Time-Space Patterns in Work and Organizing: Setting the Scene, Taking Stock and Moving Forward[1]

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Abstract

In the face of an increasing variety of spatio-temporal patterns of work and organisations, we seek to draw attention to time and space in this issue. In our introduction, we argue that they have become constitutive of the ongoing transformations of work in its entanglements with social reproduction, and of the evolving nature of organisations themselves – practices, structures, and organisational cultures. After presenting the framework underpinning this special issue and providing an overview of the contributions it comprises – five articles, three invited contributions from leading international scholars and two book reviews – we propose our own analysis of four interrelated tensions that run through the contributions to the special issue. These tensions concern the autonomy–control dialectic, the ambivalent role of technologies, subjectivities and the reconfiguration of agency, and the work–life tensions that unfold across spatio-temporal arrangements. We highlight how each tension simultaneously shapes and is shaped by contemporary spatio-temporal patterns of work and organisation. Finally, we outline possible avenues for future research that may foster novel theoretical and methodological frameworks capable of better grasping the ongoing metamorphoses of work, organisation, space, and temporality, along with the key tensions that underpin them.

Keywords: Control; New ways of working; Subjectivity; Technology; Time-space patterns; Work–life dynamics

Abstract. *Modelli spazio-temporali nel lavoro e nell'organizzazione: definire il contesto, fare il punto e andare avanti*
Di fronte a una crescente varietà degli schemi spazio-temporali del lavoro e dell'organizzazione, con questo numero monografico intendiamo richiamare l'attenzione sul ruolo del tempo e dello spazio. Nella nostra introduzione, sosteniamo che il tempo e lo spazio sono divenuti costitutivi delle trasformazioni in atto del lavoro, nei suoi intrecci con la riproduzione sociale, nonché dell'evoluzione stessa della natura delle organizzazioni – delle pratiche, strutture e culture organizzative. Dopo aver presentato il quadro teorico che informa questo numero monografico e offerto una panoramica dei contributi in esso contenuti – cinque articoli, tre contributi su invito da parte di affermati studiosi internazionali e due recensioni di libri – proponiamo un'analisi di quattro tensioni interrelate che attraversano l'intero numero. Tali tensioni riguardano la dialettica tra autonomia e controllo, il ruolo ambivalente delle tecnologie, le soggettività e la riconfigurazione dell'agency, nonché le tensioni tra vita e lavoro che si sviluppano nei nuovi assetti spazio-temporali. L'articolo mette in evidenza come ciascuna di queste tensioni contribuisca a dare forma agli, e al contempo sia modellata dagli, schemi spazio-temporali contemporanei del lavoro e dell'organizzazione. Infine, delineiamo possibili direzioni per future ricerche, capaci di promuovere nuovi quadri teorici e metodologici in grado di cogliere più efficacemente le metamorfosi in corso del lavoro, delle organizzazioni, dello spazio e della temporalità, insieme alle tensioni fondamentali che le attraversano.
Parole chiave: controllo; nuove modalità di lavoro; soggettività; tecnologia; schemi spazio-temporali; vita-lavoro

1. Setting the Scene

The evolving nature of work and organisations generates a variety of spatio-temporal patterns – some genuinely novel, others hybridizing past forms – across different organisational domains and occupations, particularly under the growing imprint of digital technologies. Some forms of contemporary work are increasingly believed to be an «ephemeral and precarious connective activity» occurring «everywhere and every time» (de Vaujany *et al*., 2021: 688), whilst others remain embedded in bounded regimes, such as in the case of domestic and care work (Marchetti, Cherubini and Garofalo Geymont, 2021). We are therefore witnessing a proliferation of «topographies of organization» (Beyes and Holt, 2020: 1) alongside a reconfigured ontology and politics of working time (de Vaujany, Holt and

Grandazzi, 2023). Yet these transformations demand empirical investigation and deeper theoretical elaboration. Reflecting on these developments since our call for papers for this special issue, the urgency of this exploration has only grown more acute. It requires the cultivation of a broad and interdisciplinary inquiry capable of asking new questions for grasping the ongoing reconfigurations of work and employment. Indeed, some argue that current transformation necessitates a comprehensive redesign of the entire work process – together with its connections and interfaces with different spheres of life – both at the organisational and individual level, and one that recognizes work through the joint design of people and technologies (Butera, 2020).

Multiple temporal patterns sit under the banner of flexibility: (a)synchronous network time in project-based or nomadic work, machinic temporalities with which we engage, and new rhythms of extension or contraction in working time (Ponzellini, 2024). These arrangements require close attention to how workers ascribe meaning to time off, navigate self-management practices, and negotiate ethical dilemmas of self-regulation (Pedersen, Muhr and Dunneet, 2024). Simultaneously, workspaces are increasingly heterogeneous, spanning domestic settings, family-like workplaces, "non-places", shared workspaces, and are both static and mobile, showing how organisations operate in fluid contexts, at the intersection of new and old organizing practices (Schreyögg and Sydow, 2010). These hybrid forms of spatial and temporal arrangements are assembled through the negotiation of agreements which vary not only across but also within organisations – between departments, professions, and teams – generating situations of internal diversity and potential conflict (Carreri, 2025).

The confusion of traditional boundaries between work and non-work, production and consumption, project-based and clock-time, autonomous and subordinated work, is altering work practices and redefining workplace interactions, leading to a diversity of work configurations in terms of where, when and how work is performed (Ropo *et al.*, 2015). In this context, the new ways in which social identities are displayed and negotiated in and through workspaces are underexplored (Tyler and Cohen, 2010). Employees are compelled to achieve wellbeing and 'balance' (Watson *et al.*, 2023) and must reconfigure autonomy over time and space, navigate relations with customers, colleagues and management across shifting spaces, as well as incorporate mobile and new self-managed work-life practices (Hughes and Silver, 2020). In so doing, they potentially gain new capacities to traverse such unknown conditions, warp and reimagine space-time.

On the organisational side, companies are grappling with the development of new work processes, surveillance systems and leadership models combining different modes of control – e.g. management by objectives and direct supervision – thereby moving labor relations towards 'hybrid' areas of regulation (Bertolini and Vercelli, 2024; Murgia *et al.,* 2020). Technology can play a central role as an 'enabling' tool that impacts control, productivity and work-life dynamics but can – quite paradoxically – be taken for granted (Sorrentino, Tirabeni and Toraldo, 2022). Analytical attention must therefore remain focused on how concrete organisational forces mediate the deployment of technologies within specific sectors (e.g., Carreri *et al.*, 2020).

Time and space, variously theorized through waiting (e.g., Bailey and Suddaby, 2023), rhythm (e.g., Lyon, 2020), aesthetics (e.g., De Molli, 2019), or topology (e.g., Ratner, 2020) are emergent becomings and increasingly critical and ethical dimensions not only for organisational and individual planning but also for the culture of organisations and the experience of work itself. This evolution is paving the way for a new phase in work regulation, potentially leading to renewed social conflict over work time and space, with the inherent risk of exacerbating social inequalities or, on the contrary, with the capacity to enable – even constitute – forms of organisational inclusion and emancipation.

As scholars of work and organisation, we interrogate the epistemological frameworks through which space and time are apprehended and argue for the need to conceive and treat them neither as mere containers of organisational life nor as coordinates for describing work and organisational processes. Rather, with this issue, we foreground spatial and temporal dimensions, in order to show how they have become constitutive of the ongoing transformations of work in its entanglement with social reproduction, as well as the evolving nature of organisations themselves – practices, structures, and organisational cultures. This issue thus aims to bring to the forefront the times and spaces of work (and of non-work) as an invitation to stimulate a deeper and more expansive theorization of how temporalities and spatialities are deeply enmeshed with dynamic dialectics such as production/social reproduction, personal/professional, past/future, autonomy/control, isolation/inclusion, and good quality/bad quality. Engaging with the spatio-temporal patterns of work and organisational processes is a core concern of work and organisation studies, and this special issue provides an arena capable of offering critical rethinking and diverse insights centering time-space in analyzing work processes (and their articulation with non-work),

new organisational models (and their relations with more traditional ones), and the everyday experience of working life.

1.1. The articles in this Special Issue

The articles in this Special Issue have been selected because they discuss a wide range of spatio-temporal relations observable in contemporary work organisations—relations that play with, distort, and reimagine space-time. This is a highly relevant topic in broader academic debates, especially in critical management studies as well as the sociology of work, and one that has traditionally been central to this journal (see, for instance, the Special Issue edited by Moschera *et al.*, 2018).

The issue opens with the article by Albano and Curzi (2025, *this issue*), who, through the concept of "controlled autonomy", set the stage for the discussion by highlighting the ambivalent nature of managerial control in remote work. The authors show how this form of control can foster overcommitment and work intensification and, beyond a certain threshold, transform managerial oversight into pure discretion. They argue that digitally mediated remote work may lead to a desynchronization and atomization of organisational rhythms, exacerbating tensions between work and other life domains. The pressure to remain constantly available— "on standby," even when not actively working—thus extends across both time and space.

The article by Pezzolo and Ascoli (2025, *this issue*) draws on a qualitative study conducted among Italian small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operating across different regions and sectors. The authors conceptualize remote work as a situated and negotiated practice, shaped by structural constraints, biographical trajectories, and informal organisational cultures. Their empirical analysis identifies three main patterns. The first concerns employee well-being: for many workers—particularly caregivers and commuters—remote work constitutes an indispensable resource for reconciling work and personal life. However, flexibility can also lead to work intensification, difficulties in disconnecting, and forms of stress associated with self-organisation. The second pattern involves the spatial reorganisation of work. The possibility of working from home, from coworking spaces, or even from abroad is widespread but often managed informally. Spatial autonomy thus emerges as an ambivalent terrain, oscillating between freedom and overload. The third pattern highlights the diffusion of hybrid practices, especially in sectors that are not fully amenable to remote work. Such practices are frequently the outcome of relational adaptations and

everyday negotiations, rather than the result of structured organisational policies.

Recchi *et al*. (2025, *this issue*) also identify several models of hybrid remote work through the analysis of a sample of 480 firms in Lombardy (Italy) in the post-pandemic period. The authors show that each model, combining different degrees of intensity and flexibility, produces distinct outcomes and varying levels of worker autonomy. Notably, employers' choices among these models depend on the differing degrees of 'teleworkability' across occupations, with implications for recruitment and retention strategies. The authors distinguish between the intensity and flexibility of remote work—both of which have increased in Northern Italy after the pandemic, partly in response to workers' expressed preferences.

The subsequent article, authored by Armano *et al*. (2025, *this issue*), presents a comparative analysis between France and Italy aimed at exploring the temporal and spatial effects of different forms of distance working on the lived experience of work. The authors examine the new forms of "work nomadism" that have emerged in the post-pandemic context and the ways in which workers may benefit from the "elasticity" of these arrangements. The reduction of constrained time—particularly that spent commuting—produces new temporal gains and opportunities, including greater freedom from the direct gaze of management and the possibility of adapting the spaces and rhythms of work to one's personal life. As a result, work time becomes inhabited differently (*ibidem*).

The last article, by Picardi (2025, *this issue*) examines the digital timescapes of academic research in Italy, focusing on the "density of the present" that arises from the fragmented and simultaneous nature of researchers' responsibilities and workloads. The author argues that this condition stems from the cultural norms of research institutions, which act as "time generators" (Rinderspacher, 1988 cited in Picardi, 2025, *this issue*)—for instance, through the pressure to publish—and are reinforced by the unboundedness of digital technologies. The effect is to transform the technical properties of these technologies—particularly speed and connectivity—into attributes of the researchers themselves, whose performance is increasingly evaluated according to such parameters.

To further advance conceptual and empirical debate, we also invited several leading international scholars whose research has been pivotal in advancing theoretical understandings of novel spatio-temporal patterns to engage in critical re-articulations. The three invited contributions – namely those by François-Xavier de Vaujany, Rob Kitchin and colleagues, and Melissa Tyler (2025, *this issue*) – guide us into distinct and innovative

directions for theorizing and conceptualizing the spatio-temporal becoming of work and organizing (see the last section of this article).

Since transformations never emerge *ex nihilo*, nor do they entail automatic caesuras with the past, the special issue concludes with two book reviews, published ten years apart – *Lavoro, tecnologia e libertà* by Anna Maria Ponzellini and *Cubed: A Secret History of the Workplace* by Nikil Saval, reviewed respectively by Salvatore Cominu and Sara Recchi (2025, *this issue*) – which offer insightful reflections on long-term transformations as they have evolved in response to shifting organisational demands throughout the history of capitalism.

The rest of the article is organized as follows. In the next section, building on these contributions and taking stock of the existing literature, we develop our own analysis of four interrelated tensions that run through the entire set of articles, highlighting how each tension simultaneously shapes and is shaped by contemporary time–space patterns of work and organisation. These tensions concern the autonomy–control dialectic, the ambivalent role of technologies, subjectivities and the reconfiguration of agency, and the work–life tensions that unfold across spatio-temporal arrangements. Finally, we outline possible avenues for future research that may foster novel theoretical frameworks capable of more adequately capturing the ongoing metamorphoses of work, organisation, space, and temporality.

2. Taking Stock: Four Key Tensions in Time-Space Patterns of Work and Organizing

Each of the following subsections will analyze a distinct but interconnected tension within time–space patterns. Drawing on relevant literature and insights from the articles in this special issue, we highlight now how each tension shapes and is shaped by contemporary time-space patterns in work and organisation.

2.1. Autonomy and Control in Time–Space Patterns

Remote working offers a range of new possibilities for organisational models. In fact, from an organisational point of view, the spatial and temporal flexibility of remote working poses a series of challenges in terms of coordinating and controlling work activities carried out remotely or in a hybrid mode (in terms of fair treatment and worker productivity) (Fogarty,

Scott and Williams, 2011; Lautsch, Kossek and Eaton, 2009; Sewell and Taskin, 2015). In this sense, it can contribute to blurring the boundaries between autonomy and control, subordination and self-employment, giving rise to forms of hybridization (Azaïs, 2019; Bertolini and Vercelli, 2024).

By eliminating the uninterrupted sharing of the workplace, remote working renders the form of control typical of Taylorism-Fordism—so-called "direct supervision" (Mintzberg, 1983)—inadequate. Some studies have linked remote working to new styles of work organisation based on greater employee autonomy and control by objectives (Doria, 2021; Mayo *et al.*, 2009; Puranam, 2018). These elements would also be introduced into subordinate work, bringing it closer to self-employment. At the same time, some literature criticizes this view, emphasizing the fact that workers are often subject to new and multiple forms of control. For example, the research of Goglio and Pacetti (2023), conducted during the pandemic period in Italy, shows that goal-oriented work has rarely been introduced with remote work, and new forms of monitoring often pass through tools that were introduced for other purposes. Sometimes the new technologies (software, platforms, etc.) used to carry out remote work give rise to new forms of indirect control.

Referring to the categorizations of Diana Limburg and Paul J. Jackson (2007), we can distinguish between "behavior control" (often achieved through direct supervision that monitors work processes, cf. Mintzberg 1983) and "results control" (with the verification of objectives achieved, leaving ample room for workers' autonomy and discretion, cf. Albano *et al.*, 2017 and 2018; Gubitta, 2018; Puranam, 2018; Sewell and Taskin, 2015). It is the first form of control that is often reintroduced through technology that allows the exact presence and activity of the worker to be verified (whether they are online, correcting documents on a shared platform, etc.). In some cases, moreover, during the pandemic, control has taken the form of "complex direct supervision" (Sewell and Taskin, 2015), intensifying phone calls and video calls with workers at home.

Finally, new forms of control vary according to the type of profession. According to Goglio and Pacetti (2022), with remote working, two powerful mechanisms of coordination and control are becoming increasingly relevant in technical and intellectual professions: "horizontal control" by colleagues and other collaborators, and "self-control" linked to professional ethics. The new digital nomads, in contrast, experience greater freedom from the direct gaze of management and the possibility of adapting the spaces and rhythms of work to one's personal life (Armano *et al.*, 2025, *this issue*).

These new forms of control can be even more pervasive, stressful, unfair, and capable of undermining well-being (Doria, 2021; Fogarty, Scott and

Williams, 2011; Fullin and Pacetti, 2020; Kurland and Egan, 1999). According to the study by Albano and Curzi (2025, *this issue*), remote digital work has significantly accelerated the emergence of "controlled autonomy" as a form of managerial control. The authors highlight the ambivalent nature of this form of control, which can lead to excessive commitment and work overload. In the post-pandemic period, most of the companies consulted combined different control methodologies: for example, a results-oriented control model and continuous control (requiring workers to keep "activity logs").

Current practices include a combination of control by objectives and direct supervision that has given employees greater autonomy, shifting the employment relationship towards "hybrid" areas of regulation (Murgia *et al.*, 2020). There is therefore a tension between these two processes. Outcomes vary greatly depending on the culture of the organisation and the type of management in which it occurred (Bertolini and Vercelli, 2024), but also depending on the level of teleworkability and the implications in terms of recruitment and retention strategies (Recchi *et al.*, 2025, *this issue*).

2.2. *The Ambivalent Role of Technology in Shaping Time–Space Patterns*

The relationship between technologies, space, and time in work and organising can be examined through different approaches. One perspective that continues to be adopted is the deterministic one, which assumes that every technological innovation automatically produces a change in organisational forms and social interactions. As Plesner and Husted (2019) observe—referring to a body of literature that is predominantly managerial in orientation, though still academic—there are still authors who nowadays, either explicitly or implicitly, adopt a deterministic stance. Indeed, the idea that technical inventions shape organisational reality continues to permeate business manifestos and managerial rhetoric (Leonardi and Jackson, 2004, cited in Plesner and Husted, 2019), while softer versions of technological determinism are indeed detectable in academic writing. Consequently, this invites us to take technological determinism seriously (Dafoe, 2015).

From this standpoint, technology decisively shapes the temporal and spatial dimensions of work and organizing. For instance, in this view, the mere availability of technologies enabling remote work is sufficient to define the spatio-temporal boundaries of work activity, regardless of the context. When this approach is coupled with optimism, technology becomes the solution—the "deus ex machina" capable of solving any problem. Returning

to the example, according to this logic, digital technologies not only make it possible to work everywhere and every time but do so with a positive impact in terms of performance and quality of work, independently of context.

Conversely, when this same approach is coupled by pessimism, technology becomes the "stone guest", a latent yet overwhelming and dangerous presence. Here, the impact is negative, leading, for instance, to a deterioration in the quality of work due to the impoverishment of face-to-face interactions—again, regardless of context. Both trajectories, whether optimistic or pessimistic, entail an automatic impact of technology on time and space, conveying a simplified and partial understanding of the issue.

It is possible, however, by adopting a different, relational and non-deterministic perspective, to focus instead on the mutual role of humans and technologies in reconfiguring the temporal and spatial dimensions of work and organisation. From this standpoint, the organisation becomes a changing context of use for multiple technologies, the outcomes of which remain open and uncertain. A classic example of this approach is provided by Orlikowski (2007), who nearly two decades ago, analyzing the push e-mail functionalities of the BlackBerry, demonstrated how constant notifications are not merely a technical feature, but intertwine with organisational communication norms, producing work dependency and redefining the spatio-temporal boundaries between private life and work.

The relationship between technologies, space, and time is thus configured and reconfigured depending on contexts, as shown by Recchi *et al.* (2025, *this issue*) and Armano *et al.* (2025, *this issue*), who respectively examine remote work in post-pandemic Milan and compare French and Italian experiences on the same phenomenon. Yet technology, space, and time are above all staged as a field of continuous tension between opportunities and constraints, producing fragmentation and performative pressures with ambivalent effects, as illustrated by Picardi (2025, *this issue*) in the case of academic work.

If we adopt an anti-deterministic perspective, the technology–space–time relationship appears more nuanced and ambivalent, giving rise to a new grammar of organisational time and space and associated gestural repertoire. The gesture of "scrolling", for instance, becomes a symbol of our time (de Vaujany, 2025, *this issue*) and of the opportunities, criticalities, and ambiguities that technologies generate in relation to time and space: accelerated, disembodied, and continuous temporalities, but also fragmented experiences characterized by impatience (*ibid.*). Within such a framework, the new temporalities of digital infrastructures come into tension with clock

time, which continues to play a central role in work and organizing (Kitchin *et al.*, 2025, *this issue*).

From this perspective, the very materiality of technologies does not mechanically determine organisational behavior, but rather "affords" (Gibson, 1979) certain uses, leaving the field open to appropriations, namely reinventions, and adaptations (Miele and Tirabeni, 2020). Hence, technological development does not in itself produce freedom in or from work, but it can expand the possibilities of deciding times and spaces of work beyond the tyranny of the time clock marking the boundaries between social life and spaces dedicated to production (Ponzellini, 2023, in Cominu's review, 2025, *this issue*).

2.3. Subjectivities, Agency and Temporal-Spatial Experience

Organisation studies are concerned not only with spatio-temporal structures, practices and technologies that form and dominate life at work, but with the inner, phenomenological, subjective dimensions of "lived time" (Sharma, 2014), and crucially, the mutually constitutive relationships that arise from these different temporal registers. Indeed, the social life of time recognises that time produces and is produced by the social (Bastian *et al.*, 2020), complicating assumptions of time as an evenly unfolding, sequential, universal, deterministic and linear backdrop to the social and natural world and organisational life. This section briefly considers how people relate to, live with and act upon the various temporalities that shape their working lives, highlighting that the micro-level is key to understanding the life of organisations.

It is widely recognised that people in different working contexts undertake "time work" (Flaherty *et al.*, 2020) to manage their everyday spatio-temporal experiences of work, seeking a sense of temporal autonomy in relation to the schedules, timetables and deadlines or overall "timescapes" of organisations (Adam, 1998; Snyder, 2019; Kitchin *et al.*, 2025, *this issue*). Moroşanu and Ringel propose the notion of "time-tricking" to refer to «the many different ways in which people individually and collectively attempt to modify, manage, bend, distort, speed up, slow down or structure the times they are living in» as a response to crisis, and as a form of maintenance work (2016, p. 18). Specific organisational structures, practices, norms and technologies operate as "time generators" (Rinderspacher, 1988 in Picardi, 2025, *this issue*) or "pacemakers" (Parkes and Thrift, 1979) which discipline workers to align their energies with organisational goals (Snyder, 2019).

However, time is an "uneven and unequal relationality" (Bastian *et al.*, 2020). It is systematically inflected by gender, race and other dimensions which may inhibit the formation of spaces of connection, resistance and mutual care for "workable lives" (Tyler, 2025, *this issue*).

Since the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, organisational life has become more spatially distributed as people work remotely or in hybrid teams, where tasks may be undertaken out of synch with other members of a work team (Felstead, 2022). New forms of so-called "nomadism" have emerged post-pandemic which offer employees some spatio-temporal "elasticity", not least freedom from the "constrained time" of commuting, which can make it possible to reconcile the rhythms of work and non-work life (Armano *et al.*, Pezzolo and Ascoli, both 2025, *this issue*). For some, this introduces a new experience of time that is not necessarily dominated by acceleration and "time pressure" (Wajcman, 2014). Equally, working remotely through digital means can lead to the desynchronization and atomization of organisational working rhythms (Albano and Curzi, 2025, *this issue*) on the one hand and increased intensification and social isolation on the other (Vassily *et al.*, 2025). At the same time, organisations seek to impose new forms of "time discipline" via digital technologies rather than standard clock-time, expanding the "invasiveness" of labour into the spaces of everyday life (Lefebvre, 2004, 2014) as boundaries are blurred, and exacerbating tensions between work and other life spheres (Albano and Curzi, 2025, *this issue*). The complexity of the temporal relations of contemporary organisational life therefore requires new forms of "temporal sensemaking" (Dawson, 2014) as some of the articles in this issue show.

2.4. Work-life Tensions Across New Time-Space Patterns

Contemporary organisations increasingly develop family-like, community-driven workplaces (Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, 2021) while enabling work from home, customers' sites, vehicles, co-working spaces and third places (e.g. cafés and parks) (Halford, 2005; Ropo *et al.*, 2015). Marking a new era in industrial relations (Ponzellini, 2023, in Cominu's review, 2025, *this issue*), they also experiment with diverse temporal arrangements – such as (a)synchronous virtual or hybrid network time in project-based and nomadic work, flex hours, or the four-day week (Aroles, Granter and de Vaujany, 2020; Carreri, Gosetti and Mattei, 2024; Pedersen, Muhr and Dunne, 2024). These working time patterns often merge with social life, multispecies interactions and consumption, altering everyday

rhythms (Carabelli and Lyon, 2025) and erasing interruptions in a sort of "negative ontology of time" (de Vaujany, 2025, *this issue*). Such spatio-temporal configurations, promoted as sustaining a new work culture (Storti and Dagnes, 2025), and enhancing wellbeing, retention and, through this, productivity, destabilize traditional work/non-work boundaries almost to the point of collapse (Fleming and Spicer, 2004; Perlow, 1998), producing new tensions at both organisational and personal levels.

Managerial and individual practices, as well as meanings attached to life spheres, shift with unprecedented implications in terms of capacities required to navigate such conditions (Izak, Shortt and Case, 2022; de Vaujany, 2025, *this issue*), boundary-work (Gold and Mustafa, 2013; Hughes and Silver, 2020) and embodiments of (un)wellness (Armano *et al.*, 2025, *this issue*; Dale and Burrell, 2014). Leisure and spiritual activities are incorporated into work (Hochschild, 1998; Fleming and Spicer, 2004; Lefebvre, 2014; Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, 2021), while organisational norms leak back into homes or third spaces, intensifying rhythms, extending hours and possibly fostering workers' self-exploitation and hypervisibility (Chung, 2022; de Vaujany *et al.*, 2021; Fleming and Spicer, 2004; Kelliher and Anderson, 2010). Yet new arrangements can also foster practices of resistance and individuals' appropriation of their own time-space (Miele and Tirabeni, 2020; Bertolini, Fullin and Pacetti, 2022).

Hybrid, liminal spaces and times in contemporary work arrangements alter the 'ordinary' boundedness of work and private life to place and time (Hughes and Silver, 2020), especially for some professions (e.g., in advanced services). Space-time patterns persist as socially produced, reproducing asymmetries and shaping values in response to shifting organisational demands throughout the history of capitalism (Recchi's review, 2025, *this issue*). Thinking in terms of tensions, the 'new' world of work thus offers diverse ways of organizing, working, and living at interstitial points between public-formal and private-informal, potentially enabling employees to balance work and life needs and increase their wellbeing through autonomy over time and space. Yet discourses of autonomy are ambiguously intertwined with stress and isolation (Pezzoli and Ascoli, 2025, *this issue*) and remain 'bounded' by organisational constraints (Tirabeni, 2024). Critical scholars highlight how routines align performance and value creation with autonomy, countering dominant wellbeing narratives (Aroles *et al.*, 2025; Watson *et al.*, 2023). In both the academic literature and in practice, organisational approaches are indeed predominantly anchored in individualised and psychological perspectives with the consequence of making workers responsible for their wellbeing and "balance". This is

described by some critical scholars as "a cultural fantasy" (Bloom, 2016), stigmatizing those social groups deemed "unfit" for the "new" world of work and incapable of managing the nexus of family, work, leisure, personal and community life (Watson *et al*., 2023).

How we perform the work-life nexus, inhabiting and traversing times and spaces, is shaped by power relations built upon embedded and intersecting inequalities, as feminist scholars powerfully highlight (Tyler and Cohen, 2010). Therefore, not everything is necessarily novel: much may be a rebranding of earlier value-production processes (Aroles *et al*., 2025). Precisely by reshaping the symbolic and material interface between productive and reproductive labor, "new" ways of working can generate new divides or reconfigure well-known asymmetries, e.g. reinforcing women's household roles, especially in Southern Italy (Carreri, 2025; de Laat, 2023). Yet they also create opportunities for emancipation of vulnerable social groups (Jammaers *et al*., 2025) and for alternative forms of collective resistance and solidarity beyond traditional workplace spatial and temporal settings (see Tyler's and Picardi's articles, 2025, *this issue*). Time and space thus emerge as critical, politically and ethically charged dimensions of organizing.

3. Moving Forward: Future Directions and Conclusions

Collectively, the contributions to this Special Issue show that targeted empirical and theoretical investigation into the spatio-temporal dimensions of work processes, workers' experiences, and organisational dynamics constitutes a particularly fertile ground for analytical and conceptual development. In this final section, we identify emergent questions and conceptual openings for further advancing the study of time–space patterns in work and organizing.

Since space and time are never containers for social processes but are always being produced by them (Beyes and Holt, 2020; Sheller, 2017), we first suggest thinking of work processes and organisations through concepts that allow us to grasp movement and grey areas between work/non-work, ultimately questioning what counts as an organisational setting. The evolving work-life configurations – of which the contributions in this special issue provide valuable insights – are undergoing profound transformations at the levels of meaning-making, material-infrastructural and socio-relational dimensions, unleashing new tensions that demand analytical engagement beyond the enduring rhetoric of separate and conflicting spheres,

traditionally framed as a matter of individual responsibility (Carreri, Dordoni and Poggio, 2022). Instead, there is a need to investigate, both theoretically and empirically, mobilities and boundaries (e.g. Schreven *et al.*, 2023), as well as liminal areas (e.g. Izak, Shortt and Case, 2022; Johnsen and Sørensen, 2014), as material, embedded, and hybrid ways through which subjects navigate the spatio-temporal nexus between work, family, leisure, organisational and community life.

In the current ubiquitous and pervasive digitalization of working life, placing the concept of the "boundary" at the centre of theoretical and empirical investigation is crucial as multiple organisational spaces, bodies and working routines can be invisible (Carreri, 2025; Izak, Shortt and Case, 2022). A possible avenue for further inquiry lies in building upon studies that have examined and theorized the merging of boundaries and coexistence of production and social reproduction across certain labour contexts (Alberti, Sacchetto and Vianello, 2017), as well as within distant geographical settings. Importantly, engaging with experiences and epistemologies emerging from the Global South offers a critical standpoint from which to destabilize Eurocentric assumptions concerning the spatio-temporal dimensions of work.

A "mobilities lens" is also promising to go beyond the conventional idea of a fixed spatial domain of formal workplace and the primacy of "time" over "space" (Hughes and Silver, 2020). Observing workers *on the move* can help us think differently: we could ask, for example, what kind of physical and/or virtual practices, experiences, and meanings of mobilities are enacted through new forms of work and organizing, or similarly how we do (not) produce collectively immobility, rest and pause; how a sense of togetherness is accomplished or impeded through co-presence, proximity-distance and (a)synchronization; and what kind of (new) mobility regimes are in play.

Similarly, liminality offers a conceptual lens through which to explore the dynamic interplay between the individual and the organisation in emerging work arrangements. Liminal areas - both spatial and temporal - could be more extensively examined, as they are essential to organisational life, whether temporary or permanent (Johnsen and Sørensen, 2014), fostering creativity, innovation, learning, identity, and engagement in organisational politics (Izak, Shortt and Case, 2022). Paradoxically, as organisational life becomes less bounded, liminality gains in both relevance and explanatory power.

Furthermore, we call for a bold engagement with an ontology of working and organizing in transformation, by revisiting and rethinking the materiality of work itself (de Vaujany, Holt and Grandazzi, 2023), without neglecting

the becoming of (non-)events in organizing (de Vaujany, 2025, *this issue*), as well as focusing on the genesis and the historicity of organisational working time-space regimes (Ponzellini, 2023). A deeper exploration of how new or hybrid forms of work and organisation are embedded into wider settings is needed. The concept of "topology" could be useful as a way to extrapolate how organisational space can take up multiple shapes, which are continually curving and deforming (Ratner, 2020). This view of organisational space is seen as a matter of changing surface relations and «compels us to explore how relationships between inside/outside, near/distant, present/absent, dis/continuous, order/disorder are immanent to space itself» (Ratner, 2020, p. 1516).

Technologies also play a crucial yet ambivalent role—one that is never univocal and always situated in practice (see e.g., Suchman, 2007; Orlikowski and Scott, 2007). Although discussions on new forms of work and organisation are often framed around time, space, and the role of technologies, the very meanings of these dimensions are frequently taken for granted (Lee and Sawyer, 2010). As Kitchin *et al*. (2025, *this issue*) observe with respect to planning, digitalization has introduced a new timescape —a hybrid temporal environment in which network and machine time intertwine with clock time and legal time. This hybridization produces spatio-temporal compression and a reconfiguration of organisational rhythms, while leaving many of the underlying contradictions unresolved. The future, they argue, will be shaped by the advent of artificial intelligence. Nevertheless, as long as the principles of responsibility, transparency, and public trust remain central, human and normative time will continue to coexist with algorithmic time.

De Vaujany's contribution (2025, *this issue*) also encourages a critical reflection on the interrelation between time, space, and digital technologies: a new time of impatience seems to be emerging through technologies that foster the very practice of seeing and swiftly moving on—epitomised by the gesture of scrolling. In light of this complex scenario, Tyler's contribution (2025, *this issue*) ultimately invites us to detach ourselves from this accelerated pace, to consider the emancipatory role of technology, and to interpret shared time and space as the context within which a politics of care grounded in recognition might flourish—a call for the time required for solidarity and 'workable lives'. In short, it is a vision of an expanded sense of time and space. In sum, we contend that close attention must be paid to the ways in which technologies and digitalization processes are regulated.

In addition, the impact of remote and hybrid work for processes of reorganisation of firms might be further analyzed in the post pandemic

period, taking into account the specificity of the national context, as well as the specific profession and sector and the culture of the firm. Remote work also obliges us to think of new forms of regulation of the job relationship, that in recent years has already been changed as a result of new forms of the flexibilization and fragmentation of labour.

Moreover, our understanding of subjectivities, social identities, and forms of agency might be further enhanced – not only in terms of management-worker dynamics (e.g., recognition and negotiations over visibility and presence) and collegial relations (such as solidarity and collaboration in hybrid teams), but also with respect to the micropolitics that underpin everyday routines and ethical choices about how to invest one's time. These processes entail potentially emancipatory as well as asymmetrical consequences, thus calling for deeper theorization of the relational, affective, and temporal infrastructures through which agency is exercised and constrained. There is a need for studying time-space as an ethical and political terrain (Tyler, 2025, *this issue*).

Alongside situations of temporal and spatial dispossession, conditions of reappropriation may also materialize, enabling the cultivation of new capacities – individual, collective, and organisational. The spatiotemporal dimensions of work and organisational life are arenas of labor struggle and contestation, inviting theoretical inquiry into the differentiated experiences of workers and potential splits and divides. At the same time, it is important to resist binary oppositions between "empowered" flexible workers capable of autonomously appropriating time and space and those "bounded" by rigid structures. Instead, the analysis must remain attentive to the nuances and contradictions that characterize these positionalities and their embeddedness within broader organisational topologies.

Finally, there are ongoing methodological challenges in researching space and time in organisations, requiring a renewal of our research methods. Novel techniques of data generation are necessary to critically grasp the live/lived experience of time-space patterns in organisations (see also Segarra and Longman, 2025). There is much promise in the creative, material, visual and sensory methods, alternative ethnographies, as well as fiction and art-based research that have been developed across the social sciences including in organisation studies in recent years (Patton and Jackson, 2025; Pink, 2020; Riach and Warren, 2014; Rose, 2023; Woodward, 2019; Woodward, Shortt and Khoo, 2025). In urban studies and geography in particular, "rhythmanalysis", originally proposed by Henri Lefebvre and Catherine Régulier (Lefebvre, 2004) has been widely used and developed to explore the time-space patterns of the public realm at different

scales (Edensor, 2010; Lyon, 2022) and the relations between them, a strategy of inquiry which also lends itself to multi-scalar and comparative research design in/across organisations. This includes the polyrhythmic constellations of specific work organisations and spaces (Lyon, 2016; Nash, 2022), and the increasing significance of the digital in organisational timescapes (Kitchin *et al.*, 2025, *this issue*).

Overall, the ongoing transformation of working life demands a rearticulation of our research questions and modes of thinking, critical engagement with emerging concepts and theoretical paradigms, and methodological experimentation in order to open up novel, potentially interdisciplinary, lines of inquiry, capable of apprehending the shifting ontologies of work and organisations, along with the key tensions that underpin them.

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