the sociological quarterly
Official Journal of the Midwest Sociological Society

doi: 10.1111/tsq.12063 The Sociological Quarterly ISSN 0038-0253

MEASURING THE GRASSROOTS: Puzzles of Cultivating the Grassroots from the Top Down

Nina Eliasoph*
University of Southern California

Does a participatory, open-ended organizational format inspire creativity and draw on participants' local knowledge? Many nonprofits operate under this assumption, and many of their financial sponsors agree, and therefore demand precise accounts documenting the nonprofits' "participatory" formats. In the U.S. youth civic engagement projects described here, the practice of accounting itself had an effect, regardless of funders' goals. Volunteers devoted more time to documenting just how participatory, open-ended and grassroots they were than they devoted to any other topic. Organizers strenuously tried to avert attention from accounting's importance, but could not avoid it. Volunteers could not reflect on the accounting process, or on the political questions behind it; knowledge of it became a repressed institutional intuition.

> "It's open and undefined, up to you to decide whatever." (Rob, an adult organizer of youth civic engagement projects at a meeting of a youth civic engagement project, fielding youth volunteers' questions about how they should plan the city's annual youth-led Martin Luther King Day celebration)

> "If you work at a food pantry for your service project, the key to it all is to ask, 'why there is hunger and what can our society do about it?'" (Jonathan, an organizer of youth civic engagement projects, discussing volunteering with fellow adult organizers)

Rob, in the first quote, wanted to summon the spirits of 1960s activists and their battle cries like "Be realistic; demand the impossible!" and "All power to the imagination!" Organizers of the youth civic engagement projects in a midsized city in the Midwestern region of the United States often began discussions by asking youth volunteers (in very slightly varied words from one meeting to the next), "Imagine you have a magic wand. What would you do to help your community?" They assumed that in the youth groups, like in those earlier activists' groups, a combination of free-ranging discussion, equality among members, camaraderie instead of competition, and emotional bonds would ignite members' creativity, inspiration, and social imaginations (Epstein 1991; Lichterman 1996; Polletta 2006). Like other adult organizers, Jonathan wanted to empower youth volunteers, and he assumed that the participatory, open-ended, "undefined, up to you to decide whatever" "organizational form" (Clemens 1997) would be better than a more top-down alternative.

*Direct all correspondence to Nina Eliasoph, Sociology, USC, HSH 311, 851 Downey Way, Los Angeles, CA 90089; e-mail: eliasoph@usc.edu

This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs License, which permits use and distribution in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, the use is non-commercial and no modifications or adaptations are made.

Funders and other sponsors agreed. So they demanded transparent documentation to prove that there was real grassroots participatory empowerment in these projects. Government agencies, voters, nonprofit funders, potential charitable donors, college admissions committees that would look at kids' resumes for evidence of freely chosen voluntary activity, and other current and future audiences needed clear evidence of such voluntary inspiration. The accounts had to be in easily digestible formats so that these multiple, distant, hurried audiences could assess them quickly: in numbers of hours spent volunteering, number of people served, number of volunteers involved, tons of food delivered to the needy. So, measuring evidence of enthusiastic grassroots participation was crucial. In fact, *more time in the youth volunteer meetings was devoted to the question of how to measure the hours spent volunteering than to any other question*.

In advocating participatory grassroots empowerment, sponsors clearly intended to avoid bureaucratic, expert-driven, top-down decision making. Nonetheless, the specific activity of accounting itself, *regardless of what the accounts were supposed to demonstrate*, was, itself, the most important and time-consuming activities of these civic projects. Social researchers recently have generated fascinating examinations of "the audit culture" (Strathern 2000), "the audit society" (Power 1997), "commensuration" (Stevens and Espelande 2008; Sauder and Espelande 2009), and similar concepts that capture the tensions between the juicy, mysterious, ambiguous world of lived experience and organizations' need for abstract documentation for distant audiences. So far, these concepts have not followed people in nonprofits and nongovernment organizations (NGOs) to see how they manage to accomplish their accounting in everyday interaction, in organizations that are supposed to incite grassroots empowerment. Examining their mundane process as it unfolds might tell us what it is about the activity of accounting that makes it undermine—or possibly aid—grassroots participation in empowerment projects. How, if at all, does the demand for accounting kill the ideal of empowerment? Are some aspects of accounting more problematic than others? Does the need for accounting ever foster the ideals of empowerment? To begin to answer these questions, we have to examine what participants have to do and say together on an everyday basis to produce their organizations' accounts. We have to understand the labor process involved in accounting.

Like the youth civic engagement projects described here, many organizations around the world require abundant, transparent documentation of participation, inspiration and localness. Drawing on this case, this article will show one set of *dilemmas* that might typically arise, and typical *organizational solutions* that organizers tinkered together, when trying to cultivate grassroots participation from the top down: the tensions involved in documenting something that would be possibly ineffable and rooted in unique individuals and locales; that is, the political transformation that organizers like Jonathan hoped to summon.

One dilemma was that organizers often needed to secure funding before youth volunteers joined, and funders often prescribed a general theme for the funding, such as arts promotion or tobacco prevention. A frequent solution involved pretending that youth volunteers had created projects themselves that in fact the adult organizers had

already created, long before the youth volunteers joined the group. As one adult organizer said to other adults, describing how youth would come to feel like leaders (an important word in these organizations), "If it's arts, we'll get them to want to do an arts project; if it's tobacco prevention, we'll get them to think up a tobacco prevention project." Another dilemma was that the organizations had to produce easily measurable and justifiable outcomes quickly, but wanted deep personal transformation. A widespread solution was to develop projects that required no discussion, and were so indisputably good, organizers called them "no-brainers," such as gathering food for the needy. A third potential dilemma concerned the political origins of their organizations. They existed partly through policymakers' decisions to fund them, but discussing this could have been divisive and partisan. Organizers' solution was simply to ignore conflict, even when enlisting the youth volunteers to work on campaigns that potentially involved political disagreement. Mainly, this meant a yearly trip to city hall once a year, to ask for increased funding for the youth programs themselves. While this might look like "politics," many scholars say that volunteers come to understand the specifically "political" aspect of an activity only when they notice conflict (Boyte 2004; Hamidi 2006; Baizerman, Velure Roholt, and Hildreth 2008).

What all three organizational solutions shared was an absence of discussion of anything except logistics. Both the no-brainer and the yearly trip to city hall disconnected empowerment from political reflection. Jonathan, in the quote at the top, suggested asking a big question about the roots of hunger, but he did not continue, to try to answer it. In these youth civic engagement projects, no one ever did.

These ways of reconciling the dilemmas of accounting made good organizational sense, although they satisfied nobody except the many sponsors. The unintended result of this silence was an unspoken definition of goodness: The measure of a good project was almost always whether it was easy to document to the multiple, distant, hurried funders, or would in some other way yield resources for the youth projects.

And yet, despite the lack of political discussion, some youth volunteers surreptitiously developed what we can call an institutional intuition, secretly guessing what realistically kept their projects afloat: funding and counting and documenting for the purpose of persuading donors. Avoiding political discussion required ignoring the very conditions of the projects' existence. If the projects had money, it was because government agencies, private donors, and NGOs funded them, instead of funding something else. If the projects lacked money, it was because government agencies, private donors, and NGOs funded something else, instead of them. Without being guided through any conscious reflection, volunteers nonetheless often overheard organizers making plans for their organization's survival, and glimpsed some sort of connection between their programs and broader political decision making that way. While adults invited youth volunteers to imagine a magic wand, the youth volunteers constantly scanned the institutional horizon, trying to guess what might be realistically possible. Even if they could not put these intuitions into words, they drew on it, as a kind of organizational know-how, a practice that any competent member needed, to keep the organization afloat.[1]

Through all this overhearing and intuiting, and despite many organizers' dreams, youth volunteers heard the programs' implicit answer to the question of hunger and homelessness. It was, implicitly, that volunteers like themselves should come to the rescue. That was the only solution that anyone entertained, even though most organizers and many youth volunteers did not consider it to be a good one. Youth volunteers heard that they were not only members, but were, themselves, symbols of grassroots local engagement as well. Their very presence was the solution that the sponsors would most carefully measure. Talking about their volunteering in terms of accounting was taboo when organizers were in front of the youth volunteers, but necessary when the organizers were with each other; it was hard to keep the two scenes separate though, and that was where the interesting action happened. It was through this inadvertent blending that youth volunteers gained their intuitions.

DATA AND METHODS

This article draws on an ethnographic study of youth civic engagement projects, in which youth from socially diverse backgrounds met to plan service projects, in a city pseudonymously named Snowy Prairie.[2] Each project involved monthly evening meetings for several months, and I attended four and a half years' worth of such meetings, from 1998 to 2004, with a year's absence in 2001 to 2002.

They involved an incredibly complicated mix of sponsors and people. For example, each autumn, the civic projects started planning the city's Martin Luther King Day event for January. Funding for the celebration and the adults who coordinated youth volunteers came partly from a federal grant and partly from local government and nonprofit sources. After Martin Luther King Day, some of the youth volunteers who organized the celebration stayed together to plan spring service projects. Some of the same adult organizers accompanied them, along with some different adults who had different funding sources, or who worked as adult volunteers. One adult might shift from government funding to nonprofit funding to unpaid volunteer work with the youth groups, all in the course of a year. At any one time, a youth volunteer could be involved in one or two such projects.

Not all organizers were as eager to make youth discuss politics as Jonathan was. In fact, most were like one who said she was not "into politics." But that does not account for the absence of thoughtful discussion about the social problems that the groups addressed. All organizers said they wanted to "change the culture," and none wanted just "random acts of service," as one sarcastically described the kind of project they all hoped to avoid.

The youth volunteers attended meetings during the school year, but adults met year round to plan those meetings and get grants for them. Two distinct streams of youth volunteers participated in these civic engagement projects. Disadvantaged youth volunteers streamed in from afterschool programs that were funded partly as "prevention programs" for "at-risk youth." After their afterschool programs ended for the day, organizers drove them to the civic projects' evening meetings, having managed to convince

them that they might have fun attending. The relatively affluent youth volunteers, in contrast, came to the civic projects in their own cars, often after a flurry of other afterschool enrichment activities. Like many university-bound youth in the United States, this second type of youth volunteered partly for the purpose of puffing up a resume for college applications (in the United States, unlike other countries, a university education is expensive and not a right; the process of application, especially if one needs financial aid, involves writing an essay touting one's exceptional dedication to noble extracurricular activities).

I attended these evening meetings, youth subcommittee meetings, events like Martin Luther King Day, and workshops and meetings for the adult organizers. Working as a participant–observer meant attending all these meetings, entering data about youth volunteering into a database that kept track of where and when local teens volunteered, deciphering grant forms, attending parties and dances, and volunteering alongside kids and adults in various youth-led service projects, such as gathering food for the homeless and decorating the Pediatric Hospital. The study of the civic engagement projects was part of a larger study, that included the afterschool programs and summer camps, on which I spent an average of about six hours a week for four and a half years. In this article, I only report on the youth civic engagement meetings, events and service activities, and the adults' separate meetings to oversee and fund the youth projects. This subset of the research took about four hours a week.

Like quantitative data, ethnographic data is separable from published uses of it. The uncoded field notes are the raw data on which I draw for this article. Quotes in this article from the field are from those field notes. Information (such as identifying features of a speaker) that was not in the original notes is set off in brackets. The book that also draws on these field notes, *Making Volunteers*, makes an expansive argument about the crisscrossed missions of organizations I called "empowerment projects," including missions that conflict for reasons that have little to do with documentation. The book called those tangled missions "empowerment talk" (Eliasoph 2011). This article focuses on one subset of that larger knot of tangled missions: the knot involving the labor that goes into producing documentation.

At each step then, even the first step of deciding what research sites to study, there was a back and forth between data collection and analysis (Glaser and Strauss 1967). I took notes after each visit to the field, reporting on what I saw and heard, and writing interpretations in a different font so I could keep them analytically separate from simple observations. The interpretations were an ongoing dialogue with other research on and theories of civic engagement, as well as my feelings as impressions. These interpretations steered my further research away from the initial questions. For example, initially, I varied the organizations by sector, expecting sectoral distinctions between government-funded and nonprofit to be important, but then I realized that this distinction did not matter for my questions, since they had such similar kinds of short-term grants with similar demands for documentation of grassroots participation. Eventually, through the "constant comparative method," I focused on how the organizations resolved tensions between their multiple missions, tied this to a larger

question about neoliberal organizational forms, and suggested how the approach developed in that book could be useful for examining actors' everyday methods of smoothing out built-in tensions in other kinds of organizations as well (Eliasoph and Lo 2010).

THE ACTIVITY OF ACCOUNTING IN ORGANIZATIONS THAT MUST PROVE HOW GRASSROOTS THEY ARE

The specter of the bureaucrat haunted Snowy Prairie organizers. A story they told over and over recounted the arrogant stupidity of the so-called experts in the mid-20th century who, in the name of slum removal, bulldozed down Snowy Prairie's quaint, slightly ramshackle neighborhoods to build impersonal housing projects, parking lots, wide thoroughfares and a hospital. Decisions made locally were considered better than those made from above. Experts and bureaucrats, in this view, should not override local folks' grassroots wisdom that is gained from deep familiarity with a unique place, and the experiences of the unique people in it.

For the past two decades or so, a panacea to the problems of arrogant experts and rigid bureaucracies, the world over, has been grassroots civic engagement. Through it, better ideas and feelings are said to arise, as locally rooted civic participants engage in open-ended, free-flowing conversation, creatively discussing new solutions to long-standing social problems.[3] Each unique participant is supposed to draw on a deep well of knowledge that is local, individual, embodied, not abstract. But remember: In the youth projects, the seemingly embodied knowledge had to be easy to document and quantify for multiple, distant, hurried sponsors.

With their hope of harnessing the creativity and passion of radical social movements plus the local comfort and deep familiarity of grassroots groups, and trying to muster them in government agencies, for-profit firms, and nonprofit organizations, Snowy Prairie's organizers resemble many leaders around the world, in the market, state, and civic sectors alike (Rose 1989; Boltanski and Chiapello 1991; Barker 1993; Forester 1999; Harvey 2007; Adler, Kwon, and Heckscher 2008; Kameo 2009; Talpin 2011; Charles 2012; Lee forthcoming).

If Jonathan had succeeded, participants would have had to work hard to translate the raw, wordless feelings into publicly available accounts, and vice versa. If they had succeeded in summoning the passions of radical activists, it could have been emotionally risky (Polletta 2006; Summers Effler 2010). If they had succeeded in summoning feelings of local familiarity and attachment to unique people and places in the local neighborhood, we could expect a struggle when they had to make those wordless, deep feelings of familiarity public (Breviglieri 2007; Thévenot 2007). I witnessed no such struggles to put wordless feelings into words. However, giving a standardized *performance* of such feelings was important. The organizations had to display evidence of grassroots participation; ideas for community service had to seem grassroots and spontaneous, but the result immediately had to be good publicity for the organizations. As researchers and observers, then, we should, before trying to ferret out any original

feelings that may have existed before the performance, examine participants' everyday methods of producing the performance[4] of grassroots, authentic empowerment.

Many scholars have fruitfully used theater metaphors to analyze the ways that people in organizations have to package and repackage their ideas and feelings. When, for example, people try to call public attention to a social problem, each "audience" expects different language, props, ways of measuring the problem, and of measuring success (Burke 1969; Gusfield 1980). The personal, heartbreaking emotional performances that anti-child sex abuse activists put on for an audience of fellow citizens, for example, are inappropriate to perform in courts, where actors have to perform more rational-sounding scripts (Whittier 2001). Both performances display real feelings, but different ones for different audiences. Packaging and repackaging emotions and ideas for various audiences' consumption is nothing special to empowerment projects.

Whether describing social movements, businesses, government agencies or NGOs, scholars have argued that organizations must put on a convincing performance for external audiences that differs from what participants say and do when members are just with each other, behind the scenes (Snow and Benford 1988; Meyer and Rowan 1991). Scholars often assume that there is a clash between "mandates" that financial sponsors and other external supporters impose from the outside, and "missions" that members of the organization really believe in and care about (Minkoff and Powell 2006). The image in organizational theory is that people in an organization have to "decouple" what they actually do in practice from what external judges say they should do; in social movements studies, a somewhat parallel idea is that activist groups "frame" what they do in a way that will attract constituents, even if it does not entirely match their own internal goals.[5]

What is special in the youth projects, then, is that there were mismatching goals: The internal participants and the external sponsors agreed on the goals, but there still was a clash between the activity of accounting and the activity of fostering local, free-flowing, open-ended dialogue. Remember, in the civic projects' meetings, participants devoted more time to the process of accounting than to any other topic. Therefore, we need to examine the *production process of the various performances*. In a study of university efforts to boost their rankings in *US News and World Report*, Michael Sauder and Wendy Espelande (2009) show that while university administrators might initially disagree with the measures of a university's quality, they have to act as if they agree. They have to make changes in their university that will boost its rankings, and the more they have to provide evidence of quality that match the ranking system's requirements, the more they have to act as if the evidence is morally compelling, until they start, perhaps, to believe that it is (Sauder and Espelande 2009).

In this approach, the accounting, itself, is a "practice, one that is intrinsic to, and constitutive of, social relations, rather than derivative or secondary" (Miller 1994; see also Krause 2010). It is an activity that takes time and effort, and that gives meaning to people's relationships, perhaps regardless of the abstract values that propel the accounting (Stevens and Espelande 2008; Fourcade 2010). In the empowerment projects described in this article, the *practice* of accounting itself shapes the organization,

regardless of the funders' demands, regardless of what the accounting is supposed to show, regardless of funders' values or anyone else's values—even if the accounting is supposed to account for how unbureaucratic the organization is. Participants had to learn very precise *methods* of keeping empowerment talk afloat in everyday conversation, while also conducting the needed accounting. Learning these methods—that is, learning when and how to reveal or hide knowledge of the accounting—*is* what participants had to master in order to be competent participants.

Studies of the audit society do not typically show everyday interaction inside empowerment projects, to see how people accomplish this feat, and with what consequences. Studies that examine international NGOs perhaps come closest, although not always with a direct focus on the audit society literature. Some show with terrifying clarity how the long arm of the account for distant audiences shapes participants' "subjectivities," and the need to please donors seeps into actors' very sense of self. For example, young Malawian women postpone marriage, with hopes of a good career in an international NGO, but then, the "bright future" does not materialize, and they are too old to be considered marriageable (Frye 2012; see also Swidler and Watkins 2008; Watkins, Hannan, and Swidler 2012). My question is less about inner selves and more of a "how" question: How do participants both hide and reveal their constant need for accounting, so that it does not seem to contaminate their efforts at invoking the magic wand of empowerment? What are the consequences of this particular set of organizational solutions to this predicament? Could there be alternate solutions?

INSPIRATION, CREATIVITY, AND DOCUMENTATION FOR MULTIPLE, DISTANT, HURRIED PUBLICS

Measurable . . . Real Changes

Organizers hoped that volunteers would voluntarily take the risk of experiencing powerful, inexpressible, spiritual inspiration and transformation. That is one piece of the radical, antibureaucratic imagination that empowerment projects hope to invoke. But the reality was different: Participation was rarely voluntary and never risky. For example, many local parents sent their teens to a community service workshop that took place on a school holiday because they wanted a safe place for their kids on a day that was not a holiday in most workplaces. Adult speakers urgently worked to inspire the sleepy, unshowered teens. Urgently pacing the stage, dramatically tossing his dreadlocks, one adult proclaimed,

> Leadership [. . .] It means taking risks, joy *and* pain, risking getting lost. You have to know what it is to be lost. How many of you have been lost?
>
> [enthusiastic shouting from the audience, as if at a prayer revival meeting]
>
> So you know how it is to be lost. Leadership: It's failing. Failing every day . . . Leadership: It's sharing—some days it feels like give, give give . . . it's a spirit that moves inside you. Nobody can see it, but you know it's there.

Moved at this image of universal respect and mystery, I found myself quietly humming a gospel song: "I'm gonna pray till the spirit moves in my heart." Taking emotional risks and getting lost is part of the vision of participatory democracy.

But the next workshop I attended in this half-day event was all about how to find easy projects and how to document them. Cleaning a roadside was an example of a good project: "It's a mile stretch, you go 3–4 times a year; it's not too bad," and you do not have to do it in the winter." The youth volunteers who suggested road cleanups to their peers assumed that someone was overseeing it all, counting miles, times, and temperatures, and that it should be easy. These projects had to be open and appetizing to all youth, not just those who wanted to take risks. They especially had to be alluring to "at-risk" youth; many "prevention program" grants served them. Those disadvantaged youth already faced risks and challenges; organizers guessed that they would not welcome yet more challenges. Earnest organizers wanted to keep those kids coming, and needed grant money to finance the aid they would give these needy youth.

So, applying for grants was important. At one typical meeting, an adult organizer, Rob, asked whether to include a food pantry in a grant he was writing. Another said that food is always a popular issue among youth. A third agreed that Rob should include the food pantry, since food fulfills a "real, measurable need." The possibility of accounting made some project imaginable and rendered others invisible.

> Rob read aloud from the grant guidelines: "We expect well-designed activities that meet compelling community needs and lead to measurable outcomes and impact."
>
> Sheila: We need to beef this part up.
>
> Rob adds: To say what service projects people actually did.
>
> Sheila: Do we need to get feedback from recipients? And from students: "Did this actually change you in any way?"
>
> Emily: Yeah, like impacts based on spirit? Like *"Did it affect your spirit?"*
>
> Sheila: Yeah, like "Did it change anything for you?"

Organizers then discussed an exceptional girl who stopped feeling suicidal when she started volunteering. This was the kind of "effect" that fueled adults' zeal, but they recognized that effects like those were hard to measure. At another meeting, one adult parodied a grant application question: "Because you ate pizza and got to socialize on Friday night, do you feel better about . . . yourself?" She noted, "The effect is more intangible." While organizers and funders alike agreed on goals, organizers recognized that measuring it neatly in quarterly intervals was impossible. Nonetheless, the relentless distinction that actors made, in practice, was only between easily measurable versus immeasurable.

And so, in the discussion of the grant application involving the food pantry, described earlier, the group of adult organizers concluded that the project had to accomplish something easily measurable, not "effects on the spirit":

Rob said that he did not think that that is what the grant application meant, adding, "They want something measurable."

Roberta: We could say, "We delivered a ton of food for 70 families, painted the YMCA Annex."

Rob: I think that's what they mean: *real changes* [this was a reference to Emily's question about "impacts based on spirit," which were, he unintentionally implied, not as real].

Erin: But what could we say: "We read to seniors at senior centers?" That sounds kind of vague.

Rob: I don't know what kids think, but I think that the association of food with service makes sense. Do you think kids would want to keep the focus on hunger?

Sheila: I'm guessing that hunger comes up every year.

Erin: Definitely!

By the end of the meeting, Rob read a draft of that section of the application:

"Youth will read to 1,000 people. Collect two thousand pounds of food." These are real—*graspable*—by participants, and by media.

Organizers and funders alike reviled old, frozen, rigid bureaucracies for doing the same thing over and over. These projects suffered the opposite malady. Short-term funding made accounting, fund-raising, and publicity aimed at fund-raising constant.

Because of this relentless need for accounting, meetings among youth volunteers devoted more time to questions of measurement than to all other topics combined. The following discussion was typical. Organizers of a county- and NGO-sponsored service club had to design and distribute forms documenting the hours that youth volunteers had completed for the "President's 100 Hour Challenge," a national award for youth who complete 100 hours of volunteer work.

Dulce, an adult volunteer, started the discussion, saying, "A question we've been racking our brains about is how to keep track of the one hundred hours . . . so that at the end of the year we can have a record."

Other adults asked, in the next minutes offered: "Would you remember to send it in?" "What if you got a reminder?" "Or gave it to your group leader and they could send them all at once?" One said, "Or if you forgot to get it signed, you could get a parent to sign." Another asked about copying and pay for postage.

Dulce: Then, what are your thoughts–would you fill it out? Our idea was to get you to reflect on your service. Would that just be an added burden?"

A teen volunteer suggested, "You could drop off huge piles in grocery stores, post offices–people could just pick them up."

The Sociological Quarterly **55** (2014) 467–492 © 2014 The Author. The Sociological Quarterly published by Wiley Periodicals, Inc. on behalf of Midwest Sociological Society

> An adult said, "If I were a young person, I'd get a pile of sheets to mail in, because everyone was doing it, but then the next week I'd forget about it [. . .]

Next was a back-and-forth about whether there would be "recognition" ceremonies for volunteers who did some but not all of the 100 hours.

Teens got volunteer hours credit for entering the data about volunteering. Teens "got volunteer hours" for *attending meetings deciding how to count volunteer hours*. If the work was unpleasant, adults let teens count the hours double; they got eight hours' credit for cleaning up after a street fair even though they had only worked four, "because," said the adult organizer, "it was crappy, to put it politely." Since some college scholarships also require volunteer work, some kids got volunteer-hour credit in two different programs at once.

All this time and effort spent on documentation unintentionally but clearly showed youth volunteers what mattered in practice. From these frequent discussions, participants developed an institutional intuition about how their organizations survived.

Temporal Leapfrog

Beyond the problems involved in providing measurable effects, there were temporal mismatches between the goal of empowerment and the need for accounting. They anticipated the future in different ways (Tavory and Eliasoph 2014). In theory, participatory democracy in an organization that is "open and undefined" breeds creativity and leadership. In practice, planning and paying for spontaneous participation was a game that required getting funding first, and *then* getting participants, who would follow the funding, to dream up projects that would go with the funding. Why? Often, grant applications were due before the youth volunteers—whom organizers dubbed "leaders"—arrived in the group. It was like a game of leapfrog: Volunteers were supposed to jump over the adults into the leadership position.

Organizers' typical solution was to figure out a way to plant the idea in youth volunteers' heads to make them feel as if they themselves had planned it. This sequence would begin with organizers reading a grant application—for hunger prevention, against tobacco use, for health promotion, or for literacy promotion, for example. In an early August meeting, for example, adults planned youth service projects to "showcase youth leadership," and "to showcase all the good work our kids are doing." But they had to start planning these projects before any of the youth arrived at the school year's beginning. Examples that adults had given included a food drive, a mitten drive, or a toy drive and visiting a nursing home or a homeless shelter.

> A city official: The original idea was to affect the city and county budgets that are drawn up in the fall, to shine a light on all the good things we *could be doing if we had money*.

> One youth worker: Let's not forget the county supervisors [regional elected officials, in charge of some of the purse-strings for these programs]. We should do something for them, let them know kids appreciate the money, and that they want them to "up"

> it next year. We could even go to a County Board meeting—do they have one that week? We could give them a "thank you note"—a note of appreciation.
>
> [more discussion of possible activities for kids to do that week]
>
> Darrell (a minister of a fundamentalist black church's youth program, that gets government money): This week is to show that we're doing these things, that kids are not out on the street, or causing trouble, that we need more money. That's what we're ultimately doing this for. Maybe we could get police records on lower youth crime that week, because youth are busy doing community service.
>
> [later that meeting] Georgia, a magenta-haired youth worker, dressed in shredded black clothes and boots: I'm wary of planning everything for people who are not at the table [her teens who would not start coming to meetings till school reopened in September] because it's not realistic.
>
> Another youth worker: When you plan like that and they weren't there, and then you say, "Oh, but it was such a good idea!" but it wasn't *their* idea.

Participants had to sail with the winds. If a program lost its grant to combat tobacco, racism, homelessness, or gangs, organizers quickly had to apply for another grant on another theme—promoting music, nutrition, or literacy.

Inspiration had to happen quickly and on schedule. Youth leaders followed the adult organizers, who followed the money. An old 1960s community activist turned city official had led a workshop earlier that year to teach adult organizers that potential supporters—city, county and state agencies, local NGOs, and voters—all operated on different calendars and expected different measures of success. Many were like the one described above, in which the application had to precede the youth volunteers. And youth volunteers knew that if they did not follow the adults who were following the money, their events would take place in dreary school cafeterias instead of expensive places like the city's airy, fancy conference center. In these financial and temporal conditions, it would be hard to hand decision making over to youth, to be "open and undefined, up to you to decide whatever."

In their quest to make youth feel like empowered leaders, organizers tried to hide the fact that they themselves had often had to secure the funding in advance. To see how organizers accomplished this temporal prestidigitation, we can return to the sequence that began with the Martin Luther King Day planning committee's meeting in August, before any of the youth "leaders" had arrived. When the school year started, a month later, youth participants joined the committee. At its first meeting, Rob, an adult organizer, suggested forming a committee to collect food, but no one took up his suggestion. So, he had to suggest that *he join* the committee, which the youth leaders had not (yet) formed!

> I'd like to join a volunteer committee, specifically, to try a food drive, to get a ton of food to food pantries and homeless shelters, Sundale kids could go to the Walmart

> there, Snowy Prairie kids could go to Food-a-rama, I'd like to work on that. If any of you wanna work with—[he paused, and I actually held my breath, because I had been consciously asking myself if he would say "with *me*," because that was *exactly* what he could *not* say—it would make him seem to be leading—so he left out the word "me" and rearranged the sentence]—want to work on that, I'd like to join.

No youth participants joined him. Only two adults joined Rob's group, in which they discussed how to encourage youth volunteers to lead their committee.

By the next meeting, however, youth volunteers had taken up his suggestion, acting as if they themselves had thought of it. One youth volunteer reported to the meeting:

> They [she was referring to the youth-led Martin Luther King committee, of which she was a part, yet she called it "they"] are going to organize volunteer projects such as food drives at grocery stores.

Samia was one of the underprivileged youth volunteers who came to the evening civic engagement meetings with the other members of her free afterschool program. When publicizing any project, adults made a point of calling it "youth-led," and Samia was one of those leaders. She knew not to say that it was an adult, not a youth member, who had decided to conduct the food drive. She managed to juggle the mismatched temporalities so they seemed to match.

THE NO-BRAINER AND THE POLITICAL MACHINE

To involve many volunteers quickly, organizers treated open-ended political conversation among volunteers as unnecessary. The best kind of project for this purpose was what organizers called the "no-brainer." No humane person could disagree about picking up litter, gathering food for the hungry, or mittens for the cold. Another kind of project that organizers treated as not requiring open-ended conversation involved enlisting volunteers to petition city hall for more funding for the youth projects, in a variation on "machine politics" (Marwell 2004): Instead of an individual getting elected by offering kickbacks to supporters, as in a traditional political machine, a nonprofit social service organization rallies its clients to demand funding for itself. Both no-brainer and the political machine worked by avoiding political questioning and dialogue.

The No-Brainer; Changing the World One X at a Time

Let's start with the no-brainers: While gathering food for the hungry, I asked two youth volunteers if recipients would be able to cook it; if they were homeless, or staying in a shelter; where the food would go; and other questions about recipients' lives and needs. None knew the answers. Not really knowing what recipients would need, we decided to ask shoppers for expensive items like tampons and toilet paper.

This turned out to be a mistake. When the adult organizer returned, we learned that she did not know answers to any of our questions except, she said, "*What I do know is that it will get measured by weight.*" The question of how to measure the volunteer work was supreme; neither the participants nor the organizer learned about the recipients' lives.

Another, similar project involved bringing canned food to donate to food pantries at Halloween time. At one meeting, Rob, the adult organizer who had, in the scenario just portrayed above, tried to interest volunteers in a food project, did it again here. "It's called Trick or Treat so Others Can Eat," he said. "You gather food to give to a food pantry or homeless shelter." No youth volunteers took the suggestion, so, at the next meeting, Rob made it again. Again, youth volunteers asked what it was. One answered that it was like UNICEF (American kids often gather coins for UNICEF when they go trick-or-treating for candy at Halloween). The second organizer again chimed in, as if she were agreeing with the idea that it was like UNICEF, saying, "Yeah, like you bring a can o' tuna."

However, bringing a can of tuna differs from collecting coins for UNICEF in significant ways. Consider this quote, highlighted on a lesson plan for teachers, to accompany Halloween UNICEF boxes that teachers can hand out. This lesson is on "how nutrition is a human right": "The world produces enough food to feed every man, woman, and child on Earth. Hunger and malnutrition therefore are not due to lack of food alone, but are also the consequences of poverty, inequality, and misplaced priorities" (UNICEF 2013). The local, hands-on, innovative activity was supposed to feel more real and personal than something as faraway, big, professional, old, and bureaucratic like UNICEF, but gathering cans of tuna did not bring volunteers into contact with local needy people, and the groups did not discuss local poverty. In a way, it was more abstract than UNICEF, which spells out concrete plans for using the money.

A "no-brainer" sounds easy, but finding one was actually quite difficult. One civic group launched a campaign to forbid local radio DJs from joking about getting drunk. In a meeting with youth, an adult organizer said, "when they're telling kids to do illegal stuff, it's a *no-brainer*. This is a good project. . . . It's a good project, and I believe in it strongly." But the DJs complained of infringements on freedom of speech, and, not knowing how to engage in a conflict, the youth group gave up.

Rather than focusing on feelings of attachment, curiosity, local uniqueness or magic wands, youth volunteers focused on logistics when describing their projects. One volunteer described how her group selected projects.

> First youth volunteer: We just do what we're interested in. *We do what there is to do*. Like nursing homes—like there's always gonna be a need for people to go to nursing homes.
>
> Second youth volunteer: Like there are always ways to help at the hospital—you just have to contact this lady named Jan Hausenblock, or Shannon, and she'll have something for you to do.

Solving problems this way seems straightforward, but the hands-on, do-it-yourself, no-brainer could make it seem impossible to ask Jonathan's questions, of why the problems existed and how they could be prevented. The typical answer was to do it yourself, to *change the world, one x (person, lightbulb, diaper) at a time*. For example, a speaker at a conference of environmental educators, held in Snowy Prairie, gave a presentation on how to encourage activism:

> The speaker: We generate 4 pounds of trash a day per person curbside, that's what we *see*, but there's 120 pounds per day that we *don't* see . . . 27 pounds of stone and cement a day, 19 pounds of coal, 11 pounds of wood . . .
>
> To illustrate her point about how we can make a difference, by taking *personal action*, she turned off the lights, saying that we could save fossil fuels that way. This was a windowless conference center room. So, her alternative required sitting in pitch darkness. She turned the light back on after a few seconds, of course.

So, how did you use so much cement? It turns out that you used it on parking lots, skyscrapers, military bases, highways, and the rest. To stop using so much cement, you would have to exert pressure on policy makers and developers. When the speaker turned off the light, it only drove home the point that saving the world one *x* at a time would not help. It seemed easy to see how this approach could lead to despair, as we sat in total darkness. Without reflecting on problems' causes, and on "the bigger picture," social ills could seem eternal.

Was there some other moment, in private, when youth volunteers reflected on their civic engagement? As we saw, youth volunteers filled out forms about their volunteer work. The forms asked where, when, and with whom, and left a space for "reflection." But nearly all the reflections, among the over 400 sheets, were blank. Only three volunteers ever wrote more than a couple of words. And only one organizer ever looked through them—and that was to find quotes, for publicity. Here again, no organizers guided youth through a process of reflecting on their participation.

Machine Politics

Empowerment minus political deliberation happened another way, in addition to the no-brainers, when organizers enlisted youth volunteers to pressure local politicians to give more money to the youth projects. This might seem directly political, but in practice, organizers' "style" (Eliasoph 2011) for conducting these campaigns treated them just like gathering tuna cans: as no-brainers.

A great deal of writing about nonprofits within the United States and NGOs abroad shows their depoliticizing effects (Silliman 1999; Rudrappa 2004; Englund 2006; for a good review, see Fisher 1997). On the other hand, Nicole Marwell argues that nonprofits can indeed politicize their members (see also Chaves, Stephens, and Galaskiewicz 2004). Here, we see how both can be right: Yes, there can be a sort of

politicization, but it can[6] be a very narrow sort: to make sure that the government keeps funding the organization (Moseley 2012), and not usually the kind of open-minded, open-ended politicization that participatory democracy promises, or that Jonathan desired.

For example, about twice a year, county youth organizers came to meetings to encourage youth volunteers to attend local budget hearings:

> There is going to be a budget cut this year, in the county budget. There are going to be a series of public hearings, and I hope you can come and advocate for youth. . . . It's important that you come and say why youth programs are really great, so we can keep this position on the budget (gestures to adult organizer) and keep the Youth Community Centers open. . . . So you've got to stand up and say why these programs and that budget position is important—you've got to be advocates for youth services, because there's gonna be handicapped people and wheelchair people and people advocating for the mentally ill and a lot of people all asking for a lot of money. *But that's the ball game* [my italics].

Other adult organizers said similar things about the budget hearings, and each fall, youth volunteers attended those meetings. Was this the political activism that Jonathan hoped to encourage? On the one hand, there was no deliberation, and the youth volunteers did not ask big questions. On the other hand, they did learn something about how to compete against other desperately needy groups for crumbs, and they learned that it was a zero sum game—if disabled senior citizens get the crumbs, the youth projects do not:

> The kids were . . . articulate, persuasive, and attractive. Everyone congratulated them; they came with a big entourage of supportive adults. They got all dressed up and looked very put together, especially compared to all the disabled adults who could barely speak, or who went on long tangents about their Halloween costumes and their tastes in clothing and pets. The youth were more poised than the crying parents of disabled babies, who lost track of what they were saying in their testimonies [. . .]
>
> I hailed VJ [a youth volunteer who was not in an afterschool program—in other words, he was one of the volunteers who was there partly to puff up a resume] on the sidewalk outside [. . .]. I said I went a couple of years ago and it was like this one–all these heartbreaking stories, really hard to listen to, really sad and upsetting. I asked him if he knew whether the groups were competing with each other for the budget or whether the whole budget could be expanded. Honestly, I didn't know, and nobody has *ever* explained it to the kids, and it wasn't explained at the beginning of the hearing!
>
> VJ said, "It's a budget," and shrugged. "That's all there is. If someone gets more, someone else gets less."

> I said, "I wonder if maybe all the groups were there to say that the whole budget for human services should go up—everyone there seemed to cheer for everyone else, and everyone was thanking other people for coming, as if we were in it together."
>
> He said, "The only way to do that is to raise taxes," and he shrugged away that remote possibility. "This isn't 'good' or 'bad,' but: I'm glad we weren't right after a real emotional one. This way we didn't have to worry about looking like we didn't really need it."
>
> The conversation ended by his saying, "There's no right or wrong answer to who should get it."
>
> In the next meeting, two volunteers said what they thought of the hearing.
>
> "Long." "Too long." "Board members were asleep." And they imitated one hefty Board member, who snored while slumped over the table.
>
> I said it wasn't clear to me whether we were competing over the same pie or not.
>
> Wanda seconded my confusion, saying: "They *all* deserved more. Healthy Infants and Toddlers didn't want more, they just wanted to stay the same. I wouldn't want to be on the County Board and have to make that decision!"

When citizens become convinced that the county budget is finite and that the battle is between seniors and disabled babies, politicians who cut budgets can "pluck more feathers with less squawking" (Zacharzewski 2010:5; see also Lee forthcoming). Youth volunteers learned to compete over scraps, rather than to question the whole national budget. Should we raise taxes? If so, on whom? Should we decrease spending on something else, like on the military or on corporate tax breaks? Why don't taxpayers vote for higher taxes or lower spending elsewhere, to prevent this heartbreaking fight between mentally ill people, old people, parents of disabled babies and youth programs? Attending these hearings could have provided a beautiful lesson in grassroots participation, decision making and democracy, but organizers missed the chance. Instead, youth volunteers learned that our society cannot pay for both infant *and* elder care *and* teen programs. "That's the ball game." And again, they learned that all that mattered for success was the display.

In another kind of seemingly political activity in the civic projects, organizers emphasized one part of participatory democracy's goal—enthusiasm—and forgot the other—political dialogue and deliberation. For example, after youth volunteers had gone door-to-door giving out ribbons and yard signs for people to display to show that they objected to sexual violence, an adult organizer at a noontime meeting of other adults, said, "It was nice to see there were so many young people out doing things on Positive Youth Day."

> Jonathan, the organizer quoted at the top, immediately asked, "Did it have an impact on enthusiasm?"

Organizers then talked about the teens' frustration at people who would not take a ribbon and a sign, saying that the kids could not understand those people. There was no discussion of any reason anyone might oppose the ribbons and yard signs. Excitement was all that mattered in these moments.

Organizers hoped that the quick emotional flash would "be a good first step" for volunteers. It might "whet their appetites." Volunteers could not realistically wait around for more reflection and dialogue. When it was part of a long-term relationship with a stable organizer and a stable group of fellow volunteers, a quick burst of enthusiasm could be a good first step, but with most projects' tight schedules and ceaseless need to display easily measurable successes, there was often no second step.

In these campaigns, we can see flickering opportunities for deliberation opening up. While organizers missed these opportunities, these momentary glimmers reveal some grounds for hope. Youth volunteers are better at overhearing than adults tend to think.

THE INSTITUTIONAL INTUITION: ACCOUNTING AND TABOO

Volunteers did not just want quick surges of emotion; they also eagerly wanted to know where they were going, on a longer-term trajectory, so they could know what a realistic hope would be (Mische 2009; Tavory and Eliasoph 2013). And so, without political deliberation, some youth participants indirectly learned about politics and about the bigger picture. How? They "learned by doing," through experience, through a constant practice of showcasing, publicizing, documenting, and accounting. In this way, some participants' intuitions developed despite organizers' intentions to invisibilize the institutional basis of their organizations.

Though they spent no time intentionally reflecting and deliberating, youth volunteers often heard tangents that helped them learn about the institutional basis of their action—reminding them that "the fiscal cycle" matters for their leaders, for example. In meetings of the Martin Luther King Day Planning Committee, for example, youth volunteers kept asking how the holiday had been celebrated in the past. Adult organizers, in turn, kept deflecting the question, insisting the past was irrelevant.

> [A] fairly new youth participant: Is the "service event" on Martin Luther King Day because it's an opportunity, because it's a day off from school anyway? Or are those things happening on that day because it's a day that's about Martin Luther King?
>
> An adult organizer, Roberta: That is a good question—whether it's a day for doing things we're doing anyway, or if it's about Martin Luther King, and all these things are happening because of him and his teachings [notice: she affirms Olympia by saying that it's a good question, but does not answer it, on purpose, because of what Rob says next]:
>
> Rob: "Ownership," "control," "initiative." You *could* make his life more central. *It's up to you*.

> Roberta: It's up to you to decide which and plan accordingly. But there's no money yet, so you have to keep that in mind.
>
> [. . . another volley of questions from volunteers about what had been done in the past, and more putting the ball back in the volunteers' court. After that, someone asks how it was funded last year.]
>
> Roberta: Local funders and a big grant—Snowy Prairie was one of the few cities to get all it asked for. But it depends on what we plan. Those of you who want to be actively involved in planning [looking seriously at the young people]: What do you need to get done by August?
>
> [Youth volunteers don't answer, so adults fill in, bandying around ideas about who would be available, and not too expensive, to invite to speak at the event.]
>
> Roberta (back to the agenda): What I'm saying is, you guys have a lot of control." [. . .]

Youth volunteers asked, "Will the theme be "hunger" again?" and "Will it be at the Snowy Prairie Convention Center again?" and "Will there be speakers and service (like the year before)?" till finally, an adult responded, "You can do what you want with it. Or not do anything with it."

Youth volunteers would frequently try to pry open discussion about their organizations' conditions of existence, but adults would insist that they start on a tabula rasa. Volunteers would ask directly, "Is this a nonprofit?" or ask about the source of paid employees' incomes. Once in a while, youth volunteers succeeded in cornering adults into disclosing something about history or funding.

When asked to "draw on their own experience," volunteers drew on their experience of the kinds of organizations about which they already knew, from their direct experience within these youth programs. While participatory democracy's fear of bureaucracy goes with an idea that direct experience is better than experience that is mediated through big organizations, the truth is that most people spend most of the day in large organizations. That is their direct experience, most of the day. It just does not look like the deeply authentic, grassroots, local experience with the magic wand that the empowerment ideal proposes.

Let's take another example: in one evening meeting of a group that met monthly to plan civic events, organizers asked teens to make a list of themes for small group workshops at the Martin Luther King Day event, that would embody the spirit of King's messages. In response, youth volunteers sketched a whole universe of projects: against AIDS, against another disease, against tobacco, against drugs, for juvenile justice, for school dropouts, and against domestic violence, along with other social service programs. Here again, they were thinking through the medium of empowerment projects. The medium channels, embodies, and shapes the thought. Martin Luther King might also have imagined other organizing bodies, like political parties, activist organizations,

religious institutions, or unions, but the volunteers drew on their real experiences: of life in projects.

Youth volunteers could gain these intuitions partly because, however hard adults tried to divert attention from the nitty-gritty details of funding and accounting, the same adults could not stop focusing on them. For example, a tobacco education program's organizer, Brian, told youth volunteers in a planning meeting, "I might not be around." Later, he repeated, "If I'm around . . . There's this question of funding." He circled around to this over and over. He said it five times. In the course of all this repetition, he ended up describing the finances in detail:

> If not me, then some other people might be laid off. There are four of us, two might get cut, some overlap—two people are basically doing the same job. There's someone from Paragon County and someone from Public Health basically doing the same job. So I might not have my job next year.
> [Later in the meeting]: Usually, the state gets $15 million for tobacco research and programs, but it'll be down this year, to $10 million, and half goes to the university. *But* I'm making this manual so you guys know what to do when I'm gone.

"When I'm gone" inadvertently sounds ominous, but in a way, the termination of funding *would* be a death—their togetherness could die, if the funding died. When youth participants loved an organizer (the way some kids loved the long-term, dedicated organizers of their free afterschool programs), the thought of their organizational demise could be fearsome, so some youth volunteers diligently kept track of their organizers' sources of income.

Documenting the problems of "at-risk youth" in "prevention" programs, for which the organizations got much of their funding, was especially important, and the kids in those programs had an especially keen institutional intuition about that. For example, when a reporter asked one wispy African American boy, age 13 or so, why he was volunteering at a local outdoor festival, the boy said, "I'm involved instead of being out on the streets or instead of taking drugs or doing something illegal." At another event, another black boy who had been asked to speak from his own personal experience, recited statistics about the horrifying dropout rates among black youth in Snowy Prairie.

In their many discussions about accounting and publicizing, some youth volunteers could sneak a glimpse of the political landscape. Paradoxically, civic projects opened up participants' political imaginations only when they ignored the promise of the magic wand, but without open discussion, these glimmers of intuition could be dangerous. The glimmers could be dangerous when, for example, the wispy boy implicitly learned to speak of himself as a problem that needed solving, or when youth volunteers implicitly learned that all that matters for volunteer work is the display and the accounting. Wouldn't it have made sense for organizers to guide these youth volunteers through their intuitions, to discuss them and locate the intuitions' sources, instead of trying to repress those intuitions?

 The Sociological Quarterly **55** (2014) 467–492 © 2014 The Author. The Sociological Quarterly published by Wiley Periodicals, Inc. on behalf of Midwest Sociological Society

CONCLUSION

How to Repress Institutional Intuitions

The overwhelming reality was that these projects constantly had to document easily measurable successes on short time lines. If documenting intangible processes, like the development of participants' political imaginations or feelings of security and belonging, is possible, it requires more time and money and, ironically, expertise to ferret out subtle evidence. Without the subtlety of expensive expertise, only crude and quick measures were allowed. Obviously, accounting and empowerment did not easily converge.

Our question has been, "How did participants handle the discord, and to what effect? Would there be any way to make them less inharmonious?" By observing the "how," we can start to see a why (Katz 2001, 2002). Then, we might even start to see a way past some of the obstacles that the accounting process poses to the ideals of empowerment. The first empirical section showed that when organizations like these constantly had to account for their successes on a short time line, there was immense pressure not to devote time to reflection, but to devote time to accounting itself. The next section showed that the funders' time lines mismatched those of youth volunteers, so volunteers were under constant pressure to tell white lies, to pretend to feel like "leaders" who had conceived projects that they knew they had not conceived. Next, we saw how hard adults tried to hide this institutional basis of their projects, even when the projects were campaigning legislators for more money for themselves, and we saw how assiduously youth volunteers tried to uncover this institutional basis of their organizations' lives.

In the civic projects, it was nearly impossible to ignore the accounting, and yet, it was taboo to discuss it. Awareness of it became repressed knowledge. By "repressed," I do not mean simply preconscious or forgotten, but forbidden: *taboo*. In an organization, repressed knowledge is knowledge that people *use* to coordinate action, but that is so fearsome and so contrary to the organization's consciously stated missions, participants cannot consciously recognize it. Some theorists use the concept of "intuition" to describe "preconscious" organizational dynamics (Weick 1995; Crossan, Lane, and White 1999:525), but they neglect this deeper, darker kind of intuition. Like psychologically repressed knowledge, it keeps bubbling up to the surface in uncontrolled ways. That is what makes it dangerous. In this article, we see how participants accomplished this repression: Organizers tried to sequester discussion of it, to hide it from the children, like anything else that is taboo.

What if organizers had not tried so hard to ignore it in discussions with the youth volunteers? Organizers' ideal of empowerment included allowing participants to "learn by doing," through their own direct experience, not by having lessons fed to them from above. But volunteers' direct experience included, above all, experience of life in complex organizations, in conditions of conflict and inequality (Dewey 1927, 1963; Addams 2002; Queré 2002). Why not let the volunteers learn through this direct experience? To encourage volunteers to learn from this kind of experience, organizers would have to see that "learning by doing" means not ignoring conflict and

organizations, but reflecting on, and working through, or against conflict, as it is embodied in real organizations like courts, legislatures, and corporations.

Organizers abdicated authority on principle, trying hard not to tell youth volunteers what to do, and trying to divert attention from the limitations of funding. But perhaps they could fulfill their own mission more directly if they had openly discussed, with the volunteers, the puzzles and frustrations of funding. Since there was no open discussion of it, but only covert, indirect mentions of it in front of youth volunteers, the unintended consequence was that most volunteers had to navigate this impatient, money-driven, competitive universe of short-term funding alone. Volunteers developed an institutional intuition without close, warm, trusted adults who could have guided them into making those intuitions conscious or questioning unspoken assumptions about what was "realistic." The volunteers had to rely on what they overheard: documentation for the funders, as the only plausible measure of goodness. They learned, in practice, that their own volunteer work, "changing the world one x at a time" would be the solution. And they learned a very narrow way of doing politics: They learned about transparency and fundraising and pleasing multiple, distant, hurried sponsors. They learned ways of competing in what looks like a struggle for scarce resources, rather than asking why there is hunger in such a wealthy country. For the youth volunteers, the definition of realistic, in their organizations' everyday practice, was short term, local, unconflictive, and pleasing to funders, without making demands on a national government. They did, then, surreptitiously learn how to negotiate the current political universe (e.g., Rose 1999; Harvey 2007): how nonprofits work; how to account for and document success; how to get funding; how to document things quickly; how to make a splash; how to display personal enthusiasm without necessarily feeling it; how to ignore the dramatic promises their organizers made.

So, what happens to "Be realistic; demand the impossible?" in empowerment projects like these? This "magic wand," "open and undefined" vocabulary took on meaning in practice. The harder the sponsors tried to fund creative local grassroots participation, and to make organizers turn their backs on the ghost of bureaucratic expertise and accounting, the more participants end up intuiting the overwhelming presence of the account ledger. When organizations tried to ignore its presence, the account ledger surreptitiously slithered into everyday action, becoming the clearest, most common, and most favored clearest way to measure goodness.

NOTES

[1]There are, of course, many definitions of the concept of "practice" in social research and philosophy. An obvious comparison here is with Bourdieu's idea of "practice," which is also a kind of savoir faire for everyday situations. He does not, however, locate it in organizations, but at either a more micro level, in biographies, or at a more macro level, in societies in general (Bourdieu 1992).

[2]To protect human subjects, all names and places have been given pseudonyms, and identifying features removed.

 The Sociological Quarterly **55** (2014) 467–492 © 2014 The Author. The Sociological Quarterly published by Wiley Periodicals, Inc. on behalf of Midwest Sociological Society

[3]See Gastil (1993), for example, on the incredible tolerance that participants in a participatory workplace have for hashing out everyday practices in great detail, in close relation to their ideals.

[4]In using the word "performance" to describe this display that aims to appear "civic," I am trying to reconcile a debate that is well *performed*, as it were, in a special issue of *The Sociological Quarterly* about Jeffrey Alexander's *The Civil Sphere*, between Alexander's (2007) emphasis on language and performativity versus Elisabeth Clemens's (2007) emphasis on organizations.

[5]Framing and decoupling both focus too much on the pitch for external audiences, but not enough on the work, the labor process of producing the pitch (for an extended discussion of this argument, see Lo, Eliasoph, and Glaser 2013).

[6]Terriquez (2011) describes nonprofits that work with minority and low-income youth and do politicize them more broadly. Her organizations start with a clear, leftist, antiracist activist position. It is not "open and undefined, up to you to decide whatever." Organizers firmly guide youth through different approaches to social issues, gently favoring some ideas over others; and in their educational activities with the youth, organizers highlight, rather than avoiding, political conflict (see also Garrow and Hasenfeld 2014). An important study could ask how organizers in projects like those Terriquez examines provide accounts to donors, and how, if at all, the accounting becomes a topic for conversation among the youth volunteers themselves.

REFERENCES

Addams, Jane. [1901] 2002. *Democracy and Social Ethics*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Adler, Paul, Seok-Woo Kwon, and Charles Heckscher. 2008. "Professional Work: The Emergence of Collaborative Community." *Organizational Science* 18:359–76.

Alexander, Jeffrey. 2007. "On the Interpretation of the Civil Sphere." *The Sociological Quarterly* 48:641–59.

Baizerman, Michael, Ross Velure Roholt, and R. W. Hildreth. 2008. *Becoming Citizens: Deepening the Craft of Youth Civic Engagement*. New York: Routledge.

Barker, James. 1993. "Tightening the Iron Cage: Concertive Control in Self-Managing Teams." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 38:408–37.

Boltanski, Luc and Eve Chiapello. 1991. *Le Nouvel Esprit du Capitalisme*. Paris: Gallimard.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1992. *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Boyte, Harry. 2004. *Everyday Politics: The Power of Public Work*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Breviglieri, Marc. 2007. "Le 'Corps Empêché' de l'Usager." Pp. 215–29 in *Institutions: La Voix des Acteurs Faibles*, edited by J.-P. Payet, F. Giuliani, and D. Laforgue. Rennes, France: Presses Universitaires de Rennes.

Burke, Kenneth. 1969. *A Grammar of Motives*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Charles, Julien. 2012. "*Une Participation 'Eprouvante. Enquêtes sur l'Autogestion, le Management Participatif, la Participation Citoyenne et l'Empowerment*." Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Sociology, Université Catholique de Louvain, Louvain-la-neuve, Belgium.

Chaves, Mark, Laura Stephens, and Joseph Galaskiewicz. 2004. "Does Government Funding Suppress Nonprofits' Political Activities?" *American Sociological Review* 69:292–316.

Clemens, Elisabeth. 1997. *The People's Lobby*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

——. 2007. "Of Tactics and Traumas." *The Sociological Quarterly* 48:589–99.

Crossan, Mary, Henry Lane, and Roderick White. 1999. "An Organizational Learning Framework: From Intuition to Institution." *Academy of Management Review* 24:522–37.

Dewey, John. 1927. *The Public and Its Problems*. Denver, CO: Allan Swallow.
——. [1938] 1963. *Education and Experience*. New York: Macmillan.
Eliasoph, Nina. 2011. *Making Volunteers: Civic Life After Welfare's End*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
Eliasoph, Nina and Jade Lo. 2010. "Broadening Cultural Sociology's Scope: Meaning-Making in Mundane Organizational Life." Pp. 763–87 in *Oxford Handbook on Cultural Sociology*, edited by J. Alexander, R. Jacobs, and P. Smith. New York: Oxford University Press.
Englund, Harri. 2006. *Prisoners of Freedom: Human Rights and the African Poor*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Epstein, Barbara. 1991. *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Fisher, William. 1997. "Doing Good? The Politics and Anti-Politics of NGO Practices." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26:439–64.
Forester, John. 1999. *The Deliberative Practitioner*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
Fourcade, Marion. 2010. "The Problem of Embodiment in the Sociology of Knowledge: Afterword to the Special Issue on Knowledge in Practice." *Qualitative Sociology* 33:569–74.
Frye, Margaret. 2012. "Bright Futures in Malawi's New Dawn: Educational Aspirations as Assertions of Identity." *American Journal of Sociology* 117:1565–624.
Garrow, Eve and Yeheskel Hasenfeld. 2014. "Instutional Logics, Moral Frames, and Advocacy: Explaining the Purpose of Advocacy among Nonprofit Human-Service Organizations." *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 43:80–98.
Gastil, John. 1993. *Democracy in Small Groups: Participation, Decision-Making and Communication*. Philadelphia, PA: New Society Publishers.
Glaser, Barney and Anselm Strauss. 1967. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Chicago, IL: Aldine.
Gusfield, Joseph. 1980. *The Culture of Public Problems: Drinking-Driving and the Symbolic Order*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
Hamidi, Camille. 2006. "Eléments pour une Approche Interactionniste de la Politisation." *Revue Française de Science Politique* 56:5–25.
Harvey, David. 2007. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
Kameo, Nahoko. 2009. Empowerment in a Knowledge-Based Workplace: Its Intentions and Consequences." M.A. thesis, Department of Sociology, University of California, Los Angeles, CA.
Katz, Jack. 2001. "From How to Why: On Luminous Description and Causal Inference in Ethnography (Part 1)." *Ethnography* 2:443–73.
——. 2002. "From How to Why: On Luminous Description and Causal Inference in Ethnography (Part 2)." *Ethnography* 3:63–90.
Krause, Monika. 2010. "Accounting for State Intervention: The Social Histories of Beneficiaries." *Qualitative Sociology* 33:533–47.
Lee, Caroline. Forthcoming. *Disciplining Democracy: Public Engagement Experts and the New Participation Economy*. New York: Oxford University Press.
Lichterman, Paul. 1996. *The Search for Political Community. American Activists Reinventing Commitment*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
Lo, Jade, Nina Eliasoph, and Vern Glaser. 2013. "Institutional Logics in Everyday Interaction." Pre-Colloquium Paper Development Workshop: Bridging Perspectives on Societal Systems, Montreal, Canada.

Marwell, Nicole. 2004. "Privatizing the Welfare State: Nonprofit Community-Based Organizations as Political Actors." *American Sociological Review* 69:265–91.

Meyer, John and Brian Rowan. 1991. "Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony." Pp. 41–62 in *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, edited by W. Powell and P. DiMaggio. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Miller, Peter. 1994. "Accounting as Social and Institutional Practice: An Introduction." Pp. 1–39 in *Accounting as Social and Institutional Practice*, edited by A. Hopwood and P. Miller. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Minkoff, Debra and Walter Powell. 2006. "Nonprofit Mission: Constancy, Responsiveness, or Deflection?" Pp. 591–611 in *The Non-Profit Sector: A Research Handbook*, edited by W. Powell and R. Steinberg. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Mische, Ann. 2009. "Projects and Possibilities: Researching Futures in Action." *Sociological Forum* 24:694–704.

Moseley, Jennifer. 2012. "Keeping the Lights On: How Government Funding Concerns Drive the Advocacy Agenda of Nonprofit Homeless Service Providers." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 22:841–66.

Polletta, Francesca. 2006. *It Was Like a Fever: Storytelling in Protest and Politics*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Power, Michael. 1997. *The Audit Society: Rituals of Verification*. Oxford, England: Clarendon.

Queré, Louis. 2002. "La Structure de l'Expérience Public d'un Point de Vue Pragmatiste." Pp. 131–60 in *L'Héritage du Pragmatisme*, edited by D. Cefai and J. Isaac. La Tour d'Aigues, France: Éditions L'Aube.

Rose, Nikolas. 1989. *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self*. New York: Routledge.

——. 1999. *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Rudrappa, Sharmila. 2004. *Ethnic Routes to Becoming American: Indian Immigrants and the Culture of Citizenship*. Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Sauder, Michael and Wendy Espelande. 2009. "The Discipline of Rankings: Tight Couplings and Organizational Change." *American Sociological Review* 74:63–82.

Silliman, Jael. 1999. "Expanding Civil Society; Shrinking Political Spaces: The Case of Women's NGOs." *Social Policy* 6:23–53.

Snow, David A. and Robert D. Benford. 1988. "Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization." Pp. 197–217 in *From Structure to Action: Social Movement Participation across Cultures*, edited by B. Klandermans, H Kriesi, and S. Tarrow. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

Stevens, Mitchell and Wendy Espelande. 2008. "A Sociology of Quantification." *European Journal of Sociology* 49:401–36.

Strathern, Marilyn. 2000. *Audit Culture*. New York: Routledge.

Summers Effler, Erika. 2010. *Laughing Saints and Righteous Heroes*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Swidler, Ann and Susan C. Watkins. 2008. "Teach a Man to Fish': The Sustainability Doctrine and Its Social Consequences." *World Development* 37:1182–96.

Talpin, Julien. 2011. *Schools for Democracy: How Ordinary Citizens (Sometimes) Become Competent in Participatory Budgeting Institutions*. Colchester, England: ECPR Press.

Tavory, Iddo and Nina Eliasoph. 2014. "Coordinating Futures: Towards a Theory of Anticipation." *American Journal of Sociology* 118:908–42.

Terriquez, Veronica. 2011. "Schools for Democracy: Labor Union Participation and Latino Immigrant Parents' School-Based Civic Engagement." *American Sociological Review* 76:581–601.

Thévenot, Laurent. 2007. "The Plurality of Cognitive Formats and Engagements Moving between the Familiar and the Public." *European Journal of Social Theory* 10:409–23.

UNICEF. 2013. *Teachers' Guide (Grades 3-5)*. Trickortreatforunicef.org. Retrieved February 10, 2014 (http://www.trickortreatforunicef.org/sitedownloads/TOT_3to5_Unit.pdf).

Watkins, Susan C., Thomas Hannan, and Ann Swidler. 2012. "Outsourcing Social Transformation: Development NGOs as Organizations." *Annual Review of Sociology* 38:285–315.

Weick, Karl. 1995. *Sensemaking in Organizations.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Whittier, Nancy. 2001. "Emotional Strategies: The Collective Construction and Display of Oppositional Emotions in the Movement against Child Sexual Abuse." Pp. 233–50 in *Passionate Politics*, edited by J. Goodwin, J. Jasper, and F. Polletta. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Zacharzewski, Anthony. 2010. "Democracy Pays: How Democratic Engagement Can Cut the Cost of Government." The Democratic Society and Public-I. Demsoc.org. Retrieved February 23, 2014 (https://www.google.com/search?q=zacharzewski+democracy+pays&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&aq=t&rls=org.mozilla:en-US:official&client=firefox-a&channel=sb).