ORGANIZATIONAL *FORMING* IN *A*MODERN TIMES: *RE*INSERTING THE DYNAMIC INTO THE ORGANIZATIONAL

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ABSTRACT

While there is an obvious concern that "new organizational forms" are appearing, and despite the topic receiving increased attention, scholars, as yet, have been unable to theorize, grasp or account for these new forms adequately. In continuing to look for the 'new' with 'old' lenses, we are seeing neither real departure from Weberian conceptualizations other than oppositional approaches still in search of an essential entity, nor much consideration given to the possibility that the paradigmatic approach to form is also part of the problem.

In light of this, I posit that thinking within a *modernist* epistemological framework has served to limit our horizons when it comes to studying "form". How to move out of such a framework? Adopting an *amodern* or *nonmodern* epistemological framework, as suggested by Latour (1993a), I propose problematizing the notion of "organizational form" by focusing on the practices of "organizational forming." To expand the limits to our understanding of the organizational, therefore, I argue an amodern metatheoretical framing facilitates paying attention to how organizational *forming* is performed, such that what we come to identify as "new organizational forms" is achieved, if at all.

ORGANIZATIONAL FORM – IS IT AN ISSUE?

The topic of organizational form has gained increased attention in the scholarly literature over the past couple of decades or so (e.g., Academy of Management Journal 2001; Aldrich and Mueller 1982; Astley 1985; Child and McGrath, 2001; Daft and Lewin 1993; Fligstein and Freeland 1995; Fombrum 1988; Foss 2002: Hawley 1988; Lewin and Volberda 1999; McKendrick and Carroll 2001; Organization Science 1999; Romanelli 1991: Tushman and Romanelli 1985). For organizational scholars, the very concept of form is at the heart of organization studies (Fulk and DeSanctis 1995: 337; Rindova and Kotha 2001: 1263), such that "[w]here new organizational forms come from is one of the central questions of organizational theory" (Rao 1998: 912).

The relevance of this topic is often portrayed as 'new times' driving the need for 'new forms', however, what is more evident in the literature is that the need for new ways of looking at organizational form has yet to be addressed. Both the popular and the scholarly literature are focused on identifying if new types of organization are emerging that could be characterized as new forms and, more importantly for the scholarly domain, whether there are sufficient theoretical and empirical developments that could engage in the proper identification, and classification of these new forms. However, rather than heed the persistent calls for new theory grounded in the empirical examination of new forms, researchers continue to use existing theoretical frameworks and seek to align their studies and findings accordingly. In essence, the mainstream continues to look for the 'new' with 'old' lenses.

The vast majority of work appearing on the topic of new organizational forms, therefore, comes from an ontologically realist and an epistemologically positivist perspective. Hence, though there is theoretical variety within this realist and positivist frame, most discussions are limited to the confines of a functionalist paradigm and continue to view form as something already formed, as an essence, with the attention focused on what constitutes

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form. That is, few theoretical developments address how what we eventually identify as a given organizational form is achieved in practice. As such, the problem that "new organizational forms" presents to the field is precisely located in the inability of the field to think in other than "form" itself. In other words, there is neither real departure from Weberian conceptualizations other than oppositional approaches still in search of an essential entity, nor is there much consideration given to the possibility that the paradigmatic approach to the problem is also part of the problem (Brown 1992).

With these arguments as my point of departure, I posit that thinking within a *modernist* epistemological framework, as evidenced by the functionalist orientation of this literature, has served to limit our horizons when it comes to studying "form". How to move out of such a framework? "Can we think in any other way" (Calás and Smircich 2003: 49), such that we do not become enmeshed in, and continue to reproduce, the problems we encounter when thinking in a modern way? Adopting an *amodern* or *nonmodern* epistemological framework, as suggested by Latour (1993a), calls to our attention the vast materially heterogeneous spaces where actor-networks are being performed – built, negotiated, shaped, ordered, unraveled – and from whence essences, forms, a given order may emerge as effects (e.g., Akrich 1992; Berglund and Werr 2000; Brigham and Corbett 1997; Cooper and Law 1995; Czarniawska and Joerges 1995; Doolin 2003; Gherardi and Nicolini 2000; Law 1994; Lee and Hassard 1999). It is through attending to such spaces that we can explore how it is that organizational forming is performed and address such questions as: How is organizational form performed through purification (boundary-making, classification)? What translation happens? What hybrids emerge? Such a framework facilitates us in problematizing the notion of "organizational form" and so begin to outline the contours of an alternative way of thinking and knowing that will allow us *re*insert the dynamic into the organizational.

In what follows, I start out by summarizing the state of play of organizational form in the scholarly literature, focusing on the areas argued to be in need of attention, i.e., new theory, definition of form, and classification. With this backdrop, I move on to argue that our understanding of organizational form comes from a particular way of knowing. From here, and in the spirit of a "modest sociology" (Law 1994), I seek to, very broadly, outline how we can begin to think differently about "organizational form".

FORMING "ORGANIZATIONAL FORM" – THE DEBATE SO FAR

Organizational form, as an issue, has been the focus of attention since Weber's (1946, 1947) formulation of the ideal-type bureaucracy. Over the last couple of decades, and largely premised on the notion of 'new times' as the driver, organizational scholars have identified the emergence and evolution of new organizational forms as a critical issue to be addressed (e.g., <u>Academy of Management Journal</u> 2001; Aldrich and Mueller 1982; Astley 1985; Child and McGrath 2001; Daft and Lewin 1993; Fombrum 1988; Foss 2002: Hawley 1988; Lewin and Volberda 1999; McKendrick and Carroll 2001; <u>Organization Science</u> 1999; Romanelli 1991: Tushman and Romanelli 1985). Though research on the topic is considered embryonic, it is attracting increasing attention and a stream of research, coming from an array of theoretical perspectives, has emerged dealing with how new forms emerge and become embedded in the organizational landscape.

Romanelli (1991) noted that, though there has existed for a long time a need for research and theory development on new organizational forms, this need was only beginning to be addressed. However, in addressing this need, she asserted that: (1) theoretical consensus was absent; (2) conceptual approaches were diverging; (3) there were no overarching themes to integrate the many theoretical perspectives formulated about the emergence of new forms; (4) there was no established universal definition of the form

concept in use; and (5) there was a paucity of theoretically directed empirical work to validate the claims of any approach to the issue. With scholars only recently paying increased attention to this issue, she suggested that the absence of synthesis or integration was probably for the better for it would facilitate conceptual development. Indeed, rather than call for consensus, convergence and integration, Romanelli suggested that diversity be embraced, differences among concepts be emphasized and the value of different definitions be demonstrated through empirical research informed and directed by theory.

Ten years later, McKendrick and Carroll (2001) "believe that the definition and use of organizational form has become, if anything, more elastic" (662). For all intents and purposes, the concept remains relatively ambiguous in that it means different things dependent on the theoretical focus or interests of the researcher. McKendrick and Carroll (2001) cite the 1999 issue of <u>Organization Science</u>, which focused on the topic of form, and note, "The editors of that issue never defined the term, but in articles it was variously equated with population, industry, M-Form, functional form, divisional form, matrix form, virtual corporation, boundaryless organization, hollow corporation, dynamic network form, cellular organization, hypertext organization, platform organization and shamrock organization" (662).

Similarly, in also noting that not one of the ten papers comprising the focused issue of <u>Organization Science</u> defined organizational form, Foss (2002: 1) contends that the concept is both "ill-defined at the core and fuzzy at the edges, yet clearly seems to capture real phenomena." And further, in the special research forum on new and evolving forms appearing in the <u>Academy of Management Journal</u> (2001), the editors never defined the concept, which was variously equated in the articles with modularity, specialist organizational form, multinational corporation, vertical integration, virtual global teams, bureaucracy and feminist bureaucracy.

In short, it would appear that in just over ten years little has changed with regard to the issues raised by Romanelli (1991) in that they still remain a focus of interest and discussion. Even though the very concept of form is considered to be at the heart of organization studies, the existing literature highlights problems that still need to be tackled if new forms are to be identified.

Need for New Theory and Empirical Work

Though there is a sense that sufficient evidence exists as testimony to the presence of multiple organizational forms, there is a paucity by way of theory and of theoretically directed empirical research to account for this variability (Child and McGrath 2001; Fligstein and Freeland 1995; Romanelli 1991). Despite theoretical interest in the emergence of new forms, a generalizable model explaining the development of such forms has yet to be produced (Ruef, 2000).

While the historical emergence of new organizational forms is of crucial importance to a number of major organizational theories (Ruef, 2000), such as structural contingency, institutional, population ecology and transaction cost economics, each of these macro level theoretical perspectives treats form as an essence, as a durable, tangible and relatively undeniable structure, which exists as an empirical entity whether or not it is perceived and labeled by the individual. Taken as a given 'out there', each approach equates form with, and classifies form as, a set of essential and identifiable characteristics that are what constitutes the organizational, the particular mix of characteristics serving to create a boundary distinguishing one form from another. Central to each approach, therefore, is the development of classification schemes and the construction and maintenance of boundaries to render forms distinct and identifiable. In terms of identifying new forms, each of these theoretical approaches is limited to seeing form as determined by "an autonomous and inexorable logic of structural causality" (Reed 2003: 294), such as fit with environment,

institutional norms, market strategies or exchange conditions (Nickerson and Zenger 2002). Thus it is that new forms can only be seen as emerging in accordance with the dictates of given, pre-existing and constraining contingencies.

While it is appropriate to recognize recent attempts to account for new forms (e.g. Academy of Management Journal 2001; Organization Science 1999), the sense of a disjoint between the capacity of existing theoretical perspectives to explain the rapid development of new forms in practice remains prevalent. Echoing Daft and Lewin's (1993) concern that scholars have been slow to engage in empirical studies and in developing new theory, Lewin and Volberda (1999) suggest that the theory essential to explaining new forms awaits a more comprehensive development. Similarly, Child and McGrath (2001) suggest that the time is ripe both for reflection on theory in an effort to understand new and evolving organizational forms and for new theory grounded in the empirical examination of these new forms.

Need for Definition of Form Concept

Added to the calls for new theory, there is concern that researchers use the form concept in many different ways and often without precise definition (McKendrick and Carroll 2001; Romanelli 1991). Indeed, while form is frequently invoked when analyzing organizations, Pólos, Hannan and Carroll (2002) contend that careful theoretical analysis has not been paid to the concept itself.

Organizational form is most commonly defined in terms of specific, core features, with organizations having the same core features belonging to the same form (Carroll and Hannan 2000), which is a mode of representation having roots in Weber's rational-legal bureaucracy (McKendrick and Carroll 2001). As noted by Rindova and Kotha (2001: 1263), the term form is employed by organizational scholars in describing patterns or features of organization (McKelvey 1982), by economists in contrasting two opposing governance mechanisms, hierarchy and market (Williamson 1975), and by ecologists in identifying

characteristics that classify an organization as belonging to a group of similar organizations (Romanelli 1991).

In broad terms, therefore, the form concept can be understood as comprising, on one level, the characteristics that serve to identify an organization as a distinct entity and, at another level, identifying the organization as belonging to a group of similar organizations (Romanelli 1991). McKendrick and Carroll (2001) are of the view that attention to the concept of organizational form would continue to benefit organization theory, noting at the same time that "many proposed definitions are abstract to the point of being vague, and thus lack bite" (662).

Need for Classification

While a commonly accepted and comprehensive classification system has yet to be developed, scholars also take different views on the value of such a system. Supporters of taxonomic research (e.g., McKelvey 1982; Rich 1992) believe there is a need for theory and methods to help in classifying forms according to their differences and similarities, so as to both increase confidence in the generalizability of research findings and arrive at a stable classificatory scheme against which so-called new organizational forms can be identified and assessed.

DeSanctis and Fulk (1999) contend that current research is largely focused on "such dichotic concepts as market versus hierarchy or bureaucratic versus post-bureaucratic" (498). Echoing McKelvey (1982) and Rich (1992), and in contrast to Romanelli (1991), DeSanctis and Fulk call for the development of refined and meaningful typologies of organizational form that "would provide a basis for identifying an array of new organizational forms that differ in observable ways in memberships, relationships, groupings, adaptation styles, competencies, boundaries, and so on" (498-499), in addition to allowing for organizations of

different eras to be systematically differentiated along common dimensions of research interest.

On the other hand, those who refrain from developing a classification scheme (e.g., Hannan and Freeman 1977, 1989) are of the view that classifying an organization as one form or another is best left to be specified according to the interests of the individual researcher. Such a flexible approach recognizes that forms cannot be readily collapsed into a few tidy categories, thus allowing researchers more space to develop intuitive, descriptive distinctions (Romanelli 1991) inferred from an organization's formal structure or normative order (Hannan and Freeman 1977, 1989).

SO, WHERE DOES THIS LEAVE US?

While differing views on organizational form have emerged, they very much involve a particular way of understanding, in line with what Cooper and Law (1995: 263) refer to as a 'distal theory of organizations'. They have emerged from a macro organization theory perspective concerned with the creation and maintenance of boundaries, with categorization and classification and with the very notion of 'form' itself. The view from the existing literature, coming as it does from a largely determinist and positivist perspective, limits understanding through establishing the world as external to cognition, collective action or experience, rendering organizations as "hard, tangible and relatively immutable structures" (Burrell and Morgan 1979: 4), completely determined by their environment and knowable through a search for "regularities and causal relationships" (Burrell and Morgan 1979: 5).

Consistent with this way of understanding, the perpetually dynamic is placed into a field of stasis and stabilized for the purpose of scientific study (Burrell 1996), such that organizations appear as static entities capable of being partitioned out and classified. Current ways of understanding also both lock into, and are locked in, such dichotomous thinking as

micro/macro, inside/outside and new/old. The notion of 'form' itself, being a noun, conjures up the sense of something that is always-already 'formed', of something that has shape, of something static, of a mode of existence or manifestation. Hence, to study form, as understood in this light, is to study something that already 'has form' or has essence.

Further, the same theories, tools, and ways of understanding, which were developed to analyze notions of the organizational at a particular time, namely bureaucracy, are being deployed in attempts at generating knowledge about the organizational in 'new times'. Concurrently, theories, definitions and classification systems are used in the literature, and espoused as definitive means for studying form, even though their use is the subject of ongoing debate over how to theorize, define and classify form.

Altogether, the dominant approach to understanding form is embedded within a *modernist* epistemological framework. How to move out of such a modernist epistemological framework? "Can we think in any other way" (Calás and Smircich 2003: 49), such that we do not become enmeshed in, and continue to reproduce, the problems we encounter when thinking in a modern way? How can we articulate and study the organizational differently? An avenue worth exploring is Latour's (1993a) *amodern* or *nonmodern* epistemological framework, which facilitates us in problematizing the notion of "organizational form" and so begin to outline the contours of an alternative way of thinking and knowing that will allow us *re*insert the dynamic into the organizational.

AN AMODERN FRAMEWORK – UNDERSTANDING ORGANIZATIONAL FORM DIFFERENTLY

As Latour (1993a) sees it, modernity involves the creation and maintenance of two distinct ontological zones, with all that is nonhuman ascribed to nature and all that is human ascribed to society. Accordingly, the work of organizational scholars is focused on one zone

or the other, treating the world according to either the authority of the natural sciences, on the one hand, or that of the social sciences, on the other. In either case, the work of scholars is to explain, to purify, the world they see in their terms. Those coming from the perspective of nature, the realists, seek to naturalize society by integrating it into nature, while those coming from the perspective of society, the social constructionists, seek to socialize nature through digestion by society (Latour 1993a).

Hence, looked at through the lens of the natural sciences, all that has to do with organization is governed by natural laws. Looked at through the lens of the social sciences, it is we humans who create organization according to our own free will. Accordingly, organization is either transcendental, having an existence 'out there', or it is immanent, having an existence 'in here', and great effort is expended in ensuring that both views remain ontologically pure. Nature deals with things-in-themselves, while culture deals with humans-amongst-themselves, such that people and things, humans and nonhumans are kept separate.

Our work as organizational scholars, therefore, is to discover facts about organizational forms existing 'out there' or to treat form as some emergent social construction. But, treating organizational form as transcendental renders problematic knowing form. How can we know something that is transcendental? Similarly, treating organizational form as immanent renders problematic giving some shape to form for immanence renders permanence and durability impossible. If some form of stability is impossible through perpetual immanence, how can we ever give name to organizational form?

To overcome this apparent paradox, and without apparent contradiction, modernity treats nature as immanent in the sense that its laws are mobilizable, humanizable and socializable, in essence, knowable, through manipulation by the modern knowledge-making apparatus (e.g., laboratories, questionnaires, experiments, statistical analyses, research

organizations, scientific institutions). Accordingly, the laws of nature can now be discovered, such that organization can be known, albeit they still remain transcendent. Similarly, society is simultaneously treated as transcendent in the sense that it has its own laws and outlasts us, with conventional ways of knowledge-making "stak[ing] out the limits to the freedom of social groups, and transform[ing] human relations into durable objects that no one has made" (Latour 1993a: 37). Hence, our freedom to create organization according to our own will is circumscribed by the laws of society, albeit these laws are our own creation.

Seen in light of the above, thinking within the functionalist paradigm views organizational form as pure fact, having a reality 'out there', holding to the notion that people are not the ones who make organizational form; rather form has always been there and has always already existed, such that we are merely unearthing its secrets. Hence, even though we construct organizational form, it is as if we did not construct it. Similarly, work coming from an interpretivist position would view organizational form, should it be named so, as pure social construction, having a reality 'in here', holding to the notion that it is people, and only people, who construct organizational form, even though we rely on things to sustain our construction and so give it essence.

Viewed from this perspective, modernity provides no means of escape from 'old' ways of thinking and knowing and so provides no useful avenue for articulating and studying the organizational differently, for modernity is part and parcel of the way organizations have been conceptualized and studied. Thus, how can we articulate and study the organizational differently? I argue that one way around this impasse is to imagine, as Latour (1993a) has done, that we have never been modern. His amodern (or nonmodern) thesis rests on exposing, and then tying together, the practices that underpin modern ways of thinking and knowing. By making these operations visible, he provides a way to reconsider our understanding about "organizational form".

Purification. As already discussed, having created two separate ontological zones, modernity's focus remains on maintaining that separation. As such, to be modern is to be concerned with maintaining the established purity of nature on the one hand, and of society on the other: to be modern requires engaging in the practice of *purification*. Such practice, in turn, requires *categorization and classification*, with things-in-themselves assigned to nature and humans-in-themselves assigned to society.

Through purifying practices, for example, what we know as virtual organization is a set of separate and discrete characteristics, each of which allows for this form to be classified as it is. Thus, we can describe virtual organization (Byrne 1993; Chesbrough and Teece 1996; Davidow and Malone 1992) as 'organizationless organization', where structure is temporarily created in the process of individuals making contact with other individuals to work on particular problems. Yet, it is that through purifying that *the virtual organization* can be identified as a form. It has been classified and categorized according to an abstract, *already known*, i.e., pertaining to 'old forms', set of features (environment, structure, authority-control, decision-making, workers, operations, core/non-core, communication, culture, etc.), such that it is now static, permanent, timeless, universal and, above all, knowable. In being purified, it has become an ideal-type against which to measure and verify that which pertains to virtual organization.

But the most important question is, in order to purify, what has the knowledge-making enterprise left out? Thus, to focus on the practice of purification is only part of the story, for there is another practice, that of translation, on which modernity depends for its existence and yet which modernity denies at the same time.

Translation and networks. Concurrent with purifying the messy world of humans and nonhumans in which we live, modernity engages another practice, that of translation. Different from the practice of purification, which involves separation, the practice of

translation involves the threading together of any or all of these actors into a network that makes sense. It entails interconnecting these heterogeneous elements and viewing them as performing relationally, as interacting to produce what we contingently call, for example, virtual organization.

What do we see happening in a virtual organization? Taking the case of a team of geographically dispersed people working collaboratively to develop a project, for the project to be successful, not only does it need people with appropriate expertise, but it also depends on them using compatible software and hardware on which to produce their memos, reports and messages. It requires that they have access to the Internet, which in turn requires a system of standards, protocols, cables, switches, servers, and so on, to share their work product amongst one another. Their work product itself must be transformed into bytes by their computer software, such that it can be saved and retrieved many times over, and into data packets by data transmission software, such that it can be transmitted from one email address to another over data networks. Thus, for the project to be successful, it must enroll these diverse materials, and others, into a network of actors that we may come to call a virtual organization. The project's success requires that all of these materials perform in relation to one another such that the project progresses smoothly. However, should, for example, an email server go down, then messages between the members will be lost or not go through, causing the network of actors that we contingently call virtual organization to fail, at least temporarily. Indeed, the growing incidence of viruses attacking the Internet poses a threat to the common interests of these actors to align together in a network. The viruses are seeking to enroll software and hardware to do their bidding, thus signaling a refusal to perform relationally to produce virtual organization.

Observing organizations this way, mixing together humans and nonhumans, without bracketing anything and without excluding any combination, their contacts are amplified.

Thus, what results from the practice of translation are hybrids, networks that are both contingent and emergent. They are contingent in that their relations are never fixed for all time, such that the actor-networks could come asunder should the interests of any actors diverge. Similarly, they are emergent in that they do not appear ready formed, as pure essences that always-already existed.

However, this very practice, the practice of translation, is denied any visibility or acknowledgement within modern thinking. Purification reclaims the network from the hybrid ontology of its formation, and renders translation invisible in the process. Thus, purification obtains in the case of the virtual organization when we no longer think of the diverse materials that go into its performance, but, instead, simply see it as a thing in and of itself. Purification is successful when the threads that bind these heterogeneous materials relationally fall out of view and are simply taken for granted.

Translation and Purification – Organizational *Forming*

In summary, both practices, translation and purification, are vital to constituting the world we live in, with one dependent on the other. Without the practices of translation, those of purification would be without meaning, for we would be dealing with nothing but pure forms with no possibility of these forms being combined to arrive at some new form. Likewise, without the practices of purification, those of translation would be hindered, restricted or discarded, for without pure forms we would have nothing to thread together to create new forms.

However, with its emphasis on knowing through purification, modernity takes hybrid networks formed through translation and cuts them into "as many segments as there are pure disciplines" (Latour 1993a: 3), severing the ties that link nature and society. Through this separation, even though imbroglios of humans and nonhumans are multiplying and proliferating, what with "[a]ll of culture and all of nature get[ting] churned up again every

day " (Latour 1993a: 2), the distinct ontological zones remain steadfastly separated and delimited from each other as if the world were divided into such neat categories, into which anything and everything could be easily slotted.

Being truly modern, therefore, requires that we regard the practices of purification and translation as separate, while at the same time subscribing to the work of purification and denying that of translation. To do otherwise, to attend to both at the same time and to acknowledge the proliferation of hybrids, is to question our modernity and to make us "retrospectively aware that the two sets of practices have always already been at work in the historical period that is ending" (Latour 1993a: 11).

In proposing an amodern thesis, Latour seeks to retain modernity's ontological zones and its practices of purification and translation, only this time both practices are to be considered as operating simultaneously, and not separately (e.g., Akrich 1992; Berglund and Werr 2000; Rottenburg 1996). He is calling to our attention the vast materially heterogeneous spaces where actor-networks are being performed – built, negotiated, shaped, ordered, unraveled – and from whence essences, forms, a given order may emerge as effects (e.g., Brigham and Corbett 1997; Cooper and Law 1995; Czarniawska and Joerges 1995; Doolin, 2003; Gherardi and Nicolini 2000; Law 1994; Lee and Hassard 1999). It is through attending to such spaces that we can explore how it is that organizational forming is performed and address such questions as: How is organizational form performed through purification (boundary-making, classification)? What translation happens? What hybrids emerge?

Through beginning to address questions such as these, and through studying the practices of both purification and translation, we can begin to attend to how it is that an effect such as organizational form emerges and becomes stabilized, if only temporarily, in the process seeing form as the product of micro-organizational practices (e.g., Bloomfield and

Vurdubakis 1999; Lee and Hassard 1999). In so doing, our interest turns to the processes of organizational *forming*, to the practices embroiled in constructing and performing an effect that we call organizational form. From an amodern perspective, that is, organizational form is both constructed and real.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

When Latour (1993b: 378) asks "What is a video player?" and answers "Probably a machine", his position is not that there are no such things as machines, but rather that a video player may not be a machine. In seeking to problematize the very notion of such a label as 'machine', without having first conducted an analysis, he is highlighting the notion that attached to ready-made labels are a whole series of assumptions relating to form, function and meaning (Bingham 1996).

If we want to understand organizational form, therefore, the argument put forward by Latour (1993a: 79, 95) is that it is important not to start out assuming that which we wish to explain: "The explanations we seek will indeed obtain Nature and Society, but only as the final outcome, not as a beginning. … The appearance of explanation that Nature and Society provide comes only in a late phase, when stabilized quasi-objects have become, after cleavage, objects of external reality on the one hand, subjects of Society on the other. Nature and Society are part of the problem, not part of the solution."

 Therefore, to start off seeing virtual organization from either a macro perspective or a micro perspective is to "close off most of the interesting questions about the origins of … organization" (Law 1992: ¶3). Rather, approaching the problem of understanding differently and starting from scratch, we could begin by considering interaction and assuming that is all there is. This would lead to questioning how it is that some interactions are more or less successful in achieving stability and in reproducing themselves; how it is that some

interactions more or less succeed in overcoming resistance, such that they take on a macro-social appearance (Callon and Latour 1981); how it is that some interactions seem to produce effects such as organizational form, effects with which we had become familiar.

Understanding organizational form this way means, for example, that bureaucracy is no different in kind to virtual organization, for questions of form become questions of effects and what is of interest is how these effects come about, how they are generated, if at all. Hence, for example,

> The organization of American business described by Alfred Chandler (Chandler, 1977)…is a braid of networks materialized in order slips and flow charts, local procedures and special arrangements, which permit it to spread to an entire continent so long as it does not cover that continent. One can follow the growth of an organization in its entirety without ever changing levels and without ever discovering 'decontextualized' rationality. (Latour 1993a: 120-122)

Seen in this light, no longer is the large, vertically integrated corporation of which Chandler writes the decontextualized configuration of macro-level theorizing, readily distinguishable from any other form through means of classification according to its unique features and characteristics (e.g., size, scope). Rather, the discrete features characterizing Chandler's M-form organization have given way to seeing organization as a materially heterogeneous relational effect made up of 'a braid of networks materialized in order slips and flow charts, local procedures and special arrangements.' Organizational form is no longer an abstract, static, essentialized concept; rather it emerges as a real, dynamic, material, relational effect produced, stabilized and sustained through a network of human and nonhuman actors embroiled in practices of purification and translation.

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