seen in formal strategising contexts such as strategy meetings, workshops and away-days (Seidl & Guérard, 2015). Finally, *theoretical coping* is indicative of the scholarly work of theorizing strategic activity, abstracting it further from its raw context in order to develop a theoretical understanding of what

happens in practice. Overall, Tsoukas (2015) further develops Chia and his colleague’s Heideggerian conceptualisation of strategy, to offer a more nuanced, analytically discriminate framework for SAP researchers.

**Table 2: Action, intentionality and strategy: Tsoukas’ (2015) Heideggerian framework**

*Adapted from Tsoukas (2015)*

Type of action	Practical coping	Deliberate coping	Detached coping	Theoretical coping
Type of intentionality	Tacit understanding (non-deliberate)	Explicit awareness (articulation and reinterpretation)	Thematic awareness	Theoretical understanding
Type of language use	Situational coping skill	Propositional (aspects)	Propositional (properties)	Abstraction
Type of strategy-making/research	Emergent pattern of action	Retrospective reframing	Strategising	Theorizing strategy-making

Second, Sandberg and Dall’Alba (2009) also align with Chia and colleagues call to rethink strategy, to argue that there is a ‘need to return to practice anew’ in organisation theory (p.1350). Drawing on Heideggerian thinking, and including insights from others within the phenomenology tradition—Husserl, Merleau-Ponty and Schutz—they use the idea of being-in-the-world as a launch pad to articulate a ‘life-world based perspective’ (p.1355) on organisational practice (see also Dall’Alba & Sandberg, 2014 in the specific context of work-related learning, and Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2020 in the context of sensemaking). They articulate a set of lifeworld (‘practice world’) concepts that frame this view, as summarised in Table 3.

Accordingly, practices are conceptualised as ‘specific [life]worlds in which members dwell, made up of an array of activities, people, knowledge, equipment, concerns and so on’ (p.1355). Practitioners are thus always already entwined in practice worlds (Table 3, point 1). They think of Chia and colleagues’ ‘dwelling’ in terms of a dwelling in the ‘practice world’ of strategy (p.1355). That is, strategy *is* a lifeworld that is constituted in (and through) the sociomaterial practices of strategy. Given this ontological entwinement, practitioners and practice world *constitute each other*. The practice world is thus a ‘way of being’ (Table 3, point 2); strategists *are* strategists based on an inherited background of practices in which they are constituted. Strategic practices, in turn, are integrated into the lifeworld of the strategist through the *embodiment* of knowledge and skills

(Table 3, point 3), learnt through *being with others* through processes of socialisation and training (Table 3, point 4) and through ongoing engagement with equipment, tools, technologies and other materials that constitute practices (Table 3, point 5).

**Table 3: Sandberg and Dall’Alba’s (2009) ‘practice world’ concepts**

*Adapted from Sandberg and Dall’Alba (2009)*

	Life-world concept	Feature of practice approaches
1	Entwinement with practice worlds	Non-dualism
2	Ways of being	Human agency
3	Lived body	Embodiment
4	Being (with) others	Practice as social
5	Equipment and body extension	Inclusion of non-humans

Although Sandberg and Dall’Alba’s (2009) life-world view is broadly positioned as a contribution to organisation studies, they also very specifically discuss how their framework stands in counterpoint to dominant conceptualisations of SAP. They do so in a way that echoes Chia and MacKay’s (2007) critique of SAP’s tendency towards methodological individualism. Specifically, they compare their lifeworld view to Whittington’s (2006) often-cited SAP framework, which views the practice of strategy in terms of three entities: praxis, practices and practitioners (see also Section 1.3; and Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Vaara & Whittington, 2012). Whittington’s aim here was to provide an analytical tool to help unpack the interactions between these elements. Sandberg and Dall’Alba (2009, pp.1361-1364) argue that this thinking—by articulating practice in terms of discrete, although interrelated entities—perpetuates the Cartesian dichotomies that practice theoretical accounts have sought to dispute. In contrast, they argue that:

placing entwinement at the centre enables a closer analysis of how organizational practice is constituted in its enactment and performance over time. From a life-world perspective, then, entwinement is the point of departure—both theoretically and methodologically—for investigating organizational practice (p.1362).

In laying out their arguments for a lifeworld view over Whittington’s more ‘traditional’ view, they offer a clear set of working principles to guide phenomenology inspired research in SAP studies.

Together, these examples (from Chia and his colleagues, Tsoukas, and Sandberg and Dall’Alba) indicate that, to-date, the value of Heideggerian thinking generally (and of his equipment analysis more specifically) has largely been derived from its use in articulating a different way of looking at the world, and so of approaching the study of strategy practice—one that more strongly emphasises *practice* as theory or philosophy (Section 1.3; Orlikowski, 2015; Nicolini, 2012). However, notwithstanding Kaplan’s (2011b) and Lê & Spee (2015) insightful indications that the Heidegger’s analysis of equipment has conceptual utility for inquiring into the role of materiality in strategy (see Section 2.1 above), the relevant Heideggerian concepts have not yet been applied systematically to these ends. As I will now present below, there is a body of work on *sociomateriality* in the broader organisation studies field that has made moves in this direction, and so can be leveraged by SAP scholars. I will consider this work from a critical perspective with the aim of showing how, when considered as a corpus, this current Heideggerian view of sociomateriality, while very useful, would also benefit from further development as part of being applied to the study of strategy practice.

#### **2.4. Introducing views of sociomateriality in organisation studies**

The term ‘sociomaterial’ (or ‘socio-material’) has been in use in the humanities since the 1980s (Jones, 2013). However, the term’s current adoption in organisation studies (and relatedly in the IS field) may largely be traced back through citations to Orlikowski’s (2007) seminal paper on ‘sociomaterial practices’ (Jones, 2013). In this, she argues for scholarly recognition of how the social and material—the human and technological in the context of her research—are constitutively entangled and ontologically inseparable. Her ideas draw on posthuman themes from science and technology studies (see already introduced in Section 1.5), particularly the concepts of actor networks (Callon, 1986; Latour, 1992, 2005), agential realism and intra-action (Barad, 2003), mangles of practice (Pickering 1995), and sociomaterial assemblages (Suchman, 2007)<sup>18</sup>. Orlikowski further develops these insights in a range of related works (Orlikowski, 2010; Orlikowski & Scott, 2008; Scott & Orlikowski, 2012, 2013, 2014).

However, overall, Orlikowski makes relatively broad claims about the nature of this entanglement, and the range of terms adopted in her articulation of sociomateriality may conflate or confuse some of the underlying premises rather than provide a clear articulation of a relational

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<sup>18</sup> See also Cecez-Kecmanovic et al. (2014) and Parmiggiani & Mikalsen (2013) for reviews and discussions of the multidisciplinary heritage of the term ‘sociomateriality’.

ontology (Jones, 2013). In conjunction with the ‘to and fro’ of academic debate, this has led to a breadth of different uses of the term ‘sociomaterial’ in the literature that has proceeded her work (Jones, 2014), and a possible lack of coherence in the vocabularies applied (Lamprou, 2017). These variations often make quite different commitments to Orlikowski’s key notion of *inseparability*, and Jones (2014) has distinguished a ‘strong’ and a ‘weak’ approach to articulate this difference—one which is in keeping, respectively, with the ‘strong’ and ‘moderate’ views on materiality in SAP offered by Dameron et al., 2015 (Section 1.5).

Jones’ (2014) main distinction is in how the two approaches treat the *relationality* that exists between the social and material. Thus, the strong approach adopts ‘a fully relational ontology in which entities only exist in their relation to others’ (ibid, p.916), such that the human and material are inseparable by virtue of their mutual constitution, thus undermining traditional distinctions between subject and object (Carlile et al., 2013). In contrast, the weak approach ‘restrict[s] relationality to human/machine agency and reject[s] strong sociomaterialist claims that the existence of entities is wholly relational’ (Jones, 2014, p.918). Said differently, humans and materialities are mutually interdependent in practice, and may share (or both co-contribute to) agency, but their *existence* is not co-constitutive. While they are therefore *empirically inseparable*, they do not have to be ontologically inseparable (for critical discussions, see Leonardi, 2012, 2013; Mutch, 2013; see also Cecez-Kecmanovic et al., 2014 and Riemer & Johnston, 2017 for reviews of the ontological debates on sociomateriality). Accordingly, a strong ontological relationality is exemplified by the foundational works of Barad (2003) and Latour (e.g., 2005) that inspired Orlikowski, while a weaker ‘empirical relationality’ is captured by Leonardi’s (2011) notion of *imbrication*.

Recently, proponents of the strong approach have sought to develop a cohesive philosophical and conceptual foundation for the notion of ontological inseparability in their sociomaterial theorising—notably Introna (2014), Lamprou (2017), and Riemer and Johnston (2012, 2014, 2017, 2019). All have drawn on themes from Heidegger’s analysis of being-in-the-world. These themes offer scholars a very well-developed relational ontology upon which to ground—and a very specific vocabulary to articulate—both conceptual and empirical inquiries into the sociomaterial. These efforts draw on the rich, broader history of Heideggerian influences in IS and related organisation studies (e.g., Bude & Züllighoven, 1992; Ciborra, 1996, 1999, 2002, 2006; Ehn 1990; Introna 1997, 2011, 2013; Introna & Ilharco, 2004; Mingers 2001; Turner 2005; Winograd 1995).

In Section 2.7, I will review the theoretical contributions of these scholars. However, first, I will present the nuanced framework of Heidegger's *spatiality* of being-in-the-world. This details two mutually disclosive dimensions (already very broadly alluded to in Section 2.2): the spatiality of the *world-as-equipment* and the spatiality of *being-in* this world. A full elucidation of these two dimensions will capture the essence of these extant conceptualisations of sociomateriality, providing the basis for their review. To unpack the complexity of spatiality in the next two sections, I draw upon a range of literature, including Heidegger's (1962) *Being and Time* as well as commentary upon this work from Heideggerian scholars (e.g., Cerbone, 2013; Dreyfus, 1991; Gelven, 1989; Kaufer, 2013; Malpas, 2006; Polt, 2010; Schatzki, 2010, 2007/2017).

## 2.5. Spatiality of the 'world': The structure of equipment

To briefly reiterate and then build upon some of what has come before in Section 2.2: In *Being and Time*, Heidegger (1962) fundamentally rethinks the nature of reality and human existence by broadly asking two related questions: What is the world to a human being? And thus: What is it for a human being *to be* in this world? What follows from these questions is his systematic analysis of the composite notion: *being-in-the-world*, and thus of the primary entity that has its existence in-this-world, *dasein* (*there-being/being-here/being-there*), depending on the translation) which—over the course of his analysis—captures the idea of what it is for a human *to be a being*. For current purposes, the analysis can be divided into two parts. The first considers 'the world'; the second considers *dasein*'s 'being-in' this world. As introduced above, both have special spatial characteristics which are key for theorising sociomateriality.

Heidegger's analysis begins with the phenomenologically oriented question of what the world of our being-in is like in its everydayness—how do we *first* experience it prior to any thematic consideration? His answer is that we primarily experience the world in terms of our involvements with(in) it—as ready-to-hand (see Section 2.2). As introduced earlier, the entities that make up the world are not first experienced as 'objects' whose physical properties are first uncovered, then evaluated and then purposefully co-opted into use (i.e., as present-at-hand). Rather, we seamlessly incorporate these things into our everyday praxis, and thus primarily relate to the world through our *use of* these things that we find in it; and not to these things in-and-of-themselves as objects. This is not to say, we cannot step back from our absorbed dealings to encounter the present-at-hand; it is just that this is a derivative, secondary *way of seeing* the world (Heidegger, 1962).

On the basis of these phenomenological observations, Heidegger (1962) defines the world in terms of structures of 'equipment'. Things-as-equipment are what they are (i.e., as the things they are ontologically present to us as being) within the context of their uses, which reflect people's goals. As also captured in Chia and Holt's 'practical coping' (Sections 2.3), these 'goals' are not necessarily purposeful, but are *purposive* and subsist within the everyday practices we are involved in, and that shape us. These practices are, of course, constituted in part *by* this equipment; so, note that there is already a sociomaterial relationality inherent in this thinking. This means that our involvements with equipment as components of human practices are thus *teleological*, and *our world* is a nexus of equipmental entities that are always already meaningful in terms of these teleologies (Malpas, 2006; Schatzki, 2010, 2007/2017).

Digging into this more deeply, Heidegger (1962) characterises the world in terms of teleologically *referential structures* of involvements—cascades of equipment *for-which* a use is embodied *in-order-to* engage in a task, *towards-which* a practice is geared, *for-the-sake-of-which* we become the humans that we are always already becoming (see also Cerbone, 2013; Malpas, 2006, Schatzki, 2010, 2007/2017). To take the hammer as an example, *what* is encountered in Heidegger's account is a relational being that is made present *as* equipment-for-our-hammering, such that hammering is *that-which-it-is-for* in our involvements with it. It would not be a hammer outside the relational actualisation of our hammering. Moreover, by extension, this also means that this thing is only the *hammer-that-it-is* in terms of its actualisation within a wider referential whole, whereby *dasein-as-me* becomes purposively involved with this entity *in-order-to* drive nails into a plank, *in-order-to* secure several planks together, *towards* the construction of a tool shed, *in-order-to* provide a means to store tools, and onwards, ultimately this all being *for-the-sake-of* realising myself as a DIY competent person. Hence this equipmental *world* is the milieu that provides the relational basis for *Dasein's being-in* any sort of world at all.

Heidegger (1962) discusses how these equipmental structures have their own form of spatiality that is existentially primordial to the space of Cartesian coordinates—the traditional notion of 'objective' space (Cerbone, 2013; Schatzki, 2010, pp.29-33). As will be explained in the next section (Section 2.6), understanding this spatiality is important in order to appreciate how *Dasein*, in turn, has its place in this world (i.e., the *here* or *there* of its being-in-the-world). According to this spatiality, every piece of equipment has its '*place*' (*platz*) according to how it belongs-to the human activities inherent in the structure. At the same time, these pieces of equipment *are* these places as they constitute the sites that allow these activities to take place: 'For the place that a piece of

equipment is the place that it possesses' (Schatzki 2007/2017, p.40). The wider relational structure of *in-order-to*s and *towards-which*s then constitutes a greater spatial 'region' (*Gegend*).

The place of an item of equipment can be thought of in terms of different equipmental (non-Cartesian) 'coordinates' within this region (see Malpas, 2006; Schatzki 2007/2017 for further examination). The first 'coordinate' relates directly to its use. Thus, a hammer may have different places that are variously bound up with the different aspects of human action involved in a practice. Thus, a hammer has a certain place when involved in the action of hammering, that is different to its place when 'waiting' on the table to be picked up for hammering. While this carries with it connotations of different *physical* places within Cartesian space (the hammer *in* the hand *versus* the hammer *on* the table), note that the hammer—still in the hand—moves to a different *equipmental place* when the act of hammering stops and the carpenter uses the tool to push a pot of nails across the bench. It is further moved across equipmental space when—again, still in the hand—it is used to break a window for the purpose of breaking into a house. Here, the hammer has a *place* in a different equipmental *region* by virtue of being incorporated into a very different teleological structure of practice.

The second 'coordinate' relates to its place relative to other equipment within a region. As discussed, a piece of equipment has a place within the greater teleological whole, but different pieces also have their particular places within this whole, meaning that these pieces all exist as meaningful *in relation to each other*. Using the example of the two different *regions-for-hammering* above. The hammer exists in a specific place in relation to planks, nails, and workbenches within the regional structure established *for-the-sake-of* building a shed. It has a very different place when defined through its spatial relations with windows and vacant houses in the region established *for-the-sake* of perpetrating a burglary.

In a world defined by this distinctive Heideggerian spatiality of equipmental places and regions, things are 'near' to us when they are in use or available for use, and 'far' when not available or not in use. Human involvements within the teleological structures of sociomaterial practices thus bring things *into proximity*, or *push them further away*. I will discuss this in more detail in the next section which describes how *dasein* is granted its own spatiality in direct relation to the spatiality of equipment. As alluded to in the opening paragraph of this section, these spatialities are, in fact, two views upon on a unitary spatiality of *being-in-the-world*: one view from the perspective of the 'world'; the other from the perspective of 'being-in' this world.



## 2.6. Spatiality of 'being-in' (-the-world): The structure of care

The spatiality of *dasein's being-in (in-sein)* the world, is a spatiality that makes us *present* in our involvements with equipment as a constitutive part of the aforementioned referential whole. *dasein* thus finds itself, in spatial terms, *in a place within a region*. There are two aspects to this spatiality of being-in: *dis-tance (ent-fernung)* and *orientation (ausrichtung)* (e.g., Dreyfus, 1991, Malpas, 2006, Schatzki, 2010, 2007/2017). I consider each in turn below.

In terms of dis-tance, things are brought *near* to us based upon the tasks and projects at hand, making these things and their constitutive places meaningful to *dasein* in ways specific to these projects. As indicated by Schatzki (2010, pp.31-32): 'the entities that compose a world are differentially near and far in—more and less involved in—the activities people carry on there. Distance [dis-tance] simply means that people's activities so unfold that entities that were far are brought near'. Similarly, Malpas (2006, p.90) states that 'my involvement in the task of fixing a chair brings chair, wood, nails, glue, hammer, and the rest into view in a way that fits with that task; it also brings into view the others with, in relation to, and for whom that task is performed'. This 'bringing into view' is a bringing-near within the context of *dasein's* own spatiality.

Dis-tance can take various forms (Schatzki, 2007/2017, pp.44-45). First, things can be near to (or far from) *dasein* in terms of what is being *attended to* by virtue of an activity. Thus, a projected slide on a lecture theatre screen may be near for an attentive class of students. Second, things can be near in terms of their actual *use* in an activity. A pen picked up from a lecture theatre desk to scribble notes is brought close to a student-as-*dasein*, whereas the mobile phone left on the same desk in 'silent mode' is further away. Third, this same mobile phone is still far closer than the vacuum cleaner stored in the lecture theatre cupboard next to where she is sitting. This is not because it is physically nearer in a Cartesian manner. Rather it is because the phone is still 'present' at the periphery of the equipmental region in the sense that it can be actively engaged at any time for 'regionally relevant' tasks such as glancing at the calendar to check the time of the next lecture, or opening the calculator app to run a calculation displayed on a lecture slide.

*Dasein's orientation* 'within' the spatiality of places and regions can be thought of in terms of the aforementioned teleology of equipmental structures (Schatzki, 2010, pp.31-32; 2017, pp.43-44; Malpas, 2006, p.90). By 'being involved in a certain task, I find myself already situated in certain ways with respect to the things and places around me' (Malpas, 2006, p.91). This 'situatedness' is an orientation that 'lies in the equipment-using actions people perform, the uses people make of

equipment. These uses are tied to the projects people carry out and the ends they pursue in doing so' (Schatzki, 2007/2017, p.43). The purposiveness that underpins this orientation is associated with three constitutive aspects of Dasein's *being-in the world*: *attunement* (*Befindlichkeit*), *falling* (*Verfallen*), and *understanding* (*Verstehen*) which I describe below (see also Cerbone, 2013; Gelven, 1989, pp.79-110; Kaufer, 2013; Malpas, 2006, pp.98-100; Polt, 2010; Schatzki, 2007/2017, pp.19-20; Stapleton, 2010).

First, *attunement* refers to the way in which, as humans, we find ourselves to be a certain person that has been 'thrown' into the world in a certain way. This idea of 'thrownness' (*geworfenheit*) indicates that our *being-in the world* is determined by pre-given circumstances that are beyond our control. More specifically, we are always already thrown into a situated context that is historically shaped, always already unfolding, and that we *cope with* in our ongoing everyday practical dealings. We are thus always already (pre)conditioned by the world we find ourselves in. Second and relatedly, *falling* suggests that we always thus 'fall' into our dealings with the things and the other people we find ourselves to be alongside in the world. Together *attunement* and *falling* thus capture the idea that we are always already embedded in cultural contexts and practices, that shape what it is to *be what we are* as we press forward in our being among (and with) the entities we relationally encounter in-the-world.

Finally, *understanding* is to project forward into our own possibilities for our being. Things are salient to us according to a background understanding of how we are meaningful to ourselves as we press forward into our futures. For Heidegger, this forward-looking sense of understanding has ontological priority over both *attunement* and *falling*, and also accords with the teleological structure of the world as presented above (Gelven, 1989, pp.84; Kaufer, 2013; Schatzki, 2007/2017, p.43-44). Thus, although our *falling* into the world is pre-configured by the purposive goals immanent in the practices we inherit and are *attuned to*, our primary mode of *orientation* is the *understanding* of the possibilities that we have to shape ourselves into our own futures (Schatzki, 2007/2017, p.44). Thus, the 'conjunction of the possibilities of things satisfying the possibilities of ourselves is what allows us to use things straightaway and, on reflection, to explicitly see them as meaningful' (Sheehan, 2015, p.132). Together these three aspects of the orientation of Dasein's *being-in the world* are unified as the *temporality of 'care'* (*Sorge*), which ultimately Heidegger sees as the *Being*<sup>19</sup> of dasein (Gelven, 1989, p.119, pp.179-185; Kaufer, 2013; Polt, 2010). Primary among

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<sup>19</sup> Heidegger (1962) uses a capital letter 'B' to indicate the ontological primordality of this state of being; one that is fundamental to the being of dasein.

these is dasein's future-directed ability to *project its possibilities* through *understanding*; dasein thus is its possibilities. In unfolding praxis, the past I am *attuned to*, and the *actuality* of my 'present' falling *show up* in terms of their meaningfulness as directed towards my own *potentialities* for the future (see Kaufer, 2013; Polt, 2010; Schatzki, 2007/2017, p.20).

This temporality of care is also reflected in the later thinking of Merleau-Ponty. Merleau-Ponty (1962) places particular emphasis on the bodily-perceptual constitution of the lifeworld. He discusses how we always experience the world in a *pre-objective* way, whereby our perceptions of the world, and our unfolding, embodied engagements with it are always shaped by the way that past experiences are *made present* to us as a basis for projecting ourselves into the future; a process referred to as *sedimentation* (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Rosenberger, 2018a). This establishes a prereflective condition of context that is ontologically *prior* to intent or deliberate action (Dreyfus, 2005). Hence, we see the world and act within it according to a set of bodily habits and tacit understandings that are *sedimented* into our praxis. Our past is therefore sedimented into the conditions of our present, establishing a feedback loop between actor and the perceived world that Merleau-Ponty refers to as an *intentional arc* (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Through this arc, our actions continuously refine our perceptions of the world, and so, in an ongoing manner, shape how the world looks to us and affects what is brought to the foreground of our attention as a solicitation to act towards (and into) our future (Dreyfus, 2005). Praxis flows from the particular significances that have become 'sedimented into the relevant features of the situation' (Wrathall, 2014, p.5). As Dreyfus (2006) exemplifies: 'Our experience of finding our way around in a city ... is sedimented in how that city *looks* to us' so that we see new opportunities for action (ibid, pp.44-45, emphasis in original). The intentional arc sets up a constantly unfolding, circular relation of *milieu and action* where there is no longer a common-sense divide between action on one hand and context on the other (Dreyfus, 2005; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Thus, as Merleau-Ponty (1962) states: a 'person's projects polarize the world, bringing magically to view a host of signs which guide action' (ibid, p.130).

In summary, according to Heidegger, *care* is the nature of what it is to be a human being. We are *concernfully*<sup>20</sup> involved with, and oriented towards things, in a manner geared towards our future-directed *ways of being*. Things therefore show up as being meaningfully 'near' to us, as specific 'sorts' of things-in-their-involvements with us, on the *basis of this care*. A lecture theatre

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<sup>20</sup> The words 'concernful' and 'concernfully' are commonly adopted in Heideggerian contexts to describe human immersion in worldly contexts and carries with it connotations of 'care'.

*appears as* a space for giving lectures, the things within it *appear as* seats-for-an-audience, lecterns-for-speaking-from and projectors-for-presenting-slides, and the people in it *appear as* students because—first and foremost—in the act of lecturing, a lecturer is comporting herself towards her future possibilities, her ultimate referential *for-the-sake-of-being-as* an academician. By virtue of this existential notion of *care*, this person presses forward into this specific ‘academic’ *understanding* of this world’s possibilities to realise their own potential. At the same time, in doing so, they also purposively embrace an historically embedded (sedimented) *attunement* to these *near things as these ‘academic things’* as constitutive of the practices within which they are themselves constitutively embedded (see also Gelven, 1989, p.121; Kaufer, 2013; Schatzki 2010, p.28). Within this spatiality of care, the spatiality of equipment so takes form, as these academic things are *brought near* in specific ways that *orient* the academician in-their-world as an academician.

## 2.7. Heideggerian contributions to theorising sociomateriality

Together the spatialities of being-in (care) and the world (equipment) are ontologically entangled as an overall spatiality of *being-in-the-world*. The human and material (or ‘subjects’ and ‘objects’), are inseparable. Accordingly, and as introduced earlier, Heidegger’s thinking provides a viable philosophical platform for theorising a ‘strong’ view of sociomateriality. Thus, with these concepts now explained, I will review how extant scholarship has drawn on various aspects of this thinking (Introna, 2014; Lamprou, 2017; Riemer & Johnston, 2012, 2014, 2017, 2019).

First, to consider the series of works by Riemer and Johnston. These scholars (2012) first draw on the ‘holism’ of Heidegger’s spatiality of equipment to make an initial contribution to theorising sociomateriality (ibid, p.6):

This circularity of reference shows that equipment (and hence practice) is a holistic socio-material entity and that it has material, practical and social dimensions that are constitutionally entangled in the way envisioned in so-called sociomateriality studies (Barad 2003; Orlikowski and Scott 2008).

They specifically consider how technology is appropriated in work and organisational practice as a spatial ‘place-making’ (pp.14-16). When a technology is new, a practitioner starts by ‘inspecting’ (ibid, pp.7-8) its properties relative to her existing skills and expectations for its use. At this point, the technology is present-at-hand. As the practitioner experiments with the technology, its referential *place* in the spatiality of equipment (its *in-order-to* and *for-which*) is discovered and configured in relation to professional norms and identities, established according to the *for-the-*

*sake-of-which* of existing practice. It then moves to a state of readiness-to-hand as it becomes integrated into practice (finds its *place*). The technology thus 'becomes a normal and a taken-for-granted part of the practice, familiarity with which is assumed for being an authentic member of the practice' (ibid, p.7). Now being part of the referential whole of an equipmental structure, it also contributes to making other elements of the world intelligible, having the potential to disrupt and reconfigure sociomaterial practices.

Riemer and Johnston (2014) explore this potential for disruption further. In particular, they consider how a new technology may meet adoption challenges defined in terms of unintelligibility, inappropriateness and threats to users' professional identity. They theorise how a new technology may at first be *unintelligible* to practitioners against the background of their existing practice with its coherent, established holism. This is because, at this point, it is not yet ready-to-hand as equipment, and has not been incorporated into a (holistic) referential (equipmental, teleological) structure; that is, it does not yet have a *place* with a clear *in-order-to* or *for-which*. Further, the technology may be *inappropriate* even when established as intelligible if it conflicts with the norms and habituated preferences of the established holism, particularly if the technology is introduced to promote change to these existing teleologies of practices. Going still further, professional identities may have already been established as *ways of being (for-the-sake-of)* in relation to existing equipmental structures. New technologies, particularly if *inappropriate* are thus a threat to identity if they have the potential to disrupt extant practices.

In Riemer and Johnston (2017), the analysis of equipmental spatiality is applied to clarify the *ontological inseparability* implicit in the 'strong' view of sociomateriality and defend its relevance in the face of objections from scholars of sociomateriality who favour a 'weaker' view on the grounds that it is more able to account for empirical phenomena (see e.g., Leonardi 2013; Mutch 2013; Sutton 2010). By applying equipmental concepts to the analysis of illustrative empirical data, the authors argue that a Heideggerian view of ontological inseparability is "(1) plausible, (2) coherent, and (3) actionable" (Riemer & Johnston, 2017, p.1075). First, it is *plausible* because Heidegger's ontology is fundamentally compatible with everyday lived experience, in a manner that can be revealed empirically (through e.g., interviews and observations). Second, it is *coherent* because the present-at-hand, ready-to-hand distinction permits 'dualist' Cartesian empirical accounts of technologies in use to be reconciled with ready-to-hand encounters with technology as parts of equipment wholes. Third, it is *actionable* as it provides a framework and conceptual language for the meaningful analysis of field data.

Finally, in Riemer and Johnston (2019), the scholars draw on insights from their work above to revisit the interpretivist agenda in technology and organisation studies. They call for non-dualist interpretivist research that investigates:

not how particular subjects ascribe meaning to IT in the world 'out there', but how IT in a particular world under study is already socially and practically interpreted, and how IT-as-equipment, activities, and people's identities become what they are as part of such a local, holistic world.

In so doing, they quite firmly endorse Heidegger's spatial analysis of equipment as an ontologically, epistemologically and methodologically robust approach (ibid, pp.13-14) to the analysis of sociomaterial practices in a contemporary world of ubiquitous technology.

Lamprou (2017) then builds upon Riemer and Johnston's (2012, 2014) works. While the latter authors focus on the equipmental aspect of Heidegger's overall spatiality of being-in-the-world, Lamprou (2017) complements this by paying very particular consideration to the spatiality of being-in; that is, to the structure of care and its temporality. On this basis, she differentiates her analysis from that of Riemer and Johnston's:

Building on the knowledge generated through these studies, I wish to move beyond a discussion of how technological artefacts are encountered in the social/organizational settings of their design, production and use to a discussion of the conditions that shape such encounters (p.1736).

Accordingly, she applies the spatiality of care to consider how technologies become meaningful to humans based upon the spatiality of their involvements within the teleological complex of sociomaterial practices. She conceptualises two forms of significance with reference to how a (technological) information system might be introduced into an organisation: *theoretical* and *practical* significance.

*Theoretical significance* is associated with the pre-implementation stage, *prior* to a technology's actual use, such that meaning is *projected* forward based upon its anticipated possibilities (i.e., the future-directed aspect of care as *understanding*). However, meaningfulness is still established from *within* existing (pre-implementation) practice structures. These provide a predisposing (*thrown*) basis for interpreting the technology (cf. Reiner & Johnston, 2017), co-shaped by ongoing concerned dealings with the materialities of the technology's pre-implementation phase (e.g., training manuals). These latter may also contribute to anticipatory (future-directed) understandings of the technology's proposed use, value and relevance.

As the technology then moves into *direct* use, it gains *practical significance* in that it is made meaningful ‘through concrete instances of use that render the system relevant and useful’ (p.1740). Significance is ‘conditioned upon care’ (ibid, p.1741), where the temporalities of past and future collapse into the unfolding *present (fallen)* enactments of the technology-in-use which are affectively experienced in the moment. Interestingly, although Lamprou (2017) discusses *orientation* (in the temporal terms that underpins its spatial ones), she does not explicitly examine how *orientation* and *dis-tance* are inter-related through care, other than to indicate broadly that ‘nearness’ is indicative of meaningfulness. I believe there is more to unpack here, as *precisely what* is made meaningful in terms of its *being made present through care* can be examined in detail as a pattern of the ‘nears’ and ‘fars’ that make up a region (cf. Schatzki 2010; 2007/2017). The spatial characteristics of this region then have a bearing on care. I will return to this point in more detail in developing my own conceptualisation in the next chapter. At that point, I will attempt to show that, being *present* as constituents of human involvements, technologies have a more significant part to play in shaping spatial regions—and thus also shaping the structure of care—than has so far been accounted for in (Heideggerian) sociomaterial theorising.

Related to this critical stance, I conclude this section with the contribution of Introna (2014). He applies Heidegger’s thinking as part of framing his *intra-actional, post-humanist account of sociomaterial agency*. Consistent with the scholars above, he sees that “humans ... exist in an ongoing structural openness ‘with’ the world in which we and the world are always already a unity, a being-in-the-world” (ibid, p.38). His account is relatively brief within the broader context of his article, but he succinctly summarises the ‘intra-active’ aspects of equipment and care in the context of a *co-constitutive agency* of the human and material. So, in terms of equipmental spatiality:

things already and immediately show up as familiar ‘possibilities for’ this or that practical intention ... [a thing’s] location, arrangement, and all the implied references to a whole array of other things within the horizon of action (the already there referential whole) constitute it as ‘obvious’—so we simply draw upon it in-order- to do what we want or need to do.

Then bridging to the spatiality of care:

However, when we take up these tools, as tools, we do not take them up for their own sake; we take them up with an already present reference to our projects or our concerns. As beings that have ‘projectedness’ (being already future oriented) as our way of being we find ourselves already immersed in a nexus of concerns that constitute us as that which we are or want to become. [...] We encounter things in the world as mattering (being significant)

because we matter to ourselves as being or becoming such or such a particular being (father, teacher, etc.).

On this basis, he argues that humans and technologies always already 'co-constitute each other's possibility for being agents' (ibid, p.38). He illustrates this posthumanism with an example of the use of a CCTV camera. He describes how the camera has agency as a technology that can 'make humans ... do what they do' (ibid) as they purposively engage with its presence in-the-world by virtue of the concerns that make them (and the technology) *what they are* in-this-world. Thus:

CCTV cameras appear in the world of police officers wanting to see at a distance (or humans wanting to avoid being a surveillance target) as *already necessary and meaningful in that world of legal enforcement*. If the possibility of surveying at a distance (or not becoming a surveillance target) does not concern you or me then the CCTV camera might merely be a decorative object on the wall (p.40, emphasis in original).

This account, while clarifying, adds little directly to the aggregate conceptualisations of Riemer and Johnston (2012, 2104, 2017, 2019) and Lamprou (2017). Indeed, as a scholarly article this was not its purpose. However, given that *my own* purpose in this chapter is to adopt a critical position in relation to this extant theorising, I view Introna's (2014) thinking as pertinent given how he positions this Heideggerian account of sociomateriality as 'posthuman'. In the next section, I will develop my critique by indicating how a sociomateriality solely based upon the 'equipment/care' spatiality of being-in-the-world, as per Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1962), may not be posthuman 'enough' to fully account for the relational (and intra-active, co-agential) 'part' that, as Introna (2014) suggests, is played by technology. I will shape this argument through reference to an aspect of Heidegger's spatiality that has not been formally considered so far in extant theorising: *the spatiality of the 'clearing'* and its implications for how things are *made present* as meaningful entities.

## **2.8. Problematising anthropocentricity and (a lack of) the social**

### ***2.8.1. Under-representing the material: Considering the spatiality of the 'there' of being-in***

If being-in as care *places* *dasein* in-the-world, Heidegger's notion of the *clearing* (*lichtung*) is the ontologically primordial 'there' that defines this place. It is the 'site' where entities are disclosed (literally come into the light of the clearing) as *the things that they are revealed to be* in the context of the referential wholes described above. As discussed by Schatzki (2010, pp.35-36; 2017, pp.20-21, 52; see also Sheehan, 2015, p.131; Stapleton, 2010, p.51), Heidegger (1962) indicates that this



clearing *is dasein* (p.171). As *dasein* is fundamentally *its care*; the world is disclosed according to *dasein's* understanding of its projects and ends—the teleologies of sociomaterial practices (Schatzki, 2010). This all makes sense given the systematic analysis of the spatialities of world-as-equipment, and being-in-(this-world)-as-care laid out above.

However, the role of *human* purposive activity or concerned *human* dealings is clearly strongly emphasised here (e.g., Malpas, 2006, p.181). This has led to criticism by some Heideggerian scholars that the thinking of *Being and Time* portrays an overly anthropocentric sense of the ontological inseparability of human and world, where the place of 'things' is subordinated to the human. Julian Young considers that equipmentality is over-stated in *Being and Time* (Young, 2006). He states that within Heidegger's broader corpus, it should be thought of as just one 'horizon' against which entities can be said to have a presence in the world:

the horizon of equipmentality is just a horizon, one disclosure of Being (reality) among indefinitely many. Our everyday horizon ossifies itself into the way reality is so that we lose [sic] sight of the fact that horizons of disclosure always "conceal" other horizons, as, for example, the "thing" horizon conceals the "stuff" horizon. We lose sight of the fact that behind every disclosure is a "reservoir" of the of "not-yet-disclosed" (pp.376-7).

Thus, 'tools' (or technologies) are always far more than *just tools* (or technologies), that is things that are *only* disclosed according to their *use* in purposive action. There are other modes through which they can be revealed. Other modes that not only disclose what things are in relation to human care, but also what 'things' may contribute to this disclosure (Malpas, 2006, p.241). Andrew Mitchell (2015) agrees with this stance, stating that '[t]o think of things in terms of tools is only to subordinate them to the purposes of a user. They serve as means to an external end. But things do not serve, they *are*' (p.11, emphasis in original). Strikingly, he reasons that this equipmental view of the world threatens to devalue Heidegger's relational ontology and its stance against Cartesianism:

[f]or all its transformation of our conceptions of 'subjectivity,' *Being and Time* remains wedded to [this] inadequate conception of 'objectivity' ... To transform the human through a thought of being-in-the-world is to likewise transform the world, and so long as the hard, philosophical work of transforming the conception of the thing in that world remains outstanding, nothing changes at all. To change the "subject" while retaining the "object" is to change nothing [...] The project of *Being and Time* demands more (p.12).

Indeed, Jeff Malpas discusses how struggles over the ontology of subjectivity never disappear from Heidegger's thinking (Malpas, 2006, p.175). He notes Heidegger's own later comment in his *Contributions to Philosophy* (Heidegger, 1999, p.208): "[in] Being and Time Da-sein still stands in the shadow of the 'anthropological,' the 'subjectivistic,' and the 'individualist,' etc." (Malpas, 2006, p.157). In truth, this apparent anthropocentrism (or residual subjectivity) is not surprising given the primary aim that Heidegger has in *Being and Time*. That is, to provide an ontological basis for understanding the *being of human beings*. The view of materialities-as-equipment *to be used by humans* is presented precisely to articulate what it is to be human. It provides a view of the meaningfulness of the world as *grounded* in human being (Sheehan, 2015, p.130). If Heidegger had set out with the primary question of understanding the *being of materialities-as-beings*, the structure of *Being and Time* might have had a quite different emphasis. This all being said, within the scope of things-as-equipment, the source of the meaning of things is limited to the context of human interests (Sheehan 2005, p.199, see also Schatzki, 2007/2017). Although it is implied in the relationality of being-in-the-world, within this complex there is little accounting of the specific manner in which things may 'themselves' contribute to the relational structures of the world and of the human. This limits the extent to which this can offer a fully 'posthuman' account of sociomateriality in which agency is truly *co-constitutive* (cf. Introna, 2014).

However, insights into the basis for such an account can be gleaned from Heidegger's much later works, where he further develops his ideas on the clearing introduced above. After *Being and Time*, Heidegger's thinking on the relationship between the human and the clearing changes significantly. He moves from the stance that human being (as *dasein*) *is the clearing* to one where the clearing is ontologically prior to the human (Schatzki 2010, p.34-36; Schatzki, 2007/2017, pp.23, 30, 52-53, 60-61; see also Malpas, 2006, pp.241-242). This means that the disclosure of the world—the revealing of the meaningfulness of entities—is something that *happens to* human being rather than something that is *constituted by* human being based primarily on the purposiveness of concerned dealings. This shift culminates in Heidegger (1971) positioning the site of the clearing *at the 'thing' (das ding)*. Heidegger's 'things' gather the world around them into *place*, a place of meaningfulness that human being is then shaped 'within' (e.g., Malpas, 2006, p.241). According to Mitchell (2015), this repositioning of the clearing, corrects for his residual subjectivity and 'arguably could be read as the consummation of *Being and Time's* effort to think the world' (Mitchell, 2010, p.209; see also Mitchell, 2010, p.210; 2015, pp.9-12, and Malpas, 2006, p.241; 2012, p.26 for similar arguments).

So, what does Heidegger mean by these ‘things’ and how are they relevant to a posthuman sociomateriality? This is a challenging question to address and, indeed, Heideggerian scholars admit that much of this later work lacks the analytical clarity of *Being and Time*, and tends towards the poetic or even mystical (e.g., Blattner, 1999; Mitchell, 2010; Sharr, 2007; Young, 2006). However, it provides an important ontological platform for me to build upon. So, not unlike ‘equipment’, ‘things’ are only disclosed to us by virtue of the form of relations that support their *coming to presence* within the world (Heidegger, 1971). Going further than this, however, a ‘thing’ cannot just be thought of in terms of the specific relations that disclose it in any single event of this revealing—that is, with any single context, such as a specific equipmental context of use. Rather, the thing has many ‘facets’; it is revealed differentially according to the varying structures of these relations (Malpas, 2006, p.243). Going further still, these ‘thingly’ relations constitute the world of *dasein*; ‘things’ extend beyond themselves to shape being-in-the world (Mitchell, 2010, p.215).

Heidegger describes this as a *gathering* (Heidegger, 1971, p.172). In Heidegger’s analysis of the nature of a jug as a ‘thing’ (1971), he indicates how this relationality of this tool extends *beyond* the focal point of its *use* in the teleological sociomaterial practice of pouring:

The gift of the pouring out is drink for mortals. It quenches their thirst. It refreshes their leisure. It enlivens their conviviality. But the jug’s gift is at times also given for consecration. If the pouring is for consecration, then it does not still a thirst. It stills and elevates the celebration of the feast. The gift of the pouring now is neither given in an inn nor is the poured gift a drink for mortals (Heidegger 1971, p.170).

Thus, while retaining the ontological priority of practical involvements, the ‘thingly character’ (Heidegger, 1971, p.165) of the jug is not limited to the ‘specific “manipulability”’ that Heidegger (1962, p.98) describes for his equipmental hammer. The jug extends beyond its direct deployment towards a human aim—that is, beyond the practical *in-order-to*, *towards-which* and *for-the-sake-of* relations (Heidegger, 1962)—to play a more active role (Mitchell, 2015, pp.11-12). It enriches being-in-the-world with a further degree of ‘radical contextuality’ (Backman, 2020, p.190). Thus, as per the above quote, the jug in its thingness is a ‘gift’, it ‘quenches’, ‘refreshes’ and ‘elevates the celebration of the feast’, over and above its praxical equipmental deployment towards the end of pouring, *in-order-to* quench a thirst, *towards* the practice of feasting, *for-the-sake* of being a communal person. The jug-as-thing *non-neutrally* co-shapes the user’s lived experience beyond the act of its *being used*, revealing a more nuanced, multifaceted structure of the lifeworld.

The implication of this richer relationality is further illustrated in Heidegger's (1971) description of how a bridge restructures the *places* within which human *being* finds itself (Malpas, 2006, 2012):

[The bridge] does not just connect banks that are already there. The banks emerge as banks only as the bridge crosses the stream. The bridge designedly causes them to lie across from each other. One side is set off against the other by the bridge. Nor do the banks stretch along the stream as indifferent border strips of the dry land. With the banks, the bridge brings to the stream the one and the other expanse of the landscape lying behind them. It brings stream and bank and land into each other's neighbourhood. (Heidegger, 1971, p.152)

To Heidegger, this bridge is not 'just' a construction, incorporated into human practice for a purpose of facilitating passage (1971, pp.151–153). In shaping a *place*, its relational presence *gathers* other things to it and establishes the very possibilities for meaningfulness that *dasein* can thus impart 'through' the structure of care (Braver, 2009, p.102; Malpas, 2006, p.241). Thus, he also notes that:

The location is not already there before the bridge is. Before the bridge stands, there are of course many spots along the stream that can be occupied by something. One of them proves to be a location, and does so *because of the bridge*. Thus the bridge does not first come to a location to stand in it; rather, a location comes into existence only by virtue of the bridge. (Heidegger, 1971, p.154, emphasis in original)

This *gathering* of things into *place* means that things are referentially bound together to *permit* meaning. The relational emphasis is different here, when compared with the referentiality of equipment. Things (as the sites of the clearing) shape the saliency of each other, and this saliency then shapes how *dasein* is present; the saliency of things is not constituted (only) in relation to *dasein's* concerns (*dasein* as the site of the clearing).

To summarise, in the early Heidegger of *Being and Time*, materialities-as-equipment *are* the world, and the mutually disclosing spatialities of equipment and care make up the structure of being-in-the-world. Tools are taken up according to a human's orientation towards its future possibilities. However, in his later work, materialities (as-things) take on a more central role, where "[t]he focus [is] on the way in which the world is disclosed in and through the concrete thing" (Malpas, 2006, p.241). Things have the capacity to *gather* the world around them. No longer 'just' tools, they set up places and paths that *reveal* the world's possibilities in which humans then can become oriented (Malpas, 2006; Schatzki, 2010, 2007/2017). Being-in-the-world is then to be open to

the possibilities that are presented through this revealing *through* things. Restated in terms of a posthuman sociomateriality: In *Being and Time*, human concerns as immanent in situated sociomaterial practice (care) shape the possibilities for human (social) involvements with the material (e.g., tools and technologies). In Heidegger's later work, the material *establishes* the world within which such possibilities can exist and carry their social meanings; things *structure* the relations that humans have with the world. Things 'push back' on Dasein's care in the co-constitution of sociomaterial practices.

The vagueness of Heidegger's language in articulating the 'thing' does not lend itself well to a pragmatic analysis of this 'pushing back'. But it does provide a useful starting point from which to question the limits of his earlier work as applied to extant theorising of sociomateriality which, I suggest, could be enhanced by offering a clearer (and analytically useful) articulation of how materialities can co-shape the relations that humans have in-the-world. This enhancement is my aim in the next chapter, where I will first turn to the philosophy of technology, and a contemporary school of thought known as 'postphenomenology'. Postphenomenology is a phenomenology with an 'enhanced sensitivity to materiality' (Agaard, 2017, p.525). It considers how tools and technologies act as *mediators* of human-world relations (Verbeek, 2005). That is, being-in-the-world is always already a technologically mediated being-in-the-world. I will then return to Heidegger's work to deploy ideas from postphenomenology to show how materialities have the potential to shape—or at least *to tune*—care. In this way, I hope to make a further posthuman contribution to the Heidegger-inspired theorising of sociomateriality, one that can then also be applied, in my empirical work (Chapter 4 onwards), to understand the relational 'part' played by technology in strategy accomplishment.

### ***2.8.2. Under-specifying the social: Considering the spatiality of being-with-others<sup>21</sup>***

However, before doing so, and in addition to problematising the 'posthuman', I also suggest that the extant Heideggerian conceptualisations of sociomateriality (Introna, 2014; Lamprou, 2017; Riemer & Johnston, 2012, 2014, 2017, 2019) under-specify the *social*. The focus on the equipmentality of the world—and the constitution of care in relation to this aspect of the worldly context—goes a long way to understanding how praxical dealings are co-shaped through concernful relations between the human and material. However, this singular focus neglects the

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<sup>21</sup> Although this thesis is presented in a linear manner, the research process behind it was more iterative. Thus, this discussion of *being-with-others* was partly shaped in response to my preliminary abductive explorations of empirical data as will be discussed later in Chapter 4 (Section 4.6).

structure of worldly (intersubjective) involvements *between* humans; involvements that are also constituted in relation to the material.

As already indicated above, equipmentality is but one ‘existential horizon’ of Heidegger’s (1962) *being-in-the-world* (Young, 2006). Boedeker (2001), Kiran (2012a) and Wrathall (2017b) describe this as the horizon of *being-amid-things*, which received significant (almost dominant) attention by Heidegger in his analysis. However, Heidegger also describes a *social* horizon: that of *being-with-others*.<sup>22</sup> Thus, while *dasein*’s spatiality takes shape through encounters with equipment (the thrown-projections that configure distances and orientations as care), it is also configured through its encounters with *other dasein*. These two types of encounter are ontologically very different for Heidegger. As discussed, *being-amid-things* in their readiness-to-hand is accompanied by understandings and attunements that reveal meaning possibilities for purposive action. However, *being-with-others* discloses possible ways for *other Dasein* to be, and what the ‘self’ as *dasein* can then be in relation to these others. Thus, as Boedeker (2001, p.73) describes:

Just as the worldly [equipmental] meanings stand together in complex relations of ‘reference’, so too do the meanings for encountering co-Daseins. But again, the interrelations among these meanings are different from those among worldly [equipmental] ones. Take the example of encountering co-Daseins in terms of their social roles or social statuses [...]. Virtually any social role gets its meaning in part from the relations in which it stands to other such roles. Heidegger gives the example of social relations’ being ‘tailored to professions, classes, and ages’ (SZ 239). Being the owner of a factory, for example, is possible only because of the relations that the owner stands to suppliers of raw materials, workers, distributors, consumers, etc. Or being a parent is possible only because of the relations in which one stands to one’s children.<sup>23</sup>

As described in Section 2.5 above, the equipmentality of *dasein*’s world is a teleologically *referential structure* of involvements—cascades of equipment *for-which* a use is embodied *in-order-to* engage in a task, *towards-which* a practice is geared, *for-the-sake-of-which* we project ourselves into ways of being and becoming (Cerbone, 2013; Malpas, 2006, Schatzki, 2010, 2000/2017). This referential whole is the meaning horizon of possibilities of *being-amid-things*. In contrast, the horizon of *being-with-others* is the referential “totality of interrelated meanings in terms of which

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<sup>22</sup> There is also a third horizon, that of *being-one’s-self* (e.g., Boedeker, 2001). This will be introduced in the next chapter where it will support my theoretical framing of ‘the self’ in relation to power and resistance.

<sup>23</sup> ‘SZ’ in the in-text citation within this quote refers to *Sein und zeit*, the German text which was translated into English as *Being and Time* (Heidegger 1962). The page reference ‘239’ refers to the 16<sup>th</sup> edition of *Sein und zeit* (Heidegger, 1986).

co-Daseins are encountered. It is the overarching network of interdependent possibilities for others to be: the totality of ‘for-the-sakes-of-whom’ ... that can guide their practical projects” (Boedeker, 2001, p.73). This horizon shapes the social norms and expectations of a community, according to which—as individuals—we tacitly assess and measure our own possibilities (McMullin, 2013, pp.142-168) such that ‘[w]hatever social role we enter, it will be meaningful only to the extent that it is possible to define it in relation to Others’ (Kiran, 2012a, p.91). Thus, the spatiality of care is not only structured according to our orientation within the world of equipment, but also within-the-world-with-other-people. Heidegger gives a special name to the notion of care in this latter case: ‘caring-for’ (*Fürsorge*).

Of course, it should be clear here that being-amid-things and being-with-others intersect as the norms established through the latter also shape the former (see Boedeker, 2001 for discussion). Being a carpenter is structured by *being-amid* the tools of the trade which is, at the same time, subject to the ‘standards’ of what it is to be a carpenter as a social role. Being with things is always a being with others according to our disposedness in the world. By virtue of the worldly contexts that shape care (our concerned orientations), our relations with others can be projected ‘through’ our relations with things. As Heidegger (1962, pp.153-154) describes it:

In our 'description' of that environment which is closest to us—the work-world of the craftsman for example,—the outcome was that along with the equipment to be found when one is at work [...], those Others for whom the 'work' ["Werk"] is destined are 'encountered too' [...] When, for example, we walk along the edge of a field but 'outside it', the field shows itself as belonging to such-and-such a person, and decently kept up by him; the book we have used was bought at So-and-so's shop and given by such-and-such a person, and so forth. The boat anchored at the shore is assigned in its Being-in-itself to an acquaintance who undertakes voyages with it; but even if it is a 'boat which is strange to us', it still is indicative of Others.

This thinking of the entanglement of *being-amid* and *being-with* is captured in social theories of practice that draw on Heidegger’s ontology—I especially highlight the work of Schatzki here (e.g., Schatzki, 2002, 2010, 2012). But it has not been given explicit attention in extant Heideggerian theorising of sociomateriality specifically. Moreover, the very particular manner in which tools and technologies can *bring people together* also requires attention. So, for example, Hafermalz and Riemer’s (2020) examination of telenursing practices shows how nurses maintain impersonal connectivity (‘the person-to-person contact we make with others’; Kolb, 2008, p.184) over geographical distance through their skilful work with technology such as the telephone. Drawing

on the existential thinking of Marcel (1965), these scholars suggest a notion of ‘presence’ whereby one is *present* with others ‘when the other feels close, no matter how geographically distant they are’ (Hafermalz & Riemer, 2020, p.1623). While centring the relational nature of intersubjectivity, this seems to sit comfortably with Heidegger’s spatiality of nears and fars (Sections 2.5 and 2.6 above).

However, the part played by technology in configuring such a spatiality of being-with-others requires further conceptual specification. In the next chapter, I will show how the postphenomenology I mentioned at the end of the Section 2.8.1 can help here too. In addition to providing conceptual purchase on the intra-active agency of technology from ‘within’ the sociomaterial, it also offers the tools to consider the intersubjective relations that technology can support. By drawing on postphenomenology to enrich extant Heideggerian theorising on sociomateriality in this way, I will develop a conceptual framing of human–technology relations that will 1) address research question 1 (as posed in Section 1.10) and then 2) directly support my thesis’ empirical investigation of power and subjectivity and its implications for strategy accomplishment as it takes place with, through, and alongside technologies of control (see Chapter 4 onwards). In doing so I also embrace philosophically informed empirical inquiry (Al-Amoudi & O’Mahoney, 2016; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2016; St. Pierre, 2016; Tsoukas & Chia, 2011) that engages with ongoing, ontological debates (Al-Amoudi & O’Mahoney, 2016, p.29), in this case those that have built upon Heidegger’s phenomenological ontology to give focal attention to contemporary technologies.



## **Chapter 3:**

### **TOWARDS A POSTPHENOMENOLOGICAL VIEW OF SOCIOMATERIAL STRUGGLES**

### 3.1. Introduction

This chapter proceeds as follows: First, in Section 3.2, I provide some background on postphenomenology as a school of philosophy, and indicate how it was, itself, developed through a critical analysis of Heidegger's work (albeit a different critique to that presented in the previous chapter). Second, I review the ontological claims made by scholars in this field and relate these to being-in-the-world according to Verbeek's (2005; see also 2011a, 2012) postphenomenological 'mediation theory' (Sections 3.3 and 3.4). I draw specifically on the concepts of *technological mediation* and *technological intentionality* to show how tools and technologies can shape relations between humans and the world by (e.g., Ihde, 1979, 1990; 1991; Verbeek, 2005, 2008a, 2008b, 2011a). Third, I consider how this may serve as a point of convergence with Heidegger's spatiality and offer the notion of the technological *tuning* of care as a conceptual contribution to Heidegger-inspired 'posthuman' view sociomateriality (Section 3.5). Finally, working from this conceptualisation, I consider how postphenomenologists (e.g., Verbeek, 2011a, 2011b, 2009a, 2013a; Dorrestijn, 2012a, 2012b; Dorrestijn & Verbeek, 2012) have further developed their thinking on technological mediation to consider the relational entanglement of technology within flows of power. This supports my conceptual positioning of 'struggles over subjectivities' in relation to technology's mediations (Section 3.6), which in turn permits me to articulate the focal research question (Section 3.7).

### 3.2. The postphenomenology of technology

Postphenomenology was pioneered by the philosopher of technology, Don Ihde (e.g., Ihde, 1979, 1990). The prefix 'post' was adopted to denote how his phenomenology of 'technics' was influenced by the school of American pragmatism, with the intention that it should be informed by empirical observation (Ihde, 2012b), so contributing to a larger 'empirical turn' in the philosophy of technology (Achterhuis, 2001; Kroes & Meijers, 2001; Verbeek, 2022). Postphenomenology's influence has expanded and—beyond a central focus on 'technoscience studies' (see Rosenberger & Verbeek, 2015 for a review)—it has been applied by materiality-focused scholars across a variety of domains, particularly learning and education (e.g., Aagaard, 2015, 2017, 2018; Adams & Thompson, 2011, 2016; Adams & Turville, 2018; Hasse, 2008, 2015, 2019; Roehl, 2012, 2018, Rosenberger, 2011b, 2017b, and new media studies (e.g., Adams & Thompson, 2020; Irwin, 2006, 2016; Van Den Eede, 2011; Van Den Eede et al., 2017), with its influence spreading into architecture (e.g., Botin, 2015; Botin & Hyams, 2021, Riis, 2011) and archaeology (e.g., Chakrabarty, 2019;

Crystal, 2018; Ihde & Malafouris, 2019). Further, it has very recently been applied in organisation studies to theorise the moral agency of everyday technologies in knowledge production (Greenwood & Wolfram Cox, 2022).

Working from Heidegger, Ihde (1979, 1990) sees humans as always already being-in-the-world rather than as subjects 'looking out at' an objective reality; reality is disclosed to us *in* our experience. As this experience is always an experience *of* something, our reality takes shape through the manner in which we become orientated towards the things we encounter. This idea is, of course, central to Heidegger's notion of the spatiality of the world. However, Ihde proposed that Heidegger's equipmental duality of the ready-to-hand and present-at-hand offers too-binary an account of the complexity of our phenomenological relationship with things (e.g., Ihde, 1990, pp.80, 98; see also Rosenberger, 2009, 2017a, c). As Ihde (1999) says of Heidegger's description of the ready-to-hand hammer:

Heidegger's hammer is a simple example: a hammer is 'designed' to do certain things - drive nails into the shoemaker's shoe, or into shingles on my shed, or to nail down a floor - but the design cannot prevent a hammer from (a) becoming an objet d'art, (b) a murder weapon, (c) a paperweight, etc. Heidegger's insight was to have seen that an instrument is *what it does, and this in a context of assignments*. But he did not elaborate upon the multistable uses any technology can fall into with associated shifts in the complexes of 'assignments' as well. No technology is 'one thing', nor is it incapable of belonging to multiple contexts." (p.46-47, emphasis in original).

Based on his own phenomenological analyses, Ihde also critically describes the ready-to-hand involvements described by Heidegger (1962) as being limited to just *one form* of human-tool relation: an *embodiment* relation (Ihde, 1990; Rosenberger & Verbeek, 2015). For Ihde, this does not do justice to the range of ways that a human can become relationally involved with tools, particularly when the complexities of modern digital technologies are considered (cf. Riemer & Johnston, 2019). As noted in his statement above, Ihde (1990, 1999) sees artefacts as being 'multistable' (see also Ihde, 2012a; Rosenberger & Verbeek, 2015; Whyte, 2015). That is, in a manner dependent on the nature of the relation, an artefact can become differentially meaningful, and mediate a range of worldly encounters. Accordingly, he outlines a range of other forms of human-technology relations which have been applied by others within the contexts of empirical studies (as will be exemplified in the next paragraph) as well as philosophical and conceptual analysis (e.g., Ihde, 1990; Rosenberger, 2018a; Verbeek, 2005, 2008a; Wellner, 2017). In addition to

the embodiment relation these are: the *hermeneutic* relation, *alterity* relation and *background* relation. These are now briefly defined.

In a hermeneutic relation, we encounter the world *through* the artefact. That is, it shapes how reality 'appears' by revealing aspects not always available to the person's direct perceptions of the world. For example, scientific and medical images transform the ways in which researchers encounter the phenomena they study (e.g., Aydin, 2018; Boer et al., 2020; Fried & Rosenberger, 2021; Friis, 2015; Rosenberger, 2008, 2009, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c), and hermeneutic relations with blackboards shape the flow of attentions of students in the classroom, bringing specific aspects of the unfolding learning experience into focus (Röhl, 2012). In contrast, in the case of alterity relations we do not relate to the world *via* the artefact but *to* the artefact. The artefact takes on the role of a 'quasi-other' (Verbeek, 2005, p.127), a sort of presence that is experienced as being in the world alongside us and to which we interrelate. Classic postphenomenological examples include our engagement with a bank's automatic teller machine which interacts with a user through on-screen displays, or with a car's GPS unit that communicates auditory driving instructions (Rosenberger & Verbeek, 2015). Finally, background relations shape our experience without us necessarily experiencing the artefact in and of itself. Materials thus take on a 'field' role, 'not usually occupying focal attention but nevertheless conditioning the context' of the lifeworld (Ihde (1990, p.111)—a 'present absence' that textures the world (p.109). One often cited and straightforward example is an air conditioning unit which may turn itself on and off automatically to regulate a room's temperature and humidity without us needing to interact with it (e.g., Rosenberger, 2018a). More profoundly, Adams and Thomson (2016, p.65) describe how in playing computer games, 'the gaming environment slips into the taken-for-granted background, a novel but non-focal technology-textured world'. In these examples, while there may have a 'vague partial awareness' of the artefact, we relate to the world neither to nor through it, but it nonetheless shapes our experiences (Rosenberger, 2018a, p.188).

Together, these descriptions and examples build on the idea that as well as being purposively taken up into praxis, materials also play active roles as co-shapers of lived experience. So, whereas Heidegger's ready-to-hand versus present-at-hand distinction draws attention to the ways in which *artefacts are made present in* human experience (e.g., how the hammer is revealed as a hammer through its praxical context of driving nails or though being broken), postphenomenological analysis foregrounds the way in which human experience is itself *mediated by technological materialities*. Verbeek (2005) offers a helpful example here: 'Someone who wears

glasses, for instance, is not the same without them...Without glasses I cannot play the piano or drive a car, and I write rather poorly. My world and the way I am present in it is profoundly shaped by my glasses' (ibid, p.130). Postphenomenology thus thinks of the lifeworld as being constituted through *materially mediated* relations. Said differently, where traditional (Heideggerian) phenomenology thinks of human–world relations (being-in-the-world), postphenomenology thinks of human–*technology*–world relations. Mediating artefacts always already shape the relations *between* human and world (ibid, p.125). Moreover, this mediation is not simply a 'common-sense' matter of modified human perception; it is firmly ontological—it is the *mediated being-in-the-world* of the *relational dasein*. It does not take place between a pregiven subject and pregiven object; it 'rather *coshapes* [what we think of as] subjectivity and objectivity' (ibid, p.130, emphasis in original). The technology is also *made material* in a certain way through this relation; it takes on a 'stability' that is itself relational. A pair of glasses is only such by virtue of constituting the 'objectivity' of the world as 'more visible' in relation to the 'subjectivity' of seeing more clearly and so being-in-the-world in a more engaged manner.

### 3.3. Technological and composite intentionality

The four forms of mediating relation introduced above are summarised in Table 4 with reference to their associated relational schema—a set of formalisms that is widely adopted in postphenomenology to articulate and differentiate these mediating relations (e.g., Rosenberger & Verbeek, 2015). As presented in the table, arrows within the schema indicate the 'direction' of human intentionality and the brackets group components that function 'together' in combination. The term 'intentionality' is used here in a strictly phenomenological sense (Verbeek, 2005, pp.109-116). That is, it does not denote human intentions (i.e., aims or goals) but can be thought of in terms of how we *encounter* the world.

As Verbeek (2008a, p.388) explains:

Rather than separating humans and world, the concept of intentionality makes visible the inextricable connections between them. Because of the intentional structure of human experience, human beings can never be understood in isolation from the reality in which they live. Humans are always directed toward reality. They cannot simply "think," but they always think something; they cannot simply "see," but they always see something; they cannot simply "feel" but always feel something.

**Table 4: Ihde's typology of human–technology–world relations<sup>24</sup>**

Relation	Schema/formalism <sup>25</sup>	Description
Generic form	human–technology–world	Being-in-the world (human–world) is mediated.
Embodiment relations	(human–technology) → world	Human intentionality is directed towards the world <i>through</i> the technology which mediates the “bodily-perceptual relationship between the user and the world” (Verbeek, 2005, p.14); e.g., Heidegger's involvements with the ready-to-hand hammer.
Hermeneutic relations	human → (technology–world)	Human intentionality is directed at a technology–world perceptual gestalt. The artefact mediates a transformed encounter with the world.
Alterity relations	human → technology–(–world)	Human intentionality is directed at the technology in and of itself and the world phenomenologically withdraws to the background.
Background relations	human (–technology–world)	Technologies shape the context of experience, but human intentionality is not consciously directed towards them.

Thus, a human can only be understood in terms of how they ‘intentionally’ (i.e., through intentionality) relate to their reality. Likewise, reality can only be understood with reference to the relations that the human has as part of it. The postphenomenological position is that technologies and tools *contribute* to this intentional structure. By mediating the human–world relation, they impart their own form of spatial directionality within the greater structure of ‘being-in-the-world’. They thus have ‘technological intentionality’ (Ihde 1990, p.141) or materially ‘mediated intentionality’ (Verbeek, 2008a) which—as indicated by the example of the glasses above—translates and transforms how the *world is made present* to the human and how the human can be *made present* in this world (Verbeek, 2005, 2011a). According to Verbeek, as technologies and tools permeate every aspect of our lifeworld, humans have no direct or unmediated access to a world apart from this intentionality (Verbeek, 2008a). Artefacts *focus* how humans can have ‘access’ to

<sup>24</sup> These four forms are not considered as discrete, but rather represent points along a continuum of human-material relationality (Ihde, 1990; Verbeek, 2005). Also, the typology is illustrative not exhaustive, indeed others have debated additional relational forms which extend this continuum, such as cyborg relations (Besmer, 2012; De Preester, 2011; Verbeek, 2008a).

<sup>25</sup> Although the formalism ‘human–technology–world’ (Rosenberger & Verbeek, 2015) is used in Table 4 other versions are seen in other texts, depending on their purpose (consistent with a broad postphenomenological use of the term ‘technology’ to include all human tools and artefacts). Examples include ‘I–technology–world’ (Ihde, 1990; Verbeek, 2005), ‘I–media–world’ (Wellner, 2017), ‘human–machine–world’ (Ihde, 1979), ‘human–medium–world’ (Ihde, 1983).

their reality (as in the case of embodied, hermeneutic or alterity relations) and structure the broader contexts within which human experience takes form (as in background relations).

Verbeek (2008a, 2011a) augments Ihde's original range of relations and their schema (Table 4) by unpacking the nature of technological intentionality and how it contributes to mediating the world and the human. More specifically, where Ihde (1990) attends to the arrows in his schema to indicate the *human intentionality* that is the 'product' of these relations, Verbeek draws specific attention to the dashes to open up the intentional structure that lies beneath. To illustrate this: in the case of the hermeneutic relation — human → (technology–world) — human intentionality is directed towards a technology–world hybrid. So, according to Ihde, the technology 'offers' the human a translated picture of the world that has to be interpreted. The primary intentionality here is towards the hybrid. However, Verbeek then asks how the technology itself *directs the human towards reality*; he unpacks the hybrid to reveal the technological intentionality that is implied but not specifically addressed by Ihde. The overall intentionality of the hermeneutic relation is represented as a 'composite intentionality' within which both technological and human intentionalities subsist (Verbeek, 2008a, p.392-393; 2011a, pp.145-146). Both relational (co-constitutive) parties (that is, human *and* technology) 'contribute' to intentionality and thus to the mediation of being-in-the-world. In keeping with this, Verbeek replaces the dash with an arrow, restating the hermeneutic relation's schema as human → (technology → world).

To demonstrate this notion, Verbeek (2008a, p.392) considers Ihde's example of a sound recorder 'as having a different intentionality for sound than human beings have, recording background noises at a louder volume than perceived by human beings who only focus on the sounds that are meaningful to them in that specific situation' (cf. Ihde, 1979: pp.77–78; Ihde, 1983 p.56; Ihde, 1990, pp.102–103). Through the *amplification* of some sounds and the *reduction* of others, the technological directedness of the recorder can transform the meaningfulness of the world revealed to the human. The technology embodies its own 'purposiveness' (Verbeek, 2011a, p.145) alongside and intertwined with that of the human. The composite intentionality that results may be quite different to the unmediated intentionality of the human.

I now wish to draw on these notions, showing *how they intersect* with the Heideggerian view of sociomateriality presented earlier. In a first move, I will consider how the idea of technological intentionality intersects with the 'human' intentionality that is implicit in Heidegger's spatiality. In a second move, I will build upon this by describing the point of intersection between what may be

called the '*amplification–reduction*' structure of technological intentionality, and Heidegger's notions of *dis-tance* and *orientation*. In doing this, I have two related aims: First, to enhance the Heideggerian view of sociomateriality by revealing how technologies may make quite definitive 'contributions' to shaping the spatial structure of being-in-the-world. And second, to conceptualise how technologies may shape the materialisation of human concernful dealings (as *care*) in the sociomaterial world of strategy and organisation.

### 3.3.1. *Intentionality as a point of conceptual intersection*

'Intentionality' was a term first developed within phenomenology by Heidegger's early mentor, Husserl (who expanded on the earlier work of Brentano; see Moran, 2018). Husserl's notion of intentionality sees its 'directedness' in terms of the human consciousness. That is, consciousness is always a *consciousness-of* something; there is no consciousness in-and-of-itself that can be understood to exist apart from the world. In distancing himself from Husserl's apparent subjectivism (see Section 2.2), Heidegger rethinks intentionality in terms of the manner in which *dasein* co-constitutes the world, as laid out in his structural analysis of the spatiality of being-in-the-world (Moran, 2000, 2018). Thus, human intentionality can ultimately be analysed in terms of *orientation* and *dis-tance* as described in the previous chapter. Intentionality, therefore, should be understood—in Heideggerian terms—as a directedness within the lifeworld that accords with *dasein*'s care, its concernful dealings in-the-world. Thus, humans (as per their spatiality) are intentionally directed towards things-in-the-world according to their historically and culturally conditioned *attunements*, and their pre-reflective *understanding* of their future possibilities, as they *fall* into the always already unfolding moment. Things are thus brought 'near'—that is, brought into salience—according to a human-centred, teleological intentionality.

However, as we have seen above, a *postphenomenological* view sees technologies, tools and artefacts as having their own 'purposive' capacity to shape human directedness by contributing a technological intentionality to human intentionality—directedness is based upon a composite *human-technology* intentionality. As signalled in the previous chapter, Heidegger's analysis, with its focal objective of understanding the nature of *dasein* as the nature of our *being* as human beings, omits specific analysis of how such materialities shape the spatiality of the lifeworld. Indeed, as Malpas (2006, p.126) notes, Heidegger gives too great a priority to *dasein*'s spatiality of being-in (what Malpas refers to as *existential spatiality*) over the spatiality of the world of equipment. What this means is that the meaningfulness—the 'nearness' and thus the 'place' of equipment—is



founded upon dasein's purposive orientation: 'the very ordering of equipmentality is dependent on the teleological ordering given in task and activity that is, in turn, related to being-there's own existential possibilities' (ibid, p.127). This overlooks the specific manner in which the orientation of dasein's concerned dealings—and thus the nears and fars that differentially bring the world into salience—may not only be determined by the aims and goals inherent in our *ways of being*, but can also be *structured by* this equipment (cf. Malpas, 2006, p.127). In a manner that resonates with Heidegger's later thinking on 'the thing', this equipmental structuring could be said to 'grant' a *place in-the-world* that permits the very possibility of having a teleological orientation (within existential space) in the first place. I suggest that it is this aspect which the postphenomenological concept of composite intentionality can address, by indicating how technologies (artefacts, tools more generally) can relationally *contribute to* care as a being-in-the-world-with-others, so working towards addressing both the 'anthropocentricity' problem and the 'social' problem articulated in Section 2.8. In the next section I consider how this contribution can be made.

### **3.4. Amplifications–reductions within the spatiality of being-in-the-world-with-others**

#### **3.4.1. Considering the anthropocentricity problem**

As introduced above, technologies—as mediating materialities—help to shape how reality is made present for us. As in the case of Ihde's sound recorder above, they can *amplify* how certain aspects of the world are brought to our attention while, at the same time, *reducing* others (Ihde, 1990, 2002, p.58; Verbeek, 2005, pp.132-135; Verbeek, 2011a, p.8). Moreover, to amplify one aspect is *always* to also reduce another; 'there can be no shaping movement without a corresponding downplaying movement' (Kiran, 2015, p.123). So, further to the sound recorder example:

Binoculars make distant phenomena more distinct. At the same time, other phenomena become less detailed or out of sight—things that are close and to the side disappear ... the phone enables us to speak to persons not present, but it is unable to communicate the bodily gestures we often depend on in face-to-face conversation. The telephone does retain intonation, though. This, however, is lost in other forms of communication technologies, such as the written letter and in e-mails, which affords communicating in a different way from the phone or face-to-face, but have their own reductions (Kiran & Verbeek, 2010, p.417).

This *amplification–reduction* structure is simultaneously one of *revealing–concealing* the world. A mediated amplification (re)discloses the world to us, by revealing aspects that had previously been concealed. Concomitant reductions then push other aspects into concealment (Kiran, 2015; Kiran &

Verbeek, 2010). Beside Heidegger's thinking, it can be seen that this has ontological implications for how the world is made present to us and how we are present in it (Verbeek, 2005, 2011; Kiran & Verbeek, 2010). That is, we relate within and to the world around us according to how the technologies make certain aspects salient relative to others which are backgrounded. So, just as the world is differentially disclosed by virtue of the technological relations, we too are differentially disclosed as 'part' of this world—human and technology are co-constitutive *as* mutually disclosing and disclosive entities in-this-world.

To unpack this in terms of its intersections with Heidegger's spatiality. I propose that technologies can be said to mediate being-in-the-world from *both* sides of the spatial 'coin' (Sections 2.5 and 2.6). That is, by reshaping both the equipmental structure of the 'world' (in postphenomenological terms, *how the world* is made present) as well as dasein's care-oriented (existential) structure of 'being-in' (postphenomenologically, *how we are present* in the world). So, in the former case, mediated amplifications and reductions (*re*)*place* things within and among the spatial regions that constitute sociomaterial practice. In the latter case, within these restructured equipmental spaces, some things (entities within/facets of the-world) are brought 'near' for dasein (revealed) while others are pushed away (concealed) by virtue of these technological mediations. This thus changes existential spatiality (being-in) in terms of *dis-tance* while correspondingly reshaping *orientation* within this (restructured) world, such that a person (as dasein) is now concernfully situated in the world in a different way. Conceptualising technology in this way, it can be seen that it plays a more active part from *within* the spatiality of care—decentring (while still not dismissing) human purposiveness.

To exemplify this, I turn briefly back to Section 2.7's example of the sociomaterial practice of CCTV surveillance offered by Introna (2014). Recall that Introna illustrates the posthumanism of the Heideggerian view by describing how the camera has agency as a technology that can 'make humans ... do what they do' (*ibid*, p.38) as they purposively engage with its presence in-the-world by virtue of the concerns that make them (and the technology) *what they are* in-this-world. Thus:

CCTV cameras appear in the world of police officers wanting to see at a distance (or humans wanting to avoid being a surveillance target) as *already necessary and meaningful in that world of legal enforcement*. If the possibility of surveying at a distance (or not becoming a surveillance target) does not concern you or me then the CCTV camera might merely be a decorative object on the wall (p.40, emphasis in original).

This highlights how CCTV technologies are made salient within the context of care that teleologically shapes the practices of surveillance. Although Introna signals that CCTV ‘makes humans ... what they do’, I have argued that there is little in Heidegger’s (1962) account to dissect this further. My postphenomenology inspired conceptualisation makes a contribution by *building upon* this posthumanism, enabling questions also to be posed about *how* the CCTV *shapes* care (and thus practice). Thus, we could now also ask: by virtue of mutually disclosive, co-constitutive human–technology (human–CCTV) relations, what amplifications and reductions take place to (re)shape the spatialities of the lifeworlds of police officers and surveillance targets, and thus, how are they (as *dasein*) *concernfully* (re)present (re-oriented) in-their-worlds as spatial ‘subjects’ to both themselves and others?

### 3.4.2. *Considering the social problem*

In addition, as I outlined in Section 2.8, the spatiality of being-in-the-world according to the care structure need not be limited to being-amid-entities (as equipment). *Dasein* is always already (and also) in-the-world-with-others. In fact, as discussed, relations with equipment shape relations with other subjects. The postphenomenologist, Robert Rosenberger (Rosenberger, 2021) highlights this in relation to Jean-Paul Sartre’s famous illustration in *Being and nothingness* (1943/1956) of the shame felt by a voyeur who is interrupted while spying through a keyhole. At first, the voyeur is fully immersed in the world of their concerned dealings. As Sartre (1943/1956, p.348) puts it (as cited in Rosenberger, 2021, p.73<sup>26</sup>):

My attitude [as the voyeur], for example, has no ‘outside’; it is a pure process of relating the instrument (the keyhole) to the end to be attained (the spectacle to be seen), a pure mode of losing myself in the world, of causing myself to be drunk in by things as ink is by a blotter.

Their sense of self, the keyhole and the ‘object’ of their voyeuristic attention (human–technology–world) are seamlessly intertwined in a manner that specifically constitutes their lived experience in that moment of action. However, the voyeur’s relationship with the world as mediated by keyhole is then profoundly reshaped by the arrival of other human beings:

Then, in a twist, the story shifts: “all of a sudden I hear footsteps in the hall. Someone is looking at me!” (Sartre, 1943, 349). Sartre’s voyeur has been caught! This sets up an exploration into how our sense of self, our sense of bodily presence, and the shape of our

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<sup>26</sup> Rosenberger (2021) here refers to the pagination of the original French edition (Sartre 1943). In the English translation (Sartre, 1956), Rosenberger’s references to pp.348 and 349 corresponds with pp.259 and 250, respectively.

lived experience can be subject to sudden change. Since he has been caught in the act, Sartre's voyeur becomes suddenly aware of how he must look to other people, guilty of voyeurism, and with nowhere to hide (Rosenberger, 2021, p.73).

In *Being and nothingness*, Sartre's (1943/1956) phenomenology builds upon Heidegger's own, by expanding on the nature of such relations between *self and other* in-the-world (Gardner, 2009, pp.133-139). He shows how one's own experience of another person is what *reveals* the nature of subjectivity. As McMullin (2013) describes:

For Sartre, the other's subjectivity is encountered through a perception that does not objectify but refers. ... the other's subjectivity is directly encountered insofar as the perception of the other refers to the relationship that springs up between self and other because of the encounter (ibid, p.68)

Thus, when the voyeur above is disturbed by someone else's gaze behind him in the hallway behind, he is torn from the immersive world in relation to the keyhole and suddenly feels exposed, having a very different sense of his own self in relation to this new other:

experiencing the other's subjectivity involves an encounter in which I am placed in a relation such that I experience myself as an object seen in the world. I experience myself as having dimensions that are seen only by the other from her perspective. Thus the primary experiences that reveal the other's subjectivity to me are, according to Sartre, ones in which I experience myself as vulnerable, embodied, limited, and exposed—experiences in which my easy mastery of the situation has been called into question [...] Living in a shared world means that I am always open to a determination of self by another (ibid, pp.68-69).

The sense of one's own subjectivity and the subjectivity of the other is thus deeply relational. How we sense others as *experiencing us* as subjects present before them shapes how we are subjects *to ourselves*, and vice versa. The intersubjective relationship between voyeur and the subject viewed through the keyhole is very different to that formed between the voyeur and the one who exposed their voyeurism. Accordingly, the subjectivity of the voyeur was drastically re-constituted in the lived moments that unfolded in Sartre's story.

Postphenomenologically, what is interesting here is the *part played by the keyhole* in this flux of intersubjectivities (Rosenberger, 2021). At first, the keyhole (as a simple form of technology) plays a classical 'Ihdean' hermeneutic relational role (as per Section 3.2 above; Ihde, 1990). The voyeur is immersed in the world as it is revealed through the limited but focused view of the other person through the keyhole. The keyhole and the world 'beyond it' are a relation gestalt, and the voyeur is

present to themselves as *within* that world while also being hidden from sight. However, when the voyeur is caught in the act, his relations to the mediating technology and the world, and to himself, are dramatically changed by the presence of another. For Rosenberger (2021) this reveals two key points about human-technology relations and intersubjectivity.

[First,] we see the voyeur's relations to technology, to the surrounding world, and to himself all change through the action of another person. [Second,] Sartre's reflections also draw out a specific point on this issue: how we are seen by others is a crucial element to human-technology relations (ibid, p.83).

So, in the first case, the way others are present 'with' and 'to' us in-the-world shapes how we can relate to technology: contrast the different sense of the voyeur's relation to the keyhole in the presence of the objectified 'subject' of the act of voyeurism with that of the person who caught the voyeur in the act. In the second case, the way that others can be present in our worlds, is itself subject to our own relations with technologies: contrast the voyeur's experience of the subject *through* the keyhole with the sense of intersubjective guilt at being *seen to be being* so engaged with the keyhole.

These ideas show that technologies mediate Heideggerian *being-with-others*. Therefore, to incorporate this more formally into the spatial terms presented above, I suggest that amplification-reductions (revealings-concealings) are not only relevant for how technology mediates relations with the 'objectivities' of the world. They are also meaningful for how other humans are concernfully disclosed to us within our worlds, and how we can also be concernfully disclosed to them. Within the spatiality of care—accounting now for both *Sorge* (Section 2.6) and *Fürsorge* (Section 2.8), others can be brought near to us (or pushed away) by virtue of technology's mediations. In so happening, they (and us) are also transformed and translated (presented differently), changing the manner in which individuals are oriented to each other 'intersubjectively'.

### ***3.4.3. Technological presence: potentiality and actuality in mediation***

It is also important to emphasise that, in shaping the lifeworld through the spatiality of care, technological mediations do not only exert their 'effects' under conditions of their *actual use*, but also based upon their *potential use* (Kiran, 2012a, 2012b; Kiran et al., 2015; Kiran & Verbeek, 2010). In accordance with the temporal aspects of Heidegger's care structure (as per Section 2.6), Kiran & Verbeek (2010, p.418) remind us:

Human existence is not something that just exists in a now, or in a past leading up to a now; it always anticipates the future. Any kind of planning [...] presupposes that we recognize ourselves as existing in a future, and, furthermore, as having certain possibilities to do something with our lives in this future. In other words, an integral part of how our *present* lives are conducted is due to how we think about, hope for, and anticipate our future existence. Said differently, human existence takes shape in terms of *possibilities*, in terms of what it might *become* (emphasis in original).

This has implications for how human relations with technology can shape the lifeworld. The *actual* use of technology can, of course, reveal possibilities for our future selves. As described by Kiran & Verbeek, 2010:

We always already apprehend the world in line with what we can possibly do in it, and these possibilities are very much related to the [technologies] in our lifeworld. ... we know that technologies present us with opportunities; technologies embody potential (ibid, p.418).

But the very availability of a technology—as something that might be drawn into use—also carries weight. Kiran (2012a) and Kiran & Verbeek (2010) think of this in terms of ‘technological presence’:

[this means that] rather than focusing on artefacts in-use, technologies’ impact should be investigated through the concept of *technological presence*. ... Said differently, technological shaping of the lifeworld happens in terms of possible technical mediations, not just actual technical mediations (Kiran, 2012a, pp.78-79, emphasis in original).

[Thus, in relation to technological mediations] *Potentiality* rather than actuality points us to the goals that we, individually or collectively, are able to set (Kiran & Verbeek, 2010, p.418, emphasis in original).

To make this theorising more concrete, Kiran & Verbeek (2010) offer the example of the mobile phone which has a taken-for-granted *presence* within our lifeworlds, such that the very possibility of potentially (rather than actually) using it has always already shaped how we experience the world and ourselves within it:

The influence of the cell phone exceeds that of being handy [a reference to Heidegger’s readiness-to-hand] whenever we need it. Its availability reflects back to how avid mobile users understand their own identity and potential. [...] Think of the disorientation when such dependent-upon technologies disappear for use; the helplessness, and the sheer effort it takes just to get through the day (p.419).

A technology can thus mediate ‘between’ human and world (being-in-the-world-with-others) according to how it is used or according to its *potential* use. It can shape the lifeworld by re-orienting us to our future possibilities of realising ourselves as subjects, as much as it can by changing how the world is made immediately manifest through actual use in-the-moment.

### 3.5. Mediating objectivities, subjectivities and intersubjectivities by ‘tuning’ care

Overall, the thinking in Section 3.4—summarised in terms of a technology mediated *being-in-the-world-with-others*—can now be considered in relation to the three spatio-temporal aspects of Heideggerian *orientation*: that is, attunement, falling and understanding (Section 2.6). Thus, by virtue of technologically mediated amplifications and reductions, the world we are *thrown* into *with others* takes on different characteristics. This brings forth different aspects of our historical-cultural *attunements* and changes the way in which we cope with the unfolding situation we find ourselves in. This, in turn, contributes to shaping our moment-to-moment actions as we *fall* into our concerned dealings among the restructured, technologically mediated ‘nears’ and ‘fars’ that now make the things and people we encounter meaningful in a different way. Further, such restructuring of what is made salient within the lifeworld opens up new possibilities to project ourselves in relation to things and others—through our actions—into the future, shaping our teleological *understanding* of who we are and can be in-the-world as we press forward into it (cf. Kiran & Verbeek, 2010; see also Kiran, 2009, 2012a, 2012b, 2015). By having the potential to shape these three aspects of *dasein*’s care in this manner, technologies can contribute to how the world is made present to us and how we then become present in it (cf. Verbeek, 2005, 2011a).

This is not to say that technological mediations are in any way determinative of care—which is of course still structured in relation to the teleologies of practice in a Heideggerian manner—but it is indicative of how human and technological intentionalities together (as a composite intentionality) are intertwined to influence the way our lifeworlds take shape by *re-orienting* and *re-distancing* within the context of its spatialities. *Care itself*—as a concerned disposition to things (*Sorge*) and others (*Fürsorge*)—can thus be refocused and refined through the materialities of tools and technologies. Said differently, through the intentionality they contribute to the human–world relations they mediate, technologies might thus be said *to tune* the spatiality of care. And as I also indicated above, this can take place through both their actual and potential use.

This postphenomenological conceptualisation adds to the extant Heideggerian views of sociomateriality presented in Chapter 2 (Introna, 2014; Lamprou, 2017; Riemer & Johnston, 2012).

2014, 2017, 2019), by expanding on the co-constitutive—but importantly, *non-neutral*—part played by technology, and so adding a further ‘posthuman’ and social sensibility that (as I have indicated) has so far been lacking.

### ***3.5.1. A brief illustration of this tuning of care in strategy work***

To illustrate some of these technological mediations in practice, I adopt Jarzabkowski and Kaplan’s (2015) approach by considering a short vignette from previous fieldwork. I conducted this fieldwork in 2018 in Australia within a medium-sized, information technology-focused services firm (pseudonymously referred to as ‘Spectrum’). Spectrum was moving through a period of significant change: originally focused solely on one country market, the senior management team (SMT) sought to expand operations into several new countries, and were considering options for the further development of their products and services. At the same time, there was ongoing pressure to build capacity to serve growing demands from existing clients. To guide decision-making the CEO, Michael (a pseudonym), constructed a financial planning tool using spreadsheet software. This tool allowed him to examine alternative business scenarios according to the revenue that they might generate, as well as the costs that might be associated with pursuing them.

One aspect of the tool allowed him to consider how to allocate his employees to these various scenarios. A relevant input sheet listed the names of each staff member together with their salaries in the first two columns, followed by a column where he could specify (or not) future pay rises within the forecast period. He could use other columns to allocate each individual to a specific functional team and to work on specific product/service offerings. The tool was set up so that these employees could be distributed across these various areas simply by typing a ‘1’ versus a ‘0’ into cells that corresponded to the individual months within the forecast period. Together these ‘employee inputs’ fed calculations that allowed employees to be weighed in terms of their contribution to forecast revenues and profits in other sheets under the different test scenarios.

Michael was one of the three technology entrepreneurs who had founded the firm. His stake in its growth and success was not just financial but also emotional. He cared about the team of employees that he had nurtured. However, his relation with the tool revealed a different aspect of each of his team members which was not salient in his routine work. Indeed, in conversations with Michael, it was clear that this relation deeply affected him and his relations with his staff. The tool’s specific materiality (as described above) presented these individuals to him as disembodied



names tabulated against specific types of employment cost. Immersed within this view, the people he primarily knew in terms of their working relations with him were re-presented as 'expensive' or 'inexpensive' relative to others, or as a 'cost burden' to specific product and service areas, and as 'resources' or singular 'cost items' that could potentially be reassigned between these areas. Further, the pay increase columns and the monthly expense columns, respectively, re-presented each individual in terms of *the possibility for them to be rewarded* with a pay rise (or not), and the *possibility* that costs could be reduced by terminating their employment. Importantly, the *flexibility* of the worksheet *invited* exploration. Individuals could be 'easily' reassigned to different product areas; salary increases could be awarded, denied and compared; and employees could be 'removed' from the business. Numerous possibilities could be examined and compared with a couple of mouse clicks on drop-down boxes, by changing a cost allocation value, or through the 'simple' binaries of inserting 1s or 0s into spreadsheet cells. Moreover, the impact of various exploratory options was itself immediately materialised in quantitative terms as a *potential impact* on the future business.

For Michael, these *relational* transformations—mediated by these specific materialities—raised new decision possibilities that had simply not been part of his routine concerned teamwork. New questions were raised for him, and his commitment (to himself and other SMT members) to acts of planning *with the tool* meant he was not able to avoid giving these decisions consideration: *Should* I be reallocating people to different product areas? *Should* I be giving everyone pay rises every year (as we have been doing to-date)? *Should* we consider cutting back some staff in some areas through redundancies? Substantively, at this point, Michael had plans in place for a 'hiring round' to boost staffing across various teams. This was driven by his view that his team was over-worked and that a 'back-log' of work needed clearing. He had previously always hired staff according to such 'frontline' perceptions of need, with little attention being given to financial issues, *until* they were made meaningfully present through his relation with the tool. This prompted deliberations (and responsibilities) that had *simply never been salient for him* before coming to encounter the world through the tool's mediations.

Consequently, his involvements with the spreadsheet tool materially changed how he related to his team in the 'real' world beyond its virtualisation in the spreadsheet. Thus, in apparent acts of avoiding the actualising of the world re-presented through the tool, he de-prioritised SMT discussions around staffing allocation choices, and would sometimes avoid his usually daily in-person team interactions with his staff as these brought home the challenging choices ahead. This,

in turn had consequences for Michael's *sense of self*. He moved from having a strong idea of his role and purpose in terms of an embodied set of managerial skills—as a motivational manager of people, as a capable coordinator of complex team activities—to feeling a sense of deep confusion about what would be needed from him to move the Spectorum business to the 'next stage'. The *tool-mediated* decision possibilities that faced him, indicated a personal trajectory that seemed incongruous with his capabilities, interests and motivations at that time. He started to doubt that he could be the CEO that the growing organisation needed.

Using the terminology of spatiality, the *presence* of the spreadsheet in Michael's lifeworld as a mediating technology, fundamentally changed how it was possible for him to relate to his team as a manager. The *amplification-reduction* structure of the spreadsheet tool (re)shaped (or *tuned*) his world, (re)structuring the *nears-and-fars* of the spatiality of his being-in-this-world-with-others. The world in its 'objectivity' was made present to him in a different way. This also meant he was concernfully *present in-the-world* differently, a new spatial orientation *among others* that was manifest as uncertainty over the previously pre-disposing teleological *understanding* of his own potential as a subject as he pressed forward into the future.

To summarise: As a tool that tuned the spatiality of care, the spreadsheet played a non-neutral role in shaping 1) the manner in which the world came to presence (as being strategically salient) for Michael, and 2) the way Michael himself became purposively present *in this world* as a leader, manager, and strategist. Aligned with Verbeek (2005, 2011a), the spreadsheet *mediated the 'objectivity'* of the world in the former case, and *mediated the 'subjectivity'* of the strategist in the latter. In addition, it also shaped how the strategist was present alongside others—how their presence in his world was transformed for him, and how he was transformed in relation to them. The technological tool therefore also *mediated the 'intersubjectivity'* of his lifeworld.

This contributes broadly to how we think about sociomateriality. However, in addition, and connecting back with my earlier review work in Chapter 1, these three dimensions of technological mediation also provide conceptual purchase for understanding the role played by technologies in the power relations of strategy. I will consider this next, in the penultimate section of this chapter. This will lead me to add a *fourth* conceptual element upon which the other three converge, one that relates to the nature of the self as it is structured within the technologically tuned structure of care. By way of preview, the framework that will then be conceptually related to my empirical research question (in Section 3.7) will thus consist of four aspects: 1) the technological mediation of

objectivities; 2) the technological mediation of subjectivities; 3) the technological mediation of intersubjectivities; and 4) the self as an integration of dispositions and projections.

### 3.6. Struggling over subjectivities: A postphenomenological framing

Recall that in Chapter 1, I developed three main points from the literature: The first: that strategy can be envisaged as a local accomplishment that must consider the situated work of those at the frontline. The second: that these local accomplishments are not ‘simply’ implementations of imposed managerial formulations, but can be forged through ongoing power struggles that include struggles over the subjectivities of these workers. The third: that technologies are (ostensibly) used as a mechanism of control over strategy accomplishment. However, at the same time, while recognising that such technologies work to discipline the subjectivities of strategic actors (by, for example, imposing metrics that shape behaviours), I indicated a need to know more about the human-technology (sociomaterial) entanglements that constitute such struggles over subject positions. I am now in a position to close the loop on this conceptually, building on the work above by engaging further with both postphenomenological and Heideggerian theorising. I consider first what postphenomenology has to say about power and technology.

#### 3.6.1. *Technologies within flows of power*

Extant SAP studies of strategy and power have tended to focus on language as central to the constitution of subjectivities. However, it is recognised that, for Foucault—upon whose work, much of these ideas were based—‘discourse’ was not only linguistic but also included the role of materialities and material practices (Hardy & Thomas, 2014; Mantere & Vaara, 2008). Said differently, subjects are not only *discursive constructions* in relation to talk and text, but also *(socio)material constructions*. Moreover, Foucault makes widespread use of various notions of ‘technology’ across his corpus (e.g., Behrent, 2013; Lloyd, 2012). Postphenomenologists have considered these ideas to attend *very specifically* to the role of technologies in power (e.g., Verbeek, 2011a, 2011b, 2009a, 2013a; Dorrestijn, 2012a, 2012b; Dorrestijn & Verbeek 2012<sup>27</sup>). Drawing on the idea that technologies are *non-neutral* mediators (as explicated above), Verbeek (2011b) states that:

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<sup>27</sup> These examples are selected from a larger body of philosophical work which recognises links between postphenomenology and issues of power, morality and ethics. Others include Verbeek (2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2008b, 2009b, 2009c, 2011c, 2013a, 2013b, 2014, 2017a, 2017b, 2020, 2022); see also Bergen & Verbeek, 2021; Dorrestijn, 2017; Smits et al., 2022; Rosenberger (2014, 2017a, 2018b, 2020a, 2020b).

We must give up the idea that we exercise a sovereign authority over technology and that we employ technologies merely as neutral means towards ends that have been autonomously determined. The truth is that we are profoundly technologically mediated beings (ibid, 2011b, p.30).

Verbeek argues that this has further consequences for how we think about the 'subjectivity' of the human actor as they engage in worldly practices. Connecting postphenomenology with Foucault's notions of power, he argues that material artefacts 'can be reckoned among these forces and structures ... Human intentions are not "authentic" but result from structures of power that can be present materially; instead of being autonomous, human beings are heteronomous' (Verbeek, 2011a, p.66). Thus, Verbeek (2009a, 2013a) describes how, through the manner in which they mediate human-world relations, technologies can variously express power through coercion, persuasion, or even seduction.

This thinking is in keeping with the aforementioned technological power of accounting and other managerial control systems (Ezzamel & Willmott, 2008; Whittle and Mueller, 2010). According to Verbeek's mediation theory, such technologies can be viewed as material embodiments (see e.g., Kiran & Verbeek, 2010; Verbeek, 2020) of managerial power and intent. They take the form of 'technological scripts' that, when enrolled into the lifeworld of a human actor, guide or steer praxis in an intended direction (Verbeek, 2005, pp.115, 160-161, 207; see also Rosenberger, 2018b; Verbeek, 2006, 2009, 2011a, 2011b). This *postphenomenological* notion of scripts draws from ANT (Latour 1992, see also Akrich, 1992) and Winner's (1986) work on the cultural power of artefacts. Accordingly, a technology is *inscribed* with intention, as 'a "non-human delegate" [that] imposes on humans a "prescription" [for action]' (Verbeek, 2005, p.160). The CE technology thus 'implicitly suppl[ies its] own user's manual' (ibid) by orienting the user to experience the world in a particular way, and to support, promote or facilitate certain ways of acting. However, as with any scripts, 'technological scripts' are not mandatory or determinative (Verbeek, 2005, pp.160-161). Postphenomenologically, the manner in which a technological script is taken up into (and so shapes) praxis depends on the social and material relations within which it is embedded and becomes 'stabilised'. Within different relational settings, a technology can be

present in-the-world in different ways, and thus be differentially 'stable' as a different entity with a different 'purpose' to different people in different contexts.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, Verbeek also cautions against a view that technologies are in any way *deterministic* of human praxis and experience, such that humans then lack autonomy and agency in the face of a technological dominance<sup>29</sup>. As per Foucault's subjectification (Section 1.7), and the contemporary idea of 'struggles' (Section 1.8):

[Humans] can find a relation toward structures of power [...] amid these structures of power, human beings can constitute themselves as (moral) subjects. Humans are not only the objects of power here but also subjects that create their own existence against the background of and in confrontation with these powers. (Verbeek 2011a, pp.66-67)

Embracing postphenomenology's roots in pragmatism (Section 3.2 above), Verbeek (2011a, 2011b) expands mediation theory's toolbox (Keymolen, 2021) by incorporating Foucauldian thinking into his conceptualisation of technology mediated being-in-the-world. He argues that technological mediations (together with their compositive intentionalities, Section 3.3 above) are themselves generative of subjectivities from *within power* (2011a, pp.81-85). That is, technology is one aspect of the structures of power within which human subjectivities take shape—technologies *do not control*, but are part of the ontological substrate *for struggles*. In addition, just as technology contributes to shaping subjectivities by mediating the relations 'between' human and world, humans also have freedom to influence these relations:

[T]he subject is formed in interaction with these [technology mediated] influences. The subject is not what remains when all powers and mediations are stripped from it; it is what results from an active designing and styling of the impact of these powers and mediations. The core of a [postphenomenologically informed] Foucauldian ethics of technology is gaining a *free relation* to technology, which allows one to *style* the way one's technologically mediated subjectivity is shaped (ibid, p.85, emphasis added).

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<sup>28</sup> See Rosenberger 2014, 2017a, 2018b; Rosenberger & Verbeek, 2015; Verbeek, 2005, p. 161 for an expansion on this basic formulation. These authors discuss a mediation theoretical view of Ihde's (1986/2012) early account of phenomenological 'multistability'.

<sup>29</sup> It should be noted that this thinking connects with a much larger *determinism–instrumentalism–substantivism* debate in the philosophy of technology. I recognise that the postphenomenological perspective is only one facet of this debate (a facet that is well articulated in Verbeek, 2005), but a full review of these various positions is beyond the scope of this thesis. Feenberg (2002, 2006, 2009a, 2009b) and Thompson (2000) provide further insightful reading.

Such ‘free relations’ suggest that technology (as part of the relational ‘structure’ of power) does not *determine* subjectivities but instead provides the context within which humans can give form to their subjectivity as part of their spatial being-in-the-world<sup>30</sup>. Free relations are possible as humans have the capacity to *relate themselves* to relations of power; a capacity to ‘style’ themselves *to and within* technological mediations through a ‘care of the self’ (Verbeek, 2011a, p.75; see also Bergen & Verbeek, 2021<sup>31</sup>). This form of concerned relation to the world involves a tacit acceptance of the ‘hybrid’, technologically mediated self (Verbeek, 2011a, p.75; see also Verbeek, 2011b, p.43; Dorrestijn 2012a; 2012b, pp.61-62; Dorrestijn & Verbeek, 2012).

So, technologies tune how we are concernedly (spatially) oriented as *being-in* in our worlds, thus changing what it is to be a ‘subject’ *in-the-world*. However, now, as per Verbeek’s Foucauldian perspective on his postphenomenology, we also have the capacity to *shape ourselves in relation* to these re-orientations—we do not necessarily oppose them, and we certainly cannot ‘step-outside’ them given we *subsist within* them. However, through a concerned ‘awareness’ of self, we fashion ourselves in relation to them. From this postphenomenological position, it can be seen that struggles over subjectivity have a spatial basis, and might even be thought of as struggles over (or within) spatialities.

This thinking provides the theoretical platform for my empirical explorations of the ‘role’ of technology in the struggles that constitute strategy accomplishment. However, at this point it is also necessary to understand the *nature* of the self that is the ontological substrate for subjectivity—the nature of the “‘I [that] is jeopardized [when] a resistant that resists” is constituted *as a subject* (Harding et al., 2017, p.1227; see Section 1.8). I suggest that—building on the above discussion, and to fully conceptualise the sociomaterial relationality of the struggle—the *self* needs to be articulated in *spatial* terms within the context of the flows of power that shape subjectivities.

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<sup>30</sup> As a point of clarification, this notion of ‘free relation’ is not related to that discussed by Dreyfus (1995). Dreyfus there was referencing Heidegger’s (1977) account of technology as the ontological condition of ‘enframing’ (*Gestell*), whereby, through ‘releasement’ (*Gelassenheit*), humans can free themselves from the limitations of enframing. A discussion of this complex topic is beyond the scope of this current work but see Wendland et al. (2018) and Rojewicz (2006) for extensive analysis.

<sup>31</sup> The notions of ‘care of the self’ borrows from Foucault’s work in *The care of the self* (Foucault, 1984/1990; see also Foucault, 1997). A full account of this is beyond the scope of this thesis. But note that ‘care’ here does not directly relate to Heideggerian care.

### 3.6.2. *The spatiality of the self as a basis for theorising struggles*

By virtue of the struggles immanent in flows of power, the subjectivity of the self is forged and reforged as claims on and for selfhood are made. However, if the subjectivity of the 'subject' is a relational being-in-(the-world) as *dasein*, and is always thus open to change as power flows, what is the essential locus of the 'Dasein self' that can 'actively' experience and then play a role in shaping such relations, and can thus lay a claim upon its own subjectivity? Answering this question is key to a full framing of the spatial nature of the struggles over subjectivity that will be presented in my findings, and—as will be described in the next chapter—was a theoretical issue that was raised abductively during the course of my analysis. Accordingly, in this current section, I introduce an account of the nature of the self in terms of the spatiality of being-in-the-world. In support of this, I will draw upon contemporary Heideggerian philosophy (especially the work of Mark A. Wrathall).

First, according to Boedeker's (2001) interpretation of Heidegger's relationality of *Dasein*, the self (*Selbst*) is *not a substance*, but a 'dynamic movement from potentiality to actuality of the specific possible for the-sakes-of-whom that one is currently projecting as a possibility of oneself' (ibid, p.75). The self must therefore be an *existential structure* that is immanent in *Dasein*'s special spatiality. Wrathall's recent Heideggerian corpus provides detailed explication of this idea (Wrathall 2013, 2015a, 2015b, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2017d, 2021a). Wrathall (2015a) first considers how Heidegger's ontology of being-in-the-world challenges the traditional idea of human autonomy, and thus the nature of the self as a *locus* of agency, and of selfhood (*Selbstheit*) as the 'quality of being a self' (Wrathall, 2021a, p.665). As he puts it, phenomenological philosophy is antithetical to the Cartesian idea that human action is part of a means–ends chain of causes involving active cognition and deliberation:

[Such a notion] takes deliberative action as its paradigm – that is, action in which the agent aims at an end or goal that he or she envisions, and pursues that end in a rational way. The pursuit of the end is rational if the actions the agent performs are, or could be reconstructed as being, the result of a judgment issuing from deliberation about how best to achieve one's ends. (Wrathall, 2015, p.194)

A search for the self within the Cartesian tradition will always start from '*within*' the human as an entity that's sits *outside* the world. In contrast, by being-in-the-world, the self as an 'agent' must be conceived in terms of *Dasein*'s always already being drawn out into-(as)-the-world. Thus, a phenomenological ontology:

does not locate the decisive explanatory grounds for action exclusively within the agent, but also in the setting that solicits the agent to respond (Wrathall, 2015a, p.196).

[Therefore] the task for an explanation of [autonomous] action is not to reduce the agent to some cause within an occurrent sequence of causes; the task rather is to *understand the self as a particular style of communion with the world* – a communion out of which solicitations can arise and function as grounds for our actions. (Wrathall, 2015a, p.197, emphasis added)

Wrathall's discussion here of 'solicitations' points precisely back to Dasein's spatiality (Sections 2.5 and 2.6). Recall that Heidegger's hammer (as manifest as a tool *for hammering*) is 'available' in-the-world within the referential structure of involvements—the *for-whiches* and *in-order-tos* that structure the nature of experience and action, disclosing a human 'subject' within their world as, for example, a carpenter. As Wrathall (2015a, 2015b, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2017d, 2021a) therefore notes, the world is disclosed to the actor as an interconnected context of potential involvements<sup>32</sup>, that therefore also disclose the potentialities that make the actor the actor who they are (or can be). However, Wrathall (2015a, 2017d) qualifies this by indicating that a *potential* involvement is itself

not yet a reason to act ... [it] doesn't *cause* me to do anything ... action requires that entities in the world do not merely afford action, they must actually solicit it ... But the world cannot solicit a response from me without my complicity. It is in this complicity that we should look to find the self. (Wrathall, 2015a, p.210, emphasis in original).

The locus of the self therefore relates to aspects of Dasein's spatial *being-in* that contribute to 'converting' potential involvements into solicitations:

[G]iven [the agent] is me-in-the-world, the world drawing my actions out of me, the self will be some individuated unit, stable and recognizable across the different situations I encounter, that allows the solicitations to arise. (ibid, p.208)

On this basis, he considers that the self, as an *individuated* unit—as something that can be ontologically distinguishable from other agential entities—has no substance, only structure: the structure that underpins dasein's care, its *thrown projection* (Section 2.6). To tease this out further, the self is:

that which grounds *autonomous action* – action that is attributable to an agent because it begins with her in some sense, a doing rather than a mere happening. What distinguishes a doing from

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<sup>32</sup> Note that Wrathall (2013, 2015a, 2015b, 2017a, 2017b, 2021a) specifically uses the term 'affordance[s]', but he derives this (via Gibson, 1986) as a translation of Heidegger's original '*Bewandtnis*' which has been translated as 'involvement[s]' in Heidegger (1962). I have used this latter translation for internal consistency within this thesis.



a happening ... is that the solicited action is the result of the individual that I am – that it would not have been solicited were I not myself, and I would not be myself were I not individuated from other possible actors. *My particular way of integrating my thrownness and projection is what individuates me, and it is also what brings together into a coherent unit the sub-agential elements that constitute me.* (Wrathall, 2015a, p.212, second emphasis added)

To interpret this, recall from Chapter 2 (Sections 2.5 and 2.6) that, by always already being *thrown* into the world, we are surrounded by and encounter meaning-laden entities that we become concernfully engaged with, to the extent we can *understand* them based upon our habits of action and dispositions. This offers an enormous array of potential involvements that must be organised to support coherent action. Dasein's (futural) *projection* – its teleological *for-the-sake-of* being – then provides the aligning structure that shapes our purposive relations to things within their equipmental contexts. Thus 'we donate to or endow upon [potential involvements with equipment] an order and direction' (Wrathall, 2015a, p.211), such that some things – that align (or accord) with our projection – are brought concernfully *near* to us while others are pushed into the background. This accords with the orienting structure of our care – entities only solicit us into action to the extent that we are *oriented* to them in our thrownness, by virtue of our *dispositions* towards them, as we experience them in the context of our *projections*. Thus, as per Merleau-Ponty (1962): a person's 'projects polarize the world, bringing magically to view a host of signs which guide action, as notices in a museum guide the visitor' (*ibid*, p.112).

To pull this all together, the *Heideggerian self* can be seen as the ontological ground (or unity) that brings a human's dispositions and projections together as a cohesive unit to disclose the world to us as being our world (Wrathall 2015a, 2015b, 2017b, 2017c, 2017d, 2021a). This is a 'volatilized self' (Wrathall, 2017) that is dispersed into the world in being-amid-equipment and being-with-others:

[The self] loses the kind of occurrent stability that we are used to associating with an embodied being ... [so that] ... I (insofar as "I" refers to the existential self) just am the organizing factor that makes there be a solicitation to doing, using, expecting, etc. There is no fixed occurrent form of embodiment that my self inhabits. The volatilized self is more like the bending of space in a gravitational field than any object in that space (Wrathall, 2017, p.234).

In this way, the self as an 'I' constitutes the 'here' of the spatiality of being-in-the-world: 'a particular "location" in a field of possible actions – "I here" am an ability to act; "you there" are a different ability' (Wrathall, 2021a; see also 2017d). This version of the self, this *spatial structure* that

integrates thrown disposedness and futural projections is — ontologically — a ‘stylistically-recognizable, recurring way of organizing or polarizing concrete contexts into solicitations to act’ (ibid) such that, by being a particular, individuated self with particular skills, dispositions and projects, the world is always already being disclosed as a specific context for experience and action (Wrathall, 2021a, p.666).

To sum up this section: by *being* this integration of dispositions and projections, the self can *own* or *claim* its spatiality (the *orientation* and the *distances* that define the *place* of Dasein’s being-in-the world). This can take form relationally through a ‘care of the self’ (Verbeek, 2011, p.75 as introduced above) that seeks to stabilise and cohere disposition and projection in such a way as to individuate the self *as its own self* (Wrathall, 2015b). Theoretically, in the empirical investigation of strategy accomplishment that will follow, this is the nature of the ‘self’ that can have its cohesion threatened, but that can also reclaim this cohesion as it struggles within flows of power in a productive relation with the mediations of technologies of control.

### 3.7. Presenting the empirical research question

Based upon this postphenomenological framing of power, subjectivity and the self, we can now view struggles — as first introduced in Section 1.8 — as being *sociomaterial* entanglements. Thus, in first calling for the value of a strong relational ontology (Chapter 1, Section 1.10), then problematising extant Heideggerian views of sociomateriality (Chapter 2), and finally addressing these problems through engagement with the postphenomenology of technology (as in this current chapter), I have addressed the first research question as posed in Section 1.10, which was:

**Research question 1:** With regard to struggles ‘accompanying’ frontline strategy work, how can a relational, non-neutral role for technologies be conceptualised?

Going forwards in this thesis, I thus coin the term ‘sociomaterial struggles’, a notion that will now inform the empirical research question for this thesis:

**Research question 2:** What are the forms and implications of these ‘sociomaterial struggles’?

I divide this into two sub-questions:

- a. How are subjectivities (re)shaped through these ‘sociomaterial struggles’ in frontline strategy work?
- b. How are these (re)shapings implicated in what is locally accomplished *as* strategy?

More specifically, I will address this question through an analysis of a case of the use of Customer Relationship Management software platform (cf. Vargha, 2018). This technology was deployed within a local operating affiliate of a multinational firm, and embodied the strategic aims of the Corporate Office's senior management team in relation to sales and marketing activities. The analytical approach that I adopt is interpretative and abductive. It supports the generation of theoretical contributions to the power perspective in SAP as well as empirical contributions to how we understand the practice of strategy at the frontline, and the role of digital technologies (as adopted to direct or steer strategy) therein. As will be discussed in the methods chapter (Chapter 4) to follow, the movements between theory and empirical data that took place prompted the introduction of the postphenomenology-informed spatial concepts within this current chapter, specifically those in Sections 3.5 and 3.6 above: 1) the technological mediation of objectivities; 2) the technological mediation of subjectivities; 3) the technological mediation of intersubjectivities; and 4) the self as an integration of dispositions and projections that is capable of shaping a 'free relation' to technological mediations. The manner in which these concepts are entangled as part of my empirical analysis will be framed in straightforward terms at the end of Chapter 4 and elucidated in my study findings in Chapter 5, where I will show how subjectivities are shaped through sociomaterial struggles that take place over time at the level of individual practitioners' frontline strategy work. These findings will also show how these unfolding sociomaterial entanglements have implications for *what* is locally accomplished *as strategy*.

## **Chapter 4:**

### **METHODS – A CASE OF STRATEGY THROUGH CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT SOFTWARE**

#### 4.1. Introduction

This chapter details the methods adopted in the study. First, in Section 4.2, I will introduce the overall approach (Abdallah et al., 2017) and ‘narratives of practices’ methodology (Rouleau, 2015; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011). Section 4.3 presents the case organisation and describes how it is relevant to the research inquiry. Section 4.4 then discusses three specific epistemological principles which influenced data collection and analysis. I describe how these both align with the ontological foundations of this thesis and meet the empirical demands of the study. In Section 4.5, I review the data collection procedures. Data analysis is then covered in Section 4.6, and the conceptual framework derived from this (abductive) analysis is presented in Section 4.7. Finally, Section 4.8 accounts for my choice of textwork as a form of presenting the study findings. Approval for this research was granted by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee (HEC 2020/50/LR-PS). Informed consent of participants was gained.

#### 4.2. Research approach and methodology

As presented in the preceding chapters, my thesis build upon non-Cartesian, posthuman traditions, underpinned by a (post)phenomenological ontology. It positions strategy as a local social and material accomplishment which takes place ‘within’ the lifeworlds of those involved— that is, through the co-constructive entanglements of subjectivities, intersubjectivities and objectivities that take form through being-in-the-world-with-others.

To accord with this position, my overall research approach was guided by Abdallah et al.’s (2017) ‘Comprehensive’ SAP research design. According to these scholars, ‘Comprehensive’ design ‘departs from traditional conceptions of strategy [in SAP], to embrace a view of strategy as a social reality carried out by discourse and dynamics across different levels’ (ibid, p.337). Thus, research participants are partners rather than informants, so the ‘approach is generally more *subjective or intersubjective*’ (ibid, p.337, emphasis added). Strategy is a phenomena that is ‘*experienced* by actors, and studying it through their experience can bring forth anew understanding of the phenomenon for the SAP field’ (ibid, p.337, emphasis added). According to Abdallah et al. (2017), this ‘Comprehensive’ approach thus sits in contrast to two other SAP designs—labelled as ‘Classic’ and ‘Expanded’— which both study strategy as an *objective* reality.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> According to Abdallah et al. (2017): The Classical SAP research design ‘generally offers an objectivist view of strategy in which a unique reality can be accessed through the accounts of top managers [...] Such

Building upon this ‘Comprehensive’ view of research design, I chose a specific methodological approach that would afford access to the everyday flow of praxis as it is tied up with the technological lifeworlds of practitioners. More concretely, the study required collection of rich, first-person accounts of lived experience, and so a ‘narratives of practices’ approach was adopted. The rationale for this choice is presented below.

#### *4.2.1. Narratives of practices: Introducing the approach*

The term ‘narratives of practices’ (NAP) refers to a specific biographical approach adopted by Linda Rouleau (Rouleau, 2015; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011) that allows ‘the researcher to dig into the ‘life-world’ of strategists’’ (Rouleau, 2015, p.462). The research design for collecting narratives of practices ‘can take a variety of forms and fit into broader mixed-methods procedures’ (p.465). Rouleau (2015) defines the NAP approach as follows: ‘a research method in which practitioners are invited to make their personal accounts of strategic events while situating it in their whole managerial and organizational career’ (p.463). The method has specifically been adopted in SAP studies (Rouleau, 2015; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011) and, further, meets the criteria defined by Balogun et al. (2003) for approaches that are suitable for SAP inquiry (Rouleau, 2015, p 467) as summarised in Table 5.

Collecting narratives of practices allows researchers to get closer to the praxis of practitioners, and also—importantly for this study—to see how this is entangled with the tacit understandings and predispositions that shape their lifeworlds. Narratives collected are thus constitutively enmeshed in their sociohistorical contexts (Cederberg, 2014). As Rouleau (2015, p.464) states, each narrative is:

the result of the temporal schema structuring the trajectories of the individuals who are telling their stories ... [in telling these stories], they also share a part of their experience in which their ‘stocks of knowledge’ reside [...] there is a need to know their own story of their past (how they became a strategist or manager) and how they situate themselves in relation to their future in order to understand how and why they act in specific ways.

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research designs still aim at offering reproducible and generalizable results. Typically, therefore, the Classical SAP research design implies a conception of strategy as being made of activities and behavioral patterns that can be systematically described and represented in a theoretical model’ (ibid, p.334). In contrast, the ‘Expanded’ design ‘also involves the studying of strategy as an objective reality, a concrete process, but the focus is on the fact that it involves change episodes that trigger interpretation and action. Discourse and interactions are considered, examined, and theorized with more scrutiny, but they are still treated as objects that can be looked at from the outside’ (ibid, p.336).

Narratives of practices allow accounts of unfolding activities to be captured as they appear to the practitioner. 'The subjective account that practitioners give cannot be separated from the way they live their work', providing an 'experiential truth' rather than an 'objective', rational account of events (ibid, p.464). It is precisely this non-Cartesian sense of a practitioner's intertwinement in their world that is required given the philosophical and conceptual positioning of my research. Also importantly, the NAP approach accords well with the study's focus on strategy accomplishment at the frontline, as well as with the standpoint position that I adopt. Accordingly, it empowers the narrators to tell their own stories and so:

give back a voice not only to middle and lower managers but also to all the actors belonging to the various subgroups inside or around the organization who are generally not considered in traditional strategy research (ibid, p.466).

Summing up the key benefits of this approach for my study: first, it allows researchers to 'understand how strategy is accomplished and performed in social relations and affiliations that go beyond the managerial end purposes of the strategy' (ibid, p.466); it so supports the empirical focus of my study. Second, it allows practitioners to raise questions and issues that are meaningful for them, allowing researchers to gain privileged access to their experiences (ibid, p.467). Third, it builds trust and is undemanding for participants and the broader organisation they work within, making effective use of their time (ibid, p.467). Fourth, it can provide them with a satisfying experience that allows practitioners to reflect on their work, and gain personal and professional value from the interactions (ibid, p.467). Indeed, this final point was well supported by comments made by the participants during my study. (See Rouleau, 2015 for further discussion of such advantages, as summarised in Table 5).

**Table 5: Narratives of practices according to Balogun et al.'s (2003) criteria**

*Adapted from Rouleau (2015, p.467)*

Criteria	How narratives of practices meet these criteria
Provide broad and deep data collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– data based on a temporal schema</li> <li>– data embedded in a context</li> <li>– data that can be compared</li> <li>– data that can be gathered from individuals belonging to all hierarchical levels</li> </ul>
Elicit full and willing commitment from informant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– very undemanding method for the organization</li> <li>– satisfying method for participants</li> </ul>
Make the most effective use of researchers' time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– data-collection time concentrated during meetings</li> <li>– analysis develops from meeting to meeting</li> <li>– permit collection of a wide range of empirical evidence</li> </ul>
Anchor the questions being asked in the organizational realities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– sensitive to organizational issues</li> <li>– take into account what interests the narrator</li> </ul>
Provide useful results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– permit participants to take stock of their actions</li> <li>– permit participants to think about their professional trajectory</li> <li>– favour the development of a relationship of trust with the researcher that can lead to subsequent collaborations.</li> </ul>

### 4.3. Overview of the case

#### 4.3.1. Introduction and case suitability

My research was qualitative, involving a single, detailed case study (e.g., Langley, 1999), as is common in the SAP field (Golsorkhi et al., 2015; Vaara & Whittington, 2012) in order to get close to strategy practices through fieldwork within an organisation (Rasche & Chia, 2009). The case organisation was a local operating 'subsidiary' company of a multinational firm (pseudonymously referred to here as 'Lorum Health' or 'Lorum'). This Lorum Health subsidiary was responsible for distributing, marketing and selling the firm's global healthcare products within their focal country market. This setting was chosen for its suitability for this study on two levels. The first aspect relates to its empirical relevance to technologies of control in strategy accomplishment. As Lorum's local operating affiliate (henceforth referred to as the 'Local Office', it offered the opportunity to study strategy at the 'formulation–implementation' blurry boundary (Leonardi, 2015). Local practitioners were routinely involved in the 'localisation' of strategies being 'rolled down' through the organisation from Lorum's global headquarters (henceforth referred to as the 'Corporate Office').



#### 4.3.2. A *'Digital Strategy'*

Fieldwork took place between October 2020 and August 2021. Before and during this 10-month study period, the global company was facing a range of inter-related challenges that were seen as typical of this industry setting. These included pressure from shareholders to boost R&D productivity and so ensure future revenue growth, shrinking operating margins associated with global product pricing and market access pressures, and decreasing returns on sales and marketing efforts. Lorum's Corporate Office took a range of significant strategic steps to address these challenges, many of which were captured under the umbrella of a new *'Digital Strategy'*<sup>34</sup>. This strategy articulated the aims for a *'digital transformation'* that spanned all global divisions, with a special focus on global R&D, global product supply, and global sales and marketing,

The third of these divisional aspects of the strategy—sales and marketing—provided the focus for this study as this was the primary operational responsibility of Lorum's Local Office. The Local Office team upon which my research was centred was thus responsible for *'implementing'* this element of the digital strategy. The Corporate Office's broad aims here were as follows: first, to develop the technological infrastructure to support capture of data (both internal and external to the organisation) that could be translated into insights to inform superior customer targeting and engagement; second to develop skills within the company's workforce to ensure a *'digital mindset'*, that is the willingness, drive and ability to embrace new digital technologies; and third to develop *'digital leadership'* to drive the appropriate cultural and procedural changes required.<sup>35</sup> A technological lynchpin of this strategy was the internal launch of *'Customer Engagement'* software platform across the global sales and marketing division; a technological and processual *'rollout'* that was compulsorily adopted by all local operating companies. I turn to this next.

#### 4.3.3. The *'Customer Engagement' technology platform*

This Customer Engagement (CE) software was a cloud-based, software-as-a-service (SaaS) suite<sup>36</sup>. It was a multi-modal extension of traditional Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software used to manage interactions with customers and potential customers. It is therefore helpful to first introduce the notion of CRM.

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<sup>34</sup> Terms used by Lorum's Corporate Office are italicised as quotes in this section.

<sup>35</sup> These aims are based on information gathered from a variety of documentary sources. However, they have been re-written to ensure anonymity given the sensitive nature of this information.

<sup>36</sup> The developer and brand name of the software platform is not disclosed for reasons of commercial sensitivity and to maintain the anonymity of the case organisation and research practitioners.

CRM refers to an information technology system that allows practitioners to record, report and analyse interactions between the company and its customers and stakeholders. It may also be thought of as the *process*, involving such IT-based capabilities, by which the information flows between customers and the company are managed. Thus, a CRM technology may be adopted by an organisation so that more effective decisions about its customers and markets can be made. This hopefully offers strategically relevant benefits, the realisation of which may well require the development of specific CRM-related processes and practices that relate to how the technology is brought into use by the relevant practitioners (Choudhury & Harrigam, 2014). Practitioners who interact with CRM systems may range across numerous roles and functions within a firm—the core customer-centric roles as well as supply-chain and product teams—as well as across levels of managerial hierarchies (Soltani & Navimipour, 2016).

It is thus easy to see how such technologies span the ‘blurry boundary’ between strategy formulation and strategy implementation (Leonardi, 2015). By way of indicative illustration: senior managers may define the priorities for how CRM is used, or may analyse data from the CRM to determine strategically relevant customer and market segments around which to organise the business at the local level. Their interactions with the CRM will thus play a part in how strategy is ‘formulated’. ‘Mid-level’ sales and marketing managers at the level of the local operating company may then be involved in developing and monitoring operational plans that ostensibly ‘align’ with this strategy, using the CRM to monitor the activity of their teams. These teams may include staff with customer-facing roles who will implement operational plans according to metrics defined within the CRM. They may also record their customer facing activities, and other relevant customer information, within the CRM. These data will in turn support future analyses that may influence strategically relevant decisions and actions across all levels of the organisation.

In this specific case study, the functionality of the CRM technology (and hence the use by the organisation of the broader term ‘*Customer engagement*’ platform) extended beyond the core affordances of recording, reporting and analysing customer interactions. Postphenomenologically, this was a ‘technological embodiment’ (Ihde, 1979, p.110; 2010, p.36) of a ‘customer engagement’ component of the new digital strategy. From a Corporate Office perspective, this was associated with an overarching ambition ‘*to adopt a fully integrated, multichannel digital approach to reaching and engaging with customers in accordance with product and market priorities*’<sup>37</sup>. Accordingly, the specific

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<sup>37</sup> This strategic objective is reworded to support anonymity. However, the core premise remains true to the case.

aims—enabled by the CE platform—were to ensure good evidence-based, locally informed decisions were made around the best channels for reaching customers; to support the development of *'customer engagement plans'* that were tailored to customer preferences while maintaining consistent communications across products, and aligning with strategic goals; to activate these plans in compliance with agreed local objectives, as well as regulatory and ethical requirements; to monitor performance and success of these implementations; and to capture new commercially relevant data in digital form to inform further planning.

Overall, the broad goal for the CE platform was thus to integrate new processes into local practice—together with the strict regulatory and compliance processes associated with this industry setting—to localise, guide and facilitate local activities that would accord with global strategy. On this basis, in addition to the core CRM module, additional CE software modules included: 1) a *'content management module'* to support development and approval of appropriate promotional and educational materials for use with customers; 2) an *'event management module'*, to facilitate coordination and approval of formal educational meetings and conferences with customers; 3) a *'key account management'* module to support sales staff who had *'strategic sales'* responsibility, 4) a *'coaching module'* to support sales managers in developing the skills that aligned with the digital and customer engagement aspects of the new strategy; and 5) a *'dashboarding module'* that extended the reporting functionality of the core CRM software. This module permitted data from various sources to be integrated in order to track a range of strategically meaningful indicators of activity and performance. Different dashboard displays were available, depending on the managerial levels and functional roles of the practitioners who were granted access. These five modules—together with more specific strategic ambitions for the technology—are discussed in more detail, as part of presenting the study findings, in Chapter 5.

It is also important to emphasise that the CE platform was also embedded in a broader set of materials and practices that constituted the technology-in-use (e.g., Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2015; Jarzabkowski, Spee, et al., 2013; Kaplan, 2011b). Thus, for example, PowerPoint slides were developed and used to communicate how the software should be used, and to relay findings and insights derived from the CE data. These presentations drew on data collations and analyses conducted using spreadsheet software. Financial information from accounting and management systems, and third-party data sources on customers, were integrated with CE data to help prioritise local operating goals and performance indicators. Where relevant to my research, the nature and use of these various CE modules, together with the wider strategic ambitions,

materialities and practices within which they were embedded, are further explicated in the composite narratives which constitute my findings.

As a final contextual note on this case, my study commenced during a period when the Local Office team were first being exposed to the Corporate Office's ideas for the new digital strategy and for the CE platform. Communications between Corporate and Local offices were fragmented at this time, and the team were uncertain of the extent to which it would change how they would work, if at all. Then, over the course of the study, there was rapid escalation of expectations from the Corporate Office and local activity became increasingly oriented to incorporating the CE platform into their routine work. Lorum's Local Office staff were expected to take part in numerous training and planning meetings with the Corporate Office, formal goals and performance indicators were established in relation to use of the CE platform, and a significant amount of time was diverted towards 'operationalising' the technology.

#### **4.4. Further guiding principles**

Based upon my overall choice of methodology (Section 4.2 above), and of the case approach as just described (Section 4.3), in this current section, I will introduce three guiding principles<sup>38</sup> that helped to shape my approaches to data collection and analysis procedures (as will be described in the two main sections which follow). These principles also help position myself as a researcher. On this basis, I first discuss the epistemological and methodological relevance of my status as a partial insider (Chavez, 2008). I then introduce standpoint epistemology (Rolin, 2009; Wylie, 2012), and finally I review the idea of 'zooming in' and 'zooming out' on practice (Nicolini, 2009, 2012).

##### ***4.4.1. Principle 1: Partial insider status and the co-construction of knowledge***

Before undertaking doctoral study towards this thesis, I worked for 20 years in the pharmaceuticals and biotherapeutics industry as a manager and management consultant. I have significant practical experience in strategy and its 'implementation' in settings relevant to the chosen case. In relation to the current study, this conferred two advantages. First, my 'partial insider' status afforded a broad understanding of the contexts within which strategic and operational decisions were made and acted upon (Chavez, 2008; see also Adler & Adler, 1987). Second, my experience lent me a degree of legitimacy supporting the development of authentic

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<sup>38</sup> Of course, other epistemological principles are already inherent in the much of the preceding ontological and theoretical discussion in earlier chapters.

relationships and trust, and so aiding my research interactions (Balogun, Beech, et al., 2015; Rouleau, 2015).

Notwithstanding these advantages, partial insider status has been associated with the risk that prior experiences might reflexively influence the research process (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Greene, 2014; Johnson & Duberley, 2003). However, while keeping reflexive notes to help recognise this potential, I also adopted a stance that was consistent with the Heideggerian ontology my work is founded upon. As already covered in detail earlier in this thesis, Heidegger (1962) sees that we are always already thrown into our worlds (Section 2.6). Any involvement in-the-world—whether it is described as an action, interaction, belief or interpretation—is already laden with our prior experiences, dispositions, attunements, preconceptions and habits of action. As Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2018) indicate:

A fundamental hermeneutic element permeates the research process from beginning to end. Interpretation rather than representation of reality [...] becomes the central element. Even more strongly, there is no such thing as unmediated data or facts; these are always the results of interpretation. Yet the interpretation does not take place in a neutral, apolitical, ideology-free space. Nor is the autonomous, value free researcher responsible for it. (pp.14-15)

We can never stand outside this world to apprehend it ‘objectively’ as interpretations are always based upon a thrown standpoint that carries ontological significance. Based upon this hermeneutic principle, an ‘objective’ view from nowhere (Nagel, 1986) is untenable (see Barad, 2003; Haraway, 1991; Rouse 2002 for similar stances).

Further, as noted by Dwyer & Buckle’s (2009):

Holding membership in a group does not denote complete sameness within that group. Likewise, not being a member of a group does not denote complete difference. It seems paradoxical, then, that we would endorse binary alternatives that unduly narrow the range of understanding and experience. (p.60)

Research interactions thus subsist in the ‘tensioned spaces’ (ibid, p.60) shaped by multiple dimensions of ‘inside’ versus ‘outside’. Thus, regardless of my experience as a strategy practitioner, some aspect of my own, unique socio-historically shaped lifeworld will always and unavoidably intersect with the worlds of the participants, influencing the flow of interactions and interpretations (Brogden, 2012). It is therefore more productive (and more consistent with a posthuman, Heideggerian ontology) to think of researcher-selves as always *being with* our participants, such that knowledge is (co-)constructed *through* these relations rather than outside

them. On this basis, while maintaining reflexive awareness of my ‘partial insider’ status, I also sought to embrace this status by recognising its epistemological value<sup>39</sup>.

Having said this, if I accept that I cannot escape my own ‘thrown’ epistemological standpoint, it is of critical importance that the standpoint of my participants is not lost; indeed, it should be brought into the foreground. I address this now as the second principle, as it also has broader relevance given the study’s empirical focus.

#### ***4.4.2. Principle 2: A standpoint epistemology***

Although I homed in on the themes of power and resistance as they emerged abductively during my analysis (as will be described later in Section 4.6), my initial study aims were exploratory, in that I sought to broadly investigate how the CE technology shaped local praxis. Having said this, I recognised during study design that settings of strategic change can be politically complex environments for research work, ‘where matters of power and commercial confidentiality involve complex sensitivities’ (Watson, 2003, p.1308) and where “hidden preferences” and “‘real’ interests” can be confused and confusing (Clegg & Kornberger, 2015, pp.393-393). I thus considered the possibility that participants (as the primary source of my data) might feel drawn to dominant organisational discourses and thus re-iterate espoused corporate or managerial views rather than disclose their own situated experiences at the frontline of strategy. This could occur, for example, due to fear of seeming to contradict such managerial discourse, or because of pre-conceptions about what I might wish to hear as a strategy researcher. In designing the methods, standpoint theoretical thinking thus provided a valuable epistemological guide—specifically the interpretations of Rolins (2009) and Wylie (2012) in relation to the study of power relations—as I will now briefly describe.

Standpoint theory is grounded in feminist philosophy of science (e.g., Harding, 1991, 2016; Hartsock, 1983; Smith, 1974). Wylie (2012, p.47) summarises it as follows

It is an explicitly political as well as social epistemology, characterized by the thesis that those who are marginalized or oppressed under conditions of systemic inequity may, in fact, be better knowers, in a number of respects, than those who are socially or economically

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<sup>39</sup> Here, I also recognise Harding et al. (2017) as their work carries a somewhat similar message. However, they push the idea of knowledge co-construction further. They engage with Butlerian and Baradian theories (Barad, 2007; Butler, 1990, 2010) to reveal the intra-actional, co-performative roles of the researcher and the researched as one *goal* of the methodology. In contrast, while I accept my relational role, I do not explicitly investigate how it contributes to my findings. This may be an objective for future inquiry.

privileged. Their epistemic advantage arises from the kinds of experience they are likely to have, situated as they are, and the resources available to them for understanding this experience.

However, Wylie (2012) does not subscribe to the classical standpoint thesis that is indicated here, where marginalised groups have some sort of 'automatic privilege' (ibid, pp.60-61) to superior knowledge (that is, an 'epistemic advantage') by virtue of their marginalisation (cf. Hartsock, 1983). Rather she reframes it as a:

purpose-specific epistemic stance [...] that directs attention to a set of jointly descriptive and normative questions about the impact of systematic social differentiation on our epistemic capacities, on what we know (well) as situated epistemic agents (ibid, p.61).

On this basis, her standpoint theoretical view recognises that flows of power can shape 'differentials' between groups of people in terms of the varying epistemic resources they develop to navigate their social worlds. According to Rolin (2009), this is especially relevant in studies where power relations are a research focus, in that these relations may themselves 'suppress or distort relevant evidence' (p.219) such that the very 'object of inquiry "resists" being understood' (ibid, p.223). In this context, a standpoint epistemology is a resource for research as it discloses 'power as a distinctive kind of obstacle to the production of scientific knowledge' and prompts the researcher 'to couple the process of generating evidence with a process of empowerment' (ibid, p.219). This embraces the fact that:

informants are not passive parties waiting to be represented by someone else. Not only social scientists but also informants make decisions about what social experiences are significant enough to tell about and to what degree of detail to tell about them (ibid, p.223).

On this basis, it is the goal of the standpoint-sensitive researcher to recognise these differentials and lift into salience the knowledge of those who may (to a greater or lesser extent) be marginalised vis-à-vis the dominant discourses. In so doing, research will recognise and reveal the particularities of their situated, socially shaped, lived experiences. I certainly do not suggest that the participants in my study were marginalised in terms of being *disadvantaged* by the organisational conditions of Lorum Health. However, they were subject to a hierarchical managerial structure, and it was formally incumbent upon them, as representatives of the operating affiliate, to align their work with the goals of the Corporate Office. Moreover, a standpoint epistemology is pertinent given the relationality of the postphenomenological position that I adopt. Each participants' particular concrete relations with the technology will be established

according to their own socially, contextually and historically sedimented dispositions, understandings and attunements. It is therefore vital that these are brought into salience from each participants own nuanced perspective (see also Rosenberger, 2020 for a broader discussion of these issues at the intersection of standpoint theory and postphenomenology).

Accordingly—informed by a standpoint epistemology—I gave special attention to my choice of method and sought an approach to primary data collection that *empowered* the participants to tell their own stories in their own way, by supporting the development of mutual trust, and by allowing the subjects to see that the research process could be of value to them on their own terms (cf. Rolin, 2009, p.224). The approach chosen, based upon the idea of ‘narratives of practices’ (Rouleau, 2015; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011), is discussed in Section 4.5 on data collection.

#### ***4.4.3. Principle 3: Zooming in and zooming out on practice***

Relatedly—and consistent with my relational, phenomenology-inspired ontology—I also sought to get close to the *lifeworlds* of the practitioners. That is, to understand their lived experiences of, and situated praxis with the CE technology. At the same time, I wanted to understand how these ‘local’, micro-occurrences were entangled with, and embedded within, the greater context of organisational practice, so as to understand how strategy accomplishment was shaped. I was thus guided by Nicolini’s (2012; pp.219-240) notions of ‘zooming in’ and then ‘zooming out’ (see also Nicolini, 2009):

First ... we zoom in on the details of the accomplishment of a practice in a specific place to make sense of the local accomplishment of the practice ... This is followed by, and alternated with, a zooming out movement through which we expand the scope of the observation following the trails of connections between practices and their products (p.219).

To connect these working principles with my posthuman, sociomaterial thinking, my approach was also somewhat influenced by Humphries & Smith’s (2014) ‘post-social, object narrative’ perspective. This considers two interwoven domains that allow us to think methodologically about the role of objects in the field: ‘object materiality’ and ‘object practice’. In the former case, ‘Objects establish relations with users through their materiality’ specifically. In the latter case, ‘objects’ also more broadly ‘participate in practices with people and forge layers of biographical strata that are interwoven with our own life stories’ (p.491). Accordingly, I sought to *zoom in* on the way everyday lived experience and praxis of individual practitioners was shaped through their relations with the specific materialities of the technology. I then wanted to *zoom out* to acquire a



view of how these same human-technology relations structured the wider webs of strategy practice.

These dual objectives informed my approaches to both data collection and analysis (described in full in Sections 4.5 and 4.6, respectively). Accordingly, I worked with individual participants to collect their unfolding work-life stories (narratives of practices) which provided the material to zoom in on specific instances of their experiences and praxis, and then zoom out within the broader stories of the work lives. Also, to enhance this broader picture, I also observed strategy, planning, training and operational meetings between practitioners, and collected secondary data in the form of documentary materials. Correspondingly, as I will describe, my analysis zoomed in on data ‘hots spots’ (MacLure, 2013) which revealed instances of expressed resistance. These hot spots then became hubs for analytically zooming out to understand how these instances were embedded (or constituted) within wider practice and flows of power.

#### **4.5. Data collection**

I introduced NAP as a methodology in Section 4.2.1. In this current section, after first describing the study participants, I will detail the specific NAP data collection procedures adopted, together with supplementary data forms, under four headings: 1) Narratives of practices: The interview process, 2) ‘Object interviews’: Inviting technology to ‘participate’ in the narratives, 3) Supplementary narrative data, 4) Field observations as additional context for the narratives, and 5) Supportive documents and other materials. Table 6 summarises these various sets of data.

##### **4.5.1. Study participants**

The primary participants in my study spanned the main commercial functions within the Local Office. These individuals all thus had some degree of involvement in the local accomplishment of strategy, and included both managers (e.g., Rouleau et al., 2015) and ‘frontline’ workers (e.g., Balogun, Best, et al., 2015). Specifically, this core group included the Country Manager, the National Sales Manager (later Key Account Manager), the Product & Marketing Manager, the National Hospital Sales Lead, the Sales & Marketing Administrator, and two Sales Representatives. Further information on these participants is provided in Table 7. Personal, identifying details are omitted to maintain confidentiality<sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>40</sup> This local operating affiliate of Lorum was small in size, and this group of participants together accounted for over 90% of its employees. Other functions, such as finance, information technology and human resources were either run as ‘core services’ from the Corporate Office, or were outsourced.

I sought to gain a very detailed understanding of how the CE technology shaped the lifeworlds of these specific individuals, and so they were the main source of my ‘narratives of practices’, as will be explained further below. I worked closely with this team throughout the 10-month period of the study. In *zooming out*, my fieldwork also included a *broader set of practitioners* within the larger organisation, as I was invited to observe meetings and workshops that the primary participants had with the Corporate Office. These practitioners included, as examples, global product team members, geographic divisional heads, representatives of the Corporate digital taskforce and CE training teams. Further, workshops also included sales and marketing staff from other countries in which Lorum had offices. I describe this fieldwork component in more detail below.

**Table 6: Summary of data sources**

Approach	Details	Data collected
Narratives of practices	– Guided interviews with primary participants	– 62 interviews – 38 hours of audio-recording
	– Participant diaries	– 125 diary entries – 7 hours of audio-recording
	– ‘Object interviews’ with main participants	– 12 interviews – 10 hours of audio-recording – 620 photos/screenshots of the software
	– Small group discussions	– 5 meetings – 3 hours total
Field observations as context for narratives of practices	Local Office team meetings – Routine weekly meetings – Quarterly sales meetings Meetings with wider Lorum practitioners (i.e., with Corporate team and others) – Digital strategy rollout meetings – Other local planning meetings – CE platform training and workshop sessions	– Over 100 hours in total – 25 specific CE technology-related meetings (45 hours) – 18 hours of relevant audio-recording
Supportive documents and other materials	– Local Office planning materials (slide presentations and spreadsheets) – Corporate presentations on the Digital Strategy – Corporate Office presentations relating to CE plans for implementation of the CE technology – Training and workshop materials developed by the Corporate Office and their consultants – Select internal emails relating to Digital strategy/CE platform implementation – Corporate Annual Reports and Shareholder reports referring to the Digital Strategy – Media releases relating to the Digital Strategy	– A total of 92 relevant documents

**Table 7: Information on primary participants**

Job title	Role-related responsibilities
Country Manager (CM)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– General management oversight for local commercial operations</li> <li>– Responsible for the operational and financial success of the business.</li> <li>– Reported into the Corporate Office; first- or second-line manager of all participants below.</li> </ul>
Product & Marketing Manager (PMM)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Responsible for national marketing campaigns and business development initiatives.</li> <li>– Collaboration with the Corporate Office to lead new product launches and align local product promotion with global strategic objectives.</li> <li>– Development of promotional materials to support the sales team.</li> <li>– Coordination of local product supply.</li> </ul>
National Hospital Sales Lead (HSL)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Sales responsibility covering large public and private sector hospitals.</li> <li>– Management of senior level business-to-business relations.</li> </ul>
National Sales Manager (NSM); Key Account Manager (KAM)	<p>In initial NSM role:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Direction of all field-based sales activities across the country.</li> <li>– Line management responsibility for territory managers.</li> </ul> <p>In later KAM role:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Sales responsibility for ‘key accounts’</li> <li>– This involved business-to-business relations with community health providers, healthcare professional groups/colleges, medical training establishments, etc.</li> </ul>
Sales Representatives (x2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Sales responsibility for specific geographic areas (territories).</li> <li>– Coordination of regular visits (sales calls) with customers to promote and educate them on the company’s products.</li> </ul>
Sales & Marketing Administrator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Provision of administrative support for the local business</li> <li>– Specific support to the sales and marketing teams, e.g., ordering and purchasing of products and services to support promotional activities, booking meeting and conference venues.</li> </ul>

#### *4.5.2. Narratives of practices: The main interview process*

Rouleau (2015)’s approach to data collection was based on a cross-sectional study of strategic change, and participants were interviewed several times during the course of her fieldwork. In contrast, the focused, single-case, longitudinal nature of my research supported (and warranted) an extended programme of multiple interviews with participants. For the first six months of the project, I met most participants once every one to two weeks to collect their narratives. Thereafter, the frequency of meetings dropped to every 2-4 weeks. Overall, I met the Territory Managers less frequently than others, given that they were not office-based and had challenging schedules. Here, I followed the guidance of the Country Manager who helped set up interviews with these individuals to align with their visits to the main office. Interviews were audio-recorded, and some were transcribed (as described later in Section 4.6 on data analysis). Interviews varied in duration,

from 20 minutes to 90 minutes; most were less than 60 minutes. In total I collected 38 hours of interview recordings (not including the extensive diary recordings and ‘object interviews’ which I discuss below), collected over total 62 interview episodes (see Table 6, p.116).

I also kept a spreadsheet log of all these meetings. Shortly after each meeting I used this to record the date, participant details and meeting duration. I also included notes on the topics covered, my initial thoughts and reflections, and points to consider as probes or prompts in future meetings. I also made a note of any documents that the participant may have referred to in the meeting, together with filenames if these documents were shared with me. This log allowed me to maintain a complete and cross-referenced summary of data.

In keeping with the guidance of Balogun, Beech, et al. (2015), in the first two to three interviews I sought to understand the practitioners’ professional histories and managerial backgrounds to help situate my understanding of their current work, in a manner theoretically in keeping with the temporality of being-in-world. The aim here was to understand their life trajectory and the experiences that have shaped them; that is to provide insights into the historical embeddedness of their praxis. These early meetings took the form of semi-structured interviews supported by cues and probes. However, as the study progressed, these meetings were increasingly shaped by the participants as they took control over their unfolding narratives, and updated me on recent events in their work lives. These were relatively open conversations to identify the themes that were *most meaningful to them*, allowing them to anchor their accounts to specific events and aspects of praxis that had relevance and importance within their lifeworlds. Here I was also guided by Hollway & Jefferson (2013) who emphasise the importance of free association in narrative data collection. That is, allowing the participant free rein to talk about what comes to mind (within the target scope of the interview), and so gain access to ‘the kind of narrative that is not structured according to conscious logic, but according to unconscious logic’ (ibid, p.34), and which thus helps uncover the pre-reflective dispositions and habits of action that are shaped through their practices (Chia & Holt, 2005; Sandberg & Dall’Alba, 2009). My role here was to facilitate the interview, where necessary, to keep the narrative ‘on topic’, to seek further clarity where needed, and to invite the participant to dig more deeply into specific topics that were evocative and meaningful for them in the context of the unfolding research.

As noted in Section 4.4, as my fieldwork progressed, I paid increasing empirical attention to instances of expressed resistance as ‘hot spots’. This meant that, at times, I was collecting narrative data that seemed affective for the participants (cf. Harding et al., 2017). To ensure sensitive

handling of such information, I confirmed with participants that they were happy for the data and quotes to be used in my work. This was, of course, in addition to 1) keeping data secure and confidential, and 2) the use of pseudonyms in my presentation of findings. Importantly, the participants made it clear to me that they found the process to be cathartic and productive, supporting them in reflecting upon and ‘opening up’ about issues within their team.<sup>41</sup> This openness was also encouraged by the Country Manager (Table 7) throughout the study.

#### 4.5.3. ‘Object interviews’: Inviting technology to ‘participate’ in the narratives of practices

Over the first 4-6 weeks of the study, participants’ narratives included stories of their broader work beyond the CE platform (which at this time was only just being introduced into the Local Office). This allowed me to gain a detailed, ‘close-with’ (Balogun, Beech, et al., 2015) appreciation of their everyday work. Importantly it also provided a foundation from which to consider how their lifeworlds then, over time, became reshaped through their increasing involvements with the technology. Thus, as the study progressed, the conversations became more tightly focused on their direct experiences with the technology, as the corporate expectations of its use became clearer and more explicit. During some of the sessions (midway through the study period), participants would open up their laptops, and take me through the functions of the software, relating specific stories of how they had been using it in their practice. This further deepened my understanding of how these practitioners *encountered* the technology in the work, how their experiences and praxis were influenced through their involvements with it, and how the specific affordances and materialities of the software played a role in this.

Over the course of the study, I conducted a total of 12 such interviews—in addition to the 62 primary narrative interviews already mentioned—yielding 10 hours of audio recording; Table 6, p.116), Over the course of these episodes, I also took over 600 photos or screenshots of the various software views that were shown to me (Table 6, p.116). The purpose of these artefacts was not to act as a singular source of data for systematic analysis. Rather, they added a richness of context to deepen my understanding of these human–technology involvements during analysis. Towards this end, I was able to time-match the audio-recordings with the photos to support their contemporaneous review. Borrowing a term adopted by scholars of materiality, I refer to these particular meetings as ‘object interviews’ to capture how the participants unfolding narrative is constitutively entangled with the technology (Adams & Thompson, 2011; 2016; 2020; Woodward,

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<sup>41</sup> Note that I also discuss this in terms of issues of *critical performativity* in Chapter 7, Section 7.4.2.

2001; 2016, 2019; Thompson & Adams, 2013, 2020). According to Adams & Thompson (2020, p.251), this post-human, sociomaterial use of ‘interview’:

[R]efers back to its etymological roots. It is derived from the old French verbal noun *s’entrevoir* and literally means, ‘to see each other, visit each other briefly, have a glimpse of’. For our purposes then, to ‘interview an object’ involves catching glimpses of the technology in action, as it mediates the perceptions and gestures of its human employer and as it associates and performs with human and other nonhuman actors.

In my study, this notion of the ‘interview’ is indicative of how the participants were immersed in a real context-of-use during these particular episodes, and how the technology was *invited* to participate (Adams & Thompson 2016), and so to provoke or elicit meaningful responses that showed me how the human and material were co-involved (Woodward, 2001, 2016). During these sessions, for example, participants might remark when an aspect of the technology frustrated what they were aiming to achieve while trying to demonstrate its use to me. This would then trigger specific recollections of previous episodes of their technology-mediated work that would enhance their narrative and offer deeper insights. So, through these entangled subject-object involvements, the CE software exerted agency in the interview (Woodward 2016) as a co-participant or even hybrid participant relationally bound up with the human practitioner (Adams & Thompson, 2016; Michael, 2004). This notion of ‘object interviewing’ is thus in keeping with the relational philosophy of this thesis which, through the narratives of practices approach, further enriched my appreciation of the technologically mediated lifeworlds of the participants (Verbeek, 2005).

#### *4.5.4. Supplementary narratives of practices data*

Biographical methods generally, and narratives of practices specifically, ‘offer multiple possibilities for collecting and analysing data’ and so support a mixture of methods (Rouleau, 2015, p.465; Eide, 2012). Thus, in addition to the narrative interviews with individuals, I also took part in a number of small-group discussions which included two to four of these main participants at a time<sup>42</sup>. These occurred in the later months of the study, once trusting relations had been firmly established. This was a practice suggested by the Country Manager who appreciated that the previous interviews had provided benefits to her team, affording cathartic opportunities for them to reflect on their work and the effects of the CE technology rollout. This manager believed that

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<sup>42</sup> The number of participants was kept small. This was requested by the Country Manager in order to limit impact on staff schedules.

allowing her team to discuss and ‘bounce their thoughts off each other’ would be helpful for their reflective practice as well as for my research. Indeed, I found these sessions to be particularly productive as a dialectic process of insight generation: the observations vocalised by one team member would stimulate further discussion across the group. This enriched my dataset, revealing insights into their experiences that they may not have emerged in the one-one-one interview setting, where I was reliant on the free-flow of thoughts from the individual participant with recollections triggered solely through a minimal use of probes and prompts. I acknowledge that such group processes such as these carry with them potential biases for data collection. However, overall, data collected in this way formed a relatively small (but meaningful) component of the narratives of practices dataset (see Table 6, p.116). Insights gleaned in this manner were thus always embedded—and so could be checked for consistency—within the broader evidential context of the individual practitioner stories.

To further supplement my narrative dataset, I also invited participants to collect supplementary data in the form of practitioner diaries (e.g., Balogun, 2003; Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Hope, 2010). The aim here was to yield close-to real time accounts of meaningful experiences *during* their routine work (that is, proximal to their actual praxis), as well as provide further opportunities for participants to reflect on their interactions with the technology in their own time. Three participants initially agreed to keep diaries. However, two of them found it preferable to write brief notes of experiences they wished to bring to their interviews rather than to maintain a formal diary. The third maintained a diary throughout the study, but their preference was to audio-record their thoughts and reflections rather than to write them down. I supplied a digital recorder for this purpose, and I saved a copy of the recordings onto my computer after each of my meetings with them. I provided some guidance on points for the participant to consider when recording diary entries to keep ‘on-topic’, to encourage participation, and to prompt them to reflect. However, the participant had complete control over this aspect of data gathering, deciding when and how often they recorded a diary entry. Data from these diary entries also provided stimulus for specific probes as the broader interview programme unfolded. I found that these interviews help both to clarify diary entries and provide new information. Although only one participant agreed to continue with diary work, I emphasise that diaries were a *supplementary* rather than a mandatory source of narrative data in the study (see Rouleau, 2015). I collected 7 hours of diary data comprising 125 entries over the 10-month period (Table 6, p.116). Thus, in total,

this provided me with 58 hours of narratives of practices data (i.e., interviews, group discussions and diaries).

#### *4.5.5. Field observations as additional context*

Fieldwork also included observations of routine Local Office meetings (e.g., Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008) as part of *zooming out* on practice. These data were not collected to reveal fine-grained details of the lifeworlds of practitioners disclosed in these meetings, but rather but to more broadly understand, for example: 1) how the technology embodied the strategy of the larger international organisation, 2) how it became related with extant managerial practices, and 3) how this connected with practitioners' work at the 'frontline'. Broadly, these research episodes took one of two forms. First, I was invited to observe local meetings between the main research participants (see Table 7 p.117). These related to the strategic priorities and expectations that were being set for the Local Office business, the planning and organisation of ongoing sales and marketing activities, as well as the implementation of the CE technology as part of the broader digital strategy being rolled out across the global organisation. The participants and I were familiar with each other at this point (given ongoing, regular interviews). My role in this episodes was therefore in keeping with that of participant-as-observer, according to Gold's (1958) typology.<sup>43</sup>

Second, as introduced earlier, I was invited to observe (i.e., as a non-participant; or 'complete observer' as per Gold, 1958), a range of meetings coordinated with the Corporate Office. All these sessions were run remotely via web-based 'cloud conferencing' software. These were largely educationally focused episodes aimed at training local teams on the use of the software, setting expectations around the implementation of the technology to support sales and marketing objectives, and to provide updates on the technical and procedural aspects of the technology rollout. I also observed three 5-hour long workshops where practitioners worked with consultants to discuss the technologies practical use, and to conduct CE planning simulations. In the latter case, virtual 'break-out' rooms were used: individuals were put into teams to work through tasks, defined by the facilitators, that simulated 'real-world' application of the software.

Overall, I attended over 100 hours of meetings (see Table 6, p.116) which provided valuable context and insights into the workings of the Local Office, the broader corporate environment, and

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<sup>43</sup> Such a degree of growing familiarity of course has consequences for the researcher. In terms of my reflexivity, my comments in Section 4.4.1 above (in relation to my partial insider status) are relevant here. I also consider reflexive issues associated with 'critical performativity' in Chapter 7.



the work lives of participants. More specifically, 25 of these meetings had content that was directly relevant to the CE technology (45 hours in total). Of these, local in-person meetings between the main participants were audio-recorded (18 hours of recordings) and field notes were taken during the sessions (Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2011; Yin, 2014). As these meetings were not always fully dedicated to discussing the use of the CE software and related technology, some parts were less relevant than others to my study. However, all meetings provided valuable contextual insights. Remote, web-based meetings were not audio recorded, but field notes were taken. These remote meetings often acted as milestone events for the Local Office team. And so, frequently, news and updates from these sessions would then become a focus for the next round of narratives of practices interviews.

#### ***4.5.6. Supportive documents and other materials***

Finally, documents were collected to provide additional insights. As per Balogun et al. (2015), these supported the research ‘through contextualization of understandings’ (ibid, p. 1292). They therefore helped to deepen my appreciation of the situated praxis of Local Office workers as they dealt with the challenges associated with the new digital strategy<sup>44</sup>. Broadly, these included: 1) strategy and planning-related documents such as slide-sets developed by the Corporate Office teams to articulate aspects of strategic objectives and initiatives, including information on the global digital strategy and the CE software’s place in this context; 2) training documents, audio-visual recordings and web pages relating to the technical use of the software and relevant managerial procedures and processes; 3) artefacts associated with the actual strategy tools/technologies that were used by the practitioners in conjunction with the CE software, for example spreadsheets and slide presentations; and 4) internal communicative media: e.g., intranet pages and emails. A summary of the various forms of documentation is provided in Table 6, p.116.

#### **4.6. Data analysis**

Rouleau (2015, p.465) emphasises flexibility in how narratives of practices data are analysed, and offers no specific prescription. Indeed, a wide variety of approaches can be adopted for analysing narrative data generally (see e.g., Bold, 2012; Fraser, 2004; Hunter, 2010; Riessman, 1993; Rodríguez-Dorans & Jacobs, 2020, among many others, for discussions). I aimed towards

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<sup>44</sup> These secondary sources were not used as primary material for the analyses below, which drew on the NAP data. However, I referred to them when appropriate to provide context and I cite relevant sources in the study findings (Chapter 5).

presenting findings as ‘textwork’ (Jarzabkowski et al., 2014) which is consistent with other SAP work adopting narrative approaches to study the praxis of strategy implementation and how practitioners cope with accompanying change (e.g., Balogun, Beech, et al., 2015; Balogun, Best, et al., 2015; Dunford & Jones 2000; Rouleau, 2005; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011; Smets, Jarzabkowski, et al., 2015; Sonenshein 2010; Vaara & Tienari, 2011). Working towards this aim, analysis was abductive and was influenced by materiality-focused and posthuman scholars (e.g., Adams & Thompson, 2016; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014; Woodward 2019)<sup>45</sup>. The overall process involved iterative steps (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018), with three broad stages: 1) gaining familiarity through immersion within the overall dataset; 2) abductively zooming in on theoretically and empirically relevant fragments; and 3) zooming out from these fragments, in a further abductive process directed towards the construction of focused narratives which *revealed* the findings in the form of textwork. These three stages are elaborated further below, and I talk more about textwork in Section 4.8.

#### ***4.6.1. Stage 1: Data familiarisation and organisation***

Initial analysis aimed towards my familiarisation with the breadth and depth of the data, while also organising it into a manageable form for more specific analysis. I first immersed myself in the data, listening and re-listening to every one of the NAP-related audio-recordings multiple times during the course of data collection and afterwards. As I did this, I expanded upon my original notes to capture additional ideas and reflections as this understanding deepened, referring also to documentary sources, and photos and screenshots of the software modules as needed.

Given the large body of data obtained (particularly given the very open nature of the narrative interview process), this preliminary stage also required that I organise, condense or focus in upon it in some way, so as to make it manageable (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011, p.9; Harding, 2017, p.1214). Before zooming in on the specific phenomena of resistance and struggles (see below), the study originally set out with the broad and exploratory ambition of understanding how technologies of control shape strategy practice. On this basis, I was thus able to focus the dataset by prioritising those recordings that were most relevant to this objective. These were transcribed so

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<sup>45</sup> I recognise that previous studies of power (e.g., Laine & Vaara; Mantere & Vaara, 2008) typically apply forms of discourse analysis (inspired by Foucauldian/poststructuralist theory). However, I wished to ‘bring together’ the social and material of the actor’s stories and therefore sought this different approach. Of note, the methodological ideas of Jackson & Mazzei (2012), St. Pierre & Jackson (2014) are also informed by Foucault as well as later poststructuralist thinkers such as Deleuze.

that I could both listen and read in parallel during analysis. I emphasis *listening* here, as this was vital to my sensitivity to the affective aspects of the narratives that led me to the ‘hot spots’ that I will refer to in stage 2 of my analysis below. I made brief summary notes of those that were not directly relevant, which allowed me to easily refer back to them if needed to provide additional context. To provide a condensed picture of the software technology and so aid in data organisation, I also wrote brief summaries of the various modules: their purpose, which included *who* used them, and *how* they were used in practice. In keeping with Holloway & Jefferson’s (2013) *Gestalt* principle, these summaries helped me to keep my eye on the ‘whole’ as I delved into the detail, and they were reworked as my iterative readings continued, and as my understanding of the data deepened<sup>46</sup>.

Over the course of this immersive process, this integration of narrative data, analytical notes, documents and materials *became* the dataset: a *Gestalt* or holistic process (Holloway & Jefferson, 2013) whereby my understanding of the whole narrative was continuously reshaped through re-reading the parts, and the parts through a developing understanding of emerging whole (see also Mills et al, 2012). This initial, exploratory analysis proceeded somewhat in parallel with data collection as I made sense of recordings, readings and observations over the fieldwork period, and thus as I started to identify interesting patterns of narrative during my repeated visits to the firm. This recognised that—in qualitative, longitudinal interpretative research such as this—data collection and data analysis are not (completely) distinct events but are pragmatically intertwined (e.g., Bold, 2012).

#### **4.6.2. Stage 2: An abductive process of zooming in on resistance**

In this stage (and in stage 3 which follows), I moved between the empirical data and relevant theory to deepen my analytical immersion (Balogun et al., 2015; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011; Langley 1999). In this process I was influenced by the abductive perspectives of Mats Alvesson (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011; Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018) as well as those of critical, posthuman/

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<sup>46</sup> It should be noted that this technology/artefact-focused summary can be compared but also contrasted with the ‘pen portraits’ adopted by Holloway & Jefferson (2013) which focus on the human agent (see also Smith, Simpson, Madill, 2021, p 4). Focusing on aspects of the technology as the ‘subjects’ of the ‘portraits’ rather than the human participants, pushed me to ‘follow the material’ and decentre the human (Humphries & Smith, 2014; Woodward, 2020). This is in keeping with posthuman approaches to materiality research (see also Adams & Thompson, 2011, 2016, 2020; Holmes, 2019; Thompson & Adams, 2013, 2020; Woodward 2019) and it provided me with a second perspective on the data that ‘cut across’ the human-centred narratives generated by the participants.

poststructuralist scholars (e.g., Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; MacLure, 2013; St Pierre, 2016; St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014). Thus, I embraced ‘the fusion of theory and empirical material’ (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011, p.3), ‘seeing the latter as a source of inspiration and as a partner for critical dialogue’ rather than it being ‘a guide to or as the ultimate validator for knowledge claims’ (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011, p.10). In my analysis, abduction was therefore not simply an alternation between theory and empirics but one ‘between (empirically-laden) theory and (theory-laden) empirical “facts”’ (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018, p.7). Considered in this way, theory—in essence—can be thought of as a *form of data* that is worked together with the empirics (Brinkmann, 2012, 2014), as an analytical entanglement of ‘plugging data into theory into data as they constitute each other’ (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014, p.717) or ‘reading-the-data-while-thinking-the-theory’ (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p.4; see also Mazzei, 2014, p.742). Data and theory (in a multiplicity of forms) are ontologically and epistemologically levelled as co-components of a dynamic assemblage, where new territories of knowledge can be claimed (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p.1, citing Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

Accordingly, in Stage 2, my continued analytical work occurred as if Verbeek (2005) was ‘reading over [my] shoulder’ (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p.7) while thinking his postphenomenology. His mediation theory thus became an epistemologically vital, interwoven part of my data workings, providing an ontological anchor and the conceptual vocabulary to open a dialogue with the empirics. Thus, I was drawn to instances in the participants’ stories where the CE technology shaped how they were *present in-their-worlds* as experiencing subjects. I noticed that practitioners would often talk about their involvements with the technology in ways that suggested it affected how they thought about their role, their sense of purpose, their priorities, how they interacted with others, and how they performed their work. In many cases, these instances resonated and ‘stood out’ from the rest of the data as particularly meaningful.

Working closely with posthuman and related materialist principles, I came to recognise these as data ‘hot spots’ (MacLure, 2013) marked by ‘affective relations to data that both “disconcert” and create a sense of “wonder”—where data “glows” for the researcher in various moments of fieldwork, analysis, and beyond’ (Ringrose & Reynolds, 2014, p.773). More specifically, I adopted Harding et al.’s (2017) analytical use of such hotspots to identify analytically meaningful moments of *expressed resistance* where the practitioner responds to challenges to self-hood, constituting themselves as a resistor “within and through the acts of saying ‘no’ to such challenges” (ibid,

p.1225)<sup>47</sup>. In my analysis, such instances of resistance in my data resonated as affective moments both for me and the participant. The latter was evident in their tone and mood, sometimes revealing frustration or cynicism as they talked about their technology mediated work. As indicated above, *listening* to the audio recordings was crucial here. In the former case, I also felt some level of discomfort (even on re-listening to the recordings), not due to any awkward flow of discourse, but because I could also *feel* their frustration, both as a responsive co-participant in their unfolding narrative and as a reflexive practitioner who could imagine ‘being in their shoes’. Indeed, as a strategy practitioner I would sense these moments as indicative of breakdowns in their local ability to *make the strategy work*. This accords with Rouleau’s (2015) notion of narratives of practices as ‘co-construction[s]’, shaped through the developing and deepening relationship between participant and researcher (ibid, p.464).

*Zooming in* on these hot spots, and seeking to understand them further, I consulted broader literature on how subjectivities are shaped in strategy implementation and strategic change. This led me to the corpus on power in strategy, and then to the notion of struggles, and then—more specifically—to the idea of *struggles over subjectivities* (as reviewed in the previous chapter). It became clear from my readings (while also plugging in mediation theory) that these empirical signs of resistance to the effects of the technology (as an embodiment of strategy) could be considered in terms of subjectivity-shaping technological mediations. These hot spots thus became the central points for then *zooming out* across the dataset to understand these phenomena further. Note that, in the Appendix B (p.252), I briefly compare the idea of data hot spots with traditional (and of course, well-established) coding-based analysis. My aim there is to help justify the suitability of my approach in the context of my study rather than to suggest it is in any way ‘better’ than coding.

#### **4.6.3. Stage 3: Zooming out and plugging in**

As indicated above, these hot spots became the central points from which I could then *zoom out* through the data. My aim here was to trace the broader web of relations that were at play in constituting struggles over subjectivities. In keeping with extant thinking on human–technology

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<sup>47</sup> Within the context of their study, Harding et al.’s (2017) hot spots relate to acts of resistance that are performed in response to challenges to self-hood that occur *within* the interview setting. While I recognise these ‘moment-to-moment’ (ibid, p.1215) in situ performances, given the reflective, biographic nature of the narratives of practices approach, I viewed such hot spots as a broader expressions of resistance embedded within the unfolding lifeworld stories of the participants.

entanglements, the hot spots thus offered experientially rich ‘little stories’ or ‘local petits récits serv[ing] as entry-points to further analysis of the materialities’ of practice (Thompson & Adams, 2013, p.354; see also Adams & Thompson, 2016, pp.24-25). Said differently, the hot spots acted as phenomenologically meaningful ‘anchor points’ from which to trace sociomaterial links and associations outwards through and between the data sources (Hollway & Jefferson, 2001, pp.112-120; 2013, pp.67-71; Michael, 2004, p.14).

This process of tracing links was facilitated by my growing familiarisation with both the detail and ‘whole’ of the data. The interviews, diaries and meetings were the primary sources for this process. I then turned to documentary sources to enrich the picture. With analysis proceeding in this way, I was able to draw in data from across the various sources to develop specific narratives that revealed the flows of power and resistance that were established in relation to the CE technology over time. As introduced above, zooming out was also done abductively, also applying the posthuman idea of ‘plugging in’ to keep ‘analysis and knowledge production on the move’ (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014, p.717; see also Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; Mazzei, 2014). So, as I worked ‘outwards’ from the hot spots, tracing the flows of power–resistance, I was able to gain deeper empirical insight into the sociomaterial relations of praxis through which their subjectivities were challenged. I will expand upon this in Section 4.7 below, which previews the analytical framework that I will levy in the presentation of findings.

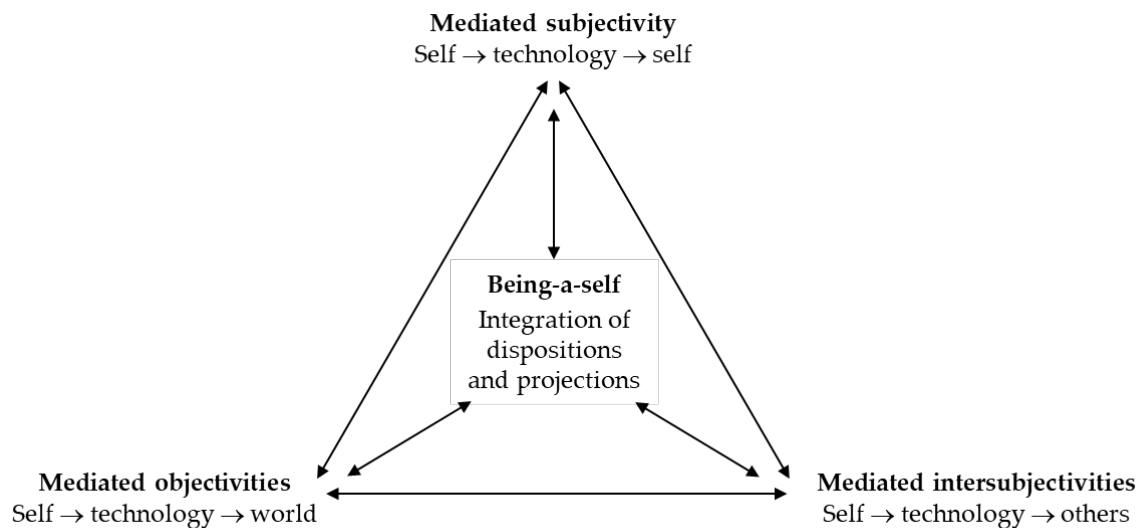
While initially anchored in the hot spots, this abductive process was dynamic and unfolding as relevant and meaningful parts of the stories were traced and woven together with each other and with the theory: some developing narratives merged with others, and some broke apart or were transformed. Through this analytical process, my findings ultimately ‘coalesced into a [set of] composite picture[s]’ (Balogun, Bartunek, et al., 2015; p.964) where empirics and theory were mutually productive. These pictures became centred upon four of the key actors at the Local Office, for whom the richest and most detailed stories emerged from the analysis. These actors were (pseudonymously): Sarah, the Country Manager; Hannah, the National Sales Manager (later Key Account Manager); Caitlyn, the Product & Marketing Manager, and James, the National Hospital Sales Lead (Table 7, p.117).

#### **4.7. A relational framework derived from abductive analysis**

Abductive analysis (plugging data into theory and theory into data) revealed three human–technology relational elements that shaped subject constitution:

1. *Technology mediated objectivities*. Relations with the technology (re)present experienced aspects of the world to the actor (by virtue of the composite intentionality that the technology contributes towards). This can be represented by the postphenomenological relational formalism:  $Self \rightarrow technology \rightarrow world$  (cf. Table 4, p.80).
2. *Technology mediated intersubjectivities*. Through relations with the technology, the actor has (re)structured relations with others. Said differently: the technology mediates *being-with-others* such that it is experienced differently, as per the formalism:  $Self \rightarrow technology \rightarrow others$ .
3. *Technology mediated subjectivity/subjectivities*. The actor's relation with the technology confronts them with a (new or different) subjectivity that challenges their own sense of self as the subject they 'see themselves' as being. This is indicated by the formalism:  $Self \rightarrow technology \rightarrow self$ .

Together, as immanent within flows of power–resistance, these three elements were seen to shape the nature of the self (*being-a-self* as a thrown projection in Figure 1). These conceptual ideas will be expanded upon empirically in the narratives. However, it should be recognised that they are, of course, entangled and co-constitutive. To borrow from Barad (2007), they *intra-act* rather than interact, and are distinguished here for analytical purposes, rather than to (mis)claim their ontological distinction as 'antecedents' or 'drivers' of subject constitution.



**Figure 1: Framework for articulating the struggles over subjectivities in the findings**

Related to this, I emphasise that—in keeping with the non-linear fluidity of the abductive process of plugging in—this framework was *not derived first* from the analysis, and then adopted as an *a priori* structure for the narratives. Rather, it was *derivative of the back-and-forth work* of reading-

data-through-theory-and-theory-through-data that informed both my findings and the articulation of concepts as they were presented in Chapter 3. The process of *analytic writing* (Brinkmann, 2012, p.14) therefore ‘revealed’ the organising elements in Figure 1 as much as these elements shaped (while also seeming to endure across) the developing narratives. Consequently, the narratives aim to *show* the framework’s meaningfulness as much as they *also draw on* the framework as part of ‘plugging in’ the theory. As already indicated in the previous chapter, the empirical story and theoretical exposé are thus co-constitutive within the narratives, and I draw reference to the elements in Figure 1 throughout to make them concrete and demonstrate their entanglement. Drawing on this analytical framework, and informed by the notion of ‘textwork’ (Van Maanen, 2011), the findings were crafted as a variant of the ‘composite narrative’ (Jarzabkowski et al., 2014) as discussed in the next section below. Importantly, and referring back to Section 4.4 above, this way of presenting findings is in keeping with the ‘Comprehensive’ approach to SAP research design (Abdallah et al., 2017) that I align with. Thus, whereas ‘Classical’ and ‘Expanded’ approaches ‘are adorned with sophisticated tables, data displays, multiple order categories, and complex recursive models that unfortunately [sic] functionalize, decontextualize, and objectify these intricate weavings’ (ibid, p340), the ‘Comprehensive’ approach requires ‘[m]ore subjective, narrative, and interpretive analyses [...] to capture in a subtler way the ‘touch and smell’ of practice (ibid, citing Nicolini, 2012).

#### **4.8. Presentation of findings as textwork**

Composite narratives are forms of ‘textwork’ that knit together extracts from field data in order to construct findings (Jarzabkowski et al., 2014; see also Van Maanen, 2011 and Wertz et al., 2011). Composite narratives bring actors, incidents and events together to reveal ‘patterns or dynamics found across multiple observations through one particularly vivid, unified tale’ (p.281). Composite narratives are particularly helpful in research involving single in-depth cases with extensive and diverse data (Balogun, Bartunek, et al., 2015). Furthermore, they support collation and analysis of the multiple, distributed, unfolding stories that are typical of periods marked by strategic and organisational change (e.g., Vaara & Tienari 2011; Plowman, et al., 2007), and provide effective longitudinal constructions of observations, experiences, understandings and meanings (cf. Langley, 1999). Composite narratives have thus been applied to present findings in a variety of SAP studies focusing on how the work of actors across different levels of organisations is shaped by strategy (e.g., Balogun, Bartunek, et al., 2015; Dunford & Jones 2000, Smets, Jarzabkowski, et al., 2015; Sonenshein, 2010).



Importantly, composite narratives do not aim to provide 'objective' accounts of specific incidents or events, which would be incongruous with the ontology and epistemology adopted in this thesis. They aim, rather, to present evocative, empirically rich stories of praxis collected from across the corpus of data 'in a rich "slice-of-life" fashion that remains unfragmented in order to make the tale as meaningful as possible for the reader' (Jarzabkowski et al., 2014, p.281; see also Lê & Schmid, 2020). This is helpful for two reasons. First, a single narrative can be structured so as to be fully revelatory of the concepts at stake in the study findings, which has communicative power (ibid). Second, in commercially sensitive research settings (such as the one in the present study), they allow for anonymisation of discrete, potentially identifiable details, habits and actions while still providing rich descriptions of situated experience and praxis that are fully grounded in the data (ibid). Composite narratives in strategy studies most commonly collate data from participants to build a picture of wider social practice. In my study, consistent with the narratives of practices approach, I focus in on the *individual* stories of the participants. Hence, I adopt a *variant* of the typical composite narrative, focusing on longitudinal development of subjectivities, rather than on broader practice. The individual stories, of course, overlap, but my aim is to provide rich depictions of practitioners' lifeworlds, establishing them as characters in their own right, and elaborating their stories in a scene-by-scene account that richly presents their lived experiences (Abdallah, 2018). Thus, the quality of findings presented in this manner, is evidenced by '[c]redible and authentic storytelling' that is 'made accessible to the reader' (Jarzabkowski et al., 2014, p.284). This idea accords with Wertz et al.'s (2011) interpretative phenomenological thinking on such ways of presenting research:

The composite is not a simple re-telling. It is interpretation by the researcher in several important ways: through her knowledge of the literature regarding the phenomenon under enquiry, through listening and hearing the stories told by the informants, and through her own reflexivity during the process. [...It] tells something that connects with universal human qualities so that the reader can relate personally to the themes; is a story that readers can imagine in a personal way; attempts to contribute to new understanding about the phenomenon; and is not exhaustive, but allows the topic to be seen more clearly. It aims to illuminate, to allow the reader to have an increased sense of contact with the phenomenon without fully possessing it. (ibid, pp.2-3)

The narratives that I will present make frequent use of participant quotes. In many cases these are expanded to take on the form of a complementary form of textwork referred to in empirical

phenomenology and related posthuman studies of technology as an ‘anecdote’<sup>48</sup> (Adams & Thompson, 2011, 2016, 2020; Adams & van Manen, 2017; Thompson & Adams, 2013, 2020; see also van Manen, 2014, pp.250-260). In keeping with the thesis’ philosophical foundations, I specifically used this form of textwork to *show* something of a practitioner’s lifeworld by offering to the reader an affective encounter with their subjectivities, crafting them within the flow of the text to help reveal the story of the actor (Crowther et al., 2016). Indeed, I shaped anecdotes around some of the specific hot spots mentioned above, rendering a sense of how the observations (as hotspots) came ‘alive’ for me as the researcher (see Section 4.6, Stage 2 above). In my findings, this also gives a sense for how the unfolding composite narrative is anchored in the data observations, and provides concrete accounts of how the presence of the technology shaped practitioners experiences. In doing so, the anecdotes *attune* the reader to the relations that constitute the practitioner, world and technology, helping to ‘recreate [the] everyday events and situations where both humans and nonhumans participate and have a say’ (Adams & Thompson, 2016, p.27).

The anecdote, in the sense adopted here, aligns with the idea of the ‘vignette’ that has been widely adopted in SAP studies. Vignettes provide short ‘vivid portrayals’ of specific episodes to bring concepts to life for the reader (Jarzabkowski et al., 2014, p.281). They provide evidential weight by providing ‘plausible, vivid, and authentic insights into the life-world of the participants, which enables readers to experience the field, at least partially’ (ibid, p.280). In SAP inquiries, they vary in form and character, and have been used for a range of purposes, to illustrate—for example—practitioners’ work interactions (Balogun, Best, et al., 2015), their conversations (Liu & Maitlis, 2014; Rouleau, 2005; Samra-Fredericks, 2003), humorous episodes in meetings (Jarzabkowski & Le, 2017), patterns of conflict in strategy implementation (Lê & Jarzabkowski, 2015), the use of strategy tools (Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2015), and the routines of strategic sensemaking and sensegiving (Rouleau, 2005). Composite narratives and vignettes (and by extension, anecdotes) are illustratively powerful when used in conjunction to present findings (e.g., Jarzabkowski et al., 2012; Michaud, 2014).

Finally, consistent with the analytical approach discussed (Section 4.6 above), the narrative ‘textwork’ form that I have adopted also *shows* how theory was plugged in to the analysis to enhance and enrich the insights developed. I thus play between empirics and theory to reveal how

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<sup>48</sup> ‘Anecdote’ as a term adopted in such phenomenology inspired research is not in any way used in a pejorative manner to suggest poorly evidenced ‘anecdotal’ data. As indicated below, it is closer to the idea of ‘vignette’.

the two inform and expand upon one another as co-generative of the findings of the analytical process (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). My textwork therefore represents a form of ‘analytic writing’, terminology which ‘stress[es] the idea that good qualitative writing often uses theoretical concepts to analytically unpack the social situations, events and processes that are scrutinised’ (Brinkmann, 2012, p.14). Said differently—in a manner in-keeping with a posthuman, relational philosophy—my writing was really a constitutive *part of* my method of inquiry rather than its terminus (Richardson, 1994; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2018; St. Pierre, 2018). Narrative writing was thus in a continuous state of becoming where the afore described ‘data analysis was writing and thinking and laying out of the field of the text, moving’ (St. Pierre, 2018, p.606) until I finally made the agential cut (Barad, 2003, 2007) seen in the findings-as-textwork presented in the following chapter. As will be evident from the sources for the quotes in these findings, the narratives of practices data became the main source of material for my analysis. Documents were drawn upon to understand the broader digital strategy at Lorum and the Corporate ambition for the CE system. These and wider observations helped contextualise my narratives.

## **Chapter 5:**

### **FINDINGS – SHAPING SUBJECTIVITIES IN RELATION TO TECHNOLOGY’S MEDIATIONS**

## 5.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I present a series of narratives that capture various ways in which subjectivities were shaped through the relations that were established between the frontline workers and the ‘controlling’ technology. These narratives will show how the human actors—as subjects shaped and reshaped through their technological being-in-the-world-with others—were claimed by, but also made a claim on, the mediations of the technology. Thus, the technology mediated the manner in which the world was made present to them and thus how they were present within this world, while, at the same time they *shaped themselves* in relation to these spatial restructurings. Overall, struggles to retain a claim on the self—by productively relating to the technology’s mediations—characterised the flows of power within the context of the local accomplishment of strategy. Resistance was not established *against* the technology or the strategy it embodied, but in relation to the mediations that the technology presented.

This chapter is structured as follows. The first narrative is positioned as a ‘prologue’ (Section 5.2). It introduces the various modules of the CE software with which the focal actors were involved, theoretically positioning them in relation to the postphenomenological notion of ‘technological scripts’ (Section 3.6.1). The main narratives then follow. These are respectively entitled: 1) James’ story: Rejecting the technology to own the potentiality it offers (Section 5.3); 2) Hannah’s story: Seizing an alternative script following a denial of self-as-manager (Section 5.4); 3) Sarah’s story: Subject positions under tension at the corporate-local interface (Section 5.5); and 4) Caitlyn’s story: ‘Re-placing’ the technology to defend the ‘local’ self (Section 5.6). While the narratives are thus presented as discrete units, they also build upon each other empirically, each setting the scene for the next to constitute a larger story of the struggles that take place at Lorum Health, and which all contribute in some way to how strategy was accomplished at the frontline. Also, and in keeping with the abductive approach of plugging in, each narrative to some extent also builds upon the last in terms of theoretical disclosure. Thus, the first narrative develops some of the foundational theoretical insights which are further applied and developed as the narratives progress.

In the narratives, I relate the empirical detail to the concepts in Figure 1 (p.129) by referring to them in bold, italic text. All actors’ names are pseudonyms, and quotes (from documents as well as individual NAP materials) and anecdotes are italicised with the sources in square brackets.

## 5.2. Prologue: The ‘modules’ of the CE software

To help ground the narratives, in this opening section, I describe more about the CE technology and its use. This provides the empirical and theoretical foundation upon which the main stories can then take form.

A driving corporate ambition for the CE system was for it to provide a ‘fully integrated multichannel marketing’ capability. The ultimate objective here was, through advanced data analytics, to be able to understand customers and their preferences, then sequence communications and interactions in the most meaningful way in order to deliver the *‘right message, at the right time, to the right people, using the most appropriate channel to improve the customer’s experience’* [extract from corporate presentation on the digital strategy]. The strategic rationale for this was underpinned by a belief that the same customers were becoming bombarded with sales and marketing communications from across multiple firms. According to Lorum’s external consultants, they were becoming at best *‘confused or deafened’* [quote from consultant’s presentation] from and at worst, frustrated and disengaged from the industry. The claim was that *‘intelligent, multichannel promotion’* would help to *‘cut through the noise’* and deliver competitive advantage for Lorum [ibid]. The various promotional channels—in the context of this ‘multichannel’ CE system—included the typical face-to-face sales interactions with customers, but—through the technology—this was now expanded to include ‘e-channels’ to support the customised distribution of e-brochures (described further below) and emails to the relevant customers through the technology. In addition, on-line promotional and educational *‘e-events’* could also be managed, run and recorded through the CE system.

As introduced in Section 4.3, the CE system consisted of several—distinct but integrated—‘functional modules’ that together supported this multichannel ambition. In the narratives below, four of these are most relevant: 1) the core CRM module, 2) a dashboarding module, 3) the coaching module, 4) the content management module, and 5) the key account management module. I introduce the first four of these below. However, the fifth will not be introduced until the close of Hannah’s story (Section 5.4). This supports the meaningful flow of the narrative as this module’s later ‘launch’ at Lorum was critical to how her subjectivity was shaped.

First, the core CRM module supported the field work of the sales representatives (*‘reps’*) by allowing them to view, manage and monitor their sales territories as visualised (more precisely, virtualised) in the software. The CRM was linked to a large database of healthcare professionals

(as existing and potential customers and clients of Lorum’s Local Office). The local team was responsible for identifying ‘*customer microsegments*’ as tranches of local ‘*target customers*’ according to guidance from the global product team at the Corporate Office. This guidance was informed by market research conducted by this global team who had identified ‘*global segments*’ based upon ‘*user profiles*’ that were seen as strategically important for the growth of the company’s products and services. The local sales and marketing team were tasked with allocating their customers to these priority segments (thus translating ‘*global segments*’ to local ‘*microsegments*’), accounting for local market conditions to customise or ‘*localise*’ the strategy. Sales reps decided on these allocations, supported by ‘*customer profiling surveys*’ set up by the local Product & Marketing Manager (Table 7, p.117). These surveys were run through the CRM module, so that the process of segment allocation and prioritisation was integrated, and such that customers in the database would be electronically ‘*flagged*’ according to their microsegment membership. [Sources: italicised terms in this paragraph are those used frequently at Lorum in interviews, meetings, presentations and documents].

These customers could then be targeted with specific product information that was customised according to their ‘*segment profile*’. Such product information was packaged into ‘*e- brochures*’ that reps could access through their laptops or tablets when they visited a specific customer, enabling them to immediately gain access to the most relevant ‘*product messaging*’. The e-brochures were designed and developed within the ‘*content management module*’ of the CE system. Some ‘*generic content*’ was uploaded into the software by the global brand team. This was ‘*pre-approved content*’ that was ‘*aligned*’ with global product strategy. The local team could adapt this content and add to it, but this would require approval (to not only conform with global ‘*strategic imperatives*’, but also to meet regulatory/ethical requirements, given its use in a healthcare context). The full brochure design and approval process was run within the CE software which was slated as offering a ‘*complete document management solution*’. Full records of document versions, requested changes, and approvals were thus available, and could be subject to internal auditing. [Sources: *ibid*].

These e-brochures had specific ‘*pages*’, each holding a different ‘*message*’. The specific pages shown to the customer (and hence the messages used) during a customer interaction (referred to as a customer ‘*call*’), were automatically saved within the CRM module as a ‘*call record*’. Reps could also record additional information about these calls within this record. To facilitate data collection and analysis by the Corporate Office (see below), the choices of messages that could be recorded

were limited to specific options in a drop-down list. This meant that reps could not record any *‘free text’* information in the CRM. [Sources: *ibid*].

All this information was fed back to the global product management team through the CE system. The Corporate Office’s long-term plan was for this information to be collected for analysis from across multiple different countries to inform iterative cycles of further segmentation and messaging. *‘In-field’* (frontline) sales and marketing interactions would then—again, in the long-term—provide a very expansive source of data for ongoing, *‘market-responsive’* strategies [source: corporate strategy presentation]. The aim here would also be to *‘empower’* local country teams with *‘big data and advanced analytics solutions’* for running customised sales and market operations, which would *‘align’* with a consistent set of global product priorities [source: corporate strategy presentation]. Ultimately, the Corporate Office’s hope was that this could be *‘powered by machine learning and artificial intelligence’* which the CE technology developers were planning to integrate into their systems [source: corporate strategy presentation].

The CE system also included a *‘coaching module’* which was accessible to those Lorum staff who had line-management responsibility for sales reps (e.g., the National Sales Manager, Table 7, p.117). Part of the role responsibility of these managers was to coach the reps and so further develop their sales skills. This module allowed them to record these coaching interactions. The Corporate Office’s aim here was also to steer rep development toward skillsets that were supportive of the new digital strategy. This included: care and good use of relevant hardware (laptops and tablets), appropriate adoption of the relevant CE software modules, good use of e-brochures, contribution to CRM data capture through survey use and call recording, and use of various sales call techniques that were consistent with encouraging *‘digital engagement’* with customers [source: corporate training presentation]. The coaching module thus allowed rep skill development to be recorded over time, according to scores allocated to a fixed set of questions about the rep that related to the skillsets above.

Finally, a *‘dashboarding module’* facilitated *‘integrated reporting’* from across the above modules [source: corporate training presentation]. Thus, relevant information could be presented to the various levels of seniority, up through the Local Office and then into the Corporate Office, in the form of graphs, charts, tables and other visualisations. For example, the individual rep could access reports with various metrics that summarised their sales interactions by segment, by specific customer, by unit of time, etc. These types of data could then be integrated to allow comparison of activity between the different reps in the local team that could be viewed by the



National Sales Manager and Country Manager (Table 7, p.117). This could, in turn, be layered up to the Corporate Office who could then benchmark between teams across different countries and product areas. This dashboarding thus aimed to support local monitoring of activity and performance, as well as the Corporate Office’s monitoring of metrics that were of relevance to product strategy implementation and ongoing strategic development.

Together, these modules of the CE technology materially embodied a degree of managerial power and intent *for strategy*, acting as *technological scripts* for the local practices of frontline strategy work (see Section 3.6).

### **5.3. James’ story: Rejecting the technology to own the potentiality it offers**

James was the National Hospital Sales Lead (HSL) at Lorum Health (Table 7, p.117), responsible for managing relations with ‘*strategically important*’ public and private clinics and hospitals [interview quote]. He spent more than eighty percent of his time (four days of each working week) ‘*in the field*’ [ibid] visiting health care professionals in these organisations to promote the company’s products and services, and to coordinate collaborative activities such as medical education meetings and product training. In this role, he was tasked with meeting product sales targets at a national level. He was responsible for determining where and how best to spend his time, working across his portfolio of accounts, in order to achieve these targets. Within the Local Office, he thus had a relatively high level of autonomy, reporting directly into the Country Manager.

#### **5.3.1. Scene 1: Introducing James’ confident, tech-savvy subjectivity**

Despite this autonomy, James had moved into this role quite recently with less than six months of experience in this commercial setting. His prior professional training was in pharmacy, and he worked as a community pharmacist for several years before starting work at Lorum. This afforded him a strong understanding of the healthcare environment as well as professional legitimacy with Lorum’s customers. This training and experience was viewed by Lorum’s managers as advantageous, offsetting his relative inexperience in a sales and marketing role. Starting out, James felt that getting the role was a ‘*stroke of luck*’ [ibid] given this inexperience, but he was thankful for the opportunity to take a different career path as it allowed him to ‘*be more socially engaged with different clients, customers and doctors compared with being a pharmacist*’ [ibid]. He admitted that he really did not know what to expect when he first started out, and he knew there would be lots of challenges. But he also had noticeable confidence in himself:

*I came into this position with a very open mind, and a positive outlook – I am a quick learner! But you don’t know what you don’t know. So, I did a lot of my own research about the role, watching quite a few YouTube videos [laughs] ... and I have always had a knack of talking to people though, so if that’s healthcare professionals then even better, I can do it! I was thrown into the deep end here. But I integrated well ... I don’t know how many people could have done it like I did without any formal training in the role. I really took the initiative to say, ‘this is what I am going to do about it’ and then be proactive! [interview extract]*

The confidence that James brought to his new role was particularly evident in relation to his use of technology, and he was keen to take advantage of this. For example, he was a great fan of his smart phone, which played a key role in his daily routines. He used it far more than his laptop—for emailing other Local Office team members and customers, and to maintain his work and social calendar. His photo library (which he showed me during one of our interviews) was full of business-related pictures taken during staff meetings (of whiteboard notes, for example). Without being prompted, he would also frequently use his smart phone to record screenshots of the CE software to send to me during our interviews. During one of our early meetings, he jovially commented on my attempt to take a photo of his screen with my own phone: ‘What are you doing? I can just screenshot it on my phone and email it to you!’ He then delightedly showed me how to do this: ‘just click the main button and the side one at the same time! It’s easy!’ [interview extracts]. James ease with technology allowed him to shape his identity within the firm, giving him a point of comparison with—indeed differentiation from—others in the sales team:

*I am fortunately pretty tech savvy; unfortunately for other staff this doesn’t come very easily, so this technology will be difficult for them – especially as there are new bits being introduced all the time. If they aren’t even competent with the first thing, then it’s just going to be a backlog. Lorum wants to be more and more digitally focused, and they want people who are digitally orientated – that’s one of their criteria now, moving forwards. It sounds like the company is going to go big on digital – it will be: ‘go big or go home’. It could be cutthroat ... if you aren’t digitally competent then, yeah, you’re gone! So, that’s a lot to ask of some of the others, some are completely digitally illiterate, like ... no idea! For example, I spent three hours with one of them just helping them use the internet! [interview extract]*

Together with his wider self-confidence—his sense of himself as a proactive, fast learner who could engage with healthcare customers as peers—James’ relative ‘tech savviness’ was important to him; it was an aspect of his selfhood that he could foster in the face of the uncertainties of this very

new role. However, this same savviness empowered him to take an informed stance on the CE system, with which he developed a very uneasy working relationship. As he commented quite early during the study:

*I hate it! I honestly find it a really terrible system! I have had problems from the get-go; it’s so clunky, it’s not streamlined, and it just adds work.* [interview extract]

Initial inquiry into the underlying reasons for this apparent resistance to the CE system was rewarded with quite nebulous responses. James was clear it impeded his work, but struggled to articulate how this was so. This was interesting, as—given how recently he had joined Lorum in this role—he admitted he was really still trying to work out *what his work actually was*. He was still shaping himself into the role, as he defined what the role meant to him, and what he *could or should do* as an HSL. Over the ensuing months of working with James, a picture emerged of the tensions placed upon his sense of self, wrought through the interplay of human, technology and world. As I present below, through these concerned, tension-filled involvements with the technology, he *worked out* what being a HSL might be (for the sake of himself), and so made *his own claim* on a subjectivity *as an HSL*—an identity constituted, over time, by distancing himself from the technology while also grasping the role-shaping structure that it offered.

### **5.3.2. Scene 2: The CRM’s scripts and materialities as a challenge to selfhood**

James primarily worked with the CRM module of the CE platform. The CRM initially seemed to provide some useful structure for James, and aligned with various aspects of what became his daily routine as he became familiar with the ‘*key accountabilities*’ of being an HSL [interview extract]. Using the core CRM, he could plan and monitor his field activities. More specifically, he could profile and prioritise his customers, schedule which customers to see and when, record the nature of his interactions with them, view historical summaries of these interactions, and define follow-up activities. From James’ perspective, these functions embodied the expectations that he felt management held for him in his role. The CRM thus provided him with a set of *technological scripts* to follow in order to perform his functions as an HSL.

However, as James continued to work with the technology according to such scripts, his sense of self became challenged in several ways. First, he struggled with the way the technology pointed towards a world (*mediated objectivities / self → technology → world*; Figure 1) that accorded only poorly with his lived experience of working in the field as an HSL. The technology mediated how the world was presented to him, a presentation that was in tension with the one in which he

actually acted in his daily praxis. For example, when recording a customer call in the software, he had to choose options from a set of drop-down lists. Completing these parts of the record was essentially compulsory. Call records could not be saved in the system (or ‘logged’ as he referred to it) without choosing one of these options—that is, the software was set up so that this was an obligatory part of the record form. Further, administrators within the Corporate Office would run reports on recorded activity for senior management—thus as James commented: if a call was not logged, ‘it didn’t happen’ and his level of sales activity might be questioned. One such drop-down list related to a range of topics that might be discussed with the customer. These topics were fixed textual items in the list, and often failed to relate to the subject of the conversation James had with a customer:

*You are really limited to what the software tells you ... I try not to let it restrict me. This can be difficult though as I tailor the materials we need to present to the customers about our products – they are specialists, and this requires bespoke interactions that have nothing to do with anything in these drop-down lists. I try to just run the call with the customer as I want to run it, and then try to fit the option I choose in the software around this. [interview extract]*

However, despite trying to adhere with this working principle of ‘fitting the option’ [interview extract], he felt tension between trying to have a meaningful and natural conversation with the customer (based upon the goals he set for the specific meeting as part of managing an account), and a tacit pressure to try to design the call around the fixed messages indicated in the drop-down options. According to James, he often managed this tension by just selecting the ‘other’ [interview extract] text option in the menu, an approach he admitted lacked utility as it would tell him nothing about his customer interaction if he needed to refer back to the record in the future.

Moreover, James was also very aware that Corporate Office management would have access to his records, and to the summary reports put together by the system administrators. Thus, any approach he took to handling this tension would still fail to fully represent his work in the field, such that the technology would fail to properly *present* him to Corporate Office management within the ‘dashboarding module’ of the CE. At this point, it is pertinent to note that the Corporate and Local Offices were geographically very far apart, in different countries many thousands of miles away from each other. Contact between Offices was generally limited to contact between the Country Manager and her direct line manager in Corporate. The Local Product & Marketing Manager (Table 7, p.117) would also have conference calls with the global product team at Corporate, but the sales team—which of course included James—had almost no traditional line of

communication with Corporate. However, the CRM now brought management and James into *relational proximity within his lifeworld* (in a Heideggerian sense, spatially near while still geographically very far away in different countries; *mediated intersubjectivities / self → technology → others*; Figure 1). This created an uncomfortable sense of exposure, as he could also see—in his own dashboard—a CRM reported ‘version’ of himself that was indicative of the ‘management view’. His own hermeneutic relation with the technology—compounded by an awareness of how management might similarly see him—mediated a sense of himself that was *other to the self that he acted as* in the field as an HSL (*mediated subjectivities / self → technology → self*; Figure 1). Overall, in this example, these technological relations mediated his *being-with-others* and a sense of his *self-as-other* in a manner that threatened how he purposively pressed *himself* forward into the world; a manner in which his own dispositions as a confident, effective, fast learning HSL were denied their projection into-his-world (his *being-a-self*).

Further to this, another drop down list in the CRM related to the task of profiling (linked to the survey tool mentioned in Section 5.2) and then prioritising customers. This allowed James to choose the ‘product adoption’ status of the customer; that is, the extent to which they were a user or supporter of Lorum’s products. Drop-down text options were limited to: ‘aware of [Product X]’, ‘would consider using [Product X]’, ‘currently using [of Product X]’, ‘preferentially use [Product X]’, or ‘advocate for [Product X]’. According to James:

*This is a really difficult one as it’s so subjective, and in this country it’s pretty binary because there aren’t many alternative [product] options. Also, we already prioritise the customers we want to see based on the fact that they like the product, so having to fill this in each time I see them is pretty redundant as it would always be the same. [interview extract]*

This expectation that the technology established here played on James’ mind over time, and he started to wonder if what he was actually doing in the field was ‘right’. That is, he continued to question the disparity between his own sense of his purposive self and the *mediated subjectivities* (*self → technology → self*) which was disclosed in the *world-as-presented* through the CRM (*mediated objectivities / self → technology → world*). Was he actually seeing the right customers, even though his priority list was signed off within the Local Office by the Country Manager? Should his customers not vary more in terms of their Product X advocacy in a way that reflected the spread of options in the CRM’s drop-down list? Should he be trying to bring these worlds into alignment somehow through his actions ‘in the field’? The CRM amplified aspects of the world that seemed less salient in his day-to-day work, but were phenomenologically *revealed to him*

through the technology as ones that *surely must be salient to management* and thus ‘should’ also be present to him in the same way. Again, this structured how Corporate Office management were also made present for him (in their geographic absence) within his lifeworld: present in terms of ‘their’ unreasonable expectation towards conforming (or even performing) his world according to what the CRM expected James-on-his-world *to be*.

However, over-riding James’ early drive to try to accommodate the mediated world of the technology into his work, was a later tendency to see his involvements with the CRM as pointless, confusing and lacking in relevance. Despite ongoing calls from the Corporate Office during CE software training to view the technology as ‘*empowering*’ for sales staff, James increasingly felt *disempowered*. Indeed, even as he felt that he was growing into the realities of being an HSL – as experienced in his day-to-day work in the field with his customers – the mediations of the technology continued to unbalance his sense of what the world ‘*out there*’ should actually look like to him (*mediated objectivities / self → technology → world*) and thus how he should be presenting himself within it (*mediated subjectivities / self → technology → self*):

*Is this what they are expecting us to talk about with customers? Is this what they think I am meant to be doing as an HSL? I now know what it must feel like to be a left-handed person who is forced to work with their right hand – you know, having to work unnaturally just because the technology is available, even though it’s set up for something else. [interview extract]*

This destabilised his sense of purposiveness and direction (*being-a-self as a coherent integration of disposition and projection*). He felt unsure of how to orientate himself within his world, and how to press forward into action.

### **5.3.3. Scene 3: Experiencing a sense of blame in relation to technical challenges**

James also had to deal with the consequences of a range of CRM-related technical failures that were beyond his control. These all reduced his view of the mediated world the technology was designed to disclose to him. Specifically, customers that were assigned to him within the software might ‘*just disappear*’. On one such occasion, he had recently added numerous new customers to his territory within the software, spending time completing their profiles and recording sales activity against them, only for them to be ‘*deleted for no reason*’:

*A few weeks ago, I had to add around thirty pharmacists to my territory because they weren’t in there for some reason, even though they are my customers. They synced ok [with the*

*database] but when I went back to record a call this week, I realised they had all gone!*

[interview extract]

Investigations into this with the Corporate Office administrators suggested that this had happened because, when entering the data in the first place, he had assigned them to a ‘hospital’ within the database rather than to a specific ‘hospital department’:

*It’s a bit crazy, why would the system not be able to handle that? I had to go back in again and start over for everyone that got deleted. Imagine if I had done that for even more customers, I would have lost months of records! I don’t know who to point the finger at – the software or someone else? Who knows if they [the customers] will not just disappear again now that I have put them back in!* [interview extract]

James’ comment about not knowing ‘*who to point the finger at*’ here was interesting. It highlights the relationality or even hybridity of human–with–technology. Who/what has agency here in terms of a responsibility for resolving James’ issue? For James, accountability seemed very murky. He showed me a very long email conversation he was having with administrators in the Corporate Office to try to resolve the problem. He was incredulous that no one (no person) seemed to know exactly why this error would happen, that no other salespeople had ever reported similar problems, and that so many steps were involved (and so many different people) in solving it: ‘*It’s all so grey, a back-and-forth where it’s like the blind leading the blind*’ [interview extract]. Here, the relational CRM-mediated *being-with-others* (**mediated intersubjectivities / self → technology → others**), confounding any sense of accountability and responsibility. For James, human agency (and support from his fellows) was lost or at least very much distorted.

Building on this idea: in another example, James described how he had learned from the Corporate Office administrators’ investigations that other customers has also disappeared from his system because they had ‘opted’ out of the underlying third-party database with which the CE software was integrated.

*The annoying thing is that I had added these doctors into the system myself, and they were happy to be added! But I then learn that this local data synchronises with the third-party data which overrules my copy. There is nothing I can do about that, so I have an incomplete list and it’s not even my fault!* [interview extract]

This denial of fault arose because James felt exposed within a ‘*never-ending cycle of blame*’:

*When that’s not getting fixed, then pressure gets put on the managers, and then the managers put pressure on the administrators, who put it back on the managers ... but now one knows what the problem is, so the questions funnel back down to me: ‘Has it been fixed yet?’ ... ‘No, it hasn’t’, which then funnels back up to my boss’s boss at Corporate, who says: ‘Why not?’ We have problems that don’t seem to be fixable by those who should be able to fix them, but then we are getting pressure to somehow fix it ourselves! It’s always just reactive – a case of what are you doing to get the technology to work, rather than helping me to actually do my job!*

[interview extract]

This iterative deferral of responsibility within the tangle of human–technology relations clearly frustrated James, but—more profoundly—it also put tension on his own sense of self-confidence as a capable fast-learner (*mediated subjectivities / self → technology → self*). At best, he felt at best helpless; at worst, he felt blamed given these problems all ‘reflected back’ on him through the technology. Again, this disrupted his ability to tacitly deploy his skills and motivations in his work and to press forward into his own potential (*being-a-self as a coherent integration of disposition and projection*).

#### *5.3.4. Scene 4: The CRM as a threat to James’ tech-savvy self*

Unfortunately, this sense of being exposed to managerial blame sensitised James to other Corporate Office expectations that he experienced as being projected through the technology from senior managers (making these managers present through these mediations: *mediated intersubjectivities / self → technology → others*). The CRM module was not designed to work optimally on Lorum’s smart phones. He felt that this constrained him to using his laptop in a manner that was not natural for him, in the context of his routine technological involvements. For example, there was functionality within the CRM that facilitated the scheduling of customer appointments. For James—despite not receiving any specific stated mandate on this from the Corporate Office—the very presence of this potential use of the technology was experienced as a nudge that he should not be using his phone calendar:

*They want us to do is to use the CRM for setting up calls like I do with my phone. They want this so it’s all centralised – one place for scheduling calls, organising calls, recording calls, tracking calls, etcetera, etcetera. But I find this a total failure. You have to lug around the laptop, pull it out, check it’s charged, open up the software, make sure its on-line and syncing properly, find the client’s name, drag and drop them over here ... it’s all so tedious. Whereas I*



*can just go to my calendar on the phone and do it all on the fly – get out the phone, do it in two seconds and put it away – done! I pretty much do everything on my phone normally, but they don’t want me to!* [interview extract]

James experienced the ‘lap-top limited’ scheduling functionality of the CRM as a threat to his existing relationship with his smart phone. It changed how he was present in-his-world *with* other technologies that formed his equipmental world. Postphenomenologically, his smart phone was being ‘pushed’ spatially away from him, denying his place (his sense of self) as being-in this referential context (*mediated objectivities / self → technology → world*). He felt limited in the extent he was ‘permitted’ to deploy his dispositions to project himself forward into the world as tech-savvy (*being-a-self as a coherent integration of disposition and projection*).

On this basis, James continued to use his phone for scheduling, even though this meant spreading his work over two devices—his laptop and smart phone—which actually added to his workload. These challenges further disenfranchised him from the CE software:

*I would be more inclined to use the CRM if it could be used properly on my phone ... I may be able to open the software on the phone and view my calls, but I can’t schedule or record calls ... so there is just no point using it.* [interview extract]

The Corporate Office administrators confirmed that they were working on software fixes that would enable improved smart phone use of the CRM. However, few updates on this were ever provided to James and, over time, he started to experience these unresolved technological challenges (those discussed here and in Scene 3 above) as impediments to his sense of purpose as an HSL.

*It feels like everything is just swept under the rug ... and I just don’t know how to feel about that. I want to hit the ground running in my role next year, but it feels like it’s all on hold.*  
[interview extract]

### 5.3.5. Scene 5: Claiming the subjectivity of an HSL on his own terms

There was a growing pattern in James’ narrative that he felt denied his ability to function in a way that suited his developing identity as an HSL (*being-a-self as a coherent integration of disposition and projection*). As he worked out how to *perform this role ‘in the field’* with ‘real customers’—where he was able to draw on his skills and dispositions (as a former pharmacist and tech savvy individual) to have meaningful, rewarding interactions with healthcare professionals—

he felt increasingly uncoupled from the world mediated by the CRM technology. At the same time, he also felt denied the possibility of even being a HSL on the terms that seemed to be scripted by the CE system, by virtue of the seeming failings of the technology. What emerged from this was a move by James to deploy his skills with *other* technologies to claim the HSL role *on his own terms*. This was achieved *in relation to* his CRM software-challenged selfhood.

*I have now insured myself with a spreadsheet which I use concurrently with the CRM software. I use this to detail all my customer interactions – who I see, when and what I talk about – all the stuff I need to view and track. It's time consuming having to do both, but it's discouraging only to use the CRM, because what's the point? Something will just go wrong! My spreadsheet is a simplified version of what I would ideally want to see in the CE that allows me to capture everything consistently. [interview extract]*

In this way, he projected his own HSL identity into and through the spreadsheet, which empowered him relative to the *disempowered self* that he saw himself as in relation to the CE software. Similarly, James further distanced himself from use of the CRM software for planning purposes, instead crafting PowerPoint slides to summarise how he wanted to '*strategically approach each account*', giving him freedom and control to express the 'objectivity' of his world as a HSL (*mediated objectivities / self → technology → world*) in a manner which was in balance with his own way of projecting into his world as an HSL (*being-a self as a coherent integration of disposition and projection*). In doing so, he also essentially transferred some of the technological scripts (for being an HSL) from the CRM into these other technological artefacts. His own projection into-his-world was still, to some extent, mediated by these scripts, but they were also essentially claimed *for him, on his own behalf*. He took up the subjectivity of *being* an HSL on his own terms, levying his existing, stable relations with technology—in relation to inadequacies of the CRM—and so working to reduce the CRM's limitations on his identity. He thus 'styled' himself in relation to the various technological mediations that were shaping his lifeworld.

Despite seeming to come to terms with his technology-mediated sense of self as a HSL, James' narrative closes with further tensions that remained unresolved. By focusing on his use of the spreadsheet as a mediator of his *being-in-the-world-with-customers*, his relationship with the CE system weakened, and he admitted that he '*let things slip*' in reference to his involvements with the CRM. Some of his earlier problems thus re-emerged as follows. In practice, he started to neglect to record his customer interactions properly in the CRM, which were seen by Corporate Office managers as the '*basics of the job*' [interview extract]. This mediated version of James—as 'seen'

*through the technology by management*—was essentially *under-performing*. He was either failing to see enough customers (and therefore there was nothing to record), or he was failing to be ‘*digitally competent*’ and therefore not recording his calls. Digital competence, as we saw above, was becoming an important success factor for employees at Lorum. The James as (re)presented to the Corporate Office in the dashboard (*mediated intersubjectivities / self → technology → others*) was still not the hard working, tech-savvy, strategically minded HSL that he had shaped himself into.

This ‘under-performing James’ was further (re)presented ‘down’ the organisational chain back to James boss, the Country Manager, who then encouraged him to maintain two identities: a ‘CE-compliant self’ to the Corporate Office as well as ‘high performing Local Office self’. James was sensitive to the tension here, and this worried him: would this mean further denials of his sense of self – this time a denial of the positive claim he has made on his own subject position by wittingly having to hide behind a managerially compliant, technology mediated version of subjectivity? This sort of concern is considered more deeply later in Sarah’s story (Section 5.5), as part of a broader presentation of how the CE technology in the Local Office was deployed to *obscure* conflicting subjectivities. In the meantime, I introduce Hannah and her story as National Sales Manager (NSM, Table 7, p.117).

#### **5.4. Hannah’s story: Seizing an alternative script following a denial of self-as-manager**

By way of preview: Like James’, Hannah’s story is initially characterised by technologically mediated threats to her subjectivity; in her case a subjectivity associated with her position as an experienced sales manager working with her team of sales reps. As time progressed, her unfolding involvements with the CE technology shaped a complex flow of tensions which challenged her sense of self as NSM. At the same time, they also amplified aspects of her identity, an amplification which was intensified in relation to a *new* module within the CE system designed to support Key Account Managers. This offered her new possibilities to *shape herself as a subject*. Thus, while James distanced himself from the CE software to shape himself into his HSL role, the story of Hannah ultimately progresses to a point where she *seizes* the scripting structure of one of the modules to *project herself into a different role*. Hannah’s narrative unfolds as follows.

##### **5.4.1. Scene 1: Hannah’s subjectivity as a sales manager**

In contrast to James, Hannah had considerable commercial experience in the healthcare industry. She moved directly into this setting after completing university, where she received a bachelor’s degree in Marketing and Management. Her first professional role was as a sales analyst

in a medical devices firm, a position in which she gained experience working with a variety of relevant healthcare data sources, as well as using some *‘simple CRM systems, as they were back in the 1990s’* to support sales reps in their fieldwork planning, and to compile reports on sales rep activity for management. She then spent a short period working in marketing for a retail pharmacy chain, before joining a pharmaceutical company as a sales rep where she remained for many years. When I first met her at Lorum, she held the position of National Sales Manager, following an earlier period in James’ HSL role, and was responsible for leading a small team of sales representatives spread across the country (Table 7, p.117). In this capacity, she routinely worked with three of the CE modules: the core CRM, the dashboarding module, and the coaching module.

Hannah’s strengths in her NSM role, as she saw them, were grounded upon a diversity of very relevant experience. First, a strong analytics capability giving her a sense of how important it is to *‘know the territories you are working’*, to be able to *‘work with the sales data, use this to determine relevant customer profiles and segments to target’* [interview extract]. Second, hands-on experience administering CRM systems for sales teams, affording a view of *‘what works and what doesn’t’*. Third, real-world experience of what it’s like in the field at the frontline, and the *‘skills that are needed for the job’* [interview extract].

#### **5.4.2. Scene 2: Transformed relations with her team as a threat to selfhood**

Like James, Hannah struggled to connect with the CE platform and its technological scripts. However, possibly given her greater experience of such matters, her initial concerns rested more on the apparent lack of association of these scripts with any sort of strategy or operational goal:

*There are so many things they [the Corporate Office] want the CE to do—which could be great—but the roadmap to getting there just hasn’t been made clear. In fact, they have launched this all upon us without any direction—it was just a bolt-on. Now, realising its all over the place, they have recruited a consulting firm to put a roll-out plan in place ... which is ridiculous! Trying to work out what to do after it’s already been done!* [interview extract]

Moreover, the technology did not seem tailored for the specific needs of the Local Office’s market and sales practices. As Hannah put it: *‘It’s one system, for the world! It feels like it’s the tail wagging the dog’*. In her capacity as NSM, this caused problems for Hannah. Because of this apparent absence of a clear vision from the Corporate Office or of a *‘locally relevant’* strategy or implementation plan, she felt that it was difficult for her to explain the relevance of the CE system to her sales team: *‘If I don’t know why this is happening and can’t justify its value, then how can I explain*

*it to them, and then get them to do it?* [interview extract]. At this point in her story, her relations with the technology projected futural possibilities for being-with her team (*mediated intersubjectivities / self → technology → others*) that threatened her sense of self not only as a credible sales manager, but also as an experienced exponent of CRM systems (*being-a-self as a coherent integration of disposition and projection*).

This challenge was compounded by what Hannah saw as a team that was inadequate to such requirements for ‘digital engagement’. As was also suggested in James’s narrative (in relation to their technological illiteracy; Scene 1), Hannah thought of some of the sales team at Lorum as ‘old school reps who wanted to work in old school ways’, as technophobes who didn’t want to ‘embrace digital’ [interview extract]. Indeed, when the CE software was first implemented in the Local Office, these representatives ‘passively resisted’ [interview extract] using it to organise and record their customer interactions (using the CRM module). Hannah experienced this as a stubbornness, on their part, to learn new things:

*There’s a lack of initiative, a lack of curiosity and the desire to learn, and it’s diverted so much of my time and energy to no benefit – it’s really frustrating! You need the right people to do the job, and if you’ve got very old school people who are used to working one way and they you try to radically change them, then you are lost. Even if you spend a lot of time with them trying to explain how to use things, I don’t think they would actually budge because some of them are just so entrenched.* [interview extract]

It seemed that, despite her own view of the relative irrelevance of the CE software for local sales operations, Hannah’s experience of her reps was pivoted – through her praxical relations with the technology as an NSM – so as to expose their lack of capability and willingness to work with the CRM. Postphenomenologically, the *presence* of the technology reshaped how her team was *present to her* (*mediated intersubjectivities / self → technology → others*). A set of team inadequacies were brought to the foreground of her attention (amplified, and so brought spatially *near*) in relation to the *potential* of the CRM. Said differently, regardless of its actual utility in their current practice, she related to her team *as a self* who had had prior *good* experiences of effective CRM deployment. So, her historical dispositions were *projected into* her relations with the ‘technology–team’ relational hybrid. Maintaining the cohesion of her selfhood here (*being-a-self as a coherent integration of disposition and projection*) manifested the team *as resistant*.

This of course also placed interesting tensions upon Hannah’s relationship with the technology. On one hand, it was relatively pointless for her, and she did not see how it would usefully support local sales and sales management praxes. On the other hand, it presented a potential barrier to team performance in light of Lorum’s strong push, globally, towards being a ‘digital organisation’. This latter was especially the case given the team were now ‘visible’ to—and so brought into a new relationship with—Corporate Office management by virtue of the dashboarding module (*mediated intersubjectivities / self → technology → others*). As time progressed, and despite her personal reservations about the technology, Hannah increasingly strived to get her team on board with the CRM so that they could meet these digitally mediated managerial expectations, and so also validate her (to herself and others) as a competent sales manager and CRM implementer:

*For me if someone said to use the system, I would be like: ‘How do you use it? Great! Let’s get on with it then.’ But not everyone is like that. But they will get left behind if they can’t embrace it. I really want to help them to see value in it ... that’s got to be part of my job. [interview extract]*

And then in another conversation, she indicated how her competent identity as a sales manager was becoming threatened:

*... But they just aren’t using the CRM to record things and it reflects really badly on me. [interview extract]*

The technology thus also amplified *differences* between her and her team (*‘I would just embrace it; but they don’t seem capable’*; [interview extract]). This had further consequences as I will describe next.

#### **5.4.3. Scene 3: Intra-team struggles as a ‘clash’ of technological stabilities**

For Hannah, as further time passed, the reps’ resistance to the technology translated into a resistance to her:

*This year has been terrible! Everything went digital and nothing had been really taught [no formal training provided about the CE system to the Local Office]. Digital is different ... it affects your brain and the way you interact with other people. So, I tried my best, I tried to get them [the reps] engaged, I dialled into digital taskforce meetings [with the Corporate Office] to learn more myself. But the reps rebelled, they rebelled against me, and it was awful! [interview extract]*

Hannah reflected on the reasons for feeling this sense that the reps’ rebelliousness was being directed towards her. Again, she referred back to poor CE technology implementation. She considered that this had put her in a position where she had to ‘force’ people to use a system without clear justification. It is tempting here to interpret this solely in terms of the managerial pressure of having the ‘buck’ passed down to her—that is, of senior management at the Corporate Office expecting Hannah to take local responsibility for their poor implementation. However, as indicated in Scene 2, no clear managerial expectations had really been set (at this point) in relation to the technologies. Rather, it seemed that it was simply ‘rolled out’ [interview extract] with a tacit expectation that its technological scripts would be sufficient to shape any desired operational change in sales rep activity.

Therefore, delegation of authority within a chain of human agency did not best account for this opposition between Hannah and the reps. An alternative postphenomenological reading would instead emphasise the non-neutral, but relationally agential *presence* of the technology within the structure of Hannah’s (and the reps’) concernful dealings. Here, the potential involvements that the CRM invited (it’s solicitations; see Section 3.6) were differentially configured by two sets of quite different self–technology relations, mediating two diverging patterns of experiences and actions. So, just as Hannah tried to take some level of control over CRM-based success to manage her own subjectivity as a capable, empowered sales manager, so each rep experienced threats to their own specific sense of self (which were similar to those described in Scene 2 of James’s story above) as this was tied to their own identities and involvements with the technology *as reps*. They thus *distanced* themselves from the CRM (cf. James’ story, Scene 2), and so *also* became distant from Hannah in relation to her *closeness* to it.

Thus, while Hannah experienced the CE technology in terms of how its successful adoption could build the legitimacy of both her and her team, the reps experienced it as *delegitimising* the value of their current approach to fieldwork, and as a device for being monitored—one that threatened their independence. Indeed, there was even a fear among the sales team that the CE technology might be a precursor to ‘*being replaced by AI* [artificial intelligence]’ [interview extract] that might later be built into the software, such that human-to-human sales calls might become redundant. These potentialities of AI are explored further in Caitlyn’s story later.

So, for Hannah, the technology was (at least for a time) relationally stabilised within her world as a medium for revealing herself (to herself and others) as a capable sales manager. While for the reps, the technology was stabilised as an entity that was a threat to their autonomy. At the same

time, Hannah was re-constituted (to the reps, and in relation to the technology) as an endorser of this threat. While the reps were conversely reconstituted (to Hannah, and in relation to the technology) as part of the threat to her managerial identity. This complex relationality was not a case of *control versus resistance to a single set* of technologically scripted strategic (managerial) intentions. Nor was it a matter of Hannah and her team being pitched against each other as human agents. Rather it was a play of power between two quite different sets of human–technology–world mediations; a contestation for stability and dominance between relational possibilities within which different subjectivities and objectivities were at stake (see also Rosenberger, 2014, 2017a).

#### **5.4.4. Scene 4: Technological objectification further distances Hannah from her team**

While trying to embrace the CE technology for the sake of bringing her team along on Lorum’s digital journey, Hannah also started to struggle with how the software *objectified* her reps. As in Scene 2 of James’ story, the technological scripts actively (re)presented them to management (*mediated intersubjectivities / self → technology → others*)—as well as to themselves (*mediated subjectivities / self → technology → self*)—through quantifications and visualisations. Hannah experienced this as a means of ‘pushing’ the reps towards conformance with structured norms of praxis that denied their own agency and autonomy. At the same time, Hannah also felt that the technology *pushed her* to limit her own perspective on her team to such objectifications, effectively challenging her own managerial claim upon them (her own relationship with them).

*It’s just cookie cutting! Like you can just put someone [a rep] in it [the CRM] and roll them out as someone else – it takes their intelligence away because they just follow the technology. It’s just churn. Also, I am meant to monitor what the reps are doing [in the field] by seeing what’s in the dashboard – I am not there with them in that case – I can’t work with them like that. The reps are just ticking boxes in the software and so am I, and that’s meant to be how we view each other. It’s frustrating for them and it’s frustrating for me. [interview extract]*

This objectification was also associated with concerns that the reps would be de-valued, as the reality of their work could not be fully captured in the system. That is, senior management were limited in what they could ‘see’ of the reps through the CE dashboard. This translated their worth into simple commodifying metrics:

*At the same time, what senior management [at the Corporate Office] see is just a bunch of data – numbers of calls per day, number of customers being seen – they have no idea what needs to*



*be done to build business on the ground, but if they don’t see the right numbers, they may decide they don’t need all these reps. They can’t appreciate all the hard work and real value, or see how relationships need to be built between reps and customers. [interview extract]*

She described how this ‘cookie cutting’ objectification was driven by a desire within the Corporate Office to be able to compare sales activity across multiple different countries, such that they needed ‘like-for-like data’ for their reports to decide which countries were successfully ‘performing with digital’. For Hannah, it seemed, again, as if this was ‘*the tail wagging the dog*’.

*The cookie cutter approach might work in other countries, but we are different here – we are trying to do things differently. It’s one size fits all for them but this just doesn’t recognise what we are trying to do locally. [interview extract]*

Further, she saw that the limits the system placed on the information that the reps could report—given the mandatory drop-down lists and lack of ‘free text’ fields (as described in James’ story, Scene 4)—provided a disincentive for reps to have meaningful, value-adding interactions with customers:

*They can’t record anything outside those options, so anything else relies on the memories, and you’d have to have a pretty spectacular memory to remember everything about all your customers and everything you talked about ... unless you write it down in a diary, but they aren’t meant to do that either as it’s got to be recorded in the CRM ... which it can’t be! So, they are just going to end up dumbing down what they talk about. [interview extract]*

This reinforced themes from James’ narrative. Thus, it seemed—for Hannah—that the Corporate Office’s strategic focus on pushing local sales and marketing teams to embrace digital customer engagement through technological scripts was uncoupled from the reality of their work on the ground. Indeed, it became an end in itself rather than a means of empowering more effective praxis. Of note, this theme will be developed further in the next narrative. However, first, I close with a final scene from Hannah that, as introduced at the start, sees her seizing the scripting structure of one of the other CE modules to project herself into a different role.

#### ***5.4.5. Scene 5: Claiming a new subjectivity by embracing an alternative script***

To sum up so far, for Hannah, the CE technology transformed the *experience of working as a sales manager with sales reps*. It amplified and reduced aspects of Hannah’s lifeworld in a manner that (re)structured how others were present to her and how—in being-with-others—she *experienced*

*herself* as a sales manager. Specifically, it revealed the team to her as digitally inadequate. It also exposed the *potential for her team to fail* in relation to technologically mediated expectations that were uncoupled from (and in tension with) what she saw as meaningful sales praxis.

Concurrently, she experienced this as a reduction in how the value of her team could be (re)presented to others at Lorum, senior managers who would only ever see the quantifications in the CE dashboard. At the same time, this also amplified the presence of these others (bringing them spatially near *through* the technology), who previously may not even have been aware of the reps’ work. Hannah herself thus felt threatened, as the objectifications inherent in working with her team through the technology obscured and limited her ability to do the work in a way that best integrated her skilful dispositions and projected sense of selfhood (*being-a-self as a coherent integration of disposition and projection*). She told me: *‘it’s like looking through frosted glass’* [interview extract].

Hannah was very unsettled by all this. She resisted being a *‘cookie cut’* sales manager leading *‘cookie cut reps’*. However, such resistance to these technological mediations were also productive, bringing aspects of her concerned self to the foreground, where they could be worked with to carve a new purposeful place for herself. She reflected on why she enjoyed her first role at Lorum as a sales rep:

*When I first joined Lorum, I just got out there and did it, I didn’t have all this stuff to worry about. I enjoyed focusing on the customers, and actually creating meaningful connections with them.* [interview extract]

This sense of her dispositions came to her attention *in relation to her experiences as they were mediated by the CE software*. These mediations created a tensioned space from within which she was confronted by a futural *‘version’* of her self: one that she felt pushed towards being in relation to the technology (*mediated subjectivities / self → technology → self*), but one that also de-stabilised the coherence of her identity (*being-a-self as a coherent integration of disposition and projection*). However, it was this very manifestation of such tensions that exposed what was *not working* for Hannah in her role at Lorum, and therefore *what might work*. Said differently, the presence of the technology and its mediations revealed a sense of the well-integrated self that Hannah might be able to shape herself into (*mediated subjectivities / self → technology → self*).

As she emphasised to me:

*Working with this as a sales manager has really told me what I don’t want to do. I do not want to be ticking boxes, I don’t want to have to motivate other people to do it either – that is not my strength. If I was in a team of people who were highly functioning and up for digital work, that might be different – who knows – but I can’t manage a team that just want it the old way. I think I need to be a solo operator, and I now recognise that in myself. [interview extract]*

At this time, a new module of the CRM was being introduced by the software developers to help very experienced sales personnel extend their ability to manage their fieldwork. This was called the Key Account Management module. Whereas the core CRM for ‘*traditional sales reps*’ [interview extract] scripted reps to segment customer according to specific profiles and then target them with specific product messages, the KAM module afforded ‘*strategic sales*’ capabilities [interview extract]. The idea was that reps who were given access to this module— who were also given the title of Key Account Manager (KAM)— would have more control over their in-field activities.

The module thus allowed for more nuanced planning of sale interactions, according to customers being grouped into prioritised ‘*key accounts*’. It allowed reps to define and prioritise their own accounts, and to plan bespoke ‘*messaging*’. Accordingly—unlike the core CRM— recording of customer interactions was not limited to fixed options in drop-down lists. Rather, KAMs would have significant facility within the software to record ‘*free text*’ [interview extract] and to track, qualitatively, how accounts were developing over time. Moreover, given the very idiosyncratic nature of KAMs’ work across Lorum’s various country operations, there was little utility in comparing KAM activity metrics in the dashboarding module (which, indeed, would also be difficult anyway given the *qualitative* nature of the KAM module recording functions relative to the CRM). This all meant that KAM records were not compiled into high-level reports for Corporate Office management. Essentially, a KAM (working with and through the KAM module) had greater freedom to operate; there was greater *distance* between KAMs and the expectations of senior management (*mediated intersubjectivities / self → technology → others*).

At this point in the story, no local KAM role was in place, and the idea of the KAM module had not been introduced to them by the Corporate Office. However, its potential availability became known to Hannah during informal discussions with others across the wider organisation. She then had a videoconference with one of the CE system administrators, and the software was

demonstrated to her. She was deeply compelled by the freedom it seemed to afford, and by the ‘strategic sales capability’ it scripted and signalled.

*The KAM module isn’t tracked, its different. I can be more flexible – it will allow me out-of-the-box thinking and working. [In the module] I can set up my own critical success factors, it allows for free text, I can set up my own objectives around my individual customers, I can show how they sit within networks of related customers, decision-makers and influencers. Most importantly it won’t force me into standard rep KPIs like call rates. [interview extract]*

She was not talking here about her own pre-given or inherent aims and desires for a new role, rather she was specifically relating to the scripts of the KAM module to *style herself* (recall Verbeek’s notion of a ‘free relation’ with the mediations of technology; Section 3.6). Thus, the mediations of the standard CRM module might be seen as a ‘push’ (a projection of what she did not want to be), while the KAM module was a ‘pull’ for this styling. In so doing, she projected herself into a relationship with this module such that the *Hannah–KAM module → world* relation was seen to offer a more cohesive sense of self than her existing *Hannah–CRM module → world* relation. Over the following months, she helped the Local Office Country Manager build a business case for her to move away from her NSM role into that of a KAM. She thus lost her line management responsibility for reps but gained new autonomy as a senior member of the field-based sales team. What is intriguing here is the way in which the KAM module provided the canvas upon which she could map her newly disclosed sense of self.

*KAM is where I can now see I will make the most difference. It’s something that is then completely within my sphere of influence – something I can control. And I need to stick close to my values which is to actually make a difference in what I do. [interview extract]*

The technology *made present* an opportunity to stably project her own dispositions (*being-a-self as a coherent integration of disposition and projection*) while still according with Lorum’s strategic drive to integrate CE technology into actors’ worlds. She *claimed* the technology into her lifeworld on her own terms, shaping a stronger sense of identity in the process. However, she was still aware that the technology would become even more deeply entrenched into Lorum’s practices, and that, even given the relative freedom of *being a KAM in relation to the KAM module*, she would still be subjected to the broader technological scripts of the digital strategy. Indeed, she was already projecting herself into these new relations, with an eye to Verbeek’s (2011a ,b) Foucauldian ‘care of the self’ (Section 3.6):

*I want to just be able to focus on making a difference in the job, and that’s what I am going to do. Hopefully I will be able to get stuff into the CE system but that will just be a sort of front, it will be to appease other people, but it won’t be for my purposes. I am not stupid, there is an element of it [what they see through the CE technology] that needs to look okay. I will dedicate enough time just to tick the boxes in the system, and then I will do my own thing; I will deliver my sales. [interview extract]*

Hannah’s story thus does not stop here, because as a KAM she was herself now subject to *new* technological mediations. Some of these will later be woven into the next section, which primarily tells the story of Sarah: Hannah’s boss and the Country Manager of the Local Office (Table 7, p.117).

### **5.5. Sarah’s story: Subject positions under tension at the corporate-local interface**

Sarah’s story shows how she managed tensions *between* subject positions by, over time, adopting the technology to *obscure* a desire for operating freedom and so retain a ‘local’ identity, while—almost paradoxically—*presenting* herself and her team as *subject to* the global strategic change mandate. Thus, as this narrative will show, Sarah was seen to conform to and support the CE technology and its scripts while, at the same time, striving to retain a sense of independence. The following scenes provide an account of the development and management of these conflicting subject positions as they were shaped through relations with the technology. Sarah is the primary subject of this account, while Hannah will be reintroduced later. Accordingly, Scene 1 offers an initial introduction to Sarah.

#### **5.5.1. Scene 1: Sarah’s dispositions as leader of the local team**

Sarah had a long history in healthcare sales and marketing. She had also been at Lorum for nearly two decades, moving between sales management and product management, before taking on the Country Manager role to lead Lorum’s local operations. She talked about the enormous organisational changes that she had witnessed during her years at the company. For example, she had started her career at Lorum in ‘*one of its legacy firms*’ which had been acquired by Lorum’s corporate progenitor. She had witnessed another significant corporate restructuring since then, as well as several rounds of global operational re-organisation, where local country operations had been significantly affected. Furthermore, within the previous two years, her local team had been downsized as strategic priorities for Lorum’s management at the Corporate Office changed. As a consequence of this history, Sarah had ‘*pretty much seen it all*’ at Lorum, and—focal to the story—

this had included experiences of previous shifts in Corporate’s stance on engaging with customers at the local level. In her view, these moves had occurred as much in response to keeping up with industry trends and regulatory changes, as to any distinctive competitive strategy at Lorum. She thus adopted a pragmatic, even slightly cynical attitude to Lorum’s ‘new’ digital strategy and CE software implementation. Indeed, she had seen new CRM systems rolled out at Lorum before—albeit simpler and less impactful ones.

Also important to her story is the knowledge that she was very proud of her local team, she cared for them in their work, and wanted them to enjoy—and feel fulfilled—in their lives at Lorum. In keeping with this, during my visits to the Local Office, I was often invited to her ‘*morning teas*’, where Sarah would organise a catch-up and refreshments for the team to relax in each other’s company. These were casual affairs, and although work-related issues were often informally discussed, this emerged in the natural flow of conversation. Her aim here was to make sure she knew her team, and they knew her and each other. As someone who had also spent many years managing sales teams, she was also especially close to the reps, and had collaborated very closely with Hannah, in a hands-on manner, during Hannah’s time as NSM.

However, one thing that was quite striking was that Sarah—while embracing such casual contacts with her team—was not generally comfortable raising issues of concern or ‘*rocking boats*’ with her staff. My conversations with others suggested that Sarah sometimes tended to ‘*keep her head in the sand*’ and tried *not to see* issues and concerns: if the team looked happy (for example, during the ‘*morning teas*’), then they *were happy*. Overall, Sarah worked well with her team, and was very popular. But these nuances of her relationship with them—coupled with the ‘business as usual’ orientation to the digital strategy and CE rollout—revealed predispositions that critically shaped her relations with the technology.

### ***5.5.2. Scene 2: A tensioned sense of self as protector and nurturer***

Similar to Hannah in her story above, Sarah was very aware that the introduction of the CE technology was changing how she related to the sales reps as subjects. More specifically—also as with Hannah—she found herself drawing comparison between herself and the reps and, in a sense, subjectifying them in relation to their relative inadequacies:

*It’s interesting for me because I am in that age group where I have been through all this digital change, and I have had to self-learn. And then you see my reps, who are younger than me and half the time they can’t do it, or don’t want to do it. [interview extract]*

Having personally experienced so much change at Lorum, and having had to deal with previous new CRM systems which had required her to take on responsibility for her own ‘*digital learning*’, she experienced a degree of frustration in their inability to handle the basics of the technology. She noted an example of how one rep had problems using her tablet when trying to move between CRM visuals:

*[The rep] struggled to flick through screens very well, even though she had been told she was still trying to do this [mimes making swipes on a screen], and she is saying: ‘it’s not working, it’s not working’. So, I say: ‘look you’ve got to use a really light touch like this’ ... and [the rep] is like ‘Ohhhh’. [interview extract]*

However, this frustration had a different sense to that experienced by Hannah in her story. Sarah’s concerns were not primarily associated with how this might reflect negatively on her worth as a manager, nor did they relate to potential (and then actual) resistance from the reps. Rather her worries were pastoral—almost parental. This was evident in the hopeful pride she displayed when relaying how she had bought the reps ‘*tablet pens*’—she thought this might be easier for them to control the screen than struggling to ‘swipe’ with their fingers. She genuinely wanted them to succeed in even these mundane tasks, so that they could embrace and enjoy the operational changes that they were facing, and so that the team could maintain working harmony and cohesion. However, she admitted it was tough for her to care in this way, as she was also grappling with a need to prepare (indeed nurture) the team for the future:

*We have to ask questions about skillsets and abilities given digital expectations. It’s making us think very differently and carefully about having the right people or the wrong people. Because if you have the wrong people in the roles for the future, because of what our needs are moving towards, then what do you do? It’s a difficult one for me at the moment. [interview extract]*

While she honestly wished to be able to develop her team to meet these new demands, she struggled to balance this with the conflicting concern that this would also put undue pressure on them, disrupting their wellbeing. For Sarah, at this point in her story, the above examples show how her involvements with the CE technology reshaped how she was present with her team—how she experienced them (*mediated intersubjectivities / self → technology → others*) and also how she experienced herself in relation to them (*mediated subjectivities / self → technology → self*). These new technology-related mediations teleologically (re)oriented Sarah towards a potential future in which she was faced with uncomfortable decisions or disruptive interactions with her

team that did not sit well with her nurturing dispositions. Said differently, her cohesive sense of self as a *thrown-projection* was disrupted and challenged in relation to her habituated, routine dealings with her staff (*being-a-self as a coherent integration of disposition and projection*).

### 5.5.3. Scene 3: The potential of the CE technology to (over)expose Sarah’s team to management

Sarah’s protectiveness for the reps was most evident in her later account of some of their own fears in relation to the CE system. Confirming some of what was alluded to in Hannah’s story:

*They like it to be just like it always has been, and they seem in denial that we have to change. With Lorum forcing this path to digitalisation, they seem really resistant and part of it - when you talk to them – is that they think by working with the technology they may do themselves out of a job. Because when you start to do things digitally, with things being done on-line and data being collected to tell them what they should be doing, they think they may not have a role in the future. So, they don’t want to adopt it now as they want to avoid this, or even block it from happening. [interview extract]*

Sarah tried to alleviate this fear by explaining to the reps how the CRM was there to enhance the ability of salespeople in their work, not to replace them. As she explained: ‘it’s designed to make their jobs easy, to help target customers and think a lot more about their objectives when they interact with them’. However, the reps saw themselves as ‘relationship builders’ and that ‘digital’ – the CE strategy and platform – was a denial of the importance of relationships with customers. It was therefore a denial of them, their interests, motivations and, importantly, of their commitment to honing their ‘relationship building’ identities (a presentation of a threatening, *mediated subjectivities / self → technology → self*), and so also of their capacity to project these identities into a future that was meaningful to them (*being-a-self as a coherent integration of disposition and projection*). As Sarah admitted as she worked through these challenges:

*The technology has got a place, but it’s so telling of where we are at Lorum at the moment, it’s all so generic and prescriptive. It’s not giving a lot of room for flexibility in how we work here [at the frontline] – we can’t think outside the box. So, on the one hand, Lorum tell us we have to be innovative and daring in how we work ... but then the system they launch won’t let you do that! [interview extract]*

In the face of these challenges, Sarah felt as if she was under a lot of tacit pressure from the Corporate Office to implement the CE system. ‘Tacit’, because, as indicated earlier in Hannah’s story, there seemed to be little clear direction or support from senior management. Rather:



*It’s all happened really, really quickly. I think they are trying to disrupt us – there is so much going on all at once, and people will sink or swim. And from their [the Corporate Office’s] perspective, the ones that swim are the ones we [they] want to keep. [interview extract]*

Here, Sarah’s sense of being ‘*under pressure to get this done*’ was mediated not by formal direction from her managers at Corporate but from the local *presence* of the technology which, by *being present*, carried with it a tacit expectation of a ‘style’ of use that was predisposed by Sarah’s *thrown orientation-in-the-world* as a Country Manager accountable for the success of local operations. As with previous examples, the technology in its local materialisation, was experienced by Sarah as a ‘closeness’ of management even in their absence (*mediated intersubjectivities / self → technology → others*). They were projected ‘through’ the technology into her lifeworld – and the script of the technology was translated as ‘theirs’ – even though the technology was not formally coupled with an actual managerial mandate. Indeed, four months after this point in Sarah’s story, she told me:

*They [external consultants] are only now trying to upskill the senior business managers, so they actually know what the CE system does and how it should work. We are many months into using it, but we [they] are only now having a deep dive to work it all out at a senior level. [interview extract]*

Thus, in keeping with Hannah’s (Scene 2) account of the Corporate Office ‘*trying to work out what to do after it’s already been done!*’, there appeared to be only a very general set of strategic aims for the technology (as broadly represented in corporate strategy documents and training presentations), and little in the way of a clear ‘roadmap’ for accomplishing these aims. The technology was seen by Corporate Office leaders as a self-sufficient template for action, without being clear themselves on what sort of action was desirable<sup>49</sup>. On this basis she was ostensibly *subjected* to a technological script. However, given the situated context of her work at the frontline, this carried with it uncertainty and ambiguity. Thus, rather than it is *imposing a subject position upon her*, it was the manner in which the *technology* was relationally enrolled into Sarah’s own world

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<sup>49</sup> Of interest, it could be said here that Corporate Office managers were *also subjected* to the scripts of the technology, accepting them as (‘hopefully’) being *determinative* of a desirable pattern of local praxis rather than being *instruments* of their agential intent as strategists. Indeed, the technology had been reified within Lorum: For example: ‘It’s been sold in so hard [by the consultants and technology developers] that people want to believe it so badly!’ [audio diary quote from Caitlyn]. ‘They [Corporate] have invested so much money in this technology that they have to make this work’ [interview with Hannah]; ‘No one dares say anything bad about it [the technology] – one girl in the Corporate task force meeting was negative and she got an absolute slating’ [interview with Hannah].

which established the experiential conditions (the expectations, pressures, fears) that constituted the threat to her subjectivity, disrupting her sense of self as a coherent thrown projection (*being-a-self as a coherent integration of disposition and projection*).

Sarah grappled with the tension between this tacit, technologically projected expectation that the CE system should be implemented quickly, and the reps’ reticence to engage with it. She moved towards a reconciliation by justifying the reps’ work in different terms:

*They might not be using the CRM properly, but they are still getting the sales which is the most important thing, right? [interview extract]*

She exhibited a protective instinct here, clearly wanting to give the reps credit for their preferred ‘relationship building’ working style. However, she could see that this would set up further problems downstream:

*In the past, we have relied on the reps’ own knowledge and opinions for profiling and targeting customers, so they have been working with their own target lists for years – seeing who they think they need to see essentially. But now, the CRM sets the criteria to apply to their targeting through the survey. The problem is that we [she and Hannah] saw that these two lists [i.e., 1) the historical and 2) the survey-based target customer lists] are totally different. But the survey works – it should pick out the high-use customers based on good criteria and data. This means most of their historic calls [customer interactions] were essentially on non-target [low value] doctors. The fact that they still got the sales [met their sales targets] suggests that something is wrong. It raises the question do we really need reps [...] because you’re getting sales, even though you aren’t seeing the right customers. [interview extract]*

Her point here was that the reps had not been taking the profiling and targeting seriously in the past, maybe just visiting the customers with whom they had the best relationships, rather than the ones that could add to sales. She worried that this might infer (through the mediated translations of the CE technology) that the Local Office was meeting Corporate’s sales expectations regardless of whether their reps were doing their jobs effectively; said differently, maybe Lorum’s products would be seen as ‘selling themselves’:

*I mean if that’s the case, management are going to think: ‘do they [the Local Office] really need any reps!’ That’s the thing - when the reps don’t do things [use the CRM] properly, it makes them [Corporate Office managers] wonder about them. [interview extract]*

Again, these fears for her team were driven by the *potential concerns* that management *might have*, as they were manifest to her through her specific relationship with the technology. This relationship was culturally-historically sedimented into her way of relating to management at Lorum (as someone who had lived through lots of change; Scene 1), amplified through the technology and attuned in relation to her specific concerned manner of being-with-her-team. Thus, in a manner similar to Hannah (Scene 4), Sarah related to the technology in terms of how it potentially objectified the reps to Corporate Office management, which then oriented her towards a potential threat to their credibility (and continued employment). Overall, the technology mediated how she was both *with* her team and *with* management (*mediated intersubjectivities / self → technology → others*). It 'brought' both parties 'together' – within the spatial context of her care – in a manner that exposed her team to a future denial of their agency and selfhood in the eyes of the Corporate Office. Notwithstanding that the reps themselves felt nothing of this specific threat (although as previously described, some had their own, not unrelated concerns; see Hannah's story, Scene 3), Sarah's concerned dealings with the team and the technology were shaped on this basis.

Overall, through her relations with the technology, her team were made present to her *as under threat*, regardless of their own sense of *being threatened*. Similarly, Corporate Office managers were made present to her *through the technology* in a way that constituted them as *being a threat* to her team, regardless of the fact that their own involvements with the CE system at this point were very limited, such that they likely had little real awareness of local frontline praxis. And so, within the context of her own lived experience, these technological relations (re)shaped the subjectivities and intersubjectivities of both parties. In doing so, Sarah's own sense of self, her subjectivity as a protector and nurturer, was also somewhat reinforced – that is, she maintained a continued, integrated claim on this aspect of her thrownness and projection (*being-a-self as a coherent integration of disposition and projection*).

#### **5.5.4. Scene 4: Protecting herself and her team by 'ticking boxes' to 'stay under the radar'**

Having said this, over time, working within this web of technological mediations, Sarah found herself trying to support two entangled subject positions, that were – at the same time – mutually supportive but also potentially in conflict. These were associated with her concerned orientations towards 1) protecting her team while, 2) also meeting the operational expectations established in relation to the technology. On the one hand, as suggested in Scene 3 above, the two might be

incongruent as adoption of the technology had the potential to (over)expose the sales reps and thus constituted a threat to them. On the other hand, these two orientations might also be aligned: meeting Corporate expectations (as made present through the technology) would *‘keep management happy’* giving her team the space to work freely. As she observed: *‘we need to be seen to tick the boxes so that we can get on with it’*. This was, of course, disorienting for Sarah, and it challenged her to think about what this all meant for her relations with her team:

*Actually, I have never come across this sort of situation before in all my time in the industry, and it’s an interesting one for me to manage – it’s like I have to push back on one level, but then also be seen to be involved at another level. This is now the big struggle for me this year, as I have to give clarity to my team about what their priorities are, but for them not be pulled into this [conflicting, confounding set of relations]. [interview extract]*

These concerns further shaped Sarah’s continued involvements with the CE technology. Indeed, she adopted the technology in a manner that allowed her to balance these disorienting tensions. However, in doing so, the technology—to some extent—also became a medium for *obscuring* local praxis; that is, a mode of *re-presenting* herself and her team (through the technology) to Corporate management to reveal them as compliant subjects of the technological scripts, while at the same time enabling ‘local’ subject constitution. This may be illustrated through two examples articulated below: First, how she managed expectations around issues of customer *‘consent capture’* in the CRM. And second, her use of the coaching module.

The Local Office team would frequently talk about the challenges of *‘consent capture’* in the CRM. The background to this was as follows: Recall from the Prologue (Section 5.2) that one of the Corporate Office’s ambitions for the CE system was for it to provide a *‘fully integrated multichannel marketing’* capability to deliver the *‘right message, at the right time, to the right people, using the most appropriate channel to improve the customer’s experience’* [source: corporate strategy presentation]. The various ‘channels’ included ‘face-to-face’ sales rep interactions with customers, as well as the new ‘e-channels’ supported by the CE technology. These latter allowed customised distribution of ‘e-brochures’ and emails through the CRM from the ‘content management module’ as well as the running of on-line promotional and educational ‘e-events’. Although these channels were all in place and ready for use, the keystone to operationalising this multichannel approach was *‘consent capture’*. For ethico-legal reasons associated with data privacy, customers would have to officially consent to ‘connect’ with these e-channels. This required a face-to-face interaction

with a sales rep where they could give their consent by signing an electronic agreement. This process was managed and recorded through the CRM module.

The sales team therefore were expected to spend a lot of their in-field time ‘*gaining consents*’ to prepare the ground for digital engagement. However, this also meant the that reps were ‘*building the plane as they were flying it*’ [interview extract]. They still had to engage with their priority target customers, and have routine promotional and educational ‘face-to-face’ interactions while also having to spend time trying to get these, and other ‘*lower priority*’ [interview extract] customers to read and agree terms. Sarah saw how this might impede their ability to have meaningful interactions with customers which, as made clear above, was key to their subjectivity as relationship builders.

*It’s compounded the reps’ distrust of everything, it’s frustrating for them because it takes so much time and effort which distracts from everything else. The reps are there to sell—and this is what they say to us [Sarah and Hannah]—so when we ask them to do these other things to feed the CE system, which is for a longer-term benefit only, something has to give during their day jobs ... and I think that [customer] relationships and selling gives. Because if you are told to do all these things, which involve multiple steps during the call to get the consent into the system, you aren’t focused so much on having a good sales interaction. [interview extract]*

However, at this point, Sarah was now receiving clear guidance from her own manager at Corporate that there was ‘*a lot of visibility*’ in the dashboard in relation to the rate of consent capture, given its long-term strategic importance, and the Corporate-level dashboard was set up to directly compare and benchmark this metric between Lorum’s many country offices:

*Even though our way of working is very different here [in this country]—[in that], we have a smaller number of customers who don’t want or need to be contacted via the different channels—we still have to tick those boxes and get consents because that’s how they see us now. [interview extract]*

Thus, Sarah and her sales team were made present *through* the technology to themselves (*mediated subjectivities / self → technology → self*) and others (*mediated intersubjectivities / self → technology → others*) as either performing or under-performing in relation to other countries. Now aware of this, Sarah deployed the CE technology to shield her reps *on the terms that were defined by this technology*. She set up quantitative expectations through her use of the *system* that

would give her local team room for manoeuvre in their sales praxis, while also aiming to present them (through the technology) as performing at least on par with other Lorum operations:

*We can't hide any more. So, I am trying to align our target for consent capture as much as possible with other countries [other Lorum local operating firms] because that will keep Corporate off my back, as they then see that we are the same [as the other countries]. This essentially means that we need just two consents per day, which isn't very much so I tell the reps: 'if you can get more consents easily just do it as then it will make us look better'.*

[interview extract]

A similar pattern emerged from Sarah’s involvements with the coaching module of the CE system. As background, this brought Sarah and Hannah into a close working relationship. Given Hannah had, at this point, moved from the NSM role to the new KAM role, Sarah was now tasked with line management responsibility for the sales reps. That is, no one was recruited into the vacant NSM position. Sarah was therefore also now responsible for the ongoing development of sales skills (‘coaching’). However, given the significant scope of Sarah’s general management role as CM, Hannah provided coaching support to ease some of the workload. In addition, as Hannah reported directly into Sarah, Sarah was also responsible for Hannah’s coaching as a KAM.

Consistent with her pastoral orientation towards her team Sarah was sensitised to how the coaching technology *made them present* to senior management:

*Before Christmas a coaching report was run from the dashboard, and it showed that we had engaged in very low levels of coaching compared to other countries and we had a really stropy [bad-tempered] email sent out to us. [interview extract]*

As with the consent capture report in the dashboarding module, the technology *translated* her team, amplifying (through quantification and visualisations) their relative ‘underperformance’ when compared with Lorum offices in other countries. This frustrated Sarah, as she felt that the local operating conditions, given her current resourcing, were such that such a comparative stance was entirely inappropriate:

*And I told them [Corporate], in reply, that we have been doing coaching, but we are small numbers here compared to other countries. We don't have a hundred reps to manage and keep our eyes on, we are a close team and things are more fluid and less formal. [interview extract]*

However, in the same way as for consent capture, Sarah was quite pragmatic about the need to complete the coaching reports in the CE software to ‘keep[ing] Corporate off [her] back’ by ‘ticking [the right] boxes’.

*I am going to have to do it, because the [dashboard] reports are going to go through. Every two weeks is a lot of work, but I will just put it into my diary and look at the positives, as it will encourage me to chat with the team and stay in good contact. [interview extract]*

Sarah was able to establish ‘free relations’ with the CE technology, bringing its subjectifying mediations *into her lifeworld* in a manner that permitted her to ‘style’ herself (Section 3.6) as a subject, not by opposing (or, indeed, by fully accepting) its mediations but by *re-orienting herself in relation to them*. Accordingly, in both the above examples—CRM consent capture and use of the coaching module—Sarah’s relational ‘styling’ eased the tensions between the two subjectivities described at the start of Scene 4. Thus, as a *subject in relation to the technology and its mediations*, she presented herself to her team (locally, in her day-to-day concerned dealings) as oriented towards supporting the identities they wished to stabilise. At the same time, she presented herself to Corporate (*through the technology’s mediations*) as supportive of (as subject to) the CE system and the digital strategy.

At first, by styling herself in this manner, Sarah reconciled the potential conflict between these two positions, cohering them into her identity as an *experienced commercial manager at Lorum working at the interface of global and local operations*. Smoothing any turbulence associated with change came with the territory: ‘*that’s what I am here for, to keep things moving along*’ [interview extract]. However, Sarah’s subjectivity, as it was so styled, then placed her in a *different relation in being-with* Hannah. As time unfolded, this presented a new form of challenge to Sarah’s cohesiveness *as a self (being-a-self as a coherent integration of disposition and projection)*. This will now be presented in Scene 5, which concludes Sarah’s story.

##### ***5.5.5. Scene 5: Sarah’s relations with Hannah – subjectivity back under tension***

These new challenges to Sarah’s coherent sense of self were precipitated by how relations developed with Hannah as she, herself, became oriented to the technological mediations of the coaching modules and CRM consent capture. I will describe these (re)orientations first, before returning to consider how this then led to the disruption of Sarah’s subjectivity.

Hannah’s (re)orientations in relation to these two modules

Looking first at relations with the coaching module, Hannah’s own view was entirely negative:

*So, I am now reporting into Sarah as a KAM, and I have to sit there while we fill out the coaching report. And it’s ridiculous, I think: ‘how can you [Sarah] measure how I am doing? You are not out there in the field with me, you have never seen anything I actually do [in the field] so how can you actually coach me on this stuff anyway?’ [interview extract]*

Hannah later qualified these feelings in relation to the specific material nature of the CE coaching template. Here, recall from the Prologue (Section 5.2) that coaching sessions were formally steered by drawing on a set of questions within the coaching module that related to a rep’s development and accorded with a set of pre-defined skill-based standards. As with the earlier discussion of how records were entered into the CRM module, these questions were mandatory and had few ‘free text’ fields. Thus, ‘answers’ to these questions were limited to fixed options in a drop-down list: ‘Not observed’, ‘Developing’, ‘Proficient’, and ‘Highly proficient’. Hannah’s feelings here were unsurprising, harking back to her earlier view of the ‘cookie cutting’ technology-mediated objectification she experienced as an NSM:

*These questions in the report are based on a situation where you are assumed to be a salesperson that only ever has a monotonous conversation with a customer, going through your standard CRM messages, and it just doesn’t fit. It’s frustrating when Sarah and I do this [coaching] with the reps, and it’s frustrating when I have to do this now with Sarah as a KAM. [interview extract]*

Now, the sense of freedom and autonomy that Hannah had seized by engaging with the KAM role and its technological script (see Hannah’s story, Scene 5) was under threat again. She was cast back to the same sense of being *constrained* in relation to the technology. Sarah who, as expected given her sense of self presented above, wanted to smooth over such tensions. As she made clear to me:

*The template is very prescriptive, I know. Hannah and I have spoken about it, and I said: ‘look, I know it’s a hassle but let’s look at the positive side – it does give us a clear template of what to talk about during coaching, and where to focus on development [of skills]. [interview extract]*

By virtue of Sarah’s relation with the coaching module, Hannah’s sense of being constrained *by the technology* was then projected through to how she then *related to Sarah (mediated intersubjectivities / self → technology → others)*:



*Sarah just wants to put a big spin on it, saying we just need to be positive and make the most of it. But I said: ‘well how about we look at my actual goals, which we actually know, given what we have planned for the year as my priorities as a KAM, and let’s measure how I am achieving next to those. Because there needs to be something in there that lets us say that none of this [in the coaching template relative to my actual goals] is applicable. How is this supposed to be motivational? And Sarah doesn’t know what I do in the field so, she’ll put ‘Not observed’ or ‘Developing’, and I am thinking: ‘well how would you know?’ Because firstly that doesn’t fit with what I am doing, and secondly you are not out there with me doing it, so it’s completely irrelevant. [interview extract]*

‘Ticking the boxes’ to stay under the Corporate Office’s radar in this way was felt as a further denial of Hannah’s sense of self. It was a denial *by the technology*, and *by Sarah*. Moreover, in contrast with Sarah who saw that these obscuring moves with technology would appease senior management (so stabilising her own sense of self), Hannah was deeply concerned that this would *mis-present* her to the Corporate folks—as well as *presenting her* with this mis-presentation (*mediated subjectivities / self → technology → self*). She would then be *denying herself (her coherent integration of her dispositions and her futural projection)* if she did not resist this presentation. In her deep frustration she tried to articulate the existential anxiety she felt here:

*It annoys me because that coaching report will go to Corporate ... and it just doesn’t reflect [me], you know ... and I just feels like: ‘this is not fair’! And so, she [Sarah] either puts ‘Developing’ or ‘Not observed’ – what does that even mean? ‘Proficient’ what does that mean? It’s just absolute crap! I am ‘developing’ or ‘proficient’ or ‘not observed’ – is that all I am to them? My efforts are not recorded, and it seems that there is a disconnect between what I am doing and what seems to be important to Lorum and therefore the question is what actually matters? Do I matter? [interview extract]*

She went on to describe how she understood why Sarah was adopting her stance, but saw it as misguided:

*I know she feels that we just need to do this and so keep under the radar and keep going, and I can sort of understand that, and I know that she appreciates what I do. But it’s like a wink and a nudge: ‘let’s keep Dad happy and just remember that Mum [Sarah] knows what you are really doing’. And she thinks we can get by that way. But for how long do we keep just pretending that everything is fine? Do we actually want changes or are we just towing the line? Everyone*

*seems to want to pat each other on the back and tell each other it’s [the technology is] a great idea when it’s really just crap!* [interview extract]

Thus, Sarah’s use of the technology to shield the local team was—for Hannah—a long-term recipe for problems. By committing to an apparent alignment with the scripts immanent within the CE system, while—at the same time, and by so doing—also obscuring *actual* local experiences and praxis could only mean that issues were brushed under the carpet. I will revisit this from Caitlyn’s perspective later in the final story.

A similar, but more concise picture, emerged from Hannah’s involvements with ‘consent capture’ using the CRM module. Hannah experienced this again, in terms of the potential objectifications associated with quantitative metrics. For example, the dashboard comparisons that this forced *vis-a-vis* other countries’ sales teams (*mediated objectivities / self → technology → world*) denied her actual lived experience of her world. This occurred specifically in relation to how her customers in-her-world were present to her.

*Ratings for consent capture across countries are always higher for some product areas than others, so some teams look better. But this is just because in some places, due to cultural differences, the customers are just more engaging. It has nothing to do with their ability to build relationships or to sell.* [interview extract]

But the problem with this technological objectification went even deeper than this:

*Sarah has given us a target of two consents per week as a target [as per Scene 4 above]. This should be easy. But my problem is that the customers I am seeing apparently don’t exist according to the CE system. So, they can never be ‘consents’ in the system either!* [interview extract]

Hannah’s dilemma here was that her KAM role meant that many of her customers were senior level decision-makers in healthcare provider organisations. The individuals were not listed on the third-party databases that fed the CE system, so she could not record her interactions with them, and indeed Corporate managers did not even see them. Accordingly, these specific customer groups took on a unique objectivity in relation to the technology (*mediated objectivities / self → technology → world*): the entire Local Office team moved to refer to them as ‘grey customers’ as they were ‘*there in one sense but not in another*’ [interview extract]. The former sense related to the team’s lived experience of the customers, while the latter to the customer’s *absence* in relation to the mediations of the technology. The CE system thus denied the objective presence of a significant

aspect of the lifeworld in which she was meaningfully oriented. Existentially, this was a further denial of herself as a thrown projection (*being-a-self as coherent integration of her dispositions and her futural projection*) and practically it was frustrating, as she had to add to her workload by adopting James’ supplementary spreadsheet approach (see James’ story, Scene 5) to supplement her records. She would then email this to Sarah to make clear how the full scope of her role was being missed through the CE technology.

*Disruption to Sarah’s sense of self through being-with Hannah*

To sum up Scene 5 to this point, Hannah and Sarah’s distinct relations with the CE technology brought them together in a way that set up patterns of inter-personal resistance. Recalling Hannah’s story (Scene 3) of her shifting relations with the reps, the CE technology was *differentially present* to these two human actors in a manner that set up some conflict in their everyday dealings in-the-world (*mediated objectivities / self → technology → world*) and in *being-with* each other (*mediated intersubjectivities / self → technology → others*). Formulaically, The *Hannah–technology → world* and the *Sarah–technology → world* relational complexes were spatially in tension, whereby Hannah and Sarah were (re)oriented—by virtue of the technology—within their worlds in new but diverging ways. This, in turn, changed how they were present to each other as subjects.

Sarah was sensitive to this shift in the nature of relations with Hannah. It disrupted the cohesiveness of self that was described at the end of Scene 4. Recall here that Sarah had styled her relations to the technological mediations (with the coaching model and CRM consent capture) and in so doing, had cohered two potentially conflicting subject positions. However, the challenges set up in relation to her *being-with* Hannah alongside the technology now challenged this cohesion. Sarah’s orientation to the technology—as a means of maintaining a protective, nurturing identity by obscuring local praxis—was now in conflict with Hannah’s own sense that such obscuring was, in fact, a rejection of her own sense of self. Sarah was thus, through these relations with Hannah, also now confronted with a conflicting subjectivity in which she was constituted as an appeaser of Corporate, someone who just wanted to ‘*toe the line*’, ‘*pat themselves on the back*’ and deny the longer-term problems that this may cause [interview extracts]. Albeit indirectly through mediated intersubjectivities, this can be thought of as a confrontation with a *mediated subjectivity (self–technology → self)* associated with the presence of the technology. This was a renewed threat to the coherence of Sarah’s selfhood (*being-a-self as a coherent integration of dispositions and projection*).

This sense of tension for Sarah was then exacerbated when, in *‘toeing the line’* in this way, she became embroiled in her own dealings with the Corporate Office. Corporate managers saw her (apparent) embrace of the technology as an exemplar of good digital engagement. Sarah was thus invited to participate in on-line working sessions where corporate came together with various local operating teams from different countries to discuss CE implementation. However, Sarah herself became disillusioned by these meetings. In one example:

*They had break-out rooms for people [from the different countries’ operating teams] who could work together on plans and things, but because we are so small in this [specific country office], they just shoved us into a breakout room with [another country office] and that was completely pointless. They were talking about setting up CE customer segments for product areas that aren’t even relevant to us here. That happens a lot with us with the digital rollout – we just get plonked in with others without any thought about what we specifically need to discuss to get this working here [in our local market]. [interview extract]*

By being seen to embrace the CE technology and thus seizing a subject position of *conforming* to global digital imperatives, Sarah’s eyes were opened to the challenges that Hannah (and others in her team) had been facing. She started to feel the same sense of *being different* (as a member of this particular Local Office vis-à-vis other country offices) and thus of needing this difference to be recognised rather than obscured through the CE technology. In the above vignette, Sarah felt rejected and denied, in trying to *be-with* the Corporate strategy alongside other country teams, she also started to feel the same sense of exposure, where continued commitment to this path of appearing to *‘toe the line’* might eventually trip her up in future dealings within this forum.

To re-cohere and restabilise her sense of self (*being-a-self as a coherent integration of dispositions and projection*), Sarah decided at this point—after six months of working with the technology—to open dialogue with her own bosses at Corporate to communicate the challenges being faced by her team in their implementation of the CE technology. While she admitted this might be a challenging process, she felt that knowing this would give her team comfort that she was fighting their corner, while also helping Corporate to understand their Local Office *‘needs space to do things differently’* [interview extract] (such that, while willing to adopt the CE technology, they might need a more bespoke approach). Here, Sarah maintained her sense of self as protector, but one who was also now *openly* in support of her team’s local needs, while at the same time still trying to show commitment to Corporate’s digital cause.

## 5.6. Caitlyn’s story: ‘Re-placing’ the technology to defend the ‘local’ self

In view of Sarah’s late-stage shift in her approach to addressing the particular challenges that the Local Office faced, the next story is interesting. It introduces Caitlyn, the Product & Marketing Manager (PMM; Table 7, p.117). If the restabilisation of Sarah’s subjectivity at the end of Scene 5 above was marked by a show of support for her team with Corporate—arguing that the local operating conditions made it difficult to follow the technology’s scripts—Caitlyn’s approach to claiming her subjectivity radically extended this position. To protect her ‘local’ interests, Caitlyn’s work essentially re-shaped how *local conditions were made present*, and in so doing, re-positioned the technology’s scripts as *irrelevant*. Said differently, she altered the spatiality within which the technology was ‘placed’ such that it no longer had a firm foundation from which to legitimately orientate local praxis. As in the previous stories, I begin with an initial introduction to Caitlyn as a subject.

### 5.6.1. Scene 1: Caitlyn’s identity as a local, politically savvy strategist

Like Sarah, Caitlyn was also an experienced healthcare industry practitioner. Her career started at a management consulting firm where, for five years, she developed her skills in market analysis and strategy, working on projects for a large range of healthcare company clients at both the global (corporate) and local operating levels. She then moved to Lorum, first working in a larger international operating subsidiary. Here, she initially had a sales and marketing analytics role, before being seconded for a short period into a sales rep position to gain ‘field’ experience. She then moved into sales management for a few years before moving to the Local (country) Office as PMM. In this current position, Caitlyn was responsible for developing promotional materials to support the local sales team, designing and running national marketing campaigns and other business development initiatives for Lorum’s products, and conducting local market research studies to support these activities. She was also tasked with monitoring local product supply to ensure that appropriate stock levels were available in the country to meet sales demand (Table 7, p.117). These responsibilities meant that she had frequent, direct communications with various parties as the Corporate Office, including the global brand teams, and the global product supply team.

This portfolio of experience afforded Caitlyn with a set of strong working relations with the Corporate Office team. She also felt she understood the workings of the Corporate environment, the processes of global-level decision making, and the routine praxis and power plays of which

these were comprised. She had a sense of the complexity of Corporate Office decisions and was politically savvy in ensuring local issues were heard by key stakeholders. Caitlyn had similar concerns to Hannah in relation to Sarah’s desire to shield her team through the technology, However, these concerns were developed from a quite different subject position, as will now be described.

### 5.6.2. Scene 2: *Subject to a script played on the wrong stage*

Caitlyn’s primary involvement with the CE technology was through the ‘content management module’ (Section 5.2). As a reminder, this module facilitated the design, creation and approval of electronic promotional materials (e-brochures and emails) used by the sales team. It provided a ‘complete document management solution’ and records of document versions, requested changes, and approvals were thus available, for Corporate to view. Recall also that some ‘generic content’ was uploaded into the software by the global brand team. This was ‘pre-approved content’ that was ‘aligned’ with global product strategy [sources: corporate strategy and training documents].

However, sitting behind this seemingly straightforward technological script was Corporate’s long-term vision for a digital customer engagement ‘Power Station’. Caitlyn recounted one of her early conversations with the global brand team, where they presented this vision and how the CE technology related to it. Caitlyn’s expressed angst with what she thought of as the managerial ‘command-and-control system’ that was embodied in and through the CE technology:

*Corporate talk about the ‘deep digital transformation’ that Lorum is undergoing, and with this [CE] technology they are pre-empting massive changes and part of this is a huge push towards ‘Power Station’ and top-down sales and marketing. But this command-and-control through the [CE] system like this just can’t work. It’s ludicrous, it’s just stupidity! The corporate segments they are forcing down on us just don’t mean anything here [in this country]. [audio diary extract]*

Here, she was reacting to how the technology would be a staging ground for an increasing role for global brand teams in structuring the nature of strategy accomplishment for Lorum across all Local Offices (countries). As introduced in Section 5.2 above, initially, large scale market analysis would be conducted—by Corporate—across multiple countries to define competitive positioning, and to profile and segment healthcare customers according to their patterns of use of Lorum’s and competitors’ products. This would then provide the basis for a local process of ‘microsegmentation’. According to this process, Local Offices would be required to align local ‘microsegments’ to the

globally defined ‘strategic’ segments. The global brand teams would mass produce a large range of promotional materials that would be loaded up into the CE system’s content management module (referred to as ‘*modular content*’). Different materials would be differentially targeted for use in different segments (and thus local microsegments). The Local Office teams would then be required to adopt these, with some tailoring to meet local language and regulatory needs. The overarching espoused Corporate aims for this ‘Power Station’ approach were to drive the strongest competitive positioning for Lorum’s brands, consistently across all markets; and to support local teams by providing ‘*ready-to-use*’ content, thus reducing local costs, and so increasing local marketing efficiency. Caitlyn made her negative stance on this very clear:

*The key [Corporate Office] message was that Lorum is behind the global pack when it comes to use of digital technologies, and we want ‘to catapult beyond our competitors’. They have really swallowed the Kool-Aid! What space are we working in? Are we a digital communications agency now or are we still a healthcare company? It feels like this technology is just a big sell, and we have bought into it hook, line and sinker. We are becoming a very top-down organisation, and there are decisions being made about technology that are uncoupled from reality. So, they are basically saying: ‘There’s this fantastic [CE] technology called [XXX] and if we use it the way the developers and consultants tell us, then we are going to be able to drive sales and become really competitive and extend our customer reach and have more touch points with our customers. And it’s almost a heresy to speak out against that!’ [audio diary extract]*

For Caitlyn, the CE technology and its success (in the eyes of Corporate) was an end in itself, one that Corporate had ‘bought into’ based on the technology’s promise, rather than having any clear idea of the strategy that might underpin it. In keeping with aspects of Hannah’s story (Scene 2), she thus questioned the operational meaningfulness of these technological scripts. She had a clear sense that they would not ‘fit’ with the local context: ‘*it’s going to be really hard to focus on things that matter; or to even understand what might matter*’. As also exemplified in earlier narratives, the *mediated objectivities (self → technology → world)* presented by the technology were incongruous with her lived experiences in-the-world. She developed a particular concern that this would hamper her own local marketing efforts, and actually add to her workload without affording any real benefit:

*The whole point was that this would empower us to reach customers more frequently with the information that’s most relevant to them, and also to communicate with them in the way they want to be communicated to. But the segments set up by the system will not all be applicable to*

*the local markets, and so there is a fine balance between using these and creating your own locally relevant ones. At the same time, you’re aware of the fact that you are expected to use the global modular content produced by Corporate, which is going to be geared towards their defined segments. So, if you go too far outside these global segments you could find that you can’t actually use the global content because it’s not going to be relevant. What this means is you would then have to produce more of your own local content. This obviates the whole point of modular content and Power Station in the first place if local countries have to go on to produce all of their own stuff to support that. And at the end of the day, you will likely then get in trouble for doing this as you then aren’t engaging with Power Station properly! [interview diary extract]*

As indicated in the Prologue (Section 5.2), the CE system was designed to capture data on how the promotional materials were used by the reps to refine segments through iterative cycles of data analysis. Eventually Corporate’s hope was that this would be enabled and ‘empowered’ through AI. However, Caitlyn did not see this as empowering; she saw this as a means of justifying and, over-time, validating the presence of the technology rather than a means to support her work at the frontline:

*It seems that they just want us to be feeding data into the system to feed the Power Station and justify its existence. It’s completely disconnected from what we need to do to add value in the market. You know, all the work I do now in creating and trying to get the reps to use e-brochures and emails is not driven by a local marketing need, it’s just driven by a need to tick boxes so that the technology is getting used. [audio diary extract]*

Such concerns were projected into her relations with others in the Local Office team (*mediated intersubjectivities / self → technology → others*). In a manner comparable to the mediated being-with-others that confronted Hannah and Sarah, Caitlyn’s perceptions of the Local Office sales reps was also postphenomenologically transformed. The presence of the technology—and the aims it embodied—*amplified* their inadequacies in relation to ‘*feeding the Power Station*’, and *reduced* the pertinence of their recognised strengths in—and their personal motivation towards—customer relationship building:

*Now the technology is moving everything towards Power Station where AI will be used to direct reps on what promotional materials to use and what to say to customers. And with the way the business is going here [in this country] it’s just not possible. Because if you are going*



*to be setting up microsegments you need good data on individual customers, the only way you are going to get good data is through rep interactions, and it’s got to be a skilled rep to ask the right questions and to interpret all this properly in terms of the microsegments, and to read all this through the technology, and then use it properly. Looking at the reps we have, I just don’t think that’s possible. [interview extract]*

Over the coming months, Caitlyn offered specific examples of how the lack of ‘fit’ of the technological scripts and the need to ‘feed the Power Station’ [audio diary extract] would confound the sales reps’ work in the field. She considered how the use of the e-brochures that she would need to prepare for the relevant microsegments would strip the reps of their autonomy while at the same time yielding data for Powerhouse that would have little real relevance to the local environment:

*So, Sarah and I were discussing this: What if the rep doesn’t even need to use an e-brochure in the call? It doesn’t always make sense to use one. You can’t force them on customers when you are talking with them. Well, that’s the problem, this [CE technology] is there to make sure reps do use them [e-brochures] every time, so that they [Corporate] can get data on whether it works or not. This is just turning the reps into mindless robots. If they use it for no good reason, just because they have to use it, it’s just going to be crap data in and crap data out. What good is that? In the meantime, the customers throw you out of their office because they don’t want to see this stuff! [interview extract]*

This idea of reps being turned into ‘robots’, echoes the earlier objectifications of the reps in relation to the mediations of the technology (see Hannah’s and Sarah’s stories). Similarly, Caitlyn also saw that reps would be challenged to even have time during their ‘calls’ with customers to use the e-brochure in the way required to capture the relevant data appropriately. This would mean that they would end up trying to fill the gaps in the data *after each call* based upon memory. Plus, ‘*how will they [the reps] even know what the customers really thought about each message or page of the brochure anyway!*’ Caitlyn had similar views of the use of the pre-prepared ‘microsegment’-targeted emails that she would have to prepare for the reps:

*These healthcare customers don’t have time to read the emails they have been bombarded with. They are smart people, they make their own decisions, so they know when they are just being marketed to. They don’t listen to us in regard to digital communications and flashy electronic*

Findings – shaping subjectivities in relation to technology’s mediations

*documents – they just want a good professional conversation to check the veracity of what they are seeing or reading or hearing. [audio diary extract]*

More broadly, she saw how the pressure to accommodate this segmentation exercise into the CE system would actually re-direct sales rep activity towards customers that might be less important to the business:

*We have to do all this work to profile customers to align with these prioritised segments, and these are the ones we are meant to be focusing on. But everyone knows that these can be the hardest ones to see because they are so busy doing their jobs they don’t have time to see reps. The ones reps can easily get to see are not the ones that are going to be most important to your business. So, this creates so much tension – where should the reps spend their time in the field? It leads to brass plating [sales rep activity that simplifies their work while being seen to conform to expectations]! [audio diary extract]*

To summarise Scene 2, it could be said that the CE technology embodied a script that could only ever be played on the wrong stage, given the ‘reality’ of Caitlyn’s lived experience of the local context for sales and marketing praxis. As I will build upon in more detail later in Scene 5, the technological presence (manifest through the relations that Caitlyn established with it) of this ‘wrong’ script was actually productive—it shaped what the ‘right’ scripts might look like:

*What we really need in [this country] when it comes to interactions with our healthcare customers in order to increase sales is to be rolling out initiatives with different types of customers to extend product use in areas where there are barriers that we need to overcome. But with this new command-and-control approach through the CE technology and the digital strategy that defines how our reps interact with almost pre-defined customers, it really doesn’t help us. We have very few competitors, so there is no need to be out-promoting other companies with promotional noise, and our products themselves are really highly accepted. Old-school product messaging isn’t going to get us any further. We need to add something on top of this. [interview extract]*

Here, postphenomenologically, we start to see how the relations that Caitlyn developed with the CE technology—given her subject position as a strategically minded, politically savvy local operative—revealed the futural *potential* for a world (*mediated objectivities / self → technology → world*) that was discordant with her teleological projection (a *place* she would not be able to be-in while *being-her-self*). Further to this, over time, these relations amplified the aspects of her world

that might be performative of this future, and thus that might be ‘corrected’ to retain a cohesive sense of her self (*being-a-self as a coherent integration of dispositions and projection*). This developing threat to Caitlyn’s subjectivity is the focus of Scene 3.

### 5.6.3. Scene 3: Subjectified by the potential to be a ‘factory for content’

Caitlyn’s growing unease was thus associated with her futural projection *into-the-world* as she struggled with the technological changes ahead. Certain inconsistencies stood out for her:

*Some things really don’t make sense: one stream [of Corporate dialogue] talks about agility and ‘pivoting quickly’ to respond to different market forces, but then on the other hand, Power Station and the [content management module]—although they are meant to drive this idea of responsiveness—don’t give local teams time to plan. You have these two sets of considerations to manage in parallel, but they are contradictory. [audio diary extract]*

She was referring here to the possible challenges local teams might have in working with the new promotional material that would be ‘pushed’ down from Corporate through the CE system. Local teams worked on quarterly and annual planning cycles. Here, financial targets and other performance-related metrics were established based upon sales and marketing plans that needed to be agreed and budgeted for in advance. This all took time, and almost paradoxically was a forward-looking process of planning that was mandated by the same Corporate Office team who were promoting agility. As Caitlyn indicated:

*It goes against that whole idea of agility because on one hand they are saying you need [through use of the technology] to be responding in real time to what is happening [in the market], but then [on the other hand] the rest of the system just can’t keep up. Because you have to prospectively plan, and lock in these plan, and then prepare [promotional activities] according to these plans. [audio diary extract]*

In keeping with some of the aforementioned fears of others in earlier narratives, for Caitlyn this all seemed to pose a threat to the viability of the Local Office:

*Maybe as part of the digital transformation, they may say that for smaller countries like us, if we don’t fall under that global model, then ‘we just don’t bother’ running those countries anymore. The technology seems to be pushing us in this direction, and when you are sitting up at global [the Corporate Office] looking at things, you aren’t thinking about the micro stuff*

*down on the ground in the smaller countries. The technology is potentially what could enable this scenario. [interview extract]*

Her thinking here was also associated with a concern that the Corporate Office’s visibility of local conditions and operations would be limited to that which was translated to them *in relation to and through* the amplification-reduction structure of the CE technology. As per Scene 2, the technology seemed designed to measure—and scripted to perform—a world that didn’t reflect ‘local reality’. Thus, from Caitlyn’s perspective, with only this transformed view, how could Corporate ever understand her and the others in the local team? There would always be a disconnect. In part looking for ways to reconcile such contradictions, Caitlyn sought guidance from other country-level marketing teams within the wider international Lorum business. These teams had already experienced the pressure to engage with Power Station. However, rather than reconcile Caitlyn’s perceived tensions, their guidance reinforced them:

*I asked the team in Country Y what they were doing. They said that basically you just need to create heaps of different content, well in advance of when its needed. You create far more [different options] than you need but so you then have enough to pick and choose from. But that means you are not using the data that you captured [in the CRM] to inform what you do; you are just hoping you have the right stuff when you find out what is needed. So, it’s not truly agile, or tailored and responsive to changes in customer need at all! [audio diary extract]*

For Caitlyn, this all pointed towards a future loss of control over the direction of her local work, as well as amplifying constraints on resourcing that would add to her workload:

*When I had the ability to determine what needed to be done for our own market, we would spend the time on the things that we knew mattered, which was based upon our own thoughts, the market analysis that we do and the feedback from the reps. But now we’ve been told that we need to have much more content as it’s all about content. And because I am the only marketing person in the country, it’s not like I have a junior person to help with churning all this out through the ‘content management module’. When will I have time? [audio diary extract]*

Caitlyn felt deeply threatened about the intensity of involvements that might be solicited by the technology, and the expectations that it embodied. Superficially this could simply be associated with workload issues. But, more fundamentally, these threats were existential, relationally associated the potentialities of the technology within her lifeworld:

*You will be expected to create heaps of content taking what global has rammed into the system ... it's then just cycles of pumping stuff through the system. I will need to create customised stuff for the initiatives we have up and running here on the ground, but all my KPIs will be linked to what I churn through the module. Something has got to give, and it will be the stuff that really matters. But then you go: 'what's the point of my job?' Because any monkey could do this. I am paid good money to think; but I don't have to think with this stuff; I just have to do. I just have to be good at clicking on the software. It's boring – I will just be a factory, a factory for content!<sup>50</sup> [audio diary extract]*

The emotive language of ‘seeing’ the future self (in relation to the presence of the technology) as nothing other than a ‘factory for content’ (*mediated subjectivities / self → technology → self*) relayed the power of the threat that Caitlyn was experiencing. This threat was manifest in terms of the *potential* for her to be subjected to—and objectified by—the CE technology and its scripts, scripts which might translate her into a ‘commoditised’, ‘reduced’ version of a marketing professional, denying her the autonomy and agency she has previously won as a ‘local product strategist’. This futural projection towards a *self that denies selfhood (being-a-self as a coherent integration of dispositions and projection)* was exacerbated by Caitlyn’s sense that her manager, Sarah, was supporting this trajectory by denying her the right to argue for the existence of this threat and so also her right to defend against it:

*I was invited to call on the CE segmentation process. They want every single target customer to be profiled using this global schema they have put together and there is about 20 different sections with about seven questions each, and every customer needs to be profiled in the CE system to feed into the microsegmentation process. That won't be relevant for any individual country at all! And then I just get told [by Sarah] to keep my head down, to stay quiet, and to just get on with it! [audio diary extract]*

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<sup>50</sup> Although outside the scope of this thesis and its positioning, I note how these empirical insights resonate with earlier scholarship showing how workplace automation can lead to worker subordination and de-skilling in contrast to freedom and autonomy (e.g., Blauner, 1964; Braverman, 1974; Cooley, 1980; Hodson, 1996; Hull et al., 1982; Noble, 1978; Shepard, 1971; Vallas, 1988). Vallas’ (1988) findings, for example, are interesting. He shows that technological restructuring of work processes can lead to the alienation of those involved in routine clerical work, due to de-skilling, while the work of those involved in ‘crafts’ may be enhanced. In the spirit of such studies—and very much as a speculative sidenote to my inquiry—it is therefore fascinating how Caitlyn initially seemed to view the futural threat of the CE technology as potentially *demoting* her to unskilled (somewhat clerical) duties, while also inspiring her (as will be seen as her story progresses further) to be *creative* in how she styled her own local strategy work, retaining a sense of her work as ‘craft’.

This feeling of threat was exacerbated as the presence of the technology started to place structural demands on the wider international Lorum organisation. New roles and skillsets seemed to be called for:

*And there are a lot of new roles being advertised internationally across the business that I have just never heard before, relating to digital product development, and scrums and scrum masters [aligned with the increasing focus on agile teams and practices]. These don’t fit into the traditional sales and marketing structure we are used to. I am wondering if this all means a big fundamental shift in how things are run. So, what is the role for local teams in this sort of future? We would just be administrators who align [promotional] materials with local regulations. No one in any local marketing will appreciate that because we feel what we [currently] do is really important. [audio diary extract]*

Caitlyn was struggling to be ‘true’ to herself under the conditions that she felt were being shaped around her by virtue of the technology’s structuring presence. In relation to the mediations that were shaping her lifeworld, she could not envisage a futural version of her self that could maintain a claim on its own selfhood (*being-a-self*). That is, a claim on a stable, cohesive, *well integrated set of dispositions and projections*.

#### **5.6.4. Scene 4: Subjected to a de-stabilising path (or trying to be the same but different)**

As suggested by others in earlier narratives, Lorum’s Local Office operations were small relative to those of other countries and, for many years, had not been exposed to significant Corporate scrutiny. As Caitlyn put it:

*Because we are small we can fly under the radar. And that’s the way Sarah prefers it. So, you need to have a relationship with them [Corporate] because you need their support when you need to put a business case together; for example, to get them to approve the launch of a new product or something. But you also don’t want to be so much in their minds that they ask too many questions about what you are doing. And that’s always been Sarah’s fear because the [Local Office] exists on a bit of a wing and a prayer as a small operation, and if too many questions are asked, they may put pressure on us in a way that may call our existence into question. [audio diary extract]*

Here, Caitlyn (and Sarah) feared that the local operation might either be reduced to a ‘skeleton’ administrative team managed from overseas or, worse, it could be dismantled entirely, and product supply put in the hands of a distributing partner. Confirming previous narratives, the

presence of the CE technology amplified fears associated with being increasingly exposed to Corporate through its mediations, while also being translated and objectified by these mediations, such that Caitlyn and the local team were *made present* to Corporate in a manner that was not consistent with their ‘reality’ at the frontline. Also, in agreement with previous narratives, Sarah was seen to hold a strong desire to keep the Local Office ‘under the radar’ by being ostensibly ‘compliant’ with the technology by ‘ticking boxes’. Caitlyn’s view was that this could only ever lead to a doubling up of her own work, almost living two realities in parallel:

*[But] I told Sarah that I can’t always do both – if we have to do stuff to tick boxes then other things will have to be dropped. And this will be the stuff that actually matters locally. How can we be seen to comply while being independent?* [interview extract]

Such tensions were projected into relations with others across the wider international Lorum organisation (*mediated intersubjectivities / self → technology → others*). She recounted challenging experiences of web conferences with the global brand teams and other international teams (who had shaped quite different relations with the technology; cf. the discussion of multistabilities in Hannah and Sarah’s stories), for example:

*When we go on calls, we are with other countries whose microsegments will align pretty well with Corporate as they have the same product mix and competitors, or these countries have forced their own locally defined microsegments into the corporate boxes defined by the CE system and are kidding themselves. We are under pressure to fit in here and be seen to agree.<sup>51</sup>*  
[audio diary extract]

And at the same time, there was a tacit pressure in these wider Lorum relations to maintain a low profile *despite* the frustrations that she felt, and *despite* her sense that passively committing to these relations was further reinforcing a path towards a futural denial of her autonomy:

*There was zero push back or dissent on the call. I was the same though, I could have used this as a chance to say: ‘well this is going to be the main issue for us [in this country] because global is not going to be producing any content that is relevant for our microsegments so why would we*

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<sup>51</sup> As noted above (footnote 50), some aspects of these findings resonate with domains outside the scope of this thesis. As suggested by this comment on corporate-subsidiary relations at Lorum, IB is one such domain. So, while not wishing to open a ‘pandora’s box’ that would distract from the focus, I do wish to acknowledge the long history of work on multinational corporation (MNCs). See, for example, key reviews on headquarters–subsidiary relationships (Birkinshaw et al., 2000; Kostova et al., 2016), coordination and control within MNCs (Gupta & Govindarajan, 1991; Martinez & Jarillo, 1989), the organisational structuring of MNCs (Brock & Birkinshaw, 2004; Buckley, 2009), and MNC governance (Aguilera et al., 2019).

*do this in the first place.’ But again, we feel we need to keep our heads down and not be seen to rock boats on this. [audio diary extract]*

By committing to ticking boxes, and signalling compliance with and support of the CE technology, the Local Office team increasingly seemed to align themselves with other countries, displaying themselves in relation to their involvements with the technology as the *same* as these other countries. This carried with it the tacit assumption that they *were the same* in terms of having similar markets, business structures and operational requirements. For Caitlyn, this was a pretence: it went further than shielding or obscuring local praxis to stay ‘below the radar’, it was a cascade of obfuscations that could only catch up with them at some stage, and at the same time was a denial of the local market conditions (the nuances of its particular healthcare practice environment and its base of customers and competitors) within which she had to work and within which she (and others such as Hannah) had defined their sense of identity. Indeed, this feeling of needing to ‘toe the line’ echoes Hannah’s experiences as recounted in Sarah’s story (Scene 5). However, what is interesting in Caitlyn’s case is how the feeling of contradiction extended into a *critical view* of her own self as she was thrown into her world, a view of her self as *not pushing back* on the technological script, seeing herself in terms of *her own* denial of selfhood. This could be seen as another manifestation of a lack of cohesion between dispositions and projection which she held herself partly to blame (*being-a-self as a coherent integration of dispositions and projection*).

From Caitlyn’s perspective, trying to stay under the radar in this way was thus doomed to failure, committing the Local Office to a track that could only see them de-railed at some point if they continued upon it. As more time passed, these concerns only deepened:

*I have told Sarah last week that, before we head further down this path, there absolutely needs to be conversations with corporate about all this. I mean everything that’s being done with this technology is setting up the foundation for Power Station and then the AI integration that will happen behind the scenes. I don’t see a place for that in [this country] at all. Because it just doesn’t fit – it’s two different universes. If we don’t have this conversation soon we will be sitting in meetings feeling completely overly committed, and we are asked questions by people who don’t understand us here and we don’t know how to answer. We need to be building the market, not running a command-and-control technology that assumes we are something we aren’t. Pretending we are competing in a one-size-fits-all competitive market based on the model global push down through the system will not grow our business. [audio diary extract]*



Further down the track, these projected concerns started to come to fruition. For example, the CE technology (specifically the dashboarding module) was translating the local sales team (making them *present* as objectifications of activity and performance relative to quantitative benchmarks) in ways that were raising ‘red flags’ in the system (for example, see James’ story, Scene 5). ‘Living the lie’ was starting to manifest inconsistencies hermeneutically revealed through Corporate Managers’ own relations with the technology:

*The message that Sarah was giving to the team for ages was that these things may be happening, but we are going to try to shield you from them. But it’s now getting to the point that no one can be shielded any more. Sarah’s boss [at Corporate] is starting to turn his attention to the detail now [cf. Sarah’s story, Scene 5]. He is looking at individual reps and their activity levels, sending screenshots of this to Sarah with a ‘please explain’ comment. So, the chickens are starting to come home to roost. [audio diary extract]*

To sum up, for Caitlyn, there were experiential and existential tensions between, first, the ‘local world’ that was being projected—through the shielding and obscuring mediations of the technology—to Corporate and, second, the ‘local world’ as it was experienced by Caitlyn. She was not able to *be-in* either of these worlds at the same time, and while they co-existed in tension, it seemed she would not be able to *be-in* either in isolation (*mediated objectivities / self → technology → world*). Accordingly, there was little sense of a stable *being-in-the-world* that would permit her to orient herself teleologically and thus maintain a coherent sense of self (*being-a-self as a coherent integration of dispositions and projection*).

This de-stabilisation continued to the point in her story where she moved to ‘pivot’ the ‘world’ that was presented to Corporate through means other than the CE technology. *She re-presented* the world, decoupling it from the objectifications constituted through the technology. In doing so, Caitlyn was able to re-cohere her sense of self and re-claim her subjectivity. This is the focus for the final scene of Caitlyn’s story, which also concludes the overall narrative arc of these research findings.

#### **5.6.5. Scene 5: Pivoting the local world of strategy around a stable sense of self**

During the very early stages of this research study, Caitlyn had described how Sarah was working on some minor sales force restructuring following the resignation of a rep in a key territory. Pending a round of annual budgeting and headcount planning, Sarah had decided to employ a casual contractor to cover the territory for the final three months of the year. Given that

this individual was not comprehensively trained on Lorum’s product range, it was decided that he would focus—for the short period of time that he was there—on the provision of a specific ‘product training service’ [not described to maintain Lorum’s anonymity] that was required under the terms of a public sector services contract.

According to Caitlyn, this was *‘reactive and not strategic ... a stop gap measure’* to meet regulatory requirements and maintain customer contact and good relations while local sales force plans for the following year were being developed. Caitlyn was not sure that this was the best interim idea as there would be a break in the continuity of *‘full portfolio’* promotion and support. She was also not completely convinced that the individual chosen to fulfil this short-term role was up to the task. However, this early development did sow the seed for further local strategising by Caitlyn during the final month of my study. At that point, she took a lead in re-designing the sales force in a manner which was influenced—as the following will reveal—by her wider concerns in relation to the CE technology as presented above. First, this was influenced by her sense of needing to justify the viability of the Local Office’s existence, given her aforementioned fears that ‘over-exposure’ to Corporate would raise doubts. Second, by her drive to reinforce how local market conditions were *different*, to steer away from the growing pressure to *appear to be the same* as other country offices in relation to the CE technology. And third, by her orientation towards uncoupling localised strategy from the conformist, determinist path towards Power Station that a full commitment to the CE technology would set them on, only to ultimately fail them. This new sales force programme was developed around a model of *‘service over promotion’*.

As per Caitlyn’s own words on her initial presentation of this plan to the global brand team:

*I presented the new structure with only three full-time sales reps: a really lean, cost-effective organisation. I also presented the stakeholder landscape that these reps would be covering, and discussed what their key objectives under this service model would be. And the main objective for them is to provide the service that we are required to provide contractually. And this will be a market building approach, not a competitive one.* [audio diary extract]

She also described how, by presenting the revised sales model in this way, it could put some distance between the local operation and the technological script:

*The specific customers they will be targeting are then a specific customer segment in themselves, but one that cannot be profiled based on product adoption or usage criteria. That’s because they are all strong advocates, so we don’t need to sell the benefits of the products.*

*Instead, what we need to be doing is make sure that they are properly supported in their continued and expanded use of these products. Traditional messaging and competitor positioning materials are meaningless in this model. So, I put these slides together to present to the global brand team and in my talking points, I stated very clearly why this approach was required to grow the [local country] market. When I finished, there was pretty much a stunned silence. It seemed that they had no idea how different things worked on the ground here in [this country] and were ultimately very understanding, and we discussed next steps. [audio diary extract]*

In these closing words, we also get a sense of how the CE technology possibly obscured the view between Corporate and the Local Office in *both directions*. For human actors on both sides of what might be viewed metaphorically as a ‘technological divide’, experiences, expectations and praxis were translated and transformed through the technology’s relational mediations.

Ostensibly, Caitlyn – in developing and presenting her arguments to Corporate – focused on rational, deliberative market and operational analysis, specifying why local conditions were different to other markets, how there were no real competitors, and that market growth would depend upon getting wider use of their products within an already strong base of customers. However, it was also clear that her articulation was made in such a way as to *claim back* her world, and her *being-in this world*. Thus, she was very open about how she had positioned her arguments around the specific threats that the CE technology, and its scripts and trajectory towards the Power Station vision:

*Power Station really isn’t going to be relevant for us here now because the global segmentation process run through the CE system is based upon the wrong criteria – they are built around ‘customer journeys’ from ‘unaware’ through various ‘awareness levels’ to being a full-on advocate. But we are now only going to be targeting advocates. So, we don’t need all that additional CRM profiling nor all the segment-specific promotional materials that will be pushed down [through the content management module]. Even then, the project-based service model means that our advocate/high-user segment is also completely different from the [corresponding] global segment. We have no real competitors [in this segment] so the competitive messaging in these global materials is also irrelevant. The material I will now put together in the content management module will now need to be specifically targeted to education, training and project-based service provision. [interview extract]*

Caitlyn also talked about the care she was taking in communicating this to the global brand team and other key Corporate stakeholders:

*I have been really careful about the communications here to get this right. For instance, I am positioning our reps not as sales reps now but as ‘service reps’. Their roles are described as project-based rather than promotion-based. And I support this with a case that shows that this commitment to long-term support is the critical factor for long-term customer engagement and continued advocacy. I also make it clear that this is not something marketing just churning out content can do, it needs reps on the ground with well-established relationships with these high-status advocates to maintain credibility as service providers rather than ‘just’ promoters of product. I also make clear that this is not something that can be done remotely via digital – you need face-to-face contact. So, I am going to keep on hammering all this home at meetings with Corporate. [audio diary extract]*

She also talked about the plans she was putting together with Sarah and Hannah to further distance the team from the technology, providing local freedom to operate, to build on their local market knowledge and experience, to be locally strategic and to have control without feeling exposed to—and under threat from—the Corporate Office:

*As what we are doing here just isn’t supported by the global modular content, we will be left alone to prepare the materials we need to prepare ourselves locally. This leaves us now free to use the system in the way we need it – to take global marketing content if it’s useful, but no longer feel constrained by it. We can create materials locally that we know will really cut through and support our local sales model. [interview extract]*

*We need to be spending our time now developing a full database of our advocates for these services in the reps’ territories. We can go back to basics with this change in customer focus. So, this will get us further away from Power Station and its ‘multichannel microsegment plans’, as we will use digital [e-brochures and emails] in a very targeted way. So, the reps will have other objectives that don’t relate to the way the CE system is set up. They can use it for record keeping but without the same constraints. [audio diary extracts]*

Caitlyn often talked about how the technology was ‘*the tail wagging the dog*’. In her view, it should not force a ‘*one-size-fits-all*’ model and set of expectations on the local team; this could only lead to local team’s ultimate failure. Rather, it should *support* the local work that Caitlyn, Sarah, Hannah and others saw as being needed to sustain and validate Lorum’s continued local

operational presence. By re-working the positioning of the local operations within the context of the market and the technology, Caitlyn metaphorically ‘re-engineered the dog’ so that the tail could no longer wag it! As introduced at the start of this story, in postphenomenological terms, she re-configured the spatiality of the world she was in (and one that was now ‘seen’ and recognised by Corporate) in a manner that stabilised (and defended) her sense of self as a strategically and politically savvy, well-networked corporate operator, who had freedom to drive local praxis (*being-a-self as a coherent integration of dispositions and projection*). At the same time, spatially, this move *re-placed* the technology *in-the-world* as shared by actors spanning both Local and Corporate teams—a relational (re)position from which some of its teleological meaningfulness (as a controlling script for strategy) was dampened. Interestingly, this meant that the strategy that was accomplished at the front line also ‘pushed’ back upwards within the organisational hierarchy of Lorum, as the Corporate team grew to accept and support the service-based focus of the Local Office. There were even signs that they might, in the future, work with the Local Office to adapt the performance metrics applied through the CE technology. While Caitlyn remained sceptical that this would actually eventuate, at this concluding point in her story, it seemed that the introduction of the CE technology had—quite unintentionally in human agential terms—disrupted the meaningfulness of the traditional ‘sales team’ model (that it was implemented to enhance), providing an impetus for local service-oriented innovation that was tacitly accepted by Corporate management.

### 5.7. Summary of findings

Common to all four narratives in Chapter 5 is a sense that all the human actors—through their everyday involvements with and alongside the CE technology—experienced some initial degree of threat to their identity, their sense of agency, and their ability to teleologically project themselves forward in a manner which was consistent with their purposive sense of selfhood. As time passed, they then *styled* themselves within the context of these technological relations, shaping *their relations* with these relations, so to speak (Verbeek, 2011a, 2011b), in order to regain (or find anew) a degree of coherence and stability of selfhood, and so make a claim on themselves as subjects. These varying patterns can be summarised for each of the four actors as follows:

Through his routine praxis as a senior salesperson, James felt that his confidence in himself (as a healthcare professional who was able to develop sound working peer relationships with healthcare customers) was jeopardised. Further, his ability to project his tech-savviness into his

HSL role was also disrupted in a manner that caused anxiety and frustration, and he actually felt blamed (or projected blame onto himself) for the technology’s inadequacies in supporting his work. As time passed, he seized those aspects of the technology’s scripts which worked for him and projected these into his favoured use of alternative technologies such as spreadsheet software and PowerPoint slideware. It should also be noted that, shortly after the study concluded, James left his position at Lorum to take on a creative, medical communications role with a digital healthcare agency. It could be speculated that his negative experiences with technology at Lorum helped him put structure to his sense of self and find a way to better integrate his dispositions and projections in a different professional environment.

This latter speculation mirrors the conclusion of Hannah’s story, in the sense of claiming selfhood by changing role. At first, Hannah’s sense of self as a competent sales manager was threatened through the very different relations that she and her sales team developed with the technology: two quite different stabilities of the technology were established, and these were contradictory and in conflict. At the same time, she struggled with how the technology objectified her reps, further distancing them from her, and further compromising her ability to mobilise and project her favoured dispositions. At the end of her story, she seized the alternative technological scripts of the KAM module, stabilising her sense of self (now in the *role* of a KAM) through this technology—a spatial ‘place’ within which she felt she could make a stronger claim on her subjectivity.

Sarah, in her story as Country Manager, felt tensions between two subject positions that, over time, diverged through her involvements with the technology as it mediated an interface between the workings of the Local and Corporate Offices. These constituted a threat to the stability and integration of her dispositions and projections that had given her a sense of self. On one hand, she was greatly disposed towards nurturing her local team and saw how the technology disrupted the flow of their routine work, also exposing them to greater scrutiny while limiting their ability to work in the style they favoured as skilful actors. On the other hand, she wished to be seen to be in support of the technology in the eyes of her Corporate bosses, while also staying under the radar to minimise further scrutiny. To balance these tensions, she encouraged ‘box ticking’, which led to the technology being mobilised to obscure aspects of local praxis to ‘shield’ her team. However, this attempt to stabilise her sense of self led to further disruptions to her relations with Hannah, who foresaw long term risk of this approach of just ‘toeing the line’.

Similar tensions were revealed in Caitlyn’s story. Caitlyn selfhood as a local strategist was threatened by the CE technology’s trajectory towards the Power Station vision. She experienced an existential threat as she saw the potential for her role to be commoditised into nothing more than a human ‘factory’ for [promotional] content. She could not see a place for herself, or others in the Local Office, ‘within’ this future. For Caitlyn, the scripts of the technology was simply not relevant and, moreover, could not be worked within the context of her world. Attempts to ‘obscure’ and ‘shield’ could only obfuscate and lead to longer term incongruencies and greater problems and deeper risk to the viability and longevity of local operations. Over time, Caitlyn reshaped how the world of these local operations were presented to Corporate through means other than the CE technology. This helped ‘re-place’ the technology in the spatiality in-the-world, so that its equipmental role as a managerial control was disrupted. She thus re-claimed herself (and her autonomy) as a local strategist.

## **Chapter 6:**

### **DISCUSSION**



## 6.1. Introduction

This discussion chapter has several aims. First, I will engage with SAP literature introduced in Chapter 1 to discuss the empirical findings in relation to the research question (as posed in Section 3.7). This question was:

**Research question 2:** What are the forms and implications of these ‘sociomaterial struggles’?

I divided this into two sub-questions:

- a. How are subjectivities (re)shaped through these ‘sociomaterial struggles’ in frontline strategy work?
- b. How are these (re)shapings implicated in what is locally accomplished *as* strategy?

Thus, I will first consider what my findings reveal both about the nature of such struggles (cf. the literature introduced in Section 1.8), and about the specific sociomaterial ‘part’ played by technology. I will then attend to the implications of these for the accomplishment of strategy (cf. the literature introduced in Section 1.9).

In addition, as my thesis also aims to contribute to theory, I will then consolidate my postphenomenological perspective on (socio)materiality and consider this in relation to extant positions on the role of (socio)materialities in SAP (cf. Section 1.5). Finally, as I originally engaged with Heideggerian perspectives in both SAP and IS to build the theoretical platform for my conceptualisations (as in Chapter 2, Sections 2.2 and 2.3, respectively), I will re-engage with this scholarship to discuss how my own work expands upon or sits alongside these views.

Accordingly, the current chapter is structured as follows. First, in Section 6.2 (and in relation to sub-question a above) I consider the findings in relation to extant notions of struggles. From this I will indicate the value of considering the individuated, dynamic nature of (sociomaterial) struggles as they were presented in my findings. In Section 6.3 (also in relation to *sub-question a* above), I show how my findings enrich the postphenomenological conceptual framework of sociomaterial struggles outlined in Chapter 4 (Section 4.7, also Figure 1, p.129). I will consider each of the three main aspects in turn (i.e., mediated objectivities, intersubjectivities and subjectivities) to highlight their nuances in relation to the empirics, and also to point towards their entanglement.

Section 6.4 builds upon this to engage more specifically with empirical work that has explicitly considered *technologies* as a form of strategic, managerial power over workers, and I discuss how my findings compare with insights from these other works. I also discuss how my findings reveal

asymmetries between strategy *as intended* (or as technologically scripted) and strategy *as accomplished*, and how my analysis of sociomaterial struggles extends recent theorising on the consequentiality of everyday strategy work. These discussions all relate back specifically to *sub-question b* above.

Then, referring back to my earlier thinking on the technological tuning of the spatiality of care, in Section 6.5, I will articulate a theoretical view of such technologically mediated struggles as *struggles for selfhood* within the spatialities of being-in-the-world-with-others. In the closing two sections, I will broaden my discussion to consider how my conceptual contribution sits alongside other views of (socio)materiality in SAP (Section 6.6), as well as extant Heideggerian thinking (Section 6.7).

## **6.2. Struggles over subjectivities as individuated phenomena**

The findings presented in Chapter 5 show how the subjectivities of individual practitioners were shaped over time as they are confronted with the technological mediations of a new (digital) strategy. This adds to, but can also be differentiated from extant work on struggles over subjectivities as introduced in Chapter 1. Laine and Vaara's (2007) important analysis established a foundation for my consideration of the struggles over subjectivity that occur in strategy implementation. Their work focused on three broad competing discourses presented broadly by three groups with different positions and interests: corporate senior management who led a hegemonic discourse of strategy creators, middle managers whose discourse was constructed to create room for operational manoeuvre, and frontline engineering workers who sought to distance themselves from strategy to maintain their professional identities. Subjectivities were defended and constructed through these discourses. The authors richly depict these positions to reveal how strategy has both empowering and disempowering effects across an organisation.

My findings indicate a similar pattern. As summarised in Section 5.7, through the sociomaterial struggles they lived through, the practitioners at Lorum all experienced a disempowering threat to their identity, their sense of agency, and their ability to teleologically project themselves forward in a manner which was consistent with their purposive sense of selfhood. As time passed, they were able to shape the nature of their relations to the mediations of the technology (Verbeek, 2011a, 2011b), empowering themselves by regaining a degree of coherence and stability of selfhood, and so make a claim on themselves as subjects.

Thus, broadly, these patterns of identity construction are in keeping with Laine and Vaara's (2007) work, these authors' findings were presented as a cross-sectional comparison of struggles *between* three broad—and hierarchically differentiated—groups of actors.<sup>52</sup> This 'group-level' picture of power–resistance in strategy is aligned with other key works. For example, McCabe (2010) highlights the discursive struggles that took place between the CEO and the staff of a UK Building Society. Although the CEO was carved out as an individual, his specific discourses might seem more generally representative of a top management team's formal corporate communications (e.g., as represented in the data by formal presentations at company conferences, communications videos, and staff newsletters). Similarly, while the lower-level staff identified in McCabe's (2010) study (as being affected by strategy) included a range of different senior and middle managers, their discourses are drawn upon rather collectively and in contraposition to the CEO's 'dominant' discourse. Individual-level struggles, as they might occur over time in relation to strategy, are not attended to. Further, Hardy and Thompson's (2014) study offers a view of how certain discursive and material practices intensified (or failed to intensify) the power effects of a strategy. The focus here was on the consequences of *broad categories* of practice. That is, the extent to which these succeeded in 'bearing down' on the fulfilment of strategy by producing *broad categories* of strategic subjects.

Thus, none of these three key works gave detailed attention to the individual experiences and routine praxis of the actors involved to unpack how they, as specific subjects, were shaped by and through the practices (discursive and/or material) of power. My work thus builds on these studies. By focusing on the lived experiences represented in actors' personal narratives, I reveal more nuanced details of struggles over subjectivity, identifying specific patterns of disempowerment and empowerment as *individual* identities are threatened, constructed and reconstructed over time. This also showcases the value of the NAP methodology that I adopted (Rouleau, 2015; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011). It allowed me to gain deep insights into the individual actors involved, and by hearing about their work-life histories early on in the study, I acquired a sense of who they were, and who they *saw themselves as*. This afforded a 'baseline' sense of their subjectivity, which I was then able to 'follow' as their experiences of working with the technology (and within the context of the new strategy) developed. The relevance of this is made clear by Wrathall (2021a) in his work on the Heideggerian self. He notes that:

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<sup>52</sup> I recognise that their study was longitudinal, but their findings were not presented so as to reveal the dynamics of subjectivity over time.

The “subjectivity” of my world [...] is found in the fact that I (qua agent) am drawn to act by affordances which might not even appear to someone else, or which he or she might recognize as mere affordances to a hypothetical action but not as soliciting a response (p.668).

In light of this, the more general group-level expositions of subject constitution lose some of their colour, in favour of an emphasis on the idiosyncratic nuances of the actor as an *individuated* unit (Wrathall, 2015a, 2021a). Further, by digging ‘beneath’ the high-level discourses that occur ‘between’ organisational hierarchies, and considering lived experiences of those at the frontline, I was able to consider how their subjectivities were shaped as part of their everyday, mundane and routine practice worlds. Said differently, I did not limit my analysis to the ‘grander’ patterns of discourse that set levels and groups apart or in counterpoint to each other (pitching ‘senior management’ against ‘middle management’ against ‘frontline workers’). Rather I was able to show how these identities were in constant flux as part of the changing patterns of praxis and experience as they were lived ‘on the ground’. I thus join others in SAP (e.g., Balogun, Beech, et al., 2015; Balogun, Best, et al., 2015; Bednarek et al., 2016; Jarzabkowski et al., 2021; Smets, Jarzabkowski, et al., 2015; Spee et al., 2016) and beyond (Back, 2020; Balogun et al., 2015; Holmes and Hall, 2020; Jacobsen, 2009; Wenzel, et al., 2019) who emphasise the value of understanding the consequentiality of the everyday and the mundane in social practice.

On this basis, I propose that Foucault-inspired views of strategy, which of course emphasise subjectivities, can benefit from closer examination of individual lifeworlds and their construction to reveal the everyday subtleties of subject constitution. Such fine-grained, individual-level analysis of power-resistance dynamics has long been embraced, more broadly, in organisation studies as exemplified by Foucauldian feminist theory-inspired work (e.g., Kondo, 1990; McCabe, 2004; Thomas & Davies, 2005a, 2005b; Trethewey, 1997). More recently, it has been recognised in Wenzel et al.’s (2019) study which shows how control and resistance are constructed through individuals’ responses to paradox. However, such individual-level analysis have been given little attention in SAP. Of note, this position also aligns with a more critical agenda in SAP inquiry (e.g., Blom & Alvesson, 2015; McCabe, 2010). Indeed, by giving voice to specific individuals at the lower levels of an organisation, I have tried to unpack how strategy affects them in their daily lives, as subjects of, but also as agents within, the ‘intensification practices’ of strategy (Hardy & Thompson, 2014). I have thus tried to envisage strategy not just as a ‘manifestation of the managerial claim to power’ (McCabe, 2010, p.22), with its implicit aim of understanding how strategy can fail or succeed (Hardy & Thompson, 2014), but also as a force that fundamentally

restructures (for better and worse) how workers can relate to their world and to themselves and others within it. I will unpack this in more detail in Section 6.3 below, but by revealing the stories of those at the ‘receiving end’ of strategy (McCabe, 2010, p.22), I have tried to indicate some of its ‘material consequences’ for those who are subjected to and by it (Blom & Alvesson, 2015, p.420). This focus on subject constitution at the individual level, and on the mundane and the everyday is *not* to ignore the broader social practice of strategy. Rather, I suggest, it adds granularity to the picture of *how* strategy is accomplished.

Related to this, my findings also revealed some interesting examples of *individual* subjectivities being shaped through a play of tensions. This idea resonates somewhat with the paradox-theoretical work of others (Dameron & Torset, 2014; Wenzel et al.’s (2019)<sup>53</sup>. I will briefly outline key points from these studies before relating back to my own findings.

So, Dameron and Torset (2014), as introduced in Section 1.7, consider how strategists can position themselves as subjects in relation to the tensions and contradictions that they face in their strategy-making work. In doing so, these authors conceptualise ‘strategizing as the art of balancing tensions’ (ibid, p.311) between, for example, thinking and action, and analysis and intuition, whereby various coping mechanisms are adopted to ‘strengthen the identity and power of strategists’ (ibid, p.312). Although not related to the practice of strategy, there are similarities here with examples from Wenzel et al.’s (2019) study of tensions and power—a study which is particularly interesting in that it emphasises the *everyday* work of frontline actors, as in my own study. They show how the employees at a youth prison constructed positions of power in response to paradoxical circumstances to pursue their role-based interests. Correctional officers drew on paradox ‘to privilege punishment as the dominant modality for the prison’ (ibid, p.61) and so construct and reinforce a position of control. Youth therapists in the prison resisted these attempts to control by creating space for their rehabilitation work, so reinforcing their own subject positions and empowering themselves in this process.

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<sup>53</sup> While drawing such comparisons, I am cautious not to over-represent the organisational tensions illustrated in my study as ‘paradoxical’. While tensions can be an underlying source of paradox (Lewis, 2000, pp.761-763), *paradoxical* tensions are conceptually distinguished from tensions associated with organisational dilemmas and dialectics (Smith & Lewis, 2011). Given my study was not designed specifically to investigate organisational tensions, I do not attempt to clarify or apply such conceptual distinctions here. Suffice to say that the shaping of subject positions in my study was certainly associated with tensions as they were experienced by the actors involved as ‘contradictory demands’ placed upon their work (ibid, p.381).

To my mind, Wenzel et al.'s (2019) study thus demonstrates that the subject-shaping 'art' work involved in balancing tensions is not limited to the 'upper echelon' praxis of strategy makers (as was the focus of Dameron and Torset, 2014, p.311). It is also immanent in the everyday, practical coping activities of individual frontline workers. By extension, my findings illustrate such artwork when strategy is viewed as an 'accomplishment'. While my work takes a different theoretical stance to both of these studies, and was not designed with the same research questions in mind, it does show how those involved in accomplishing such work at the frontline also encounter tensions through which they construct their identities and agency. For example, and as noted above, Sarah experienced tensions between conflicting subject positions through her work at the corporate-local interface. Caitlyn had to resolve diverging positions as her sense of identity as a local strategist conflicted with the self that was projected into the future in relation to the commodifying objectifications of Power Station. Hannah was faced with similar tensions, confronted with a future potential identity as a 'cookie cut' manager of sales reps that completely contradicted the identity she wished to nurture. And James' sense of his own work and productivity was in tension with what the CE technology represented to management on his behalf. In all these cases, through the play of technology mediated tensions, a resistant subjectivity took on form (cf. Harding et al., 2017), one that sought to re-cohere its sense of self, identity and purpose *in relation to* these tensions. These observations also highlight the importance of understanding how individuals navigate tensions as they unfold through the *everyday* lived experiences and activities of their work (Lê & Bednarek, 2017; Pradies et al., 2021; Wenzel et al., 2019).

### **6.3. Enriching the picture of technological mediation in sociomaterial struggles**

As introduced in Section 3.6, extant SAP Foucault-inspired studies have tended to focus on *discursive practices*. However, for Foucault, 'discourse' also included materialities and material practices, and I sought to explicitly accommodate these in my work. To support this, I considered postphenomenological ideas that give specific attention to technologies within flows of power (e.g., Verbeek, 2011a, 2011b, 2009a, 2013a; Dorrestijn, 2012a, 2012b; Dorrestijn & Verbeek 2012). Accordingly, my framing in Figure 1 (p.129) supports the elucidation of how struggles take shape *in relation to* the mediations of technology. In this current section, I will first review the findings in relation to this framework—that is 1) mediated objectivities, 2) mediated intersubjectivities and 3) mediated subjectivities. All three of these intra-act to shape the self as coherent integration of their dispositions and projections. Then, drawing out the various empirical manifestations of these forms of mediation, I will consider them in relation to broader postphenomenological theory to

further enrich these components of the framework. This will also then support a discussion (in Section 6.4) in relation to previous inquiries into technologies of managerial ‘control’ (i.e., those introduced at the end of Chapter 1: Mantere & Vaara, 2008; Ezzamel & Willmott, 2008; Whittle & Mueller, 2010).

### 6.3.1. *Technology mediated objectivities*

The concept of *technology mediated objectivities* relates to how the technology (re)presents experiential aspects of the world to the actor, and I represented it with the postphenomenological formalism: *Self* → *technology* → *world*. In the findings, mediated objectivities could be seen to threaten the stability of the self by presenting a world, through the technology, that was incongruous with the ‘real’ world within which actors’ subjectivities had found some stability. We saw how the materialities of the technology (re)presented the world (made it present anew) in particular ways. For example, by presenting data on customers in a very specific and limited manner, or by restricting the ability of actors to record details of rep–customer interactions and manager–rep coaching interactions by limiting them to fixed terms in drop-down menus. Further, the dashboarding module forced comparisons with other international teams across Lorum’s global business in a way that failed to recognise local operating conditions, forcing a conformist, one-size-fits-all template upon the worlds of the Local Office actors. Relationally, these objectifications were therefore denials of the actors’ own lived experiences, and of their ability to express these experiences. They challenged what really should matter to them in their roles, and set up unreconcilable tensions between the actualities and potentialities of the world. Overall, these objectifications were felt as a denial of the actors’ own purposive *being-in-(the-world)*, their sense of their own selves as established in their everyday work at the frontline. They were thus a threat to the coherent integration of their dispositions and projections.

Importantly, the CE technology mediated *different objectivities in different ways for different actors*. For example, we saw with Hannah in Scenes 2 and 3 (Sections 5.4.2 and 5.4.3) how the relations that she and her team of reps developed with the CE technology led to conflicting ways of experiencing the world and the technology’s place within it. Similar relational differences were seen between Sarah and Hannah, where the former experienced the CE technology as a means to protect and shield her team, whereas the latter saw this as harmful obfuscation (Sarah’s story, Scene 5, Section 5.5.5). Such differences are consistent with the relational, mutual constitution of human, technology and world. This is in keeping with an observation by Laine and Vaara (2007).

They emphasise that the struggles they describe in their study were not associated with differing *opinions* on the strategic options their case firm should pursue, but rather—and more fundamentally—with the different ideas of “what ‘strategic development’ or ‘strategizing’ should be all about” (ibid, p.54). Going even further—beyond the cognitive—the ontology I apply indicates that these different ‘ideas’ are related to very different ‘realities’ of being-in-the-world ‘with’ the strategy.

In the context of technological mediation in my findings, this can be considered in terms of the postphenomenological notion of technological ‘multistability’ (introduced Section 3.2, e.g., Ihde, 1999, 2012a; Rosenberger, 2014, 2017a, c, 2018b, 2020a, 2020b; Rosenberger & Verbeek, 2015; Verbeek, 2005). Thus, according to Verbeek (2005, p.117), although technologies shape the relations between humans and world, a technology cannot ‘be spoken about independently of the humans that engage with it ... [Technologies] can only be understood in terms of the relation that human beings have to them’. There is thus no ‘technology-in-itself’ (ibid) that possesses intrinsic properties that are human- or world-independent; there is only technology-*in-relations*. In keeping with Heidegger’s spatiality (Section 2.5), technology is only ever ‘technology-in-order-to’ ... [such that they are only *what* they are in equipmental contexts]. This spatial ‘context dependence’ (ibid, p.118) denotes how technologies are *multistable*, subject to being *differentially made present* under different relational conditions of mediated being-in-the-world.

Based upon this thinking, multistability expresses the idea that any one technology can mediate quite different experiences (and praxes) for different human actors. And so, ontologically, the technology *itself becomes* a different entity—within the context of these varying relational structures—just as the objectivity of the world and the sense of purposive self of the actor ‘within’ it are differentially disclosed. This also has relevance for the mediation of intersubjectivities as I will discuss below.

### 6.3.2. *Technology mediated intersubjectivities*

The second element in Figure 1 (p.129) relates to *technology mediated intersubjectivities*: the manner in which the CE technology (re)structured relations with others. That is, how it mediated *being-with-others* as per the formalism: *Self* → *technology* → *others*. The narratives indicate that such restructuring can occur in two ways. First, it can be mediated through a specific hermeneutic relation (a relational form first introduced in Section 3.2), such as when one party is presented to another (and so translated through amplifications and reductions) ‘through’ the technology.



Second, it can occur—more indirectly—when the *presence* of the technology (as per the idea of ‘technological presence’ introduced in Section 3.6) restructures how people are *present* in-their-worlds such that it alters the way they are able to relate to each other. This can also be associated with the notion of multistability discussed above.

In the first case, in the narratives, technological mediations (re)presented actors to each other, objectifying them through the metrics and visualisations of the CE technology that translated and transformed them in the ‘eyes’ of others as ‘subjectivities’. This was particularly relevant to actors’ involvements with the dashboarding module. These involvements led to their sense of being (inappropriately or over-) exposed to the Corporate Office team, and indeed being brought into a previously unexperienced *proximity* to senior management (e.g., James’ story, Scene 2, Section 5.3.2; Sarah’s story, Scene 2, Section 5.5.3). In the manner of Foucault’s panopticon (Foucault, 1977<sup>54</sup>) they felt like they were being actively monitored and indirectly disciplined. This was despite the fact, that at least in the early part of the study, senior management were barely using (or even had a practical understanding of) the CE technology. These mediated intersubjectivities thus influenced the manner in which Corporate Office-based senior managers and their (apparent expectations) were *made present* for Local Office actors (even in their *physical* absence halfway around the world). They also shaped how these actors felt that they were *presented* to these senior managers.

As per the second case, the CE technology had implications for interpersonal relationships within the Local Office too. However, these were not associated with the hermeneutic relations above, but with the diverging ways the technology was differentially stabilised within the lifeworlds of different actors. The examples of mediated objectivities above (Section 6.3.1) indicated the very different human-technology relational stabilities established by Hannah, on the one hand, and her reps on the other (Scene 3, Section 5.4.3). Building on this, it was also evident that there were marked changes in how Hannah and her team then became *intersubjectively present* to each other. This was associated with conflict. However, this was less about conflict between *human actors* than about conflicting relational patterns of human, technology and world. Similar

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<sup>54</sup> This relates to Foucault’s (1977) analysis of Jeremy Bentham’s panopticon as a technology of disciplinary power. The panopticon was Bentham’s (1791/1995) model for a prison. With a circular structure of cells surrounding a central watchtower, it would permit constant monitoring of prisoners who, at the same time, would not be able to see those who were monitoring them. Thus, inmates would be aware of the continuous *potential* for surveillance while not knowing when or whether they were actually being watched. This would ostensibly subject them to conditions where they would discipline themselves. For a detailed examination from a postphenomenological perspective, see Dorrestijn (2012).

intersubjective shifts occurred between Hannah and Sarah as they clashed over the use (diverging stabilities) of the technology to 'shield' the reps (e.g., Sarah's story, Scene 5, Section 5.5.5).

In summary, the presence of the technology thus changed how people related to each other as subjects. This occurred either in terms of how they were (re)presented to each other *through* the technology (in terms of hermeneutic mediations) or in terms of how their relations with the technology (as different stabilities) re-oriented them within-their respective worlds, and thus, to each other.

### 6.3.3. *Technology mediated subjectivities*

The third element, *technology mediated subjectivity* prompts consideration of how technology mediates actors' relationships with themselves (*Self* → *technology* → *self*). Said differently, how the actual or potential use of the technology discloses a 'vision' of selfhood to an actor that then challenges their sense of identity and purpose. In the findings, this took place in two ways.

First, the technology presented a translated 'version' of the self to the actor. This was most evident alongside many of the hermeneutic (re)presentations that occurred through the technology. Thus, the technological translations and transformations immanent in the metrics and visualisations revealed, in many cases, a picture of (a potential) subjectivity *faced* by the actor, one which disrupted the actor's stable sense of self. For example, James questioned his sense of purpose and actions in relation to what *he saw of himself* as it was projected *back to him* through the technology (Scene 2, Section 5.3.2). Bergen & Verbeek (2021) recognise similar mediations in their postphenomenological analysis of a 'to-do list' smartphone app called Habitica. They describe how the app, through gamification, encourages users to complete day-to-day tasks that they set for themselves. Through involvements with the software interface, users are offered an ever-accessible representation of themselves (as performing well or poorly in relation to task completion). Each user is thus exposed to 'the motivating force of the *confrontation* with [the] self' (ibid, p.332). Such confrontations (as also seen with the CE technology at Lorum) result from a mediated manifestation of the self which is 'other' to the self that is currently known. This sets up a 'critical relation to the self' providing an opportunity for 'care of the self' (ibid, p334; also see Section 3.6) and thus is a stimulus for seeking the coherence of the self as its own (Heideggerian) thrown projection (see Figure 1, p.129, also Section 3.6.2).

Second, and highlighting how the elements of Figure 1 (p. 129) are entangled (as I will discuss further below) the self was also confronted by mediated objectivities and mediated

intersubjectivities (see above) that pointed towards an alternative subjectivity constituted in relation to these other mediations (as per the spatial co-constitutions inherent in the ontology of being-in-the-world-with-others). This is exemplified in the findings when Sarah (Scene 2, Section 5.5.2) was trying to balance shifting relations with her team and with Corporate, and thus faced changes in how she saw herself in relation to them. Or when Caitlyn's concerns with the mediations of the technology were teleologically projected to 'see' a version of her future self as nothing more than a 'factory' (Scene 3, Section 5.6.3). Importantly such manifestations of self-as-other could also be productive, where subject-threatening relations with the technology revealed new (but 'other') possibilities for the self that could then be claimed. For example, Hannah's realisation of what she valued in a role, a position from which she was able to seize the KAM opportunity (Scene 5, Section 5.4.5).

To summarise: Mediated subjectivities confront the actor with a transformed 'version' of the self that is 'other' to the self. This might occur directly through hermeneutic relations, where the self is (re)presented through the technology, or by 'broader' virtue of technological presence, and how by restructuring the spatiality of being-in-the-world, this presence places tension on how actors can be *present to themselves* in-their-worlds.

#### **6.4. Implications for considering technologies in the power relations of strategy**

##### **6.4.1. *The entanglement of technological mediations***

Recall from my introduction to Figure 1 (p.129) in Section 4.7, that the elements in this figure are thoroughly entangled and mutually generative in accordance with a postphenomenological ontology. Based on the findings in the last chapter, and on the discussion above, it can be seen that these elements influence the flows of *being-in-the-world-with-others* through which struggles for subjectivities take shape. This entanglement emphasises the 'part' played by technology as a relational co-constituent of (and within) the lifeworlds of the actors involved. It contributes to the shaping of objectivities, subjectivities, and to the stability of the technology as a presence in itself.

Thus, in terms of flows of power, the dynamic entanglements of human–technology relations are generative of subject positions, presenting actors as both empowered and disempowered in different ways over time as they struggle to claim their selfhood within their sociomaterial worlds. This view extends extant studies of power–resistance in relation to managerial technologies of control in strategy (e.g., Ezzamel & Willmott, 2008; Mantere & Vaara, 2008; Whittle & Mueller,

2010, as introduced in Section 1.9)<sup>55</sup>. As I will discuss below, my findings converge with some aspects of these works. However, they also enrich them.

For example, in Ezzamel and Willmott's (2008) account of a management accounting system as a 'calculative technology' at StitchCo (ibid, p.198) there are empirical signs of the technological mediations of objectivities that I have described (although, of course, they were not conceptualised in the same way). Thus, calculations and visualisations in the system provided a 'rational view of the way the business could operate' (ibid, p.206), constituting 'a new regime of truth' that, for example, 'constituted parts of the business as worth keeping and other parts [...] as a non-value adding burden that had to be shed' (ibid). Similar to the CE technology at Lorum, measures within the accounting system also profiled customers, objectifying what the 'right' customer looked like, defining 'success' in terms of effective customer engagement metrics, linking this to employee remunerations, and offering comparisons with other StitchCo outlets in a manner in keeping with the inter-country benchmarking at Lorum (Sarah's story, Scene 4, Section 5.5.4; Caitlyn's story, Scene 4, Section 5.6.4).

Mediated objectivities might also be identifiable in an example of discourses of 'technologization' offered by Mantere and Vaara (2008). These authors indicate how the 'balanced scorecard' technology in their study was 'alien and inaccessible' to frontline personnel, as the strategy specifications it embodied were 'written from an organization-level viewpoint' that did not translate well to the department level (ibid, p.350). There were thus problems finding a performance measure within the scorecard that was actually indicative of the 'extensive workload of specific personnel' (ibid). The 'logic' of the technological system that ostensibly embodied the strategy process had an incongruence with the working world of the frontline staff. Postphenomenologically, this local world of praxis could be thought of as existing in tension with the world 'assumed' through the mediations of the technology. This was certainly also the case at Lorum as discussed above (Section 6.3.1).

Further to this, insights from Ezzamel and Willmott (2008) might be seen to mirror some of my findings in relation to mediated intersubjectivities. These authors describe how the formulations of the accounting system permeated down through the company. Frontline machinists working on the shop floor were subjected to metrics intended to boost their productivity by encouraging them

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<sup>55</sup> Note to focus my discussion, I limit coverage to those studies that consider how technological systems exert *power* over strategy.

to streamline their work as teams. However, this ‘created considerable tensions within teams’ as individual workers were concerned about the way they might be portrayed *through the system to management*, potentially unfairly levelling out disparities across individual team members’ productivity and performance in the real world on the shop floor. This is comparable with the situation faced by Hannah in relation to the sales reps at Lorum (Scene 2, Section 5.4.2).

So, sensitive to indicators of technological mediations, there are some clear points of empirical alignment between my findings and those of these earlier studies. However, I also suggest that postphenomenological thinking—by giving specific conceptual and analytical attention to such mediations and their entanglements in practice—can invite deeper insights into the generativity of power flows over time. So, for example—working further with the case of Ezzamel and Willmott’s (2008) machinists above—the metrics imposed upon them were a local ‘manifestation of the ... strategy’ (pp.208-210) which was viewed by these workers as a ‘divisive means of extracting more effort from their labour without corresponding material compensation’ (ibid). This led to practices of resistance such as ‘slowing down tactics, being less cooperative, and being resentful’ (pp.208-210). In the authors’ example of the foremost practice, they briefly describe an example of one machinist who would turn up late for work, and who took breaks even when not delivering her output. In the study, this is taken—at face value—as a simple act of opposition to the strategy and its imposed metrics.

However, by way of speculation and extrapolation, there might be much more to unpack in this scenario by levying my conceptualisation. Given the machinist’s role, it is unlikely that she had direct access to the management accounting system to ‘see’ how she was objectified through the system. So, it may be expected, given the team-work focus and peer pressure noted in the study, that intersubjectivities shifted in relation to the managerial control system. What shifts occurred here? How did the technology mediate these? What different subjectivities were shaped across the team by virtue of these mediations, and how were they divergent? How did these threaten her as a subject? Indeed ‘who’ was she as a subject that could be threatened in this manner? What aspect of her own sense of self was she looking to retain a claim upon through her actions? Unpacking these relations further (through the means I have explored) might open up fascinating insights into the flows of power and resistance that took place. It would also support a wider critical aim of giving voice to those upon whom strategy is imposed (McCabe, 2010), and thus add to our understanding of how strategy *has* consequences (I will consider issues of consequentiality as an opportunity for future work in the final chapter).

To offer another example, Whittle and Mueller (2010) describe how the consultants in their study resisted the disciplinary power of a managerial accounting system that, through its quantifications, objectified them as ‘unprofitable’ (ibid, p.634). This made them feel anxious, reducing the sense that their work and business ideas held legitimacy, and stimulated an awareness that their positions, as subjects, were ‘precarious and marginal’. Although they do not offer detailed examples, the authors indicate that the consultants resisted this imposition by ‘tactically’ involving themselves with the technology: ‘working around the system’, (ibid, p.638) and playing ‘the numbers game’ (ibid, p.637). We saw rich examples of comparable objectifications of technology in Chapter 5 which also led to angst and resistance, as well as illustrations of ‘playing the system’, particularly the use of the CE technology to obscure local praxis. However, my postphenomenological analysis showed the deeper relational dynamics of subject constitution that underpinned such ‘games’. It revealed not only the *behavioural manifestations* of resistance, but also showed how the selfhood of workers was threatened by such objectifications, how they grappled with tensions and intersubjective pressures mediated by the technology, how they were then constituted *as resisters* (cf. Harding et al., 2017), and how they shaped themselves constructively in relation to such technological mediations.

Overall, in the extant studies above, resistance—while certainly recognised—is viewed in terms of the concrete actions and behaviours that are established *contra* the disciplinary power of technology. While subjectification is of course implicit in these analyses, they do not unpack the specific manner in which subjectivities are threatened, or then re-constituted through actors specific relations with such systems. In contrast, the narratives presented in Chapter 5, show that resistance was not ‘simply’ performed in opposition to the scripted impositions of the technology and strategy. Rather resistance—viewed as one manifestation of the struggle (Fleming & Spicer, 2007, 2008)—was constituted idiosyncratically in relation to the nuanced ways through which the technology restructured actors’ ‘ability’ to be present in-their-world *as subjects*.

Further to this, my findings—sensitised by a postphenomenological framework—also reveal the *temporality* of such struggles in relation to the CE technology’s mediations. The ideas developed initially in Sections 3.4.3 and 3.5 conceptualise how technologies, by tuning the spatiality of care, *project* human actors towards future possibilities. The *potentialities* of technology can restructure how a human is present in-their-world *in the present* by disclosing a possibility for their own future that they become (re)oriented towards. This was most clearly evident in Caitlyn’s story where she ‘saw’ herself projected into a potential future where she would be subjectified as a

commodity, as a ‘factory for content’ (Scene 3, Section 5.6.3). It was also indicated in the threat that the sales reps experienced in relation to *the possibility* that the CE technology might be empowered by AI in the future (Hannah’s story, Scene 3, Section 5.3.3). In these examples, the ‘power’ of the technology as it was ‘imposed’ upon the subjects was not a technological embodiment of any pre-defined managerial or strategic intent. Nor was it a subjectification based upon the technology’s *actual* use in the moment. Rather, it was something *experienced* by the practitioners as a threat to their *future selves*, one that also constituted them *as resistant in the present*. This was grounded upon their own ‘particular’ spatialities of care, such that these were uniquely tuned by the potentialities of the technology. These examples further highlight how this postphenomenological thinking on spatiality extends extant notions of struggles over subjectivities, further troubling traditionally dichotomous views of control and resistance (Wenzel et al., 2019).

#### **6.4.2. Technological scripts and asymmetries in strategy accomplishment**

So, what are the implications of this sociomaterial view of struggles for the *accomplishment of strategy at the frontline*? As described in Section 3.6, mediation theory suggests that technologies, such as the CE technology at Lorum, can be thought of as material embodiments of power and (managerial) intent (see e.g., Kiran & Verbeek, 2010; Verbeek, 2020). They can thus be viewed as ‘technological scripts’ (Verbeek, 2005, pp.115, 160-161, 207; see also Rosenberger, 2018b; Verbeek, 2006, 2009, 2011a, 2011b) that are *inscribed* with intention, as ‘a “non-human delegate” [that] imposes on humans a “prescription” [for action]’ (Verbeek, 2005, p.160, building on the ideas of Akrich, 1992 and Latour, 1992).

In Section 5.2, I conceived of the modules of the CE system at Lorum in this manner: as inscriptions of strategic intent (in relation to the new digital strategy), and thus as scripts to be performed by frontline actors to implement strategy. However, both theoretically and empirically, the work of this thesis shows how these scripts are never simply performed, they are always transformed and translated given the realities of practice and the flows of power that are immanent within this practice.

To consider this more deeply, I return first to the notion of technological intentionality in Section 3.3. The CE technology thus had a purposive capacity *to shape* human directedness in-the-world. However, such technological intentionality—when relationally taken up into human praxis—can only ever be combined or merged with human intentionality to structure a *composite intentionality* (Ihde 1990; Verbeek, 2008a). This means that regardless of any attempt by the

Corporate Office and the software developers to *design* a script (to *design* intentionality) into the technology, its use in the practice of strategy accomplishment was necessarily met by a human concerned directedness and orientation that pre- or re-configured this intentionality. Said differently, there were human–world relations that pre-existed the technological mediation of the CE technology. This shaped the nature of the human–technology relation that thus developed.

Thus while, ostensibly, strategic or managerial intent may have been materially embodied within the CE technology, what became manifest, or materialised was co-constitutive of both human and technology. In a Foucauldian sense, *how* Lorum’s Local Office staff were subject to—and subjectified by—the technology was crucially dependent on *how* they were concernfully oriented as beings-in-the-world-with-others, and thus *how* the ‘subject’ received the CE technology and its inscriptions into-their-world. For example, in James’s story, by rejecting the technology while also seizing some of the scripts that it offered on his own terms, he styled himself as being consequential for what could be accomplished. However, in doing so, the Corporate Office’s intent for the digital strategy was somewhat sundered. While the scripts of the technology were to some extent carried through, and so remained strategically cogent, the *actual use* of the CE system—use that was a critical part of senior management’s strategic vision of digital empowerment—was essentially bypassed.

In Sarah’s story, her drive to shield her team (and herself) through her involvements with the technology provides a second example. The picture projected through the technology—and in Sarah’s seeming compliance with its scripts—was one of conformance to the Corporate Office’s strategy. Senior management, for a time at least, saw their strategy as being implemented. However, it was clear that what was actually accomplished on the ground was uncoupled from this perception. Said differently, Corporate ‘saw’ the digital strategy as materialising frontline strategic action that were *symmetrical* with their strategic intent. In postphenomenology, this notion of symmetry has been related to a ‘positivist problem’ (Albrechtslund 2007; Kiran, 2012b) which assumes that the ‘user context of a technology can be intentionally shaped or influenced through the design context’ (Kiran, 2012b, p.183). That is, there is an erroneous understanding that there is a *symmetrical correspondence* between design and use<sup>56</sup>.

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<sup>56</sup> Also see Ihde’s (2006) postphenomenological account of the ‘designer fallacy’. Pentland and Feldman (2008) make some similar points in relation organisational routines and the ‘folly of designing artifacts, while hoping for patterns of action’ (p.235).



However, what was actually happening at the frontline at Lorum (and what was strategically accomplished *locally*) displayed clear *asymmetry* to this strategic intent. This pattern is maybe most marked in an example from Caitlyn's story. In re-claiming her subjectivity as a 'local strategist', she seemed to successfully reduce the potential of the CE technological to lay its own claim upon her identity. Her praxis, in turn, severed some of the controlling connections that the technology ostensibly had imposed between Corporate and the Local Office. She carved out new 'strategic' space in which the local team could operate while also limiting the degree to which they could be seen to directly oppose the digital strategy and its technological scripts.

The asymmetry, or severing, or uncoupling of different aspects of strategy revealed through these examples can be compared with other recent scholarship that has focused on frontline work. Notably, as introduced in Section 1.4, Balogun, Best, et al. (2015), show how formal strategic aims are successfully 'realised' through the routine work of museum guides. These authors offer rich sociomaterial vignettes to show "the intricate and embodied nature of the 'work' of workers to *bring into being* the strategic aims of an organization" (p.1308, emphasis added). From my analytical perspective this presents a picture of a 'symmetry' between high-level strategic intent (as represented in the strategic plans of the museum's senior management) and local strategy accomplishment by the guides. This could be called into question given the pervasiveness of unintended consequences in the practice of strategy (Balogun & Johnson, 2005). Of course, Balogun, Best, et al.'s (2015) study was designed to address the specific question of *how* aims are manifest through routine work. However, this carries with it an implicit (over)acceptance of symmetry which could be subjected to deeper examination from a more critical or sceptical position (Blom & Alvesson, 2015 p.421). As my work suggests (e.g., the three examples above) superficial symmetries may be founded upon deeper asymmetries. These may be wrought through local power-laden, sociomaterial struggles that may contradict or confound what is actually *observed* to be 'realised' as strategy by any one party.

#### **6.4.3. A question of consequentiality**

In a very recent move to reinvigorate SAP research, Jarzabkowski et al. (2021) question the notion of 'consequentiality' in strategy. These authors call for inquiry 'that takes the notion of consequentiality beyond its preoccupation with strategic performance and/or known strategy processes and into the unique territory of the practice realm' (ibid, p.7). They indicate that researchers' immersion in the research context can reveal praxis that has strategic consequences

even if it is mundane and taken-for-granted by participants, following ‘hunches about mundane practices that seem to have no ostensive consequentiality and yet appear important to them through their own unique interpretive lens’ (ibid). My approach and findings accord with this principle. As noted, immersive exploration of the lifeworld of the actors in the study—as enabled through the NAP approach—afforded access to routine experiences and everyday praxis of these practitioners to reveal the sociomaterial struggles that took place. However, what of their consequentiality for strategy as per Jarzabkowski et al.’s (2021) thinking?

To address this question, based on my findings, I suggest that there is utility in extending Jarzabkowski et al.’s (2021) notion of consequentiality to consider not just how the mundane may be consequential *for* strategy (and so, what is viewed as being ‘strategic’ in SAP), but also how the mundane of strategy is consequential *for* those involved (cf. Blom & Alvesson 2015, pp.419-420; McCabe, 2010). Thus, Chapter 5’s narratives show how the threats to selfhood and claims on subject positions—in relation to the technology as an embodiment of strategy—contributed to what became locally consequential *for* strategy and what was accomplished *as* strategy at the frontline.

For example, as discussed in the previous section (Section 6.4.2) in relation to the (a)symmetries of strategic intent and accomplishment, James styled himself as *being consequential* for local strategy accomplishment. By rejecting the technology while also seizing some of the scripts that it offered *on his own terms*, his everyday praxis changed the way that the digital technology itself was *consequential for* strategy. Thus, while its scripts were consequential to the extent that James was influenced by them, the consequentiality of the technology itself as a manifestation of the Corporate vision of digital empowerment was reduced. Similarly, in re-claiming her subjectivity as a ‘local strategist’, Caitlyn reduced the CE technology’s claim upon strategic consequentiality. Further, she made *herself* consequential in its stead. Indeed, by the end of her story, her styling of her self-in-the-world with the technology had reshaped not only what was *locally* consequential at the frontline but also what was consequential *for the Corporate Office* who, over time, grew to recognise the meaningfulness of the local service orientation of the Local Office team.

There are thus entanglements between 1) the consequentiality of actors *in strategy work*, and 2) the consequentiality of their (everyday) work *for strategy*. These might be further exposed and elucidated in future work. This would also bring themes of power and practice into a close co-generative dialogue when considering consequentiality in SAP. Indeed, strategists might be seen to empower themselves and so *enact themselves into strategy*.

### 6.5. Circling back to theory: Struggles for selfhood from ‘within’ the spatiality of care

The discussion above now prompts review of what the postphenomenological conceptualisation of the spatiality of care contributes to our *theoretical understanding* of power in strategy. While risking some restatement of ideas, my aim is to consolidate my theoretical stance as a prelude to then engaging—in Section 6.6—with extant theoretical positions on (socio)materiality as applied in SAP more broadly. So, overall, I point towards a notion of *struggles over subjectivities* (Fleming & Spicer, 2007, 2008; Laine & Vaara, 2007) that sees them as taking place from *within spatialities* as relationally shaped through human–technology (sociomaterial) involvements. I will first set the scene by revisiting how postphenomenological thinking on power builds upon the earlier conceptual work on the spatiality of care in Chapter 3.

So, recall first that in Section 3.5 (p.89), I summarised the idea that technologies ‘tune’ the spatiality of Heideggerian care. I stated that:

technological mediations are [...not...] determinative of care—which is of course still structured in relation to the teleologies of practice in a Heideggerian manner—but it is indicative of how human and technological intentionalities together (as a composite intentionality) are intertwined to influence the way our lifeworlds take shape by *re-orienting* and *re-distancing* within the context of its spatialities. *Care itself*—as a concerned disposition to things (*Sorge*) and others (*Fürsorge*)—can thus be refocused and refined through the materialities of tools and technologies. Said differently, through the intentionality they contribute to the human–world relations they mediate, technologies might thus be said *to tune* the spatiality of care. And as I also indicated above, this can take place through both their actual and potential use.

Thus, by shaping *dis-tances* and *orientations*, technologies change how actors can be concernfully present in-their-worlds. Technologies are immanent within but also ‘tune’ the ontological *revealings and concealings* of being-in-the-world-with-others (Section 3.5). They mediate how the ‘objectivities’ of the world are made present to the human actor, and also how the actor can be present in this world *as a subject*. In Section 3.6, I added to this thinking to specifically consider the nature of the *self* within this spatiality. This afforded a connection with Foucault-informed thinking on struggles over subjectivities. More specifically, it allowed me to articulate how the subjectivity of actors who are *subjected to* such re-reorientations may be challenged—their sense of self threatened—by technological shifts in spatialities. Within these tensioned spaces, their dispositions are placed in discord with the projections that orient their place-in-the-world. The orientation that *is their care* (in the Heideggerian sense of the word) is fractured. They are thus then

constituted as resisting ‘subjects’ who seek to sustain their existential selfhood by *styling* their relations with the mediations of the technologies.

Note that this does not mean they resist (and then either succeed or fail to overcome) the mediating relations that the technology established ‘between’ human and world. As Verbeek (2011a) makes clear, humans cannot sit *outside* the relations that technology has always already structured; just as actors cannot sit outside the forces of power that constitute them as subjects. Rather, by seeking cohesion and integration between their dispositions and projections<sup>57</sup>, they make a (new) claim on their selfhood through this productive ‘styling’, an ‘active appropriation of technological mediations’ (ibid, p.87) ‘which allows one to style the way one’s technologically mediated subjectivity is shaped’ (ibid, p.85). This is very much in keeping with Foucauldian notions of the *generative* nature of struggles, revealing something of how such generation occurs (Mumby, 2005; Fleming & Spicer, 2007, 2008, 2014; Thomas & Davies, 2005a).

What does these ideas add theoretically to incumbent perspectives? I have suggested (and empirically illustrated) that the Heideggerian notion of the self contributes an ontological and conceptual locus for the analysis of the struggles for subjectivity and identity that are immanent in flows of power. In contrast, previous studies have not considered the *nature of the self*, which tacitly leaves us with an unanswered question: If subjectivity is malleable and always in flux by virtue of movements within and through relations of power, what is the ontological basis of the self that makes these moves? Stated in relation to other studies on power/resistance: What is the “‘I’ [that] is jeopardized” when resistance is performed (as in the work of Harding et al., 2017, p.1227)? Or what is the entity whose ‘understandings of [its] self-identit[y] provides an arena for resistance’ (as per Thomas & Davies, 2005a, p.686)? Without addressing these questions there is little ontological basis from which to reveal ‘what’ is at threatened when resistance is constituted. As empirically demonstrated in Chapter 5, articulating a centralising structure of the self supports longitudinal analysis that can reveal the dynamics of subject constitution as actors seek to maintain existential coherence and cohesiveness.

More broadly, framing struggles in terms of Heideggerian spatiality emphasises how subjectivities are *always shaped through being-in-the-world*. While extant Foucauldian thinking has

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<sup>57</sup> This is not at all to say that actors will seek to retain their ‘hold’ on a single set of dispositions and a single teleological orientation into the future. Rather, as they style themselves ‘back’ into the technology mediated world, they will seek to *regain coherence* by drawing on new projections and possibly different sets of dispositions through which their sense of self (as an integration of disposition–projection) can be stabilized.

provided rich depictions of how discourses and wider practices are mobilised to construct subjects and objects, an ontology of Heideggerian care allows us to unpack these constructions by viewing subjects and objects as *relationally derivative*, and mutually constituting (as examined in detail in relation to the entanglements of technological mediations discussed above in Section 6.4.1). Taking an example from Hardy and Thompson's (2014) work (introduced in Chapter 1, e.g., Section 1.7) as a point of comparison: in the telecommunications from they studied, *cost-effectiveness* was shaped into a 'strategic object' (ibid, p.335) through the relocation of jobs, waves of downsizing, the creation of new business units, and changes in working practices at the customer interface and in product development. They argue that—when the power effects of strategy are successfully intensified by its practices—'a well-defined strategy object is produced ... In addition, a strategy subject is produced who identifies with the strategy object' (ibid, p.344). While there is an implicit theoretical relationality here *between* strategic subject and object, the nature of this is under-specified, and the question remains of *how* the subject so produced is constructed *in relation to (and with)* the new object.

My theorising supports a deeper analysis of such (intra)relations, with the findings in Chapter 5 revealing the productive interplay *between* 'strategic' objects and subjects. Recall, that Lorum's Corporate Office had an over-arching strategic aim to deliver the '*right message, at the right time, to the right people*' to improve customer experience and engagement (see Section 5.2). In Hardy and Thompson's (2014) terms, the technology was implemented to reshape local practices and so 'bear down' (ibid, p.342), and thus intensify, this aim as a 'strategic object' *to which subjects could be related*. However, at the level of individual practitioners, such objects (or objectivities) are very subtle. Recall, for example, how Caitlyn saw the 'objectivities' that were 'intensified' through the CE technology were corrupt translations of her natural customer interactions, ones that, quite frankly, violated her own lived experience of such work (e.g., Scene 2, Section 5.6.2). This placed significant tension on her own subjectivity which constituted her as a resistant subject.

In such cases, the question of whether the intensifying practices 'succeeded' or 'failed' (according to Hardy and Thompson's framing) seems too general (and of course, the challenges to symmetry I discuss above in Section 6.4.2 already unsettle such notions). So, to build upon Hardy and Thompson's (2014) work, I think the question now becomes—what objectivities *materialise* (in lieu of being agentially 'produced' through intensification) given the (idiosyncratically) unfolding subjectivities of the various actors involved? Phenomenologically, struggles for subjectivity in-the-world are always enacted within the medium of subjectivities-constituted-through-objectivities,

and of objectivities-constituted through-subjectivities (cf. Moran, 2000, p.15). This means that any one actor's espoused intention towards (or perception of) a strategic object may not easily be recognised (as such) in the lifeworld of another. Indeed, this was reflected in the multistability of the materialisations mediated by the CE technology in Hannah and Sarah's stories. Thinking through this relationality thus facilitates deeper analysis of the construction of strategic 'objects' and 'subjects'. It helps to critically destabilise the binaries of success versus failure—and control versus resistance—which adhere to a 'narrow, managerial focus and agenda' (McCabe, 2010, p.6). In doing so, this thinking can reveal nuances of organisational practice that—rather than *intensifying* strategic goals through power—are seen to steer, shepherd and shape *what strategy becomes* by setting up constructive shifts and tensions within the spatialities that orient human actors in-their-worlds.

## 6.6. Relating to other theoretical stances on (socio)materiality in strategy

In this section, I will discuss how my postphenomenological stance sits in relation to two extant theoretical positions on materiality in SAP inquiry (as introduced in Section 1.5). The first is the 'moderate' view adopted by Jarzabkowski and Kaplan (2015) in their review of strategy tools. The second is the 'strong' view of materiality adopted by CCO scholars. Here my focus is not on power, but on broader issues of how we conceive of the role of materialities in the practice of strategy.

### 6.6.1. Troubling instrumentalism: Tools- and technologies-in-use in strategy

As noted by Dameron et al. (2015), much of the work to-date in SAP has largely prioritised *human agency*, generally assuming that tools and technologies are *purposefully* deployed as (relatively) neutral instruments to meet human ends. As introduced in Section 1.5 this 'moderate' view sees human and material, subject and object as interrelated but still discrete entities (Dameron et al., 2015). It invokes the idea that materials have affordances that enable and constrain *human agency*. In contrast, the 'strong' view considers human and material to be *mutually constitutive* (Dameron et al., 2015). As per phenomenological and postphenomenological ontologies, it emphasises the ontological relationality of 'subjects' and 'objects' in strategy work, where *agency* is not situated 'in' the social/human or 'in' the material/technological. Rather agency is generated through their intra-action (Barad, 2003, 2007).

According to this definition, Jarzabkowski and Kaplan (2015) adopt a relatively moderate view in their extensive review of the formal tools of strategy (e.g., Porters Five Forces)—an analysis

which also extends into the space of enabling technologies (ibid, p.539). They deploy the terms tools-in-use and technologies-in-use (cf. Orlikowski, 2000; Orlikowski and Barley, 2001) to capture the idea that an understanding of the role of materialities necessarily requires an understanding of how they are adopted and applied by practitioners in their actual practice. Supported by this review, they conceptualise tool use in terms of the interaction between the affordances of tools and the agency of their human adopters. Thus, practitioners *adopt* tools according to their *own purposes*, while the materialities of these tools act to *enable or constrain* these purposeful applications. This thinking recognises that tools and technologies can influence the nature of human praxis. However, according to this relatively humanist ('weak' sociomaterial) position, they do so rather passively by 'offering' properties and features that can be *applied to* or (have to be) *adapted according to* human objectives and interests (pp.543-546). Affordances and human agency seem to fit together like a lock and key—the material and human pre-exist each other ontologically and the latter seeks out the former according to an *instrumental* fit with (or adaptability to) a need.

In contrast, by adopting a relational, co-constitutive view of the human and material, the (post)phenomenological conceptualisation in my thesis points the study of tools-(and technologies-)in-use in new directions. It not only examines how tools become enrolled into use according to the cultural-historical purposiveness of a practitioner's praxis (the phenomenological corollary of Jarzabkowski and Kaplan's (2015) human-agential view) but, moreover, it also supports consideration of how human purposiveness may be re-oriented according to the materialities of tools and technologies, and also how subjectivities are shaped through tool use. More fundamentally, it asks how human *experience of the world and others* is restructured through their relations with these artefacts. What humans *do* with tools is thus not just linked to what the tool offers (as an 'afforded' abstraction or representation of a world; see also Jarzabkowski, Spee, et al., 2013) but to how the co-constitutive, mutually generative *relations with* the tool shapes the nature of the social world the human actor then has cause to act within. As the postphenomenologist Verbeek (2009) makes clear:

The central idea in the theory of mediation is that technologies should not be understood as functional *instruments*, but as active *mediators* in relations between humans and reality. This mediation can occur because most technologies-in-use are not the *terminus* of human perception and action, but rather withdraw from our attention in order to make possible a specific involvement with the world (p.66, emphasis in original).

At an ontological level, this thinking changes how we think of the part played by strategy tools and technologies in strategy work. And so, any sense of agency ‘over’ tools-in-use does not reside *with* the human, but is *derivative of* the human–tool–world relation. Further, from this relational substrate, the ‘*whatness*’ of the tool (how it is made present, revealed or disclosed as an entity), is instantiated during those always already unfolding moments of ‘use’ (or possibilities for ‘use’ as per Section 3.4.3). Postphenomenologically, the word ‘use’ here is now considered in terms of how the tool mediates human–world relations.

From the perspective of this postphenomenological posthumanism, tools are not *adopted and adapted* to meet objectives (cf. Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2015); rather, they mediate different ways of being-in-the-world through which they *become* the things that they are ‘used for’. Correspondingly, ‘worlds’ (the salience of ‘objectivities’) and identities (‘subjectivities’ in relation also to ‘intersubjectivities’) are mediated by and through tools, and so *co-materialised alongside them*. Under these ontological conditions ‘there is a need to talk about technology in a *noninstrumental* way, that is, to use a different language and to use language differently [begging the question of] what kind of language we should use to talk about technology’ (Coeckelbergh, 2017, p.188, emphasis added). The postphenomenology of Ihde and Verbeek can be seen as such an innovative use of language that allows us to think beyond instrumentalism and the dominance of human agency (ibid). As will be discussed further in Section 6.7.2 below, it gives voice to the ‘material’, epistemologically revealing its relational importance. On this theoretical basis, *tools-in-use* might suitably be rethought as *tools-through-their-mediations-in-the world*.

### **6.6.2. Relationship with other ‘strong’ positions on sociomateriality in strategy**

Various scholars have suggested widening the scope of what is studied in relation to ‘matter’ or ‘materiality’ in strategy. In their review, Lê & Spee (2015, p.590) emphasise the importance of ‘a focus on materiality as a construct that expands beyond mere physicality to looking at significance and impact’. In a similar vein, Leonardi (2015, p.S19) calls for consideration of the ‘role that materiality plays in the materialization (or lack thereof) of strategy.’ ‘Matter’, in these cases, carries a dual meaning referring both to physical ‘things’ that can be seen or touched, and to ‘things’ (concerns) that *come to matter* to us, by being made meaningful and salient.

This idea is considered in Cooren and his colleagues’ CCO approach (e.g., Bencherki et al., 2019; Cooren, 2015, 2018, 2020; Cooren et al., 2012; Vásquez et al., 2018) which was introduced in Section 1.5 as another ‘strong’ view of materiality (Dameron et al., 2015). Cooren goes further than



Lê & Spee (2015) and Leonardi (2015) and challenges any separation of the dual notions of ‘matter’ referred to above. To collapse the distinction, Cooren (2020) proposes that we ‘think in terms of *materialization* rather than exclusively in terms of materiality’ (emphasis in original, p.16). He thinks of materialization as:

[the] ways by which various beings (e.g., a procedure, a mission statement, an organizational chart, a strategic plan, a CEO, a spokesperson, an organization, an idea, etc.) come to appear and make themselves present throughout space and time. (p.2)

Cooren’s ideas are grounded in his own work which sits at the interface between materiality and discourse in strategy and organisation studies. However, his emphasis on the *relational* nature of such materializations accords with—and is reinforced by—my postphenomenological position on sociomateriality. For Cooren, things are thus *made material*, or *brought into existence* through processes of materialization—mediated through communicative media—which make them concrete as foci around which lives are organised, regardless of their physical tangibility (Cooren, 2020). He gives evocative examples which clearly resonate strongly with Verbeek’s (2005, 2011a) mediation theoretical thinking:

Loved ones are constituted *through* the photographs that make them appear to you on your desk (icons), a disease is constituted *through* the symptoms that reveal it to physicians (indexes), and a conflict is constituted *through* the comments it later triggers in a hallway (symbols). It does not mean, of course, that these photographs, symptoms, and comments respectively *exhaust* the modes of being of the loved one, disease, and conflict. It means that they just are one of their embodiments or materializations among many others, that is, one of the ways by which they happen to *exist*. (Emphasis in original p.11)

The (post)phenomenological concepts introduced in this thesis have the potential to offer deeper insights into *how* such processes of *materialisation* unfold over space and time, so adding to Cooren’s thinking. They provide specific language to articulate the nature of human-medium-world relations and the manner in which the (phenomenological) *intentionalities* of human and medium are co-constitutive in making things-in-the-world material through shifting spatialities (amplifications–reductions, nears–fars, and orientations).

This idea of materialisation also resonates with Latourian ‘matters of concern’ which Cooren and colleagues have also drawn upon in their work (Bencherki et al., 2019; Vásquez et al., 2018). For Latour (2004), sociomaterial agencies do not present the world as objective ‘matters of fact, but always as *matters of concern*, with their mode of fabrication and their stabilizing mechanisms clearly

visible' (ibid, p.246, emphasis added). As Verbeek (2020) discusses in his postphenomenological analysis of the politics of technological mediations, technologies are able to 'gather' such matters of concern (Latour 2005; Verbeek, 2020). They thus 'can transform the composition of a world [... to ...] .. give them [these things] a political voice' (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2011, p.88; see also ibid, 2017, p.34) such that 'the rise of issues are in fact technologically mediated processes' (Verbeek, 2020, p.151). We saw examples of such materialisations arising in relation to technology mediated objectivities in Chapter 5's narratives. On the basis of such thinking, the question for SAP research becomes: how do human involvements with the (physical) materialities involved in strategy work (artefacts, tools, technologies), (re)shape what *comes to matter* to the strategist?

### **6.7. Broader relationships with Heideggerian thinking**

I considered what postphenomenology adds to extant Heideggerian views as part of initial conceptual development in Chapter 3. I would now like to discuss three broader points in relation to these streams of literature. The first relates to how we might think about the empirical phenomenon of technology adoption, which was the focus for Heideggerian theorising in the IS work that was introduced (Section 2.7). The second relates to the epistemological and methodological 'power' of postphenomenology as it is entwined with Heideggerian ontology (Sections 2.5 and 2.6). The third considers the positioning of my work relative to existing Heidegger-inspired onto-epistemologies<sup>58</sup> in SAP (Section 2.3).

#### ***6.7.1. Supporting extant Heideggerian thinking on technology adoption***

As introduced in Chapter 2, the work in my thesis was partly inspired by Heideggerian theorising in the IS domain. So, to offer something in return so to speak, I suggest that postphenomenology might also support IS scholars in the way it expands upon aspects of their theorising (as it was presented in Section 2.7; e.g., Lamprou, 2017; Riemer & Johnston, 2012, 2014, 2017, 2019). I exemplify this by giving specific reference to Lamprou (2017) and Riemer & Johnston (2014).

My thinking, of course, directly extends Lamprou's (2017) deployment of the spatiality of care in the context of IS implementation and use. In relation to her conceptualisation, she asks the question, '[w]hat does it enable us to see that we could not see before?' (p.1741) To consider this

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<sup>58</sup> From a Heideggerian perspective, I do not consider ontology and epistemology as separate here. Rather, we can only *know* according to a *way of being*. Hence, and recognising the insights of Barad (2003), I adopt the term 'onto-epistemology'.

question, she draws on a number of examples from previous studies of technology implementation. One that is of particular relevance here relates to Leonardi's (2011) account of imbrication (as introduced in Section 2.4 as a relatively 'weak' view of social and material entanglement). Leonardi considered the use of a software tool to increase the speed with which engineers could simulate car crashes. Because the software automated the production of simulation results but not the actual set up of the simulations, new features were built into the software. For Leonardi, this illustrated how 'existing human agency is imbricated with a new material agency' (Lamprou, 2017, p.1743). In counterpoint to this, Lamprou argues that

Approaching this empirical situation through the perspective of spatiality as care would allow us to explore [it...] in a different manner. The outcome of the situation would have been less reliant on the manner in which human and material agency is patterned (i.e., existing human agency with new material agency or vice versa) and more on the efforts of the [...] managers to appreciate the *theoretical significance* of the system (ibid, emphasis added).

I outlined Lamprou's (2017) notion of 'theoretical significance' in Section 2.7. In the context of the spatiality of care, I presented it as:

[being] associated with the pre-implementation stage, prior to a technology's actual use, such that meaning is projected forward based upon its anticipated possibilities (i.e., the future-directed aspect of care as understanding). However, meaningfulness is still established from within existing (pre-implementation) practice structures. These provide a predisposing (thrown) basis for interpreting the technology [...], co-shaped by ongoing concerned dealings with the materialities of the technology's pre-implementation phase (e.g., training manuals). These latter may also contribute to anticipatory (future-directed) understandings of the technology's proposed use, value and relevance.

For Lamprou, Leonardi thus under-emphasises the manner in which the use of the software was shaped through the managers pre-disposing (spatial) *understanding* of it, the meaningfulness and saliences it had for them given their own particular ways of being-in-the-world.

This mirrors my thinking in Section 6.4.2 above in relation to technological scripts, where I observed that the manner in which Lorum's Local Office staff were subject to the CE technology was crucially dependent on how they were concernfully oriented towards it as it was enrolled into their lifeworlds. However, I would now add to Lamprou's examination. By giving specific attention to the how technology *tunes* care, a postphenomenological view of spatiality would have permitted additional questions to be asked. For instance, while acknowledging theoretical

significance, how did the software then ‘direct’ these managers towards their routine practices such that the inadequacies of the software were revealed as matters of concern? Restated conceptually: For these managers, how did the technology mediate the objectivities of their worlds—and their intersubjective relations with other relevant human actors—so as to re-orient them as subjects (make them present in-their-worlds) in such a way that these problems were seen as problems at all. Moreover, what struggles for their own senses of self may have characterised these re-orientations? And how did these influence the processes of software implementation and adaptation described?

As another, brief, example Riemer & Johnston’s (2014) work showed how Heideggerian thinking might help us to understand why IT implementation exhibits ‘messiness’ and why new software systems may be resisted leading to adoption failures. As indicated in Section 2.7, these authors speculate that a new technology may at first be *unintelligible* to practitioners against the background of their existing practices and its specific referential (spatial) structure. They also suggest that, by virtue of the Heideggerian co-constitution of *human* (being-in) and *world*, professional identities established as *ways of being* (*for-the-sake-of*) in relation to existing equipmental structures may be challenged by new technologies.

From this starting position, and based upon the view of the struggles which can take place in relation to the introduction of a new technology, it is easy to see that, by thinking of technologies postphenomenologically—as mediators of being-in-the-world—we might enrich future analysis of such patterns of ‘messiness’ in technology adoption. This might reveal insights into the manner in which the specific materialities of a new technology present challenges to intelligibility, ways of being, and identity as actors struggle ‘through’ mediated objectivities, intersubjectivities and subjectivities. In fact, Chapter 5’s findings might easily be (re)read in terms of similar technology adoption challenges, so broadening the empirical relevance of the study.

### ***6.7.2. Revealing the material: The practical value of postphenomenology***

In this section, I will further reinforce the case for postphenomenology that I have tried to develop within in this thesis, aiming to cohere the epistemological and practical value that it holds for the researcher. The IS scholars above agree that Heideggerian views of sociomateriality open up new ways of questioning the role of technology in organisational life. Indeed, as introduced in Section 2.7, Riemer and Johnston (2017) deploy Heidegger—theoretically and empirically—to

address previous criticisms of the ontological inseparability of human and technology implicit in strong views of sociomateriality:

Overall, ontological inseparability has been portrayed as an overly ontologically focused position that might make some sense philosophically but offers little of practical value to the IS researcher. (Riemer and Johnston, 2017, p.1062).

Thus, Riemer and Johnston (2017) demonstrate how a Heideggerian view of the sociomateriality has *analytical value* in empirical studies of technology. They argue for its *plausibility, coherence, and actionability*. It is plausible in that it is compatible with everyday lived experience, in a manner that can be revealed empirically. It is coherent as it permits 'dualist' Cartesian empirical accounts of technologies in use to be reconciled. And it is actionable as it provides a conceptual language for analysis of field data. As I first introduced in Section 3.2, postphenomenology is grounded upon a Heideggerian ontology which supports conceptual integration. Thus, in developing a postphenomenological position on sociomateriality, I retain Riemer and Johnston's (2017) plausibility, coherence and actionability while also extending the conceptualisation in an analytically useful manner. In a similar manner to that accomplished by these scholars, I hope to have demonstrated this both theoretically and empirically in earlier chapters.

More profoundly, and as already noted above, Lamprou (2017) sees that a Heideggerian lens can change our view of empirical situations of technology use, enabling us 'to see that [which] we could not see before' (ibid, p.1741). To argue how postphenomenology further empowers this claim, I will discuss literature that underpins the *epistemological* value of both Heideggerian and postphenomenological ontology. I will then draw upon Adams & Thompson (2016) notion of *posthuman heuristics*, to substantiate postphenomenology as a method of discovery that *reveals* the sociomaterial world anew, and so—as per Lamprou (2017) above—permits the researcher to *see in new ways*. To frame this, I first discuss one core element that underpins Heidegger's ontology: that of 'unconcealing' (*unverborgenheit*). This builds upon the revealing–concealing structures of the spatiality of care. As should be clear at this point, in *being-in-the-world-with-others*, we (as *dasein*) always already encounter things, people and ourselves according to the relations that disclose these as such. Through the relations that disclose these aspects of the world, these aspects are revealed or, according to Heidegger, brought out of *concealment*. This underlying state of concealment is the "'default" state of entities' (Wrathall, 2021b, p.794). Wrathall describes this as follows:

One reason Heidegger talks this way is that he wants to emphasize the fact that entities are in many ways independent of us – independent, for example, of our perceptions, beliefs, wishes, intentions, and purposes. This means that uncovering [unconcealing] things demands something of us: it requires us to struggle and foster and develop the right skills, attitudes, and bodily dispositions for dealing with things and letting them show up in their “essence,” that is, as what they are. Heidegger illustrates this by describing a shoemaker’s workshop: “which entities are there and how these entities are available, in line with their inherent character, is unveiled for us only in dealing appropriately with equipment such as tools, leather, and shoes. Only one who understands is able to uncover by himself this environing world of the shoemaker” (GA24:431). For most of us, the entities in the workshop are not in fact uncovered, or could be uncovered only if we come to acquire the appropriate skills. And what is true of the workshop is true of the world as a whole (ibid, p.794)<sup>59</sup>

Thus, certain aspects or facets of the world (and of ourselves) are brought into salience (unconcealed) by virtue of specific relational (equipmental) contexts. These subsist within a much larger (infinite) set of worldly possibilities that are always already concealed. Other ‘unconcealings’ require different worldly relations: different dispositions, understandings and orientations; different ways of being-amid-things and with-others – that is, other relational ways of being-in-in-the-world. As should be clear at this point, postphenomenology builds upon this by revealing how our relations with artefacts and technologies shape how the world is made present to us, and thus how we are present in-the-world.

According to Kiran (2015), the ‘two-sidedness’ of this revealing–concealing structure is the *ontological* ‘dimension of technological mediation’. However, exposing this two-sidedness also has *epistemological* implications with methodological consequences for assessing technologies (ibid, pp.123-124). Thus, when considered in these terms, Kiran (2015) thinks of mediation theory’s amplification–reduction structure as an epistemological corollary of revealing–concealing. As exemplified in the context of medical X-ray images:

An X-ray image results from the interaction of a body, an X-ray technician, the X-ray technology and the practice of using it. ... The X-ray image produced, then, is a certain manner in which the body manifests itself. It is not the “truest” or “most objective” representation of the body, but is a functional mode of the body that reveals certain aspects deemed relevant for

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<sup>59</sup> When citing ‘GA24’, Wrathall (2021b) is referring to volume 24 in Heidegger’s *Gesamtausgabe* (his collected writings). This volume is also published as Heidegger (1982) ‘The basic problems of phenomenology’. For consistency, it is this latter version that is listed in the references section of this thesis.

the task. [...] The technology *focuses on and enhances, augments and translates* certain aspects of the body, while at the same time it plays down or ignores others. ... it *reveals* certain aspects of the body and at the same time, it *conceals* other possible representations of it (ibid, p.130, emphasis added).

Importantly, from this perspective technology can also be likened to other mediating 'tools' that we use to disclose the world, such as language, theories and conceptual devices (Coeckelbergh, 2017, 2022b; Rosenberger, 2013). This is in keeping with interpretative/hermeneutic epistemologies applied in social sciences. Alvesson & Kärreman (2011) note that:

The knowledge and the person doing the knowledge work/development can't be separated ... The framework, the researcher, and the social reality while inescapably represented through potentially contested representations are thus always interrelated and provide an interconnected net of potential insights and ideas [...] In this case, the researcher aims towards a hermeneutical translation and clarification of the life-world of the particular group of people under study (pp.35-36).

This entanglement of theories/concepts, the researcher ('subject') and the researched ('object') aligns with postphenomenology's premise that human, tool and world are co-constitutive. The relation that the researcher has with the tool configures the world that is revealed. As Alvesson and Kärreman (2011) indicate:

Theory is often seen as providing direction and control, but it can also be *mobilized as a tool for disclosure*. A theory can open up not only other theories and their lines of interpretation, but also sensitive constructions and interpretations of empirical material (ibid, pp.37, emphasis added).

On this basis, it can be argued that postphenomenology not only considers how technologies mediate access to the world. It also provides a conceptual language that *itself* also mediates a particular mode of onto-epistemological disclosure; it *unconceals* the world in a specific way. Accordingly, with its specific set of theoretical tools, postphenomenology has non-neutral implications for what we (can) know of the empirical world. It is important to recognise this 'constraint'. But it is also important to recognise what is *particular* to this epistemological revealing, and what it can thus add to a 'strong' sociomaterial view of strategy and organisation.

Thus, at the heart of postphenomenology sits a drive to expose and interrogate the *non-neutrality* of 'things' in human affairs. As examined in Chapter 3, by building on Heidegger's work it clearly sees that the human and material are thoroughly entangled. However, whereas

Heidegger positions *dasein* as the focus of analysis, postphenomenology *de-centres* *dasein* to specifically draw out the role of things as mediators of the worldly relations that then constitute *dasein*. Postphenomenological analysis of being-in-the-world *as mediated* thus gives specific *posthuman* analytical voice to the material from ‘within’ the sociomaterial. This view is supported by Adams & Thompson (2016): ‘A new epistemology like posthumanism demands new methods: Thinking in a new way is closely tied to doing (and ultimately being) in a new way’ (see also Adams & Thompson 2011; Thompson & Adams 2013). On this basis, these authors propose that postphenomenological concepts can be applied epistemologically and methodologically as:

heuristics to assist researchers and practitioners mobilize posthuman insights through making the digital and its objects available for critical interrogation ... [as a] a way of “speaking with things,” that is, of making visible and questioning relevant digital objects ... [and] other nonhuman entities (ibid, p.6).

Echoing Abbott’s (2004) explication of heuristics as ‘methods of discovery’, Adams & Thompson, do not consider such methodological adoption of postphenomenology as a prescription but as a way of becoming attuned to things in scholarly inquiry:

[an] approach hoping to discover, uncover, or find out something new. Such an approach is a way of traveling ... The researcher or practitioner starts out on a footpath taken by others before, but with an eye for surprises and a willingness to make unexpected detours.

Drawing from Alvesson & Kärreman (2011, pp.37) this exploratory pathfinding requires an ‘[o]penness [...that...] demands that we include a broadening of the repertoire of vocabularies and theories that can be mobilized in order for us to consider more and less self-evident aspects’. An epistemological and methodological openness to revealing (unconcealing) the non-neutral part played by tools, artefacts and technologies in constituting human lifeworlds also resonates with Bennet’s (2010) thinking on of the ‘vibrancy of matter’:

What is also needed is a cultivated, patient, sensory attentiveness to nonhuman forces operating outside and inside the human body. I have tried to learn how to induce an attentiveness to things and their affects [...] Without proficiency in this countercultural kind of perceiving, the world appears as if it consists only of active human subjects who confront passive objects and their law-governed mechanisms. (Bennett, 2010, p.xiv)

On this basis, I offer the postphenomenological conceptualisation articulated in this thesis as a novel *heuristic mode of discovery* to explore technology in strategy. As I hope to have demonstrated in Chapter 5’s findings—and building on Riemer and Johnston (2017) above—its *practical value* lies

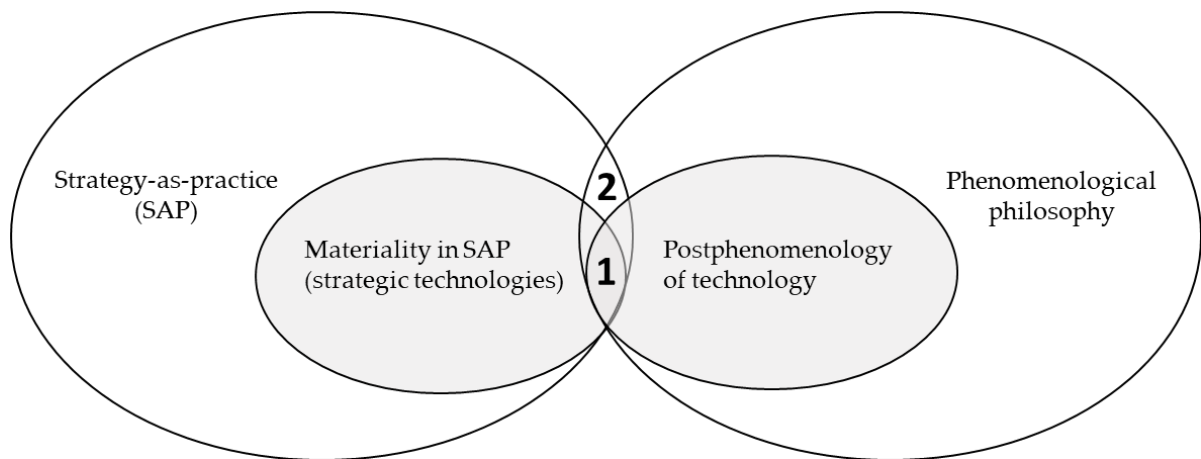


in exposing the *non-neutral part* that technology plays by giving voice to (or better, *amplifying* the voice of) the material from 'within' the sociomaterial, as it is entangled and co-constitutive of human affairs. In this sense, and connecting back with the discussion in Section 6.6.2 above, materialities are *materialised* as *matters of concern* for the strategy scholar.

### 6.7.3. Relationships with existing phenomenological positions in SAP

Finally, I would like to discuss how my postphenomenological contribution sits alongside extant Heideggerian thinking in SAP. As introduced in Section 2.3, various scholars have applied such thinking to refresh or renew how we think about studying practice. As already noted in Chapter 2, these extant works have not aimed to pay detailed attention to the role of materialities in strategy. This indeed was a stimulus for exploring the broader literature to consider first, how Heidegger's ideas had been adopted to consider technology in the IS literature (Chapter 2) and second, how Heidegger's ontology has been further developed by the postphenomenological school of the philosophy of technology (Chapter 3). However, (and notwithstanding my interaction with Foucauldian concepts) there are points of convergence between my postphenomenological stance and these other works, which I now discuss. Note here that I do not attempt any sort of integration, or a thorough comparative review. Rather, my far more modest aim is to consider some broader points of positioning. Indeed, as illustrated in Figure 2, by specifically homing in on the role of materialities/technologies in SAP, my postphenomenological contribution (position 1) sits somewhat adjacent to most extant thinking (position 2).

Recall from Section 2.3, that Chia and his colleagues adopt a notion of readiness-to-hand to shape a postprocessual path for SAP (Chia, 2009; Chia & Holt, 2006, 2009; Chia & MacKay, 2007; Chia & Rasche, 2010). From this perspective, they deploy Heidegger's tool analysis to consider strategy as practical coping or dwelling. While this thinking countered methodological individualism and decentred human agency to offer an alternative onto-epistemological position for SAP inquiry, it did not specifically account for the readiness-to-hand of *actual tools* in strategy, and their place within the spatiality of being-in-the world (Section 2.3). This became the focus for my own conceptual work.



**Figure 2: An adjacent contribution that extends the phenomenological view of SAP**

While not specifically building upon the notion of dwelling, my postphenomenological conceptualisation still embraces the *immanence* of strategy in sociomaterial practices that is so well captured by Chia and his colleagues. As we saw in the Lorum narrative, strategy (as it was locally accomplished) was materialised through the everyday, often mundane workings of the Local Office employees as they struggled with (practically coped alongside) the CE technology. Drawing comparison with the discussion of scripts in Section 6.4.2 above, the CE technology embodied (or was inscribed with) an ostensible strategy, but this strategy was never *transcendent* (as per a ‘building’ view, Section 2.3), it was always already transformed and translated through the flows of practice and power that constituted the world within which these actors dwelt. My work is thus congruous with that of Chia and his colleagues. In accordance with my epistemological discussion above about giving ‘voice’ to the material, I also suggest that that my work *reveals* the part played by materialities (technologies) in shaping how strategy unfolds as part of practical coping, how the human and material are co-constitutive as ‘co-dwellers’ of the lifeworlds of strategy.

This idea seems to complement the recent work of Burke & Wolfe (2021) which was also briefly introduced in Section 2.3. Their study investigates the development and use of *de novo* tools in strategising, particularly in the context of addressing ‘wicked problems’<sup>60</sup>. They argue that strategy toolmaking ‘invites a dwelling mode of engagement, where latent issues can be progressively surfaced, explored, and tackled’ (ibid, p.383). But they also indicate that this engagement is simultaneously one of building. Indeed, dwelling and building here:

<sup>60</sup> Quoting Rittel and Webber (1973, p. 167), they define ‘wicked problems’ as “unknown quantities that ‘defy efforts to delineate their boundaries’”.

operate concurrently during strategy toolmaking, creating a dynamic and valuable interplay between intentional action – the deliberate design of a strategy tool – and unintended action – the non-deliberate and non-linear exploration of wicked issues (ibid, p.382).

In their empirical analysis, such sociomaterial processes generated ‘recurrent cycles of spin-off strategizing’ (ibid, p.379) that invited wayfinding, discovering and materialising latent ambiguities and issues, and disentangling the complexities of the problem through unfolding *practical coping* activities. Their work thus ‘cast[s] light on the role of impromptu detours and spontaneous strategizing’ (ibid. p.382). Working with the tools (and, by extension, technologies) of strategy thus ‘can take strategy meaning making in unexpected directions’ (Knight et al., 2018, p.918) opening up new materialisations to ‘allow managers to explore beyond preconceived boundaries’ (Burke & Wolf, 2021, p.381). Although my study investigated a technology of strategic ‘control’ rather than a tool of strategising, it revealed complementary findings, showing how strategy – although inscribed into the technology in a manner in keeping with the deliberate design of the *building* mode – was enrolled into the lifeworlds of the Local Office actors as *dwellers*, inviting non-deliberate actions of practical coping from which strategy as an accomplishment unfolded. Postphenomenologically, by virtue of the non-neutral, and generative mediations of the technology, new worlds ‘beyond’ the boundaries of the technological scripts were made present ‘for’ the *being-in* of the frontline strategy worker.

Looking beyond such notions of building and dwelling, there are also links between my work and Sandberg and Dall’Alba’s (2009) lifeworld view of strategy. As outlined in Section 2.3.2, recall that these authors conceive of the sociomaterial practices of strategy and organisation as ‘specific [life]worlds in which members dwell, made up of an array of activities, people, knowledge, equipment, concerns and so on’ (p.1355). They specify a range of concepts that together capture how practitioners are always already entwined within their ‘practice worlds’ (Table 3, p.53). These concepts seem to resonate with my postphenomenological conceptualisation. Thus, they discuss ‘being (with) others’ to portray how practitioners are socialised into practices, always shaped (albeit idiosyncratically) by the inherited background of shared ways of doing, saying and thinking. They also discuss ‘equipment’: how tools can become extensions of human bodies when bound up in the readiness-to-hand of practice, and thus are constitutive of (and within) practice. These entanglements contribute to ‘ways of being’, giving meaning to what humans do, and who they are to others and to themselves. Given the shared phenomenological heritage, these ideas are broadly in keeping with the spatiality of care (in being-in-the world-with-others) laid out in

Chapter 2. However, by considering how care is tuned by materialities (Chapter 3), and giving voice to the material (Section 6.7.2 above), I also bring Sandberg and Dall'Alba's (2009) concepts into closer dialogue to indicate a (mediating) mode through which equipment and being-with-others-(in-the-world) interact and are entwined as co-constituents of the practice worlds that shape ways of being.

## **Chapter 7:**

### **CONCLUSION**

## 7.1. Overview

This concluding chapter first reviews the flow, contributions and limitations of this thesis (Section 7.2). I then consider some postphenomenological elaborations that may support further conceptual development (Section 7.3), and then pose some open questions that may invite future work (Section 7.4). Finally, I close with some thoughts on managerial practice (Section 7.5).

## 7.2. Review, contributions and limitations

My aim in this current section is to review the flow of this thesis, highlighting three main areas of contribution, labelled as contributions 1, 2a and 2b below, in keeping with the related research questions (i.e. question 1 as posed in Section 1.10, and questions 2a and 2b as posed in Section 3.7). First, in Chapter 1, I reviewed literature to support the broad positioning for my work within the domain of SAP, and to situate the overall research opportunity at the intersection of sociomateriality power. I considered work that focuses on the participation of organisational actors *outside* top management in strategy work to think of strategy as an enactment or accomplishment which takes place at the frontline of the organisation, where actors engage with the 'end targets' of strategy such as customers and clients (e.g., Balogun, Best, et al., 2015; Jarzabkowski et al., 2015; Rouleau, 2005; Smets, Jarzabkowski, et al., 2015; Vargha, 2018). I then discussed how artefacts and technologies play a role here, as they span the 'blurry boundary' between strategy formulation and implementation (e.g., Leonardi, 2015). In doing so, I positioned my thesis within a growing stream of research interested in the role of materialities in strategy, while placing specific emphasis on digital technologies, a relatively under-researched theme in SAP (Dameron et al., 2015; Laine & Parkkari, 2015; Lê & Spee, 2015).

From here, I moved on to introduce the power perspective on strategy work, specifically focusing on extant views of subjectification and struggles over subjectivities (e.g., Hardy & Thomas, 2014; Knights & Morgan, 1991; McCabe, 2010; Laine & Vaara, 2007). These indicate that power works to shape the subjects and objects of strategy. Working from the idea that technologies are embodiments of strategic intent, I discussed how extant works that consider the role of technology in strategy (such as managerial accounting systems) have tended to think of these as extensions of a hegemonic, managerial claim to power (e.g., Ezzamel & Willmott, 2008; Mantere & Vaara, 2008; Whittle & Mueller, 2010). These technological claims exert 'control' over what is locally *accomplished as strategy* by subjectifying actors 'lower down' in the organisational hierarchy, (re)constructing them in relation to the (new) strategic 'objects' embodied or inscribed within the

technology. However, such works place less emphasis on the local constitution of the struggles that take place, over time, as actors work with such technologies at the frontline, and so do not unpack the flows of power that take form.

To address this lack, I indicated at the end of Chapter 1 that there is conceptual value in considering how the human and technological are mutually generative of these struggles. This requires a 'strong' view of (socio)materiality, one that explicitly thinks of the two as being entangled and co-constitutive of practice and power. To develop this conceptual positioning, I engaged with two streams of literature. The first, developed from within the IS field, is one that has developed rich posthuman frameworks for analysing technology (and its organisational adoption), based upon Heidegger's ontology (as in Chapter 2). The second is the contemporary *postphenomenological* school of the philosophy of technology with its focus on how technology mediates the lifeworld to shape human 'subjectivities' and worldly 'objectivities' (Chapter 3). I will briefly review these below.

In Chapter 2, to establish a base of knowledge for the former stream, I first described how Heideggerian thinking has been adopted by a number of scholars to theorise the practice of strategy (e.g., Chia & Holt, 2006), indicating, however, that such thinking has only been superficially applied to consider the specific role of materiality (e.g., Kaplan, 2011b). I then provided a systematic account of Heidegger's existential analysis of being-in-the-world, and reviewed the IS scholarship that has adopted this analysis to theorise sociomateriality (Introna, 2014; Lamprou, 2017; Riemer & Johnston, 2012, 2014, 2017, 2019). As a preliminary contribution of this thesis (*contribution 1a*), this review offers a foundation of conceptual insights for SAP scholars, specifying how the *spatiality of care* (concernful being-in-the-world) provides a framework to articulate the ontological entanglement of the human and material in organisational work.

However, based upon a broad discussion of the work of contemporary Heideggerian scholars (e.g., Boedeker, 2001; Malpas, 2006; Mitchell, 2010, 2015; Schatzki, 2010, 2007/2017; Sheehan 2005, 2016; Wrathall, 2017b), I critically evaluated these extant conceptualisations, problematising them on the basis of a residual humanism (that neglects material co-agency) and an under-specification of the social (intersubjective) dimension of practice. To address these problems, in Chapter 3, I engaged with postphenomenology (e.g., Ihde, 1990, Verbeek, 2005, 2011; Rosenberger & Verbeek, 2015), integrating themes from its mediation theory to articulate how technologies can *tune* the spatiality of Heidegger's care. I showed how this offers conceptual tools to attend to the non-neutral, relational 'part' played by materialities in strategy work by mediating how practitioners

are always already *in-the-world-with-others*. In doing so, I make a contribution to extant Heidegger-inspired theorising on sociomateriality, providing an expanded language (or method of discovery) for scholars that—by attuning us to things, and giving voice to the material—decentres human agency without denying it (Abbott, 2004; Adams & Thompson, 2016; see also Section 7.3.1 below). I thus also hope to have offered a useful conceptual framework for scholars seeking to consider the use of material objects in strategy practice, joining attempts to bring strong theoretical views of sociomateriality to the SAP domain (Laine & Parkkari, 2015). I label this as *contribution 1b* in that it extends *contribution 1a* above.

I closed Chapter 3 by proposing how this postphenomenological conceptualisation of sociomateriality might be levied to analyse power and struggles (and so addressing research question 1). I drew upon extant postphenomenological theorising that intersects with Foucault's thinking on subjectification (e.g., Bergen & Verbeek, 2021; Dorrestijn, 2012a, 2012b, 2017; Dorrestijn & Verbeek, 2012; Verbeek, 2011a, 2011b) to conceptually connect the postphenomenological notion of human–technology relations with the notion of the *struggle* (Fleming and Spicer, 2007, 2008; Laine & Vaara, 2007). I then discussed how actors can *relate themselves* to technology mediated relations of power. Sociomaterially, such struggles can thus be viewed in terms of *what they produce*, as actors play a role in shaping how their subjectivities can take form as a being-in-the-world-with-others in the mediating presence of such technologies. This reinforces and extends extant work which emphasises that positions of power and resistance are derivative rather than pre-defined entities (Harding et al., 2017; Wenzel et al., 2019).

This provided the theoretical basis for my empirical research question and an exploration of struggles and subject constitution in relation to a technology of strategic control. My empirical case study followed the 'implementation' of a Customer Engagement software platform deployed within the local operating subsidiary of a multinational healthcare company. The software embodied the aims of the company's new digital strategy for sales and marketing. To get close to local practice and to inquire into the lived experiences of the practitioners involved, I adopted a NAP approach (Rouleau, 2015; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011; Chapter 4). I then presented my findings as narratives focusing on single actors, an approach that allowed me to reveal the dynamics of subject constitution in relation to technology use. Together these also wove into a broader story of how strategy was locally accomplished by these frontline workers as part of their everyday praxis (Chapter 5).



As discussed in Sections 6.2 and 6.3—and relating back to research question 2a—this study offers fresh empirical insights into the everyday struggles over subjectivities that take place in frontline strategy work supported (or ‘controlled’) by digital technologies (*contribution 2a*). First, it reveals their individual-level nuances and dynamics. That is, the various ways that subjectivities are both threatened and reclaimed as actors ‘work’ to retain their cohesive, purposive senses of self. In so doing, I also advance perspectives on power in SAP research by explicitly accounting for—and offering insights into—the *relational* ‘part’ played by technologies in dynamic, individuated flows of power, showing some of the forms that *sociomaterial* struggles can take on.

As the discussed in Section 6.4—relating back to research question 2b—My findings also empirically revealed how the enrolment of the technology into the lifeworlds of the frontline actors had implications for the local accomplishment of strategy (*contribution 2b*). First, I showed how sociomaterial struggles shaped ‘asymmetries, where the strategic intent inscribed into the technology was, in various ways, uncoupled from what was locally accomplished, thus adding to our understanding of how strategy is realised—or rather of *what* is realised *as strategy*—at the frontline (Balogun, Best, et al., 2015). I then extend Jarzabkowski et al.’s (2021) notion of consequentiality in strategy, showing not just how everyday frontline praxis may be *consequential for strategy*, but also how the mundane work of strategy is also *consequential for those involved*, as subjects. This brings practice and power into closer critical dialogue in SAP (cf. Clegg & Kornberger, 2015) More broadly the study also responds to previous calls for attention to be given to technologies in SAP (see Section 1.5; e.g., Dameron et al., 2015; Jarzabkowski, Spee, et al., 2013), to the role of material artefacts in strategy implementation (Friesl et al., 2018), and for stronger links to be made between themes of power, sociomateriality and discourse (Balogun et al., 2014).

By ‘plugging data into theory into data as they constitute each other’ (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014, p.717), I was also able—through my empirical work—to further extend contribution 1 as introduced above. In this manner, I articulated a view of such struggles as human–technology (sociomaterial) entanglements that take place from ‘*within*’ Heideggerian spatialities. I showed how the mediations of the CE technology in my study presented ‘new’ objectivities, intersubjectivities and subjectivities to the actors, (re)shaping the *dis-tances* and *orientations* that defined the spatial structures of their worlds as concerned beings. It thus placed them in ‘changed’ worlds, and so made them present (to themselves and also others) in transformed ways. Importantly, this conceptualisation was empowered by Verbeek’s detailed integration of his postphenomenological mediation theory with Foucault’s thinking (e.g., Verbeek, 2011a, 2011b; see

Section 3.6). Accordingly, struggles over subjectivities (cf. Fleming & Spicer, 2007, 2008; Laine & Vaara, 2007) are always struggles *in relation to* the mediations of technology that structure the spatialities of being-in-the-world-with-others. Thus, in contrast to extant Foucauldian SAP studies, this stance allowed me to think beyond control–resistance binaries (Mantere & Vaara, 2008; Ezzamel & Willmott, 2008; Whittle & Mueller, 2010; see Section 6.2 above). Rather, power and resistance were manifestations of the subtle—and, as already indicated, somewhat idiosyncratic, and always temporal—technological mediations that shaped lifeworlds. This theoretical position exposed the deeper, *relational* roles played by technology. I was able to show that *what* the technology is ‘seen’ to be (and *how* it exerts an impact) is dependent on *how* it is enrolled into the lifeworlds of the actors (‘who’ they are in terms of their spatial ‘place’ in-the-world). In this way, *what* becomes manifest *as* power, *what* actors grow to resist, *who* they then *become* as resistant or empowered subjects, and *how* this shapes strategy as it takes form at the frontline, are seen to be dynamic, complex, and always already unfolding into future possibilities and potentialities.

This thus also contributes to sociomaterial theorising more broadly by giving attention to the ontological entanglements of the social and material as co-constituents of (and within) organisational practice more broadly. I discussed this view in relation to extant views of sociomateriality in SAP, troubling the instrumentalism (anthropocentricity) that is often taken-for-granted in ‘weaker’ views (Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2015), and indicating points of potential intersection with other ‘strong’ views (e.g., Cooren, 2015, 2018, 2020). Drawing on the Heideggerian onto-epistemology of *unconcealment*, I also indicated how the conceptualisation affords an opportunity for scholars to give greater analytical ‘voice’ to the material from ‘within’ the relationality of the sociomaterial, providing tools for future empirical work on technology use and adoption in SAP and beyond. By linking the local work of strategy accomplishment with themes of power, my work also responds to calls to make connections between the critical and the practical in SAP research (Kohtamäki et al., 2022, p.15; see also Balogun et al., 2014; Blom & Alvesson, 2015).

Of course, the single-case design of the study limits how these empirical and theoretical insights may be generalised (indeed, generalisability was not the aim). However, this does present opportunities for future inquiry. The Lorum case focused on a specific CRM-like software platform which is interesting in light of Vargha’s (2018) similar empirical interest in such technologies in the performance of strategy (I will consider this further in Section 7.4.2). However, it would be productive to consider the mediating role of other technologies that have commonly been

associated with systems of power and managerial control, such as management accounting systems (as per Ahrens & Chapman, 2007; Erp et al., 2019; Ezzamel & Willmott, 2008; Skærbærk & Tryggestad, 2010; Whittle & Mueller, 2010). The Lorum example also focused specifically on local sales and marketing operations, which is certainly pertinent given the similar ‘frontline’ focus of other SAP scholars (e.g., Balogun, Best, et al., 2015; Jarzabkowski et al., 2015; Rouleau, 2005; Smets, Jarzabkowski, et al., 2015; Vargha, 2018). However, as described in the initial introduction to the case in Chapter 4 (Section 4.3), Lorum’s global digital strategy also aimed for changes in other organisational divisions, including global R&D and global product supply. It would be of empirical interest to consider the part played by technologies of control in these different settings, with their different local contexts for practice and relevancies for strategy work.

By attending to the specific ways that in which technology mediates human–world relations, postphenomenology enables deep examination of the experiences and actions at the level of the individual (that is, the human–technology–world intra-actions that constitute individual subjectivities and objectivities). As discussed above, this has advantages in that it helps expose the sociomaterial dynamics of struggles within flows of power, and the specific (re)shaping of subject positions over time. However, to consider another limitation of my research, postphenomenology’s capacity to embrace the wider social dimension of human practice has previously been critiqued by some philosophers of technology working from within this tradition (Coeckelbergh, 2017; Coeckelbergh & Reijers, 2016; Van Den Eede, 2011). For example, Van Den Eede (2011) argues that postphenomenology currently fails to “specifically address the ever-intensifying technological mediation of our ‘being-with-each-other,’ which has become by now—in the concrete shape of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)—a basic condition of most of our everyday lives” (ibid, p.140). By this he means that, although the social embeddedness and relationality between people and things is implicit, it does not specifically consider how technologies change how people are *together for each other* as subjects (i.e., intersubjectivities).

I have, of course, tried to address this issue in my articulation of the technology mediated spatiality of *being-with-others*. In effect, I have also thus made a modest contribution to postphenomenology by drawing on this ‘social’ dimension of Heidegger’s thinking; one that, to the best of my knowledge, has not previously been integrated into mediation theory in this manner. However, I believe this is a preliminary step, one which presents an opportunity for further work to bolster the analytical power of postphenomenology in studies of the social practices of strategy and organisation. I consider such elaborations below in two steps: first in

relation to ANT and the methodological practice of zooming in and zooming out (Nicolini, 2009, 2012); and second, in relation to recent conceptual developments (by e.g., Reijers & Coeckelbergh, 2020) that integrate Ricœur's narrative theory (Ricœur, 1980, 1983, 1985) with mediation theory (e.g., Verbeek, 2005, 2011a).

### 7.3. Future postphenomenological elaborations

Postphenomenology's application within strategy and organisation fields is very new<sup>61</sup>. In this thesis, I have drawn upon *some* of postphenomenology's core mediation theoretical themes. However, the field is very active, and it is pertinent to consider what future opportunities it might present. So, my aim in this section is to make some preliminary suggestions of ways that the conceptual power (and thus empirical utility) of postphenomenological analysis might be enhanced to support inquiry in SAP (and also in wider domains). In what follows, I speculate on some ways to better situate the 'individuality' of postphenomenological thinking within broader contexts of social practice.

#### 7.3.1. *Zooming out with ANT to 'connect' human-technology relations with social practices*

As discussed in Section 4.6, I zoomed in on specific instantiations of resistance or threats to identity in relation to the mediations of the CE technology (that is zooming in on 'immediate horizon[s] of concern', Nicolini, 2009, p.1410), and then zoomed out applying Foucauldian thinking (on struggles) to understand how these were embedded within broader praxis, and to understand their outcomes or 'effects' (ibid, p.1409). However, such outward moves can be expanded into different theoretical spaces, and ANT provides a particularly salient option, supporting the analytical tracing of the sociomaterialities of practices through its actants (ibid, p.1395). I will discuss this further below, after first describing the relative onto-epistemological positioning of ANT and postphenomenology.

As first mentioned in Chapter 1 (Section 1.5), The SAP literature that has focused on materiality has generally prioritised a relatively 'weak' view of sociomateriality. In contrast, the relational ontology that underpins Heidegger's phenomenology and the postphenomenology of technology places it within a larger family of perspectives from STS and the philosophy of technology that have adopted 'strong' views (Section 1.5). Those who have discussed opportunities for a stronger

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<sup>61</sup> In addition to my own application of mediation theory in this thesis, I recognise the very recent conceptual work of Greenwood and Wolfram Cox (2022). They draw on postphenomenological thinking to theorise how moral agency is mediated through technologies in academic knowledge production.

co-constitutive, relational approach to sociomateriality in SAP point to such science and technology studies, and often refer specifically to ANT as a fruitful path (e.g., Clegg & Kornberger, 2015; Kohtamäki et al., 2022; Lê & Spee, 2015).

ANT and mediation theory are quite different<sup>62</sup>. Both are underpinned by a relational ontology that seeks to overcome the Cartesian subject-object dichotomy. However, the conceptual deployment of the term ‘relations’ is a key point of distinction between these approaches. For ANT, entities as ‘actants’ emerge from *networks of relations*. The term ‘actants’ does not distinguish between human and material; it treats them *symmetrically* – they are not only equally agential; they are ontologically equivalent, both taking form within chains of sociomaterial associations that constitute praxical networks of involvements and interactions (e.g., Latour, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1999, 2005). The relations themselves are *not* the epistemological focus in ANT, which seeks to *follow the actants* to understand the associations and translations that link them through social practices and that constitute phenomena. In contrast, postphenomenology – in keeping with its phenomenological roots which emphasise human experience – maintains an *asymmetry* between the human and material, at the same time as attending specifically to the relations that co-constitute both. Verbeek (2005, p.168) summarises as follows:

[In postphenomenology,] one looks “from inside” to the relation between humans and world (that is, from the experience of an action in the world); in [ANT one looks] “from outside.” Latour argues not from the standpoint of human beings who are concretely situated in the world, but from the standpoint of an analyst who describes configurations equally from the perspective of humans and non-humans.

Thus, according to this comparison, while both ANT and postphenomenology agree that materialities are not neutral entities deployed instrumentally towards a given human purpose (as with the humanist perspectives of ‘weak’ approaches to sociomateriality), they disagree on what it is to *be human* in a relational sociomaterial world (Verbeek, 2005). ANT ontologically *flattens* any human-material distinction by viewing them equally as transient points of translation within networks. In contrast, postphenomenology (and, by extension, my postphenomenological extension of Heideggerian sociomateriality) considers *how* the human is constituted through its

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<sup>62</sup> Note that I do not aim to provide a full account of ANT. Also, ANT has already been extensively compared with postphenomenology’s mediation theory elsewhere (e.g., Adams & Thompson, 2016, pp.3-16; Boer et al., 2018, 2021; Verbeek, 2005, pp.161-168; 2006; Verbeek, 2015; Smith, 2003; Romele, 2021; Rosenberger, 2014, 2017a, 2018b). Also, Lamprou (2017) briefly contrasts her Heideggerian sociomateriality to ANT.

involvements with the material and conversely how the material thus appears to the human. This postphenomenological 'posthuman' position resonates with Cooren (2020) in that it does not deny the human, but does *de-centre*:

[A posthumanist perspective] does not mean that humans are suddenly devoid of their autonomy, consciousness, intentionality, or specificity. It simply means that all these qualities are conceptualized as relational and finite [...] and that people cannot anymore be seen as the absolute starting point of what is happening in a given situation (pp.3-4)

These differences help to position my postphenomenological contribution vis-à-vis ANT. However, what is also important is that, despite these differences, the two approaches may be viewed as complementary as they consider different levels of analysis (local instantiations of experience and praxis *versus* broader 'networks' of sociomaterial translations). This utility is exemplified in the work of postphenomenologists who have embraced concepts from ANT to extend the power of their theorising (e.g., Rosenberger, 2014, 2018b; Lanng & Borg, 2020; Verbeek, 2005, 2011a, 2015). According to Verbeek (2005, p.168; see also Verbeek 2015, pp.194-195):

What postphenomenology contributes to actor-network theory is the situated perspective, the perspective "from inside out," thanks to which part of the perceived associations and translations can be more closely analysed in terms of experience and action, existence and meaning ... Correspondingly, actor-network theory contributes to postphenomenology a way to elucidate the networks of relations that allow entities to be present.

On the basis of this thinking, after first 'zooming in' on human-technology relations through mediation theory, ANT affords an ideal theoretical platform for 'zooming out' on the broader networks of actants and practices within which such mediations are embedded<sup>63</sup>. This might also help scholars to think more broadly about issues of strategic identity: how identity takes form *through* their individual-level involvements with materialities and then how this is implicated in the wider sociomaterial practices of strategy work. As Balogun, Beech, et al. (2015) indicate: 'the understanding of how strategists shape strategizing activity through *who they are* is underdeveloped' (p.449, emphasis in original). I would add that this is even less developed in relation to the artefacts, tools and technologies that are inherent in such practices. My

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<sup>63</sup> This also aligns with Nicolini's (2009) indications that we might zoom in on practice by putting *Heideggerian* thinking to work while then adopting ANT to trace connections outward and follow actants as they shape practice.

postphenomenological work in this thesis provides a base for future work, and ANT might offer a powerful analytical supplement.

### 7.3.2. *Narrativity and technological mediation*

The above discussion considers how to expand upon mediation theory's attention to the social by extending it 'outwards' (a nod to Verbeek's, 2005, p.168 quote above) through engagement with ANT. However, as I will now discuss, Mark Coeckelbergh and his colleagues consider how mediation theory may be supplemented more directly (from 'inside') by drawing on Ricœur's philosophy of language (see also Reijers et al., 2021 for broader Ricœurian perspectives on the philosophy of technology).

Grounded upon a broader series of analyses (Coeckelbergh, 2017a, 2017b; Coeckelbergh & Reijers, 2016; Reijers & Coeckelbergh, 2018), these philosophers work within the postphenomenology tradition to expand its thinking to capture sociolinguistic aspects of human–technology relations. Coeckelbergh (2017a, 2017b) critiques Ihde's (1990) and Verbeek's (2005) relational forms and schema (see Table 4, p.80), arguing that the philosophy of technology also needs to engage with the philosophy of language (see also Coeckelbergh, 2022b for broader discussion of this intersection of disciplines). Thus, building on the postphenomenological claim that technology mediates the human–world relation, he develops the position (from Heidegger) that these relations must always also be *mediated by language*. Being-in-the-world is always a *being with language*—just as it is a being-amid-things (or technologies)—such that it provides an ontological condition of possibility for our disclosure (unconcealing/revealing) of the world (Coeckelbergh, 2017a).

As such, language can be a medium 'between' humans and world, a medium 'between' humans and technology, and can thus also mediate our relation to the world (ibid, p.184). In short, human–technology–world relations must be viewed as human–language–technology–world relations (Coeckelbergh, 2017a, pp.184-185; 2017b, pp.169-175). Technology is embedded within structures of language and language within structures of technology (Coeckelbergh, 2017b, p.187). Therefore—and drawing on ideas from the philosophies of Wittgenstein (1958/1965, 1968, 1951/2009) and Searle (1975, 1995, 2006), and the media theorist, McLuhan (McLuhan, 1964/2001; McLuhan & McLuhan, 1988)—Coeckelbergh argues that worldly relations with technology can be further exposed by considering how they have a form of 'grammar': 'technology, also because of

its own ['grammatical'] properties and structure, co-shapes social reality and perhaps all reality' (Coeckelbergh, 2017b, p.56).

Reijers & Coeckelbergh (2020) then build upon this critical analysis (see also Coeckelbergh & Reijers, 2016 and Reijers & Coeckelbergh, 2018 for early developments) to consider the value of Ricoeur's narrative theory (1980, 1983, 1985) 'to connect the hermeneutics of things to the hermeneutics of language' (Coeckelbergh, 2017b, p.205; see also Romele et al., 2021). Thus:

If postphenomenology would be our starting point, Ricoeur's hermeneutics would show that (1) there are other non-technological mediations next to the technological mediations, and (2) technological mediations are wrapped up in non-technological, namely linguistic and narrative conditions of possibility. (Romele et al., 2021, p.xii)

Starting from Ricoeur's phenomenological position that human existence is shaped through a 'narrative mode' (Reijers & Coeckelbergh, 2020, p.81)—in this sense 'narrative' being a 'ontological concept' (ibid, p.86)—they propose that:

(1) human experience and understanding are mediated by narrative structures and (2) that these narrative structures are generally accessed through involvement with the ready-at-hand, which includes a variety of "things" such as books, movies, houses, computers, and trains.

In this way, tools and technologies provide 'syntax' to co-configure the narrative plots that organise and place entities and events into a meaningful (sociomaterial) whole, so allowing us to make sense of our unfolding, temporal and teleological lifeworlds (Coeckelbergh & Reijers, 2016, p.331; Reijers & Coeckelbergh, 2018, pp.113-114). In relation to such plots, they theorise four concepts that 'make explicit how technological emplotment mediates our social world' (Reijers & Coeckelbergh, 2020, p.107): textuality, literacy, temporality, and distancing (summarised in Appendix C, Table 9, p.254). Although a full explication of these concepts is beyond current scope, it can be said that they help to make explicit the various ways in which human-technology relations can configure the social. Such analytical approaches have already born fruit in empirical philosophical studies aiming to dissect the complex human-world mediations of advanced technologies such as AI and blockchain (Reijers & Coeckelbergh, 2018, 2020; Keymolen, 2021). Emerging postphenomenological ideas like these will only add to the analytical toolbox, supporting future work on the materialities in strategy practice, while also joining wider schools interested in how contemporary digital technologies can transform organisations, and societal and



work processes<sup>64</sup> (e.g., Mayer-Schönberger & Cukier, 2013; Newell & Marabelli, 2015; Pasquale, 2015; Zuboff, 2019).

#### 7.4. Some open questions and opportunities

In this section, I will consider some areas where my work intersects with broader conversations in SAP and related areas. These are somewhat tangential to the main thread of my thesis, and hence were not raised in the Discussion chapter (Chapter 6). However, they open up some pertinent opportunities for future inquiry.

##### 7.4.1. *Technological scripts: Performativity and/or mediation?*

A range of studies have shown how the metrics, visualisations, rankings (and the like) that are commonly associated with strategy can *perform* the realities that they are ostensibly designed to represent (e.g., Clegg & Kornberger, 2015; Espeland & Sauder, 2007; Knights & McCabe, 1997; Kornberger & Carter, 2010; Pollock, 2012; Pollock & D’Adderio, 2012; Vargha, 2018). Such materialities contribute to the *power* of technologies by shaping how the world ‘looks’ and how actors relate to it and then enact it. As Knights and McCabe (1997) state in their study of Total Quality Management (TQM) systems:

When successful, this results in the transformation of individuals into subjects who ‘feel’ responsible for procedures that go wrong and, thereby, seek to put them right. This is the cascading impact of pushing responsibility down the hierarchy so characteristic of strategic forms of management (ibid, p.379).

We saw examples of such materialities in Chapter 5’s narratives. For example, metrics and fixed-text drop-down lists were ostensibly in place to represent and permit representation of Lorum’s Local Office actors (e.g., in-field activity, skill development status), their customers (profiles and targets) and their routine work (e.g., sales interactions). However, the managerial intention—as it was *experienced by* these frontline actors through their relations with the technology—was not one of the provision of a passive or enabling representation. Rather, they felt that the technology was *forcing* a world upon them, a presentation of what the world *should look like*, and how they *should be present* within it. By virtue of their involvements with the technology, there was significant *performative pressure* to conform with and enact these presentations. This intersects with recent interest in formal theories of performativity (such as those of Austin, 1962;

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<sup>64</sup> Note, for example, the interests of the European Group for Organizational Studies (EGOS)’s Standard Working Group (SWG) 11 on Digital Technology, Media and Organization (<https://egos.org/SWGs/SWG-11>).

Butler, 1990, 1993, 2010; and Callon, 1998, 2007, 2010) in studies of strategy (e.g., Cabantous et al., 2018; Guérard et al., 2013; Kornberger & Clegg, 2011; Vargha, 2018<sup>65</sup>). Although I make no attempt to integrate or synthesis theories here, my findings do suggest that the postphenomenological notion of technological mediation might enrich how we think of performances and performativity, particularly when such are considered in the context of power and control (Cabantous et al., 2018; Clegg & Kornberger, 2015; Kornberger & Clegg, 2011; Visser & Davies, 2021).

For example, in her study of CRM, Vargha (2018) engages with performativity theory to position such technologies as ‘strategic scripts’ (in keeping with the postphenomenological notion of technological scripts that I have adopted<sup>66</sup>) which work to enact or create both subjects and objects. However, she shows that, while being connotative of a strategic intent, these scripts are never simply sets of instructions that are then acted upon by frontline workers. She concludes that *what* is performed *as strategy* must be analysed in terms of ‘the activities resulting from the strategy’s [technological] presence, [and] the life of a strategy’s assumptions in specific settings’ (ibid, p.490). Thus:

[Actors] can fluidly accommodate issues that arise when acting as if the strategy’s assumptions were real. Technology alone cannot act on all aspects of organizational activity. Instead, employees manage the technology while also feeding back into it (ibid, p.491).

Similar to my own observations of Sarah and Caitlyn—and in keeping with the asymmetries I discuss earlier (Section 6.4.2)—Vargha (2018) describes how the real-world adoption of strategic scripts can actually lead to practices of ‘subverting strategy to realize strategy’ (p.489). This aligns with my thinking above, in that what is ‘realised’ as (or accepted as being) consequential (for both those at the frontline as well as those who are ‘strategy makers’) is always a translation, transformation or adaptation of any espoused strategic aims embodied in the technology. Thus, a *postphenomenological* thinking on scripts—which must consider them as mediators ‘between’ actors and their worlds, and thus also ‘between’ actors—encourages us to ask questions about *how* the performativity of such scripts might take shape. Human, technology and world are co-constitutive according to postphenomenology. This means that ‘what’ is ‘performed’ must take into account the nature of the subjectivity (of the subject) who enrolls the technological script into their world, as

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<sup>65</sup> See also articles in the special issue of Long Range Planning (2018) on the performativity of strategy (Volume 51). These include Cabantous et al. (2018) and Vargha (2018).

<sup>66</sup> Both Vargha (2018) and Verbeek (2005, 2006, 2009, 2011a) draw upon the same foundational notion of ‘scripts’ as deployed by Akkrich (1992) and Latour (1992).

well as the nature of this world within which enrolment occurs. Deeper understanding of these relations might open the door for future research into the performances of strategy.

#### *7.4.2. Reflecting on issues of critical performativity*

While considering notions of performativity, and given the explicitly ‘critical flavour’ (Blom & Alvesson, 2015, p.415) of my thesis, it would be remiss of me not to also reflect upon *my own (potential) performativity* from a critical stance. This is especially so, given my own background as a practitioner (Section 4.4.1) and given the close-with relations (Balogun, Beech, et al., 2015) that the NAP approach to data collection afforded (Rouleau, 2015; Section 4.5). For Spicer et al. (2009) ‘critical performativity [in research] involves active and subversive intervention into managerial discourses and practices’ that might change organisational work for the better (ibid, p.538). They thus advocate for:

Performative engagement [...] to appreciate the contexts and constraints of management. [critical research] needs to take seriously the life-worlds and struggles of those engaged with it. [...] It should also open up a space for critique and challenge [...which] means being prepared to engage in critical dialogue and a wish to encourage reflection (ibid, p.545).

Being given ‘access’ to the lifeworlds of the actors in my study over a relatively sustained period of time certainly encouraged reflection on both their parts and mine. I must therefore acknowledge that our research interactions no doubt had a performative element. Although, I continuously disciplined myself not to be a ‘consultant’ in the room with them, their knowledge of my professional background did encourage them to view me as a sounding board, as they reflexively worked through their problematic encounters with the CE technology. This openness was of course desirable—the point of the NAP approach being ‘to give back a voice’ to research participants and support their reflective practice (Rouleau, 2015, p.466; Section 4.5). However, my very presence as a researcher expressing interest in their work created a forum for them to consider, expose, translate and transform their experiences and possibilities for future action.

However, from Spicer et al.’s (2009) critical performativity perspective, it would actually not be appropriate to try to exclude, control or correct for this possibility. Indeed, ‘a critical-performative approach involves asking practical questions which care for participants’ views at the same time as seeking to challenge the same participants’ (ibid, p.547). Accordingly, these research interactions were opportunities for participants to challenge themselves through ‘specific and focused attempts to create spaces of autonomy among institutionalized relations of power’ as they made sense of

their struggles (ibid, p.553). Although not analysed in these terms, the study possibly made a material contribution to Local Office praxis at Lorum through ‘micro-emancipations’ (Alvesson & Wilmott, 1992; Spicer et al., 2009, pp.552-554), as participants exposed their subjectivities to themselves (with me) and questioned their place within the technology-mediated lifeworld of their practice. Such potentially cathartic, productive, (micro-emancipatory) contributions echo through comments made by some participants. For example, an anecdote from Caitlyn near the mid-point of the study:

I feel like, by being part of this research, I am starting to really examine the way I respond to these [CE technology] challenges. I guess I am also thinking more about how other people might be feeling, particularly as I become even more aware of how *I feel* about the [CE] system. I recognise that this stuff [what we are now talking about in this interview] really matters. And it has got me thinking: if I have these same discussions with the others [in the Local Office] and explain how I recognise that work pressures are changing, and that this can make us feel things about people that are nothing to do with the person themselves but are just because of what’s happening with the [CE] system ... By having that understanding we can prevent conflict in the local team while we work through this together.

And then Caitlyn followed up on this reflection a few weeks later:

So, I had a really interesting conversation with Sarah today. We were talking about some staffing issues and normally I would get frustrated about these sorts of things, but we really opened up to each other. She told me things I would never have expected her to. We would never have had that sort of conversation in the past, but we have common ground to reflect on now, as I know we are all talking about these things with you as part of this project.

In the process of this research, Caitlyn clearly developed a new understanding of herself and those around her in relation to the CE technology. This shaped how she styled her (sociomaterial) relations in-her-world, and thus how she was able to (re)construct herself *as a self*. It would be very interesting in future work to revisit (and expand upon) insights such as these, and do scholarly justice to the ‘critical’ performative possibilities and outcomes of this sort of narrative inquiry.

### **7.5. Closing thoughts on managerial practice**

The work of this thesis also has implications for managers involved in deploying—or working under the auspices of—technologies of ‘control’, as well as those who design them. The findings and discussion above indicate that working with such technologies can have profound effects on the everyday work of practitioners. Managers might benefit from recognising, reflecting upon and

developing a sensitivity towards the mundane, routine struggles and enactments that take shape. Such effects extend beyond simple binaries of the success or failure to implement strategy, or the acceptance of, or resistance to the technology and its scripts. Indeed, through their unfolding relations with these technologies, workers see themselves, others and the world around them in ways that are very difficult to predict but that can nonetheless direct the work of accomplishing strategy in unintended directions; ones that might bely the potential utility of the technology.

New managerial technologies should not be viewed as instruments that can simply be ‘plugged into’ practice to redirect it. And resistance should not just be viewed as a simple reticence, reluctance or refusal to accept these new directions. Here, apparently straightforward (perceived) behavioural acts of resistance may in fact be manifestations of deeper, existential challenges. Through their individual relations with technology, those involved can lose their sense of purpose, feel deeply frustrated and undermotivated, and simply not see how to deploy the technology to the ends it is supposed to serve. Managers should be sensitive to these relational issues if new technology is to drive a ‘useful’ outcome that justifies the potentially huge investments made. ‘Success’ in technology implementation cannot be disentangled from the ‘success’ of the human teams involved. Teams cannot be judged simply on how ‘well’ they implement the technology and the strategy it embodies.

There is no simple prescription for addressing such issues of course. But managerial lessons might be learned by engaging more closely with applied insights and actionable frameworks derived from aligned streams of postphenomenology. As noted in Section 6.7 of the last chapter, postphenomenology challenges the way we can think about the development and adoption of new technologies. Indeed, various scholars have adopted mediation theory to consider design and implementation processes, with a particular focus on issues of ethics (e.g., Coeckelbergh, 2020; Smits et al., 2022; see also Verbeek, 2011a, 2011b, 2013, 2017; Verbeek & Tijnk, 2020). Smits et al. (2022) acknowledge that design methods increasingly emphasise ethical issues and philosophically informed theory by ‘designing for values’ so that technologies are developed that consider *what people find to be important* in their lives (for review, see Reijers et al., 2018). However, they critique such processes on the basis that they fail to recognise that (in postphenomenological terms) values can *never be stable* during technology design, adoption or use:

we believe that values arise only in the interplay between users and technologies and therefore are far from stable. Hence, designing for values is impossible without considering potential value mediation (Smits et al., 2022, p.40).

Most of the current values-based methodologies do not acknowledge that the technologies designed for values then can affect users' experience of the value frameworks for which they were originally designed (ibid, p.53).

This idea that values are subject to change through technologies' mediations harks back to the discussion of technological 'multistabilities' in Sections 6.3.1 and 6.3.2. Recall, for example, how the CE technology at Lorum was differentially stabilised over time, becoming a 'different' thing for 'different' actors according to 'different' webs of mediating relations. By seeking to expose the different standpoints of the various actors, we got a sense of how *values differed* between people and were shaped over time as specific, individuated human–technology relations developed: 'what' the technology 'was' to them, and the manner in which it shaped *what was important* to these actors was dynamic and often became contested<sup>67</sup>. To consider such multistabilities, Smits et al. (2022) detail a systematic, applied 'Values that Matter' (VtM) approach to technology design. By attending to the idiosyncratic specificity of the human–technology relations that might develop, VtM considers how technologies might 'induce' value shifts as they differentially shape the lived experiences of various users. The goal here is to iteratively *explore, conceptualise and anticipate* the range of potential 'downstream' consequences of use, and account for these in design and implementation. The authors give a full account of these three phases of the VtM process, based upon their work redesigning a continuous medical vital sign monitoring device used in hospitals (Hesselink et al., 2020; Smits et al., 2021).

Thinking back to the Lorum case, on the whole—while questions over the level of 'success'<sup>68</sup> of the CE technology remain—I think it is safe to indicate that the potential value-shaping mediations of the CE technology-as-it-was-used were not accounted for in its development and implementation. So, could Lorum have been done 'better' with processes informed by postphenomenological theory (Coeckelbergh, 2020)? Might this have yielded a more informed understanding of the potential (unanticipated) ways that the technology could shape human experiences and praxis? Might this have then facilitated the accomplishment of 'local' work that was not only in keeping with corporate strategy but also shaped 'values that mattered' for

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<sup>67</sup> In this sense, the idea of multistability echoes Mol's (1999) ontologically political 'object'. Here, the issue is not one of politically distinct perspectives, interpretations, or opinions on what an object is or does. Instead, multiple 'versions' of an object are enacted: an object *becomes* a different thing to different people (see also Alcadipani & Hassard, 2010; Law & Singleton, 2005; Mol et al., 2002).

<sup>68</sup> And the question is, itself, very open to interpretation. That is, what might 'success' for (or at) Lorum even mean in the context of strategy accomplishment, when looking at Lorum through a mediation theoretical lens that emphasises relationality and multistability?

frontline actors, granting them a greater sense of self-worth while also 'aligning' with (or supporting, or locally reinforcing) corporate ambitions (in all their ambiguity)?

At present, these are moot points of course. However, as a final note to close this thesis, I believe it lifts the gaze towards a vast horizon of opportunity for managerially-relevant, ethics-sensitive research on technology design, development and implementation that not only has relevance for SAP and related practice-oriented organisation studies, but also has potential utility in wider domains such as innovation, design, product management, and IS.

## APPENDIX



## A. Economics-oriented theories in strategic management

Table 8:

Theory	Main tenets	Strategic management exemplars
Market power / industrial organisation	Market power theory assumes that the success of firms is determined by the structure of the industry within which they compete, and their ability to take a dominant position.	Classic exemplars: Porter (1980, 1981), Tirole (1988).
Transaction cost economics (TCE)	A firm seeks to minimise the sum of transaction-specific and production-specific costs. The former costs are incurred from activities necessary for an exchange; the latter are associated with the internal activities of the firm. A firm can limit exposure to transaction costs by internalising activities into the hierarchy of the firm (e.g., through mergers and acquisitions) rather than relying on market exchanges.	Classic exemplars: Coase (1937), Williamson (1973, 1981, 1991, 1992). See also: Borys & Jemison (1989), Powell (1987), Thorelli (1986).
Social exchange / relational contract theories	Exchanges are not discrete transactions (cf. TCE) but ongoing, repeat interactions which build relational (or social) contracts between parties. Social exchanges, unlike economic exchanges (TCE), are not (or are unlikely to be) subject to contract and there is a voluntary nature to the benefits provided, leading to greater uncertainty between exchange partners.	Relational contracts: Macneil (1973, 1980). Social exchange: Blau (1964), Emerson (1976), Homans (1958), Thibaut & Kelley (1959).
Resource based view (RBV)	Strategic advantage is conferred by a firm's stock of resources (rather than its market position, cf. market power theory). According to RBV, a firm seeks to configure its resources and capabilities so that they are rare and unique. This means that they have to be durable, and also difficult to imitate, appropriate, replicate or transfer.	Classic exemplar: Barney (1991, 2001), Barney (2001), Wernerfelt (1984, 1995). See also: Grant (1991), Peteraf (1993).
Dynamic capabilities view (DCV)	DCV extends RBV by emphasising higher order capabilities. Dynamic capabilities confer the 'ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competences to address rapidly changing environments' (Teece et al., 1997, p.244). For this to be achieved, resources must be embedded within organisational processes/routines which must be responsive to dynamic conditions.	Classic exemplars: Teece et al. (1997), Eisenhardt & Martin (2000).
Competence based view (CBV)	CBV is related to both RBV and DCV and seeks to provide a more nuanced and holistic perspective on the nature of firm-specific competitive advantage. 'Competence' has a multidimensional nature that combines resources, routines, processes, capabilities, and social interactions.	Classic exemplar: Rumelt (1984). See also: Sanchez (1997, 2001), Sanchez & Heene (1997).
Knowledge based view (KBV)	KBV builds on RBV and gives specific attention to knowledge as a firm's resource that can be created and transferred to confer strategic advantage.	Kogut & Zander (1992); Nonaka (1994), Nonaka & Takeuchi (1995); also, Grant & Baden-Fuller (1995).

## B. A note on hot spots vis-à-vis coding

The identification of hot spots as a basis for analysis stands somewhat in counterpoint (epistemologically and methodologically) to analyses that rely on ‘traditional’ data coding. It is therefore pertinent to recognise this distinction in the context of the current study. Importantly, the ‘hot spot’ approach is in keeping with both the aforementioned *Gestalt* and the abductive principles applied to my analyses (see Section 4.6). In terms of the former, hot spots stand out as salient only in terms of a hermeneutic immersion in the ‘whole’ of the data. In contrast, Hollway & Jefferson (2013) argue that data fragmentation using computer assisted ‘bottom-up’ coding processes risks losing sight of this ‘whole’. Further, in positioning the utility of ‘hot spots’, MacLure (2013) criticises coding on posthumanist and poststructuralist grounds. Citing Deleuze (2004), she argues that coding imposes a

logic of representation [...where...] things are frozen in the places allotted to them by the structure that comprehends them – in the double sense of enclosing them, and of rendering them comprehensible [...] Coding also tends to take you ‘away’ from the data – from their detail, complexity and singularity (ibid, pp.168-169).

Building on this view, St. Pierre & Jackson (2014, p.715) emphasise the onto-epistemological incommensurability of coding (and other traditional ‘humanist’ qualitative methodologies) with non-Cartesian and poststructuralist (which includes Foucauldian) thinking (see also St. Pierre, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2021)<sup>69</sup>:

We argue that coding data in that way is thinkable and doable only in a Cartesian ontological realism that assumes data exist out there somewhere in the real world to be found, collected, and coded using the “Cartesian principle of breaking down the difficulty into as many parts as may be necessary for finding the solution” (Derrida, 1967/1978, p. 287).

So, according to this thinking, conventional coding methods would not sit well with the posthuman, postphenomenological ontology that underpins my thesis. In contrast, hot spots may be viewed as data that *give themselves* to the researcher while they are immersed in the research (Brinkmann, 2012, 2014) rather than being *taken* through ‘humanist’ (MacClure, 2013) or ‘dataistic’ (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011) processes of representation.<sup>70</sup> Data are valued interpretively in terms

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<sup>69</sup> See St. Pierre & Jackson (2014, esp. pp. 716-717) for a detailed discussion of this point.

<sup>70</sup> See also the special issue of *Qualitative Inquiry* (2014) on ‘Qualitative analysis after coding’ (Volume 2, Issue 6; July) for a selection of related articles that critique—and present alternatives to—the epistemological and methodological dominance of bottom-up coding in qualitative research. Alvesson & Kärreman (2011) also make related points in their approach to abductive analysis.

of their ability to provoke a sense of 'wonder' or 'mystery' that prompts iterative dialogue with both theory and empirics, rather than in terms of their validity in representing an objective 'truth' accessible through their classification and codification (Adams & van Manen, 2017; Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011; Brinkmann, 2014; MacLure, 2013). Sullivan and colleagues also support this general approach, arguing that homing in on discrete and resonant 'key moments' (Madill & Sullivan, 2010; Sullivan, 2012) or 'key extracts' (Moate & Sullivan, 2015; Sullivan & McCarthy, 2008) of data allows the capture of clear, rich examples of lived experiences that can then form the basis for deeper analysis.

It is pertinent to note that approaches to identifying extracts of data that illuminate emerging empirical patterns for focal attention have been adopted elsewhere in the SAP corpus (this is not to say that, in these cases, there was not also some element of coding in these authors' analyses). For example, Balogun, Best, et al. (2015) specifically extracted 'fragments of data' that 'showed tour guides acting in ways that advanced strategic aims' (p.1293), and Jarzabkowski and Lê (2017) specifically isolated analytically meaningful data extracts that represented episodes of humour in strategy meetings. However, in contrast to the identification of hot spots (Harding et al., 2017; MacLure, 2013; Ringrose & Reynolds, 2014), such approaches generally apply 'objective' criteria to define extracts. Thus, Balogun, Best, et al. (2015) identified specific patterns of praxis which resonated with the analytical constructs of 'moral order' (Garfinkel, 1967) and 'working audience' (Best, 2012). And Jarzabkowski and Lê (2017) applied Holmes' (2000) structured definition of humour together with Hendry and Seidl's (2003) concepts of initiation, conduct, and termination to demarcate specific episodes.

### C. The four concepts of the narrative theory of technological mediation

**Table 9:**

Adapted from Reijers & Coeckelbergh (2020, pp.89-103); also see also Coeckelbergh & Reijers, 2016.

Concept	Description	Examples
<b>Textuality</b>	<p>Denotes how technologies play a <i>passive</i> or an <i>active</i> role in shaping the world.</p> <p>Passive: they 'pre-configure' the world in a Heideggerian manner. We already have a natural responsiveness to them that orients us in-the-world.</p> <p>Active: technologies take a more direct role in 'configuring' the 'plot' of the world as it unfolds by mediating how people, things and events appear to us.</p>	<p>An old, well-used bridge will already have pre-configured some aspects of (local) human experiences and social practices through its historical presence.</p> <p>Contemporary information technologies will be <i>active</i> in plot configuration. They are like Ricoeurian texts (have high 'textuality') in that they co-author the narrative plot that unfolds from their use.</p>
<b>Literacy</b>	<p>Considers the degree to which humans are attuned to the technology (able to encounter it in a certain way, given their skills, dispositions, etc).</p> <p>Technologies can thus range from being <i>accessible</i> to <i>inaccessible</i> for human involvement.</p>	<p>Using the example of information technologies, there are differences in attunement/understanding based on the different '<i>literacies</i>' of a developer and a user. For example, the code may be <i>accessible</i> to the former but <i>inaccessible</i> to the latter.</p>
<b>Temporality</b>	<p>Considers how technology mediates worldly understanding by organising how we make sense of time and the succession of events.</p> <p>Technologies can configure <i>rigidity</i> on the succession of sociomaterial events or can support a 'natural' <i>dynamic</i> of 'ready-to-hand' responsiveness.</p>	<p>A car may <i>rigidly</i> 'determine' the order of human involvements: you may have to depress the brake before you can use the ignition. In contrast, you may have <i>dynamic</i> freedom to 'control' the sequence of events when making seat and mirror adjustments, or in prereflectively accommodating other drivers that share the road.</p>
<b>Distancing</b>	<p>Considers the degree to which relations with the technology <i>abstract</i> from or <i>engage</i> with the sociomaterial world.</p> <p><i>Abstracting technologies</i> 'create distance' (p.339) by configuring narrative structures that are 'representational', configuring narratives of quasi-events and quasi-entities that are removed from the technology and its use.</p> <p><i>Engaging technologies</i> 'remove distance' by configuring a narrative that directly engages the human with the sociomaterial world of action.</p>	<p>Algorithmic trading technologies <i>abstract</i> the events and characters with which the trader engages: the narrative develops around interactions with second order (quasi) entities such as equities and options.</p> <p>The old bridge mentioned above engages people in the world of action: it supports interactions with others and things as first order entities (actual merchants, travellers, etc).</p>

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