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ORGANIZING NETWORKS

**AN ACTOR-NETWORK THEORY
OF ORGANIZATIONS**

From:

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What are organizations? Where do they come from? How are they transformed and adapted to new situations? In the digital age and in the global network society, traditional theories of the organization can no longer answer these questions. Based on actor-network theory, this book explains organizations as flexible, open networks in which both human and non-human actors enter into socio-technical assemblies by constantly negotiating and re-negotiating programs of action. Organizations are not macro social structures or autonomous systems operating behind the backs of individuals. Instead, they are scalable actor-networks guided by network norms of connectivity, flow, communication, participation, authenticity, and flexibility.

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Introduction

The story we will be telling is about organizations, about what they are, how they come to be, how they are maintained, transformed, dismantled, or sometimes just left behind and forgotten. Although this story belongs to the genre of management and organization studies and organization theory, it shares one thing in common with all other stories. It is just a story. It could be told otherwise. The actors, events, plot, sub-characters, time line, and surrounding circumstances, all could be different. This is what makes stories so useful in scientific work, it allows for the unexpected, the contingent, and supports innovative thinking. Scientific theories have long dispensed with the burden of simply reflecting so-called “facts” and have proven their value in their coherence, scope, and heuristic fruitfulness for research and action. This is especially the case in the social sciences, where the object of study is not external to the subjects doing the studying and where knowledge is unavoidably connected to action.

The heroes of this story are networks. Networks are everywhere. Just as systems science before it, network sciences are discovering network properties in almost all forms of order in the natural as well as the social world. Within the emerging interdisciplinary paradigm of network science, it is to be expected that social phenomena such as organizations be also interpreted as networks.¹ Networks, of course, have long been a topic of interest for sociology.² In organization theory, networks offered an alternative principle of organizing apart from the rigid opposition of

1 | See Arsenault (2011) for an overview of network theories in the social sciences.

2 | Durkheim, Tönnies, and Simmel discussed groups and communities. Moreno, Granovetter and others developed forms of social network analysis. For a summary of work on social networks see the Wikipedia article https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_network

markets and hierarchies.³ Networks were conceptualized as a unique and independent form of social order that should not be understood as a hybrid mix of markets and bureaucracy. Podolny and Page (1998) define the network form of organization “as any collection of actors [...] that pursue repeated, enduring exchange relations with one another and, at the same time, lack a legitimate organizational authority to arbitrate and resolve disputes that may arise during the exchange” (59). Included in this basic definition are many different kinds of associations such as business groups, joint ventures, franchises, strategic alliances, research consortia, outsourcing agreements, and relational contracts. What stands out in all these examples is that “there is no clear mapping of formal organizational arrangements onto the network form” (Podolny/Page 1998: 60).

Reasons for organizations to enter into network forms are knowledge sharing and learning, legitimacy and reputation, improved performance, enhanced adaptability, and better management of resource dependencies. Until the digital media revolution, network forms of organization remained an interesting sideshow to organizations based on markets and hierarchies. This situation has changed. After the industrial era and the informational era, we seem to be entering the era of the global network society (Castells 1996). As Castells (2005) points out, it is not networks that are new in human history, but “What is new is the microelectronics-based, networking technologies that provide new capabilities to an old form of social organization” (4). Digital information and communication technologies make global networked organizations possible. Both large and small, whether high-tech or not, organizations in all areas of society are changing. Castells (2005: 8) locates three processes characteristic of the network society,

- 1) the “generation and diffusion of new microelectronics/digital technologies of information and communication;”
- 2) the “transformation of labor that is able to innovate and adapt;” and
- 3) the “diffusion of a new form of organization around networking.”

Organizing networks has today become as important as was once the organization of hierarchical, scientific, and bureaucratic organizations in the industrial era.

3 | See Powell (1990) and Podolny/Page (1998) for an overview of research on networks as forms of organization.

New theories respond to this situation by describing organizations in terms of “chaos” (Smith 2001), “fractal” (Warnecke 1992), “holocracy,”⁴ “adhocracy” (Mintzberg 1992), “organization 2.0” (McAfee 2006), “networked,”⁵ and “pattern-breaking management” (Wüthrich et al. 2009, Kaduk et al. 2015). Common themes in these new approaches to organizations are decentralization, flattening out hierarchies, self-organization, flexibility, innovation, multi-directional communication, risk tolerance, transparency, flow, connectivity, trust, non-linear processes, teamwork, collaboration, knowledge management, and networked organization design. The rise of the “sharing economy” and the “commons” has further complicated organization theory by undermining traditional economics and models of organizational behavior.⁶ The commons, as Benkler (2004) argues, is an organizing force that is neither hierarchy nor a market, neither collectivist nor commodifying. Although not all of these new theories of organizations are explicitly based on network models, the idea of networks and networking can be found in some form in almost all of them.

We follow these new developments and tendencies in contemporary organization studies and propose to understand organizations as networks. The concept of “network” is as controversial as omnipresent. What exactly is a network? What kind of networks are we talking about in organization studies and related fields? We base the view of networks

4 | <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holacracy>

5 | https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Network-centric_organization

6 | “The sharing economy encompasses a wide range of structures including for-profit, non-profit, barter and co-operative structures. The sharing economy provides expanded access to products, services and talent beyond one to one or singular ownership [...] Corporations, governments and individuals all actively participate as buyers, sellers, lenders or borrowers in these varied and evolving organizational structures.” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sharing_economy. See also Benkler (2004: 275): “The world’s fastest supercomputer and the second-largest commuter transportation system in the United States function on a resource management model that is not well specified in contemporary economics. Both SETI@home, a distributed computing platform involving the computers of over four million volunteers, and carpooling, which accounts for roughly one-sixth of commuting trips in the United States, rely on social relations and an ethic of sharing, rather than on a price system, to mobilize and allocate resources.”

presented here on actor-network theory (ANT), especially as Bruno Latour has developed it during the last three decades.⁷ This implies that when we speak of networks, we are not referring to the above mentioned theories of networked organizations, that is, traditional organizations that enter into partnerships of one kind or another and can therefore be said to exist within a network of alliances. This concept of a network organization relies on traditional organization theory and refers to “legally independent companies or subsidiary business units that use various methods of coordinating or controlling their interaction in order to appear like a larger entity.”⁸ In opposition to this view, the networks we are talking about are *the basic form of social and organizational order* and not a particular way in which some traditional organizations might decide to work together. Based on ANT, the concept of network we propose is neither market, nor bureaucracy, nor a mixture of the two. Our aim is to offer a different theoretical foundation for talking about organizations as networks.

Another possible misunderstanding that talking about networks brings with it is the common conviction that networks in society consist of relationships between people, relationships that become visible through methods such as social network analysis, otherwise known as SNA.⁹ Speaking of organizations in terms of social networks, that is, in terms of connections, hubs, nodes, path length, gateways, clustering, power laws, segmentations, and distributions doesn’t change anything in the basic conception of what the organization is, how it arises, and what it consists of. Social network analysis is not a theory of organizations. It is a method for discovering patterns of communication between people, whether they are “organized” or not. A more interesting development that is related to SNA and the mathematical models behind it has come to be known as “relational sociology.”¹⁰ Relational sociology goes further than SNA by

7 | See https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bruno_Latour. See the essays collected in Belliger/Krieger (2006) and for the reception of ANT in management and organizational studies MOS see Tønnesen et al. nd; Czarniawska/Hernes (2005), Hernes (2008).

8 | <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/business.html>

9 | https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_network_analysis

10 | “Relational sociology is a collection of sociological theories that emphasize relationalism over substantivalism in explanations and interpretations of social phenomena and is most directly connected to the work of Harrison White and

proposing a constructivist relational ontology of the social. Although ANT can also be understood as a constructivist relational ontology of social reality, it is fundamentally different from relational sociology. ANT has its basis in ethnography and science and technology studies and proposes a methodological symmetry between humans and non-humans. This clearly distinguishes ANT from relational sociology.¹¹

The actor-network view of organizations implies the following assumptions: Organizations do not “emerge” as macro-actors from the interests and decisions of individual human actors, nor do organizations somehow precede or transcend individuals. They are not overarching social structures. Organizations are not wholes that are always more than the sum of their parts. They are not containers into which individuals are “socialized.” They do not exist on some higher level from which they influence individuals, as it were, behind their backs.¹² The choice of ANT requires, among other things, moving away from understanding organizations as social “entities” or “structures.” From the point of view of actor-network theory, organizations are not some kind of unique social substance. Finally, this view also implies that organizations do not make up an “ecology” of their own in which they must adapt to “institutional” pressures in order to establish legitimation.¹³

Charles Tilly in the United States and Pierpaolo Donati and Nick Crossley in Europe.”
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Relational_sociology

11 | For a critique of relational sociology from the ANT perspective see McFarlane (2013). “Despite the move toward the concept of relation, relational sociology maintains a reactionary humanist social ontology acting as though social relations are limited to the relations that are obtained between humans and denying the existence of those relations that are obtained between humans and nonhumans such as animals, plants, and things” (45).

12 | For an overview of traditional organizational theory see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organizational_theory

13 | The new institutionalism, for example Scott (2001), DiMaggio/Powell (1983, 1991), Meyer/Rowan (1977), sees organizations as shaped by deeper social norms and expectations that condition, if not determine, what can be considered acceptable modes of organizing at any time. Although we will emphasize the influence of “network norms” on organizational communication, this should not be confused with the program or methods of the new institutionalism.

The view of organizations as networks that we propose relies neither on traditional rational choice theories, nor on the various forms of institutionalism that are their counterpart, nor on the assumption of “micro” and “macro” levels, nor on supposed tensions and antagonisms between “agency” and “structure,” nor on the various organicist models of organizations arising from systems theory. For actor-network theory, *social space is flat and the whole is always less than the sum of the parts*.¹⁴ Networks are scalable actors, and actors are always made up of many heterogeneous associations. In other words, the actor *is* the network. Networks, however, are not collective actors in the sense of being stable and homogeneous structures with clear boundaries. Networks should not be conceived of as simply a new name for that which traditional sociology has termed organizations. Instead, they are *processes*.¹⁵ Following actor-network theory, we will portray organizations as *processes of organizing in which heterogeneous actors, both human and non-human, are constantly negotiating and re-negotiating programs of action*.

If organizations are nothing other than the process of organizing, they cannot be “containers” in which certain well-defined activities take place. Neither can they be seen as structures emerging from individual interactions only to take on a life of their own as super actors influencing, limiting, conditioning, steering, and even determining individual actors and what they may or may not think and do.¹⁶ This does not imply that individuals are not constrained in processes of organizing. On the contrary, all actors involved are constantly attempting to constrain, that is, in the language of ANT, to “translate” and “enroll” other actors into “programs of action.”¹⁷ We will argue that constraints themselves are processes and

14 | See Latour et al. (2012).

15 | The process view of organizations has gained wide acceptance. For a discussion of process thinking in organization studies see Hernes (2008). Also see the volumes of the Oxford University Press series *Perspectives on Process Organization Studies* edited by Ann Langley and Haridimos Tsoukas, as well as the *Oxford Handbook of Process Philosophy and Organization Studies* edited by J. Helin, T. Hernes, D. Hjorth, and R. Holt, Oxford University Press (2014). Our approach here is based on ANT and not directly on process philosophy although Latour explicitly acknowledges his indebtedness to Whitehead.

16 | See Giddens’ (1984) influential theory of structuration.

17 | See Latour (1994) for a discussion of these terms.

that *organizing is indistinguishable from activities of networking*. For this reason, it would probably be more appropriate not to speak of networks at all, but only of *networking*. Nonetheless, common language usage makes it awkward not to speak of networks as well as of networking. It must also constantly be born in mind that the word “networking” is burdened with associations to well-known discussions of “social capital.” With this in mind, when we use the word “network,” we always understand this term to imply the activity of networking as it is defined by ANT. The title *Organizing Networks* should be understood in the sense of networks that are always in the process of organizing, that is, networks that are doing the organizing as well as being organized.

Networking does not stop at clear boundaries, nor does it privilege human actors. It does not limit itself to standard procedures, or conform to goals and strategies of an encompassing system. To put it bluntly, to define organizations as processes of networking as this term is defined by ANT means that there are no such “things” as organizations and that networks consist of both human and non-human actors. Of course, if we step back and take a snapshot of what we are doing at any moment, what we see may look like an organization characterized by clear boundaries, well-defined internal processes, a collective identity, and external goal-directed relations. However, this impression disappears the moment we step up close. Then what we see are actors, both human and non-human, busily “organizing,” that is, making temporary associations in all directions with all kinds of other actors. ANT proposes that we “follow the actors” instead of assuming that the social world is made up of micro-interactions on the one side and macro-structures on the other.¹⁸ However, it would be a misinterpretation of ANT as well as of the process view of organizations to assume that if one eliminates macro structures, then what is left are micro interactions and that the problem of organization theory is therefore to explain how organizations “emerge” from fleeting, local, discreet, face-to-face conversations between co-present individuals. Emphasizing process and doing away with structure does not mean that we now have only

18 | This famous methodological rule of ANT (Latour 2005: 12) is influenced by Garfinkel's Ethnomethodology and describes ANT's ethnological approach to science and technology studies. It differs from Garfinkel in including non-humans in the process of negotiating order, that is, by allowing non-humans their own “accountability.”

micro interactions from which to explain organizations. Doing away with structure does not leave us with agency alone from which structure must somehow be generated and explained.

If this were the case, the task of organization theory would be to show how macro social structures emerge from micro interactions and then turn around and condition if not determine the micro-interactions. There is admittedly much that speaks for this view. We did not invent the language we speak, the social roles we learn during socialization and the customs, norms, laws etc. of the society we live in. Where did all these conditioning factors of social life come from? If they did not exist from the beginning of the world, or were set in place by “God,” then they must have arisen from interactions of individual human agents. Once they have been created, they have the say and not the individuals. If we follow this path, we find ourselves back at a dualistic view of interacting agents on the one side and determining structures on the other. The usual solution is to assume that this is a problem similar to the problem of the chicken and the egg. Which comes first? The only answer seems to be that both somehow arise together in a mutual interdependence.¹⁹ Actor-network theory takes another course.

To say that organizations are not things but processes does not imply that organizations could exist *without* things. *Social order in general and organizations specifically are constituted by both human and non-human actors who influence each other, enter into associations, and build actor-networks.*²⁰ In this way, fleeting social encounters take on the durability and stability of things. Paradoxically, it is the non-human that makes us human. This

19 | See Giddens (1984: 2): “The basic domain of study of the social sciences, according to the theory of structuration, is neither the experience of the individual actor, nor the existence of any form of social totality, but social practices ordered across space and time. Human social activities, like some self-reproducing items in nature, are recursive. That is to say, they are not brought into being by social actors but continually recreated by them via the very means whereby they express themselves as actors. In and through their activities agents reproduce the conditions that make these activities possible.”

20 | Callon (1987) offers a succinct definition of actor-network; “reducible neither to an actor alone nor to a network [...] An actor-network is simultaneously an actor whose activity is networking heterogeneous elements and a network that is able to redefine and transform what it is made of” (93).

means that networking is neither agency nor structure. Furthermore, networking should not be understood as “interaction,” that is, as long as interaction is traditionally defined as face-to-face communication under the conditions of bodily co-presence. If networking is not interaction, neither is it structure. This is because it cannot be distinguished from the activities of organizing. If networking is neither micro-interaction, nor macro-social structure, nor a dialectical interdependence between them or a recursive loop, what is it then? Can it be that networking, as described by ANT, offers an understanding of the origin and nature of organizations that goes beyond dualisms of agency and structure, individual and society, and subject and object that characterize modern organization theory? Does actor-network theory offer the basis for a foundational theory of organizations that is not dependent on modern sociology? This is the question we will attempt to answer.

Every story must have a beginning. Where should the story of organizations begin if not with the beginning of human history? Our story begins with the question of what makes human social organization different from the behavior of our nearest animal relatives, the primates. The usual answer to this question is to point at the specifically human use of symbols, signs, and language.²¹ This traditional view puts mind, cognitive processes, and language in the center and sets the stage for assuming meaningful action is the prerogative of conscious, *intentional* speakers who can *account* for what they are doing. Indeed, ever since Max Weber it is almost a platitude to assume that what distinguishes meaningful action from animal instinct is the ability of humans to *explain* what they are doing or at least to be able to *give good reasons* for their actions. Meaningful action, as opposed to instinctual behavior, depends upon intentionality. Cognition is something that happens exclusively in big brains and is expressed in language. It is true that the so-called “linguistic turn” in the social sciences has shifted the focus away from psychological intentionality to social communication as the basis of meaningful action. Nonetheless, for the most part communication is understood to be the prerogative of human subjects and an expression of internal cognitive processes. Communication has become the social act *par excellence*, that act by which the psychological individual enters into social relations, and

21 | See for example the discussion in Fukuyama (2011), who sums up recent literature on the evolution of social and political order.

therefore the basis for theorizing organizations.²² Although it is almost impossible to conceive of the social world without communication, without giving accounts, or without “sensemaking” (Weick 1995), we will argue that making sense of what we do and coordinating our actions in society must neither be reduced to the use of linguistic signs, nor to face-to-face interactions, nor to cognitive processes inside big brains. Instead, *communication is narrative enactment, that is, the distribution of cognition among humans and non-humans in actor-networks*.

ANT proposes a non-linguistic concept of communication. Not words, but things make the difference. For ANT, as we shall see, instead of “doing things with words” (Austin 1962), what makes human social relations different from apes is that humans can “do words with things.” Latour (1994: 33) speaks of “technical mediation” to describe how things take on agency and become “actors” with “programs of action” – the usual term is “affordances (Gibson 1977) – of their own.”²³ Of course, things of all kinds have always played a role in human social relations. However, the roles that traditional social theory has allowed things to play in society have been relatively limited. Things were either commodities in trade relations, or gifts in community building.²⁴ ANT on the contrary argues that humans build their social relations, give them stability and repeatability with the help of things, artifacts, or generally speaking technology. For ANT, technical mediation is what networking is all about. This view has recently received support from the new non-Cartesian cognitive science. New directions in cognitive science view mind as “embodied,” “embedded,”

22 | See for example George Herbert Mead (1934), Garfinkel (1967), Habermas (1981), Luhmann (1995), Weick (1963, 1995), Taylor (2001b), Cooren (2010).

23 | “An affordance is a relation between an object or an environment and an organism that, through a collection of stimuli, affords the opportunity for that organism to perform an action. For example, a knob affords twisting, and perhaps pushing, while a cord affords pulling. As a relation, an affordance exhibits the possibility of some action, and is not a property of either an organism or its environment alone.” <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Affordance>

24 | Appadurai (1986). See Fiske (1991) for a more differentiated analysis of the roles things play in social relations. Regardless of what roles things are allowed to play, sociology usually grants the right to assign roles and give meaning exclusively to humans. Things are usually seen as dumb and passive and not as social actors in their own right.

“enacted,” and “extended.”²⁵ Mind, according to this view is not limited to cognitive processes inside of brains, but is “distributed” among heterogeneous actors and extended beyond the brain, and even beyond the body into the environment. Of course, the use of signs, symbols, and language are part of this. For ANT, however, things can come to have a “voice” of their own. They are not passive recipients of meaning giving acts, but participate as actors in making the associations that build social order. This is important when one asks the question of how dominant technologies, such as ICTs, are influencing social order.

After introducing artifacts as social actors via the concept of technical mediation in order to explain what “networking” means, the second episode of our story (Part 2) deals the role of communication in organizational studies. Communication has long been a major topic in organization theory. What role does communication play in understanding organizations and what difference does it make for organizational practice? This question has motivated much theoretical and empirical research in the area of management and organization science. However, only recently in the work of Weick (1979, 1995, 2005), McPhee and Zaug (2000), Taylor (1993, 2001a), Cooren (2000), and others has the traditional view of organizations as social entities, institutions, and macro-structures been placed into question. Many of these thinkers have come to understand their work as a common enterprise under the title of “communicative constitution of organizations” (CCO).²⁶ The CCO movement follows Weick in explicitly understanding organizations as the process of organizing. Process not structure takes center stage. The process from which organizations arise is communication.

CCO thinkers stand in the tradition of symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, and linguistic philosophy. From the point of view of ANT, however, the processes that CCO focuses on seem to be primarily linguistic forms of communication. All that is needed for organizations to come into existence seems to be “talking heads.” With regard to the role that non-humans can be said to play in creating social order, the

25 | See Rowlands (2010) for an overview of the new paradigm in cognitive science. Lindblom (2007) uses the insights of non-Cartesian cognitive science to give an account of social interaction.

26 | See Brumanns et al. (2014) as well as the Website/Blog (orgcom.wordpress.com) for an overview of CCO research.

various theories and models of society that are associated with CCO raise many questions. Can Weick's "sensemaking" be reduced to linguistic communication? What, according to CCO theorists, is the communicative process that constitutes organizations? Who does the communicating? What are organizations made of? Can non-humans as well as humans be considered as social actors? What do actors do, such that organizations come into being? Are organizations something other than what ANT calls actor-networks? Is sensemaking the same as networking, understood as technical mediation? Can actor-networks be considered organizations at all? How can an extended concept of communication that includes the "voices" of non-humans be understood? What exactly is the contribution of ANT to understanding the communicative constitution of organizations?

Although communication is claimed to be the key to understanding organizations, there is no consensus, even within the CCO group, on what kind of communication constitutes organizations, what organizations are, and what it means to constitute an organization. Depending on how these key concepts are defined, very different theories of organization appear, from closed systems to open networks, from macro-structures to chains of interaction episodes. Building on the idea of networking as technical mediation from ANT and the work done by the CCO movement, we will argue in Part 3 for an interpretation of these key concepts not only from the perspective of actor-network theory, but also on the basis of a reconstruction of Goffman's dramaturgical sociology of interaction and the theory of narrative.²⁷ *Our claim is that Weick's seminal concept of sensemaking is best understood as networking, provided that sensemaking includes Goffman's dramaturgical staging of social interaction as well as a theory of narrative informed by non-Cartesian cognitive science. Networking, sensemaking, staging, and narrative all refer to the same process by which organizations are constructed, maintained, deconstructed, and transformed.*

In narrative, as the founding myths and rituals of every society illustrate, all kinds of beings "speak" and "do" things. Semiotics has shown that narrative language is a language in which "actors" (this can be anything at all that plays a role in a story) do things.²⁸ In a fairy tale,

27 | For a discussion of the importance of narrative theory in the sociology of organizations, see Czarniawska (1998).

28 | It is well known that ANT is dependent on the "actant" narratology of Greimas (1983, 1987).

for example, not only human beings are actors, but also swords, crowns, mythical beings, animals, trees, stones, rivers, etc. Both human and non-human actors contribute to narrative. ANT goes beyond traditional narrative theory by extending linguistic semiotics to things. It is possible to speak of a “semiotics of things,” a topic that has found resonance in work on “material culture,” or “material semiotics.”²⁹ What has this got to do with narrative in the usual sense of telling stories? This is the question we will attempt to answer on the basis of a reinterpretation of Goffman’s dramaturgical theory of social interaction and with reference to recent developments in cognitive science. We will try to show how Goffman’s theory of interaction allows for an understanding of narrative that is not purely diegetic, that is, purely linguistic. Social interaction, and therefore, communication need not be understood as purely linguistic, but also mimetic, embodied, and extended. Following Goffman, we will argue that social interaction is best understood as “staging,” that is, bringing many different actors, both human and non-human, into play in a *local* situation that is connected to a *global* situation.

To speak of the communicative constitution of organization, therefore, is to understand communication not merely as verbal utterances, but also as *performance*, whereby performance means that “sensemaking” (Weick) is embodied, enacted, and extended in the environment. Talk is not mere talk, and, as the new non-Cartesian cognitive science shows, it is not the prerogative of heads with big brains. Narrative, we will argue, is a form of doing. It creates order by linking humans and non-humans in actor-networks. Performance is therefore more than “performative.”³⁰ It is not merely “doing things with words,” but, as could be claimed in the spirit of ANT, “doing words with things,” that is, constructing networks that are made up not only of signs, but also of hard, durable, resistant artifacts and technologies with affordances of their own. Narrative, from the perspective of non-Cartesian cognitive science, can be understood as embodied, enacted, embedded, and extended and thus distributed among non-humans as well as humans. From this perspective, narrative, which is an essential aspect of Weick’s sensemaking, can be aligned with networking as technical mediation as well as Goffman’s staging. It holds

29 | https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Material_culture and Law (2008) on the concept of “material semiotics.”

30 | See the theory of performative speech acts see Austin (1962).

the key to understanding how many different entities, both human and non-human, and their many different activities can be “coordinated” and thus brought into a kind of order that “makes sense” in the specific organizational meaning that Weick gives this term. *Making sense via enacted narrative is the kind of communication that constitutes organizations.* This argument is intended to enrich and extend the promising work done by McPhee, Zaug, Taylor, and Cooren and others on the communicative constitution of organizations.

Narrative communication understood as networking, staging, and sensemaking eliminates the traditional sociological distinction between interaction and organization. We no longer need to think of society as consisting of small interactions and large organizations. The small and the large do not constitute distinct ontological levels, but exist on a continuum. This continuum can be understood as *localizing and globalizing*. Every event and every story takes place not only within a concrete local context, but at the same time within larger frames. Stories can include other stories, just as frames can be within frames going all the way on up to a whole world. These frames, however, are not encompassing structures like matryoshka dolls, one within the other. Talking about, that is, “performing” the company, the economy, legal regulations, political processes, norms, international relations, cultures, etc. simply *adds more links, more actors, and more events to the same story*. Usually, we have neither the time nor the resources to tell the whole story. If two people share the same culture, work at the same company, participate in the same team, it is relatively easy to link the small stories about current projects up to larger ones about the reorganization of the department or the new five-year strategy should the need arise. Socialization or enculturation mean exactly this. We spend a good part of our lives in school and all of our lives in informal learning so that we already know the big stories and can spend our working time and energy on the immediate job to be done. Even if interactions appear to take place in the small dimensions of the local here and now, they are in fact both local and global. They include actors that are not present at the moment of face-to-face interaction.

For example, if we ask our team members to be present at a meeting on Monday at the office, then many different actors, settings, scripts, etc. are brought in and linked together so that everyone knows what is expected of them and will be at the right place at the right time with all the necessary information. In case there is uncertainty about why we make the request,

where we should meet, what we will be doing, etc. we can extend the story almost indefinitely. Even if we have to extend the story to global levels including the companies new strategy, new regulatory restrictions, a recent legal ruling, budget cuts, unforeseen technological developments, international treaties, new competitors, etc., we still do not suddenly jump to a higher ontological level. No matter how small or large the network and no matter how complex and long the story, it is the same world. The local and the global build a continuum. There is not a higher ontological level of macro-structures, institutions, norms, nations, or cultures. There is just a much longer and much more complicated story to be told. This does not mean, however, that there are no norms or constraints on what will be accepted as a social binding story. Globalizing involves worldviews, values, and, as we will argue in Part 4, it is influenced by those network norms that arise from the affordances of new media.

Networking, sensemaking, staging, and narrative performance move seamlessly from individual to collective actors, for example, from individual employees in the marketing department to regional managers, to the CEO, and the board of directors or the stockholders. All are involved in the same way, on the same level, in constructing, de-constructing, transforming, or maintaining networks via narrative performance. The scale of the network is variable, a company can restructure, lay-off half of the workforce, merge into another company, or be broken up into many smaller companies by order of anti-cartel laws, but the ontological level is the same. The more actors are involved, the more “collective,” “organized,” and “institutional” the network appears. We do not have a multitude of ephemeral interaction episodes on the micro level and somehow appearing above them macro social structures, despite the fact that this was thought to be a “good story” in most of modern Western sociology. What matters much more than ontological levels are, as we will argue, the affordances of the technologies that allow us to communicate. The mythical face-to-face conversation is of course still there, but it is now accompanied, mediated, and influenced by digital information and communication technologies. Today, bodily co-presence is almost inconceivable without smartphones, wearables, and other devices. Information has taken on a very different meaning and function in social organization, when it is an effect of digital networks. We will claim that this is important and plays a large role in how localizing and globalizing is done in today’s network society.

To take another example, if a representative of an insurance company knocks at the door, then the story they tell links to things that have existed long before this particular interaction that takes place here and now at our front door. When they start talking, they bring into the story things that will continue in other places long after we say we are not interested and shut the door. Without these things, the interaction could not take place, or at least, it would be a different interaction. The Life Insurance Company, the collective actor, is not limited to this particular time and place. Nonetheless, it is here doing its job. Where is the jump to a different ontological dimension of social structure? We could follow the information, the brochures, the contracts, and the people from this single representative trying to sell me an insurance policy to the local office and from there to the central office in Zurich right into the meeting of the board of directors without a gap, breach, or break. It is all one seamless web of associations and links. Furthermore, the trail does not stop here, as if one could arrive at a whole that is somehow more than the sum of the parts. What goes on at the meeting of the board of directors depends on government regulations, the strategies of competitors, risk scenarios, innovations in statistical modeling, changing demographics, urbanization, climate change, and much more. Starting from any individual actor, no matter how small and insignificant, the chain of operations extends almost infinitely in all directions. Indeed, the whole is only accessible in and through the part, which can be understood to mean that what we are tempted to refer to as “the whole” is merely an arbitrary cut-off point in the description of networks and thus always less than the sum of the parts.³¹

What these examples intend to show is that the local and the global are on the same ontological level. As Latour puts it, social space is flat.

The macro is neither ‘above’ nor ‘below’ the interactions, but added to them as another of their connections, feeding them and feeding off of them. There is no other known way to achieve changes in relative scale. For each of the ‘macro places’, the same type of questions can be raised. The answer provided by fieldwork will bring attention back to a local site and re-describe them as some disheveled arrays of connections through which vehicles (carrying types of documents, inscriptions, and materials) are traveling via some sort of conduit. [...] An actor-network is traced whenever, in the course of a study, the decision is made to replace actors

31 | See Latour on Tarde (Latour et al. 2012).

of whatever size by local and connected sites instead of ranking them into micro and macro. (2005: 177, 179)

The post office is not only that small building at the end of the street, but also all those other buildings in which letters can be sent as well as the central administration including all the transportation systems, laws, directives, plans, and authorities that contribute to making the post function. When we send a package or a letter at the local window, we may be talking to one person, but this person is authorized, dressed accordingly, behind security glass, consulting tariffs, regulations, schedules, etc. As more and more of these “actors” are brought in, the local interaction becomes extended in space and time, and, as we know today, it can even become “global.” Setting all this up so that it works and so that we can go to the small building on the corner and send a letter is best described as networking, staging, sensemaking, and narrative performance. The “big” story of the organization is only a larger, longer, more complex, and time-consuming telling of the small story that is taking place in the face-to-face conversation at the window in the local post office.

The concepts of localizing and globalizing are useful for understanding how small interactions are linked to larger, collective interactions and for explaining how networks are scalable. Insisting upon the role of non-humans in narrative performance, however, raises the question of how technologies influence the communicative constitution of organizations. Communication is not a human mental and linguistic process, but is distributed, embodied, embedded, and extended. According to the new non-Cartesian cognitive science, the environment is a constitutive part of the cognitive process.³² The kind of sense that can be made depends on the kind of artifacts and technologies that make up the environment. The very idea of networking implies that non-humans, that is, artifacts and technologies play decisive roles in the communicative constitution of organizations. If narrative performance is a distributed form of communication involving not only humans, but also non-humans, what effects do the affordances of dominant technologies have on the kinds of stories that can be told and consequently on the kinds of organizations

32 | Cf. Rowlands (2010), Clark (2008), Clark/Chalmers (1998), Gibson (1977), Hutchins (1995), Noë (2004), Shapiro (2004), Thompson (2007), Wheeler (2008, 2010).

that can successfully be set up? What makes a narrative performance powerful and convincing? What kind of narrative performance can constitute an organization in today's global network society? What do these organizations look like? These questions lead to issues raised not only by CCO thinkers, but also by new institutionalism's concern for the influence of cultural and historical "norms" and "values." Not any story at all that can be told will "make sense" and be successfully "stageable," and thus able to constitute social order. What makes certain stories constitutive of organization and others not? We will argue in Part 4 that there are indeed norms influencing or conditioning what stories and what kinds of sensemaking constitute social order and organizations. However, these norms are not to be found where the new institutionalism looks for them, that is, in cognitive constraints that arise from culture. Instead, norms arise from the conditions of successful networking. We refer to these conditions, which depend on the affordances of the technologies that we are linked up to, as *network norms*. In Part 4, we turn to the question of how any communication in today's world is conditioned by the affordances of digital information and communication technologies. The main actor in this episode is *new media*.

The affordances of digital information and communication technologies are considered by many to be nothing short of revolutionary.³³ Just as the printing press created new forms of life, labor, and organizing in all areas, so too new digital media are transforming every aspect of society. Networked organizations are more and more taking the place of traditional organizations. Networks no longer appear as a more or less interesting exception to markets and hierarchies. The global network society is characterized by a "structural transformation" (Castells 1996) in which "technology does not determine society it is society" (Castells 2005, 3). The new media revolution puts us in the position to appreciate the potential of network models of organizing, both theoretically and heuristically. Our claim is that narrative performance is constitutive of organizations in today's world when informed by the affordances of new media. The affordances of new media translate and enroll communicative action into new norms. These can be called "network norms" (Krieger/Belliger 2014).

33 | https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_Revolution

On the basis of new media studies, we will argue that the network norms guiding communication can be said to be connectivity, flow, communication, participation, transparency, authenticity, and flexibility. After the new media revolution, *organizing appears explicitly as networking*. The “socio-sphere” opened up by networking makes it increasingly difficult to maintain even the appearance of macro-structures, institutions, and closed systems. Furthermore, it makes hierarchies increasingly inefficient, since the connectivity of all nodes in the network and the flow of information can no longer be easily controlled. Organizing according to network norms results in forms of social order that do not fit within the descriptions of traditional organizations. The various new theories of organization that have become known under titles such as “chaotic,” “fractal,” “holocratic,” “adhocracy,” “organization 2.0,” and “networked” support this claim. The communicative constitution of organizations that is influenced by the affordances of new media favor organizations that are decentralized, non-hierarchical, self-organized, flexible, innovative, transparent, connected, and collaborative. Organizing in this way demands “pattern breaking” (Wüthrich et al. 2009; Kaduk et al. 2015) management practices.

In the final episode, Part 5, we turn to concrete examples of what organizing networks can mean for management and decision-making in business, education, healthcare, and civil society. We will test the heuristic value of the theoretical framework that has been developed in the previous chapters by a description of how communication guided by network norms is changing organizing in various areas of society. Where once educational organizations, businesses, healthcare organizations and so on were modeled as closed systems with clear boundaries, functional roles, and standard processes, we are more and more seeing open, flexible, non-hierarchical networks. Networks take on many forms and involve many different kinds of actors. In education, for example, personal learning environments seamlessly link up formal schooling with informal workplace learning, learning on demand, social learning, and life-long learning. In business, networked organizations, global projects, and new forms of entrepreneurship are emerging. In healthcare, e-patients, self-trackers, health 2.0, and connected healthcare are changing the very meaning of healthcare and contributing to public health and medical research in new ways. New social movements and a networked, global civil society are challenging political organizations. These changes

confront managers and decision-makers with new questions. What are the great narratives of education, healthcare, business, citizenship, etc. in a global network society? How is networked organizing changing society? Can organizing in today's global network society best be described as networking in the sense of ANT? Are traditional institutions becoming smart networks characterized by network norms and pattern-breaking management practices? It is certainly too early to answer these questions definitively. Nevertheless, it is our hope that the theoretical perspective we attempt to sketch out here has sufficient heuristic value to inspire empirical research and suggest how surprising and useful answers could be discovered.