BROADENING CULTURAL SOCIOLOGY’S SCOPE: MEANING-MAKING IN MUNDANE ORGANIZATIONAL LIFE

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Cultural sociologists do not often focus on daily, unremarkable life in organizations. Instead, we usually spotlight more public, visible action: either moments of high drama, when symbols glow with high emotional intensity, making front-page news, or in organizations’ explicit public self-presentations in newsletters and mission statements. Organizational sociologists, for their part, need a usable theory of culture. Many already use and develop culture concepts. To both subfields, we want to contribute a sensitive method of seeing how culture shapes everyday activities within organizations, and how, in turn, everyday activity can build up, bit by bit, to large-scale cultural change. We argue that people’s everyday methods of coordinating action in organizations are, themselves, meaningful. Recognizing and documenting this everyday meaningfulness clinch the connection between scholarship in culture and organizations. To understand how this back-and-forth works, we need to examine patterns of interaction, not just in dramatic public disputes, but in unremarkable boring moments, inside the everyday lives of organizations. Cultural sociology and organizational sociology need each other. The goal of this chapter is to marry them—or, at least, to propose a more serious engagement between the two.
In proselytizing for a broader program for cultural sociology, our purpose is to make cultural sociology more useful for understanding more varied kinds of activity. It ought to be useful, not just for analyzing moments of drama and crisis, and not just for examining organizations' declarations about themselves, but for understanding the daily working of civic associations, businesses, government offices, and nonprofit agencies—all sorts of ongoing organizations. It is in formal organizations that most of us spend most of our days, so broadening the agenda is an important task. Seeing how mundane activity produces meanings that might ripple out to the broader culture is an important task, that is, unless we want to say that throughout most of the day, most people do not generate meaning, but just respond to meanings that were already generated elsewhere.

Our argument is that people do generate new meanings that become socially binding and shared both "from above" and "from below." We need to be able to trace both movements, both up and down: to show how well-established cultural categories from outside (or "above," to continue the up-and-down metaphor) of the face-to-face situation infuse everyday interactions, and to show how everyday meaning-making in mundane situations feeds "up" and out, into more public, shared, collective meaning-making.

What is missing from one or the other schools of thought that makes the engagement seem difficult?

First, cultural sociologists and organizational sociologists both tend to rely on a sociolinguistic theory that is not cultural enough, when they say that actors always have to improvise in an "ad hoc" way to figure out how to use collective representations in everyday life. Rather, we argue that everyday language use depends on people's filling in cultural, institutional knowledge, to make sense of the words. Meaningful speech is impossible unless people share these built-in references to institutions and culture. Through these, meanings enter the situation, without simply being generated in it. But these meanings are not quite "collective representations" of the sort that cultural sociologists usually examine; they make sense because of how they resonate with the situation.

Second, the definitions have to make sense of, and in, ongoing activity. They stick when they can do a job within a relatively predictable organizational form; they must be pragmatically usable by people who need to coordinate action in organizations. Participants need fine methods of distinguishing between different kinds of organizations, so they can know which definitions to put into play when. To explain peoples' methods of drawing such distinctions, cultural sociologists often point to big, broad categories—the differentiation of spheres of market, state, family, religion, and civic association. Using these categories is indeed part of how participants distinguish between one kind of organization and another, but not enough. In practice, almost no activities neatly adhere to one single sphere's implicit "logic." To orient themselves, to figure out what their organization is "a case of" at the moment, participants gather up a range of unspoken cues as informal evidence, not just the organization's proclamations about itself and its own definitions.

Like our second point, our third is also an element of pragmatic knowledge that participants have to share in order to keep an organization going. Cultural sociologists have said that both stability and change require moments of collective effervescence, when people reaffirm their bonds by jumping out of their skins, in ecstasy, momentarily "fusing" (Alexander 2007). Exciting moments momentarily sweep people out of their mundane activities and bind them together in a powerful sacred-secular ritual—a political drama such as Obama's election is a good example. The world held its collective breath. But in everyday organizational life, breathing has to work differently. The collective representations that emerge from these intense moments extend promises of bliss that never can be met in ordinary life, when the logistical work of implementing the promises begins. Here, again, actors have to coordinate action together, partly drawing on collective representations even though the exciting collective representations never fully or accurately describe their action. In ordinary organizations, people have to learn how not to be swept away by unmetetable promises. Not all successful organizations have dramatic moments that affirm members' shared missions; in fact, any organization short of a cult whose members were so tightly bound together would not be able to function.

As cultural sociology maintains, people never start generating meaning from scratch in interaction—meanings are never simply generated from the ground up, never just in the course of interaction. Our agenda here is to show how researchers can complete the circle, to show how the process is much more of a chicken-and-egg story: to see how meanings filter into everyday interaction and circulate back out to solidify into publicly shared cultural structures and filter into interaction, in a cycle. For all three elements of everyday meaning-making in organizations, routine and repetition create meaning, over time, when people have to get things done together.

To illustrate these arguments, we trace transformations of words' meanings in everyday language use. Our first set of examples comes from a study of changes in the publishing industry; we begin by building on this study's insights, which bridge the subfields of organizational and cultural sociology. Our second two examples derive from a larger study of youth civic engagement projects in the United States. The uses of the words "leadership" and "volunteer" in these "Empowerment Projects" (Elia and Shof 2011) will show how words' definitions change when they keep being misused in the same way over and over in a typical organization: After a while, the misuse becomes the use. Whatever goes on at a higher level, in national rituals or public events, words' definitions in-use materialize and possibly transform through these repeated formations and possible reformations and deformations. After giving our three examples, we feed them through the essay's three-point argument, about cultural sociology's approach to sociolinguistics, to the differentiation of spheres, and to collective representations, to show how to see the tiny integuments that connect culture to everyday activity in organizations.
Organizational Sociology and Cultural Sociology’s Shared Perspectives on Change

Example One: Changes in the Publishing Industry

Some organization scholars already draw on and seriously develop cultural sociology. Drawing on and refining Robert Alford and Roger Friedland’s idea of “institutional logics,” for example, Thornton and Ocasio say that these logics are “supra-organizational,” and they “order reality, provide meaning to action and structure conflicts” (1999: 803). They are

the socially constructed, historical pattern of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their social reality... both material and symbolic... a set of assumptions and values, usually implicit, about how to interpret organizational reality, what constitutes appropriate behavior, and how to succeed. (1999: 804)

In Thornton and Ocasio’s case, a shift in the U.S. publishing industry from an “editorial” logic rooted in editors’ sense of professional wisdom, to a market logic in the 1970s, began as a response to changes in the economy. The shift was not, however, just a reaction to those “material” conditions; for the shift to matter for the organizations’ operations, it had to become meaningful. It had to be institutionalized, solidified into new equipment—such as, for example, trade journals that focused on market competition in the book industry; new words and phrases such as “acquiring parent,” “target company,” and “deal price”; and the development of a subset of the banking industry that was now devoted to book publishing. In other words, Thornton and Ocasio’s article shows how culture is generative, not just a response to conditions, but a creator of conditions, a condition in its own right. This is the core insight of cultural sociology: that culture is generative.

Another inspiration shared by culture and organization scholars is this: Tension prevails at the “borders” between each of these “differentiated spheres,” and there are fierce battles over where to place an activity—like publishing, or like current arguments about education or health care (Alexander 1998). The second section of this chapter will show how these border struggles transform when they materialize in everyday life conditions.

Another shared inspiration is this: Rituals affirm an organization’s collective bonds (Kunda 1990, e.g.), and organizations need them to survive; participants need to feel unified with their organizations through the intense collective representations that the rituals generate. Our third section will show how important it is for people to generate less intense, possibly flexible, lightly held representations as well.

If we went inside the organizations to get a closer glimpse at the process of change, we would find, in all of these, that people’s methods of coordinating action over time, so that it could be relatively predictable, would be at the center of the analysis. Thornton and Ocasio examine the effects of the changes that they describe, but do not look inside the firms to see how such happened. They suggest that the process was incremental rather than revolutionary (826). Getting a closer glimpse of change, then, would require slowing down the camera, with an ethnographic or a historical investigation that focused on sequencing (Pierson 2004; Abbott 2001). If we did this investigation, what might we find? Why do some new words become prevalent and others do not? How do the symbols and the words absorb meaning from the contexts in which they are routinely seen and spoken?

Before turning to our theoretical arguments, then, we need a view of the insides of organizations in the process of transubstantiating old meanings. Our second and third examples come from a larger ethnographic study that one of the co-authors conducted on youth civic engagement projects.

Example Two: “The Leader”

In the past decades, the words “leader” and “volunteer” have changed dramatically. Once, a leader was someone who had followers; now, a leader is someone who takes the initiative and is responsible. “Leadership” programs for youth have inadvertently propagated this new definition.

Programs for disadvantaged youth in the 1980s were then called “prevention programs.” But policy-makers realized that this smacked of condescension, as if the policy-makers were treating the youth as “problems,” rather than as responsible, self-propelled actors. Influenced by social research that described the “disempowering” effect of highlighting deficiencies, policy-makers funded programs that aimed to ferret out and develop potential “leadership,” even before the potential leaders had actually led anything.

We can observe the initial puzzlement that this new use of the word could provoke by drawing on my study of youth empowerment projects: At a meeting, about twenty-five teen “volunteers” are asked to break up into small groups and discuss what the qualities of “a leader” are. Many small groups misinterpret the question, giving answers like “tall, athletic, does well in school, and handsome.” Upon hearing these summaries of the small-group discussions, Roberta, the adult organizer who had posed the initial question, recognized the error, and said, thinking aloud, that many of the teenagers did not consider themselves to be “leaders.” She had to rephrase the question, so at a later meeting, she asked them how they themselves had become leaders. Many said that they were not leaders. However, eventually, after participating in this leadership group for a while, the disadvantaged youth learned that even if they never led anything, they were leaders. Soon, the new definition backfired: Roberta said to a meeting of other program organizers that their new definition had succeeded too well; that now, teens associated “leadership” with “programs for disadvantaged youth.”

Calling people who have never led anything “leaders” makes sense if the mission is to help those potential leaders—if the organization is a kind of social service agency as well as a volunteer group. Calling them “leaders” does not make sense if the organization exists to help the needy, or to help distant others, and is not also
doing double-duty as a social service agency. In organizations that blend social service with volunteer work for the purpose of "empowering" average citizens—"Empowerment Projects" (Eliasof 2011)—the word "leader" is in the course of changing meaning.

These changes in meaning come about not simply because organizers declared that henceforth a word will mean something new. There was no exciting moment of collective effervescence branding the new meanings into people's consciousness. Rather, the change in meaning walked hand-in-hand with much larger changes in the provision of social services over the past three decades. In this neoliberal form of governance, states and nonprofits try to help the needy by "empowering" them to take responsibility for themselves, transforming them into volunteers who will be able to help themselves. The policy-makers' vision is that a person who helps others and becomes a leader will learn and grow, and eventually, by becoming the kind of person who is strong enough to give help, he or she will no longer need help. Thus, a social service agency that gets government funding also has to make sure that the recipients of aid are being treated as potential leaders. To coordinate action, participants need to hold both meanings in play, to keep both suspended for possible use, depending on what the participants are doing together: whether they are talking to funders—who can assume, from a distance, that needy recipients of aid can easily and instantly become "leaders"—versus when they are talking to fellow members, who need to know who is "really" leading, in the old-fashioned sense of the word.

Example Three: “The Volunteer” in the Empowerment Project

Our third example further illustrates this point. In the same kinds of projects, the words “volunteer” and “volunteer group” are also in the course of changing meanings, for the same reasons. A voluntary association was formerly a band of unpaid people who met informally to improve something on behalf of a collectivity. They could change course midstream as, in the course of meeting, they discovered new problems to solve. They did not need to account to any external authority for their actions or expenditures. Now, more and more, these defining features of volunteering are changing: Volunteer work is often organized from the top down, by nonprofits, corporations, and governments. Some members are paid. Their organizations have to render transparent accounts to funders, and cannot simply change course midstream. Formulating these accounts takes a great deal of time and thought. The collective representation—"volunteer"—is nearly sacrosanct in American culture (Wuthnow 1991a, 1991b), and here we can see it while it is changing. It changes when it keeps being used in new ways; after a while, it transmutes in these new conditions.

Organizations have to make the public representation of "the volunteer" very explicit and easily readable, to document large quantities of volunteer work, and large numbers of volunteers, in order to demonstrate to their nonprofit and corporate funders that they have real grassroots support. To take a personal example that echoes dozens of others portrayed in Making Volunteers: One of the co-authors went to a river clean-up day sponsored by the Friends of the Los Angeles River, but was embarrassed at how little trash she picked up, and offered to bring young volunteers to pick up the trash next time. The coordinator nodded enthusiastically, saying, "The more volunteers, the better; it shows our corporate funders that we really have community support!" Indeed, corporate logos peppered the backs of the t-shirts that all volunteers received. Some volunteers already had their own sponsors: A phalanx of them were wearing t-shirts from the Disney Corporation's "showyourcharacter.com" volunteer program, for example. The river clean-up was good for something, but keeping the river clean was probably not the main good that came from it. Part of the reason that a volunteer who arrived after about ten o'clock picked up so little litter was that other volunteers had already picked up most of it that Sunday. By the next Sunday, the river once again looked like the breeding ground for muddy plastic bags, Taco Bell soda cups, and broken shopping carts. So, the number of volunteers was not, in fact, the problem; rather, timing was. To clean the river, weekly visits would have been necessary. But doing that would be difficult, and would somewhat miss the point, because all that sponsors needed to know was that this organization could really muster large numbers of volunteers.

This changed definition of "volunteer" responded to and made sense of everyday practices and organizational forms. Without these changed organizational forms, the changed definitions, by themselves, would not have become meaningful and would not have lasted. And they would not have stuck if there had been no practical way of using these words in action. They would have sounded like nonsense, and if participants had tried to use them, their action would not have made sense, would not have been possible.

“Typification”: A Missing Concept in Both Cultural Sociology and Organizational Sociology

For both organizational theory and cultural sociology, one missing link is a culturally grounded theory of everyday interaction. On the one hand, their linguistic theories hold that codes, languages, and myths develop a life of their own, and the signs within them relate to each other somewhat or completely independently of the interrelations of the objects to which the signs refer. We will return to this later. On the other hand, both subfields have an overly random view of language, and Harold Garfinkel's work is the culprit. This may sound impressively obscure and nitpicking, but it really matters if an analysis has a thin theory of interaction, and both subfields rely on his work for their understanding of "interaction."
Garfinkel treats interaction as "ad hoc," constantly improvised and not patterned. He asserts that everyone who enters a new situation gropes around until he or she finds patterns, de novo in each organization.

His and fellow ethnomethodologists' agenda is to show how people improvise meanings in their everyday workings in an infinite reality. Even workers in a seemingly rule-bound office have to sort through files, and the rules cannot take account of all the infinite details of each file. People have to "fill in," with background knowledge that comes from elsewhere and can never be fully specified. For example, welfare office workers have to know how to greet applicants, how to tell when someone is waiting in line, how to distinguish applicants from other people such as delivery people who may enter the office, how to tell when the applicant is done talking and has given the final answer to Question 17 on the form they have to know basic manners and to suspect deeper problems if the applicant does not, for example. Rather than assuming that bureaucracies really work by following all the rules, for example, old insights coming from management studies (Blau 1965, e.g.) and the labor movement itself show that any bureaucracy that rigidly followed the rules would collapse instantly. "Working to rule" is a way of calling going on strike, calling a halt to all action without leaving the building. So, ethnomethodology says, people improvise as they go.

The problem with Garfinkel's theory is that it allows us to imagine that words and deeds can be decoupled; as if in the daily workings of an organization, actors can ignore the organization's public representations, self-descriptions, and projected images. It throws out the baby with the bathwater, making it seem as if once we learn that people in bureaucracies can never work only according to the rules, we should therefore drop any attempt at categorizing organizations. Yes, ethnomethodology is right to say that bureaucrats act in a way that is less rule-governed than the standard image of bureaucracy implies, and that religious leaders act in a way that is less inspired and devout than the standard image of an otherworld-oriented religious organization. But this does not make the process of adjustment "ad hoc." That cannot be how organizations work. Rather, a person who enters a new organization can guess, rather accurately, what will happen next, and what to expect to happen in the next hour, day, or month, so that the new member can make plans and coordinate actions with fellow members. The new member needs to gather up tidbits of evidence in order to "typify" the situation, as in "the case of" a traditional school, alternative school, volunteer group, activist group, business, nonprofit, or other typical kind of organization.

To take Harvey Sacks' example (1971, 1972), when we hear, "The baby cried. The mommy picked it up," we immediately conjure up a whole story and impute motives: The mommy picked the baby up for the purpose of soothing it; maybe the baby was hungry or tired; the observed "mommy" was indeed the baby's mother. In contrast, when we hear, "The baby cried. The shortstop picked it up," we do not know what to think: Will the shortstop throw the baby to second base? Was the baby underfoot on the Astroturf, in the dugout, in the way? To understand the baby/mommy sequence, we need, and have, a set of cultural, collective knowledge that comes from outside of the immediate interaction. "Mommy/baby" may be humanity's most long-lived, stable meaning unit, institutionalized in every society in some way or another, but even here, the words may change and are never simple neutral labels, more and more so every year, as divorce and adoption make it harder to take only one "mommy" for granted. In other words, just knowing the stable meaning will not suffice: We also have to do some work in interaction—only a little bit, in this case—to make sure that there are no obstacles to our normal interpretation, which would be that this woman is this baby's mommy, not someone else's, for example, and that she was picking up the infant for the culturally expected, predictable reasons.

Rather than drawing on Garfinkel, both cultural sociologists and organization scholars could benefit instead from drawing on the work of Aaron Cicourel or Harvey Sacks, who show us how to use the concept of "typification" (Cicourel 1981; Schutz 1967; Cafai n.d.). Through the process of typification, people learn to adjust the symbols, to adapt them, wiggling them until they seem to make sense in everyday contexts. When, as in the cases of "volunteers" and "leadership," symbols accrete new meanings, it is not only in a dramatic watershed moment, but more often, it is in a more geological way, like stalactites that take a hundred years to grow a millimeter and eventually fill up a cave. When meanings change in dramatic moments, they take a while to filter into everyday practices and vice versa: When meanings change in practice, they take a while to filter into formal settings and eventually solidify in dictionaries.

Researchers who stay rooted only on the level of interaction leave open the possibility that symbols or metaphors are important for channeling people's emotions and actions (Katz 2001), but they do not press on with the investigation of symbols; it is not what these researchers are doing. They leave them for someone else to investigate while they themselves focus on participants' step-by-step groping. Researchers in this vein do not ask if these improvisations follow patterns: from one welfare office to another, one school or political party to another. We argue that the improvisations do come in patterns, and that the patterns themselves are meaningful.

In leaving the question of stability across local sites aside, research that ignores culture implicitly suggests that organizations might arrive at novel, unique, local, idiosyncratic solutions. If it were usually the case, however, creating and maintaining organizations would be impossibly difficult. Moving from one job to another, or even learning how to be client or customer from one store to another, would require learning from scratch each time. Publicizing and translating one organization's activities to another would be impossible. Part of asking any "how" has to include asking how people calculate or choose, or intuitively grasp at or develop, patterns of coordination when they enter an organization, and how they transfer knowledge and practices gleaned in one place to another. The "how's" almost inevitably extend far beyond any one organization itself, because most organizations have to represent themselves to multiple, distant others, in a complex society, with multiple, diverse audiences, actors, scripts, and props.

The concept of typification helps us grasp these how's, but we still need something more. Any act of typification has to draw on some culturally shared meanings,
and yet people who are attempting to coordinate action in an organization cannot rely on meanings that are as big and blunt as "market, state, religion, civic, family." Making finer distinctions is not simply a matter of random improvisation, and actors need to make these finer distinctions right away, the moment they enter the relationship. Each time the word "volunteer" is used to point to the person who goes on the half-day river clean-up, the word changes a little, because participants have to learn what to expect when they respond to a call to "volunteer," or when organizers ask a high school "volunteer" who is getting school credit to come to an event, and then have to check to make sure that the "volunteer" deserves the credit necessary to graduate from high school.

Pragmatically, people in the organization need this knowledge, even before it has become sedimented into any public discourse. They have to know to expect something like the river clean-up, not a band of unpaid, local, independent folks. This kind of everyday tinkering eludes both organizational sociology and cultural sociology.

**Structuralism in Practice**

This kind of tinkering is not as necessary in very public cases, when the new symbol does not need to be immediately ready for use, to coordinate action, this minute. Alexander brilliantly shows that constellations of meaning are internally referential in his historical study of the rise of American anti-anti-Semitism: Before World War II, Americans were just about as anti-Semitic as Germans at the time. Later, in an effort to distinguish America from Nazi Germany, Americans sounded—and eventually became—much less anti-Jewish than they had been before the war. The opposition German versus Jew confronted the opposition German versus American; the result spawned a new creature: German anti-Semitic versus American non-anti-Semitic. Here is a perfect illustration of the way that cultural structures build up their own steam, develop their own momentum, regardless of any "conditions" aside from the need to create binary oppositions to distinguish one thing from another, and especially, to distinguish one's own group from the enemy. The structural logic Alexander describes has little to do with anyone's feelings or any material pressures, or anyone's immediate need to continue to coordinate action immediately with other people.

This approach works well for a dramatic historic reversal, but not well enough for explaining the changes inside organizations. In the cases of the words "leader" and "volunteer," we can see, day by day, inside organizations that change is happening. When change happens so incrementally, the logic is different from that of dramatic change. While the cultural structures form their own constellations, they also immediately, simultaneously have to have a connection to activity. A new usage that starts in one place filters and transforms in another, in an endlessly changing cycle, when people start to use old words in new ways, to do new things together. Wuthnow (1991), and Ghaziani and Ventresca (2005) show precisely how words change over the course of a long stretch of time, and how the changes articulate organizational changes—"articulate", as Wuthnow says, in both senses of the term: to give voice to the changes, and to link the changes the way sinew links bones so that the cultural structures can be used.

The primary task of cultural analysis should be "to identify recurring features, distinctions, and underlying patterns which give form and substance to culture" (Wuthnow et al. 1984: 255; see also Ghaziani 2004). Meaning—or the sense people make of the world or some aspect of it—is established from the relationships among these patterns" (Ghaziani and Ventresca 2005: 533).

A structuralist account would focus on how distinctions multiply primarily as patterns of binary oppositions between signs, but for everyday practical activity, that is not enough. "Giving substance to" cultural change is key in the above quote; it means more than finding out how new relationships between symbols arise. It also requires figuring out how people attach the meanings to everyday practices and equipment (Thévenot 2006; Callon 1986). In other words, the new meaning of "leader" depends on more than a constellation of meanings, it also depends on the way the patterns articulate to new organizational forms (Clemens 2005) and give them voice. These new "leaders" or "volunteers" make sense of and in organizations that are simultaneously supposed to be therapeutic social service agencies for the leader/volunteers and also civic associations. They are both "state" and "civic" for the study of organizations, cultural sociology would start by pointing us to a finite number of such self-definitions that organizations can project into the public arena—"family, market, religion, profession, state," for example. This is a good step but, again, not precise enough if we want to understand how these distinctions materialize in organizations, as the next section will argue.

**Border Disputes: Tinkering But Never Triumphantly Repairing**

A busy hive of institutions like "state" and "market" shape and reshape, interpret and reinterpreting, activities such as "publishing," "volunteering," or "leading"—transforming any actions' meanings depending on which "logic" is in play. This has, of course, been a central idea in sociology since Weber.

Family, market, religion, and the like are some of our most common and visible signposts, but there is a problem: There are also, to take Thornton and Ocasio's example, publishers with an "editorial, professional" logic and there are publishers with a "market" logic, both of which have to make enough of a profit to stay afloat as businesses in the marketplace. There are churches, but then, some are mega-churches with big parking lots and electric guitars, some are storefront evangelical churches whose members touch each other's thighs and sob together (Stohlan 2007), some are white clapboard, steepled churches with organs and no physical touching. Luckily for the church-goer, these subdivisions are easy to
recognize, without making too many mistakes. But the big signpost “church” does not help a person know how to act in any particular type of church. The same holds for all the big signposts—“state,” “market,” “family,” or “civic association”—particularly now that these “spheres” appear more and more in “hybrid” formats, all at once (Hall 1992; Eliasoph 2009; Dekker 2009).

If we think that culture matters for people’s everyday actions, then it ought to be useful for understanding how people distinguish between the mega-church and the evangelical storefront church. If we think that culture matters in this regard, we will notice that there is a move “from the bottom up,” which complements cultural sociology’s usual move from the top down. To grasp this movement, we will notice that people “typify” the organizations quite nicely and the accumulation of small differences—the storefront church’s acoustic guitars versus the mega-church’s electric ones, storefront on a busy street versus big building behind a parking lot, hugs and screams versus polite chitchat, big versus small, to take some items that people might employ when informally classifying the two. These differences become meaningful; meaning hangs on them, but they themselves are not empty hangers. They, in turn, contribute to the actors’ meaning-making. For example, since acoustic guitars have different properties than electric ones, allowing for more singing along, for example, the initial small differences create subsequent ones. The objects have their own steam that is not entirely dependent on the cultural structure (Callon 1986, e.g.).

- We will notice that all these little distinguishing features add up to a meaningful whole that becomes greater than the sum of its parts.
- We will notice that once people have gathered up this accumulation of small differences, the distinction that they make between the two sorts of churches is meaningful and likely to become more so every year on the world stage.

If, in other words, we think that organizations require meaningful action, then we need to know more than we learn from cultural sociology or organizational sociology. We still need to know, with more precision, how to extend the “strong program in cultural sociology” all the way down to the level of everyday organizational life.

To see how this works, let us take the redefinitions of “volunteer” and of “leader,” and of a “good publisher.” They are, indeed, what Alexander would call border disputes. These boundaries between institutions are inevitably “moral” boundaries, not just in the sense in which we normally use the term, to mean overarching, placeless, timeless values, ideals, beliefs, judgments, attitudes, or symbols; they are about everyday judgments about situations, about what is appropriate to say or do where, when, with whom, with what equipment—what Kenneth Burke (1969) called “the pentad”: the actors, the characters they impersonate, the mise-en-scène (props, scenery, lighting), the audience, and script.

Yes, part of our explanation of the changed definitions of the key symbols of “volunteer” and “leader” relies on this longstanding assumption that different spheres of market, bureaucracy, civil society, family, and the rest promise different moral goods. People cannot decide what is “good” or “bad” unless they know where they are. They also cannot even figure out what is possible to do unless they know where they are. What is decent to do or say in one context is rude, wrong, and out of place in another. Misplaced typifications of situations make people angry; they are “wrong” in both senses of the word: not only because they are mistakes, but also because they undermine participants’ ability to know what is reasonable, decent, or good to say or do in that situation.

The boundaries between institutions, which tell us which justifications to muster where, are always tense, and therefore, where the interesting action is (Alexander 1999, 2003; Boltanski and Thevenot 2005; Lamont 1991). They are tense because gaps between promises and action are inevitable; each sphere exists by making promises that cannot be met (Alexander 1999): Bureaucracies promise to administer justice impartially; families promise unending loyalty; civic organizations promise free and equal relationships; markets promise fair competition. Before utopia (in other words, forever), it will be impossible to fulfill all these promises all at once. The moral goods that are promised in one “world” are incomparable with those of the others: Each set of promises is good in its own way, and each maintains its own blind spots. For example, what is proclaimed good in a bureaucratically organized relationship—fairness according to measurable criteria, spelled out rules, personal neutrality—is considered bad and weird in a civic group, and even worse and even weirder in a family-like setting. For Boltanski and Thevenot, only certain ideals can become “justifications”: They each promise a different kind of equality—equal chances to compete in the marketplace so that you can be better than everyone else; sacred equality to be respected as a unique human being who does not need to compare him-or herself to anyone; legal equality so that everyone is the same under the law (see also Stone 1988). None of these promises can be met completely, but that does not make the stories irrelevant. To know what people consider to be “the good” in any particular instance of public decision making, you would need to know how they implicitly answer the question, “The good in relation to which moral world?”

Organizations cannot make good on their promises, but the expectations and hopes are not, therefore, “mere” fictions. As Alexander, Boltanski, and Thevenot and others insist, these collective representations organize how and where people can realistically make public claims, what ideas they can express where, and even what they can feel justified in feeling in public situations. For example, even though we might take it as obvious that the police do not treat everyone equally, or the government does not maintain roads in poor neighborhoods as nicely as it maintains roads in wealthy ones, we are justified in being outraged when they do not. And we are justified in expressing our outrage publicly. Taking boundaries as real means being able to hold the bureaucrat accountable for being inefficient or not following rules, for example, or it means being able to scold the civic group for not being egalitarian.

Here is what we add to this important set of insights: Saying that people implicitly figure out which moral world they are in, and act accordingly, does not
mean that the "bad and weird, out-of-place things" do not happen. This is a crucial point, because in everyday organizational life, people need to know how to do the "out-of-place" activities without destroying members' shared implicit expectations about the organization. That is, they have to know how to uphold the borders correctly, which means that they have to uphold them in certain places and not others.

One might feel a bit queasy the first few times one hears churches using the tools of businesses, acting like businesses, calling Jesus their first "Chief Executive Officer" (Fox 2004) and the flock "consumers," or the first time one hears how much paperwork the Vatican has to do to name someone a saint. The unsettled feeling comes from having to make explicit what everyone had already known intuitively—churches do not simply inhabit a world of cherubim and seraphim, but have already been paying rent and raising funds and doing paperwork and designing parking lots and access ramps the whole time. The difference is in whether and how, and where people are noticing and talking about such. After a while, the collision starts to feel easy and normal, and spectators cease to be startled when they see church commercials on TV. Actors rely on, while also constantly adjusting, potent symbols, and over time, the adjustments become the meanings.

Here, again, time and repetition matter. Keeping the "out-of-place" elements at bay is easier to do for the duration of a public performance than it is to do in an ongoing organization. Alexander says that people are always creatively "repairing" boundaries, as one world invades another (1999, 2001). This is a good metaphor for public speechmaking, but works less well for descriptions of ongoing organizations, unless we have in mind a "tinkerer" who never really finishes the job, because the out-of-place things continue happening, and the participants keep having to repair, constantly, never finally sealing up the leak, because after sealing up one leak, two new ones spring up.

After constant "tinkering" (Lévi-Strauss, 1963; de Certeau 1988; Swidler 2006), patterns emerge. Old "logics" expand into new conditions, and then they, in turn, solidify into newly predictable organizations. For example, in San Francisco's gay rights movement of the 1980s, a hiking club could become a "gay hiking club," a sewer circle could become a "lesbian sewing circle," a donut shop became "Sticky Buns," and a hamburger joint "Hot and Hunky," thus expanding the movement to include "things" like trail-heads and donut-holes that had previously been used only for recreational or commercial purposes. Suddenly, they are all on the same table, thus redefining activism and eating and hiking and sewing. Just by eating dinner at "Hot and Hunky" and having dessert at "Sticky Buns," you could feel the collective effervescence of the larger movement and, in some concrete though diffuse way, contribute to it. Eventually, the joke—the Hot and Hunky or Sticky Buns—becomes predictable and then, eventually, unremarkable, a "dead metaphor." People come to expect that some hiking clubs will be lesbian hiking clubs. Organizations settle into "styles" that new members quickly recognize as typical—they've seen an organization like this before. Activists tinkered with old organizational forms to create new ones (Armstrong 2002).

Similarly, members of American groups that lobbyists for the right to vote at the beginning of the 1900s wondered, "What kind of group are we? Are we like a political party, whose members should address each other formally and elect their leaders? Or are we like a social club that holds fetes with lovely food and fine dress? Or perhaps we are like a neighborly mutual aid group, whose solicitous members should cook for each other and take care of each other's children in times of need? People recognize patterns of coordinating action, so that they know that if their model is the charitable ladies' aid society, they should act personal and caring, not loudly plot about gaining power. This does not mean that the women in the charitable ladies' aid society do not plot about gaining power; they just do it behind-the-scenes: They learn what to say and do where, with whom, and how. Eventually, this organizational style feels typical and predictable.

When imagining how people construct these new organizational forms, think of LEGO® constructions, or broken-down cars in the front yard of a rural shack, being picked apart for their working pieces—"cannibalized." People do not make up organizations from scratch, but trade their organizations together, cannibalizing other organizations' parts and combining them in somewhat unforeseen ways, ending up with somewhat new vehicles. "Ending up," though, is not quite the right metaphor: The tinkering has to be slow enough for participants to know how to coordinate action together even when they are coordinating action that has not yet happened.

When making plans, they have to share rough predictions of their future together. Here, culture must enter (Tavory and Eliasoph forthcoming): since, obviously, the future has not yet happened, participants have to rely on culturally shared hints about it. If the tinkering systematically transforms deeply and passionately held symbols, it has to make the changes slowly enough for participants to do this. But the tinkering can never stop, because no organization lives up to the claims it makes about itself.

Routine ways of drawing the boundaries often invoke ambivalence: At the end of the long line in the bureaucracy, we are surprised if our problem is actually solved—surprised, that is, if the bureaucracy worked the way it was supposed to work. But we are still outraged if the problem is not solved. The "reality of moral expectations" (Boltanski and Thevenot 2000) is that they are complexly nuanced, not simply on or off. This does not mean that we can end the discussion by saying that in everyday life, boundaries are simply fuzzier versions of the dramatic renditions of the boundaries, or that everyday life is just a pale, constantly degrading image that gets reinforced with light and color at the next ephoric moment of collective effervescence. If that were so, cultural sociology would be irrelevant for the study of everyday life, but it is not so. Rather, it means that moral meaning-making happens through this process of wiggling the elements of the performance until they feel predictable. Our point is that "predictable" is a kind of morality; it is not the same as fusion and does not grow with the intensity of a collectively breathtaking moment. For the pentad to make sense in everyday life, making the elements cohere has to stretch out over a long period of time, and sediment into predictable
Border Disputes within Organizations

In a "typical" complex organization, there are inevitably different subunits that need to tell different stories, to different audiences, using different props—in the manufacturing wing, the legal department, the advertising department, the benefits office. This way to understanding organizations asks the observer to capture the audience as it is making itself... and notices that there are multiple situations, in which a group's internal unity and external relations, coordination in time and space, all become problematic. [In such an analysis] 'space' shatters into multiple places, each clamoring for public attention, in an architecture of scenes; 'time' explodes into different ways of marking time, each with its own rhythms and qualities..." (Cefai 2002: 67-69).

In a typical organization's "architecture," members know more or less how to play different justifications in play in different places. For example, parents and medical staff have systematically different responsibilities to seriously ill babies (Heimer and Staffen 1998). The two internal audiences require different performances, but still have to cooperate. And as organization scholars say, when people coordinate action, according to repetitive, predictable patterns, the patterns accumulate, building up, over time, into "institutions" (Jepperson 1991, e.g.). Alexander and others who examine dramatic public justifications say that there is a "how" but they do not press on with the investigation of the step-by-step groping; it is just not what these researchers are doing. They leave it to someone else to investigate the groping, while they themselves focus on participants' more intensely symbolic, imaginative, or transcendent "storied" moments.

In stable organizations, "out-of-place" activity happens all the time. So out-of-place activity usually becomes hidden, or ignored, laughed at, or smoothed away, in seemingly effortless, predictable ways. People move it "backstage" (Goffman 1958), or joke about it (Lichterman 1996), or otherwise keep it separate in time and space from the main interaction. This is all difficult to accomplish, and there are always mistakes, jokes, and willful transgressions. But the work of making it all cohere comes to feel normal, as people intuitively develop shared ways of minimizing, arguing about, or displacing activities that do not fit.

Moments of collective effervescence immediately are given a lie the next morning, when the new meaning is supposed to take hold, because the new meaning is always more glorious than any everyday organization could uphold. Both are true, but in different ways. The Obama election is a good example: The moment was beautiful and told a transcendent truth about Americans and people in general. But the moment could not last, no matter how good a president he became, because that level of beauty cannot be sustained. It is not how organizations work.

To understand this "how," we need the concept of "organizational style" (Lichterman 2003; Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003; Eliasoph 2010). For example, in some university-based activist organizations in Brazil (Mische 2008), members assume that the way to be a good member of a good group is to argue and plot ways of gaining power for the group. In these groups, hesitation, agreement, and cautious deliberation occur, but only behind the scenes. In other Brazilian youth groups, expressing harmonious feelings is the glue that holds people together; in groups like these, in turn, participants have to push disagreement backstage. Still other Brazilian youth activist groups highlight cautious, rational discourse; in these groups, anger and passion hide backstage. There still is agreement and self doubt in the cantankerous groups; there still is disagreement in the consensus-based groups; and members in the rational groups still have strong feelings: They are just harder to express. As Mische argues, newcomers can recognize an organization's style by observing how members push some feelings, ideas, and relationships off the horizon here, but spotlight them there; by talking about some issues only in small, late-night huddles, and others in plain view, frontstage; by shunning some members for asking the wrong questions in the wrong tone. Within each style, it is easier to do or say some things, and harder to do others. Organizational style is another word for the classical concept of "prudential knowledge" sometimes translated as "prudence"—a word that we would like to resurrect for this purpose, but doubt will stick.

Participants' methods of distinguishing between one organization and another have to work, in everyday practice, when they are "put to the test" (Boltanski and Thevenot 1991), so investing all of their trust in the organization's explicit promises will not usually be good enough. Here, again, typification and pragmatic action are the keys; situations become easy to recognize, solid-seeming, "institutionalized" for most people in a society, even though, as organization scholars argue, no situations actually ever fit the rules, stories, moral narratives, myths. Even though bureaucratic rules do not work the way rule-makers say they work, people can usually still recognize a bureaucracy and predict what is likely to happen next in one.

People routinely massage unruly situations until they seem to fall into patterns, so that there are not just infinite, bewildering, unique situations dazzling us every day.

Many organizations share an "organizational form," but do not share a "style." Perhaps a good analogy is Darwin's well-known distinction between "unity of type" and "conditions of existence." Fins, flippers, and arms share a unity of type, so, at least for a few million years, this preservation of the form makes them recognizable related. Eventually, the adaptations become too distant to be recognizable, as the forms transform in everyday conditions. There are many empowerment projects, many similar welfare offices, many similar small "alternative schools," many similar environmental activist groups. We propose that a finite number of "organizational styles" will be easily available to most people who have any familiarity with a range of organizations that share a "form." After having participated in two strident student groups or two rigid bureaucracies or two more familiar ones (Gouldner 1956), a person knows how to "do" the third. When millions of people have the same experience, a predictable kind of organization solidifies.
Performance: The Need to Fail

Finally, we extend Alexander's concept of "performance" to see how organizations represent themselves, to their members and their external audiences.

Echoing Durkheim, Alexander starts by saying that societies need strong collective representations, and that these collective representations, feelings, and ideas are forged in extreme moments and endure until the next meltdown and reforging. An intense ritual brings people out of their individual selves, reawakens their sense of belonging, and reforges their ability to make meaning together. Alexander wisely contends that this was easier to do in pre-Antiquity, when ritual involved a ruler performing his own role as ruler, before an audience that was, itself, part of the ritual action, to enact a situation that was supposed to represent the ruler as perfect and the society as perfect. Alexander says that it is difficult to stage a convincing public performance in a diverse, complex society. Unlike ancient or tribal societies, Western societies since ancient Greece have separated out the scripts, audiences, actors, the characters whom they impersonate, and the society that they are supposed to reflect. Because of this differentiation, the play often fails: The actors, the characters they impersonate, the mise-en-scène, the audience, and script—the elements of Burke's pentad—do not match, do not "fuse," and the ritual's power is thus "de-fused." Different audiences, for example, may interpret the same performance in quite opposite ways. Or there may be suspicion that the actors are puppets, or the props on stage may undermine the message. In those cases, Alexander says, the performance "fails." In a successful performance, the spectator, as well as the actor, "identifies with something with which he is not identical." In the gap, solidarity grows; people who take a metaphoric leap together momentarily merge en route (Auverbuch 2003 [1953]).

A metaphoric flight like this transports us together when we have no baggage, but in most cases, we do. This approach to performance assumes that in an effective, meaning-generating ritual, "saying is doing." Language philosopher J. L. Austin (1965) described cases when "saying is doing"—when the public official breaks the champagne bottle on the side of the ship and says, "I christen thee the Queen Mary"; when the police say "You are under arrest"; or the minister pronounced you man and wife. In ongoing organizations, however, participants have to know how and when they can "do things with words"; if I christen you, or say you are under arrest, it probably will not have any affect. To know when the performance will work and when it will not, people have to develop methods of attaching the ritual to their everyday conditions, with the equipment that they can muster, and only certain people can make the words stick. No matter how many times a business claims to be a family, if it still fires loyal employees, the words will not stick. Participants have to know how and when to invoke the words, and how to protect themselves from getting fired. No matter how often a business claims not to be a hierarchy, participants have to know, again, how and when and with whom to invoke the claims (Kunda 1992).

In the everyday life of organizations, the failure to fuse and take the metaphoric leap together does not result in organizational failure. It is normal and typical, and necessary for the organization's ability to survive and to change. Organizations' public representations never adequately describe what goes on inside them; all organizations make implausible promises, but the organizations keep stumbling along anyway—muddling through, in Charles Lindblom's words (1980). This means that participants have to learn precisely how to expect the performances to fail. Thornton and Ocasio's article, for example, implies that looseness of definitions is not a mistake, but is necessary. As organization scholars have long recognized (Meyer and Rowan 1977, e.g.), people can never use their ritual knowledge in everyday life undiluted; doing so would be to collapse the boundaries between the real and the symbolic. Maintaining both kinds of meaning is necessary in organizations. Too much depth or excitement would be a problem, not a goal. If organizations lack dramatic celebrations and glue, they keep muddling through anyway, precisely because members lack serious psychic investment, and know how and when to take the big promises seriously.

Our point is that that connecting or decoupling them is never just an on/off switch, but requires pragmatic precision. We argue, further, that through repeated couplings and decouplings of ritual knowledge and pragmatic action, new meanings arise. When, for example, the words "volunteer" and "leader" change meaning, the change is happening in a less dramatic, less public way than the changes Alexander describes. It is happening in such a way that even after people have redefined the word, they can still use the expression "an hour later" in its older definition, depending on what they need to get done at the moment. If someone who was just called "a leader" has no experience in leading anything, and the task at the moment is not to inspire future potential leadership but to get a specific task done, participants have to know this. They have to know which definition to use, to get something done together. Nonetheless, this new, flexible set of definitions ultimately also becomes culturally binding.

Alexander's key insight can be extended even further than he himself does: Doing the kind of performance that Alexander calls a "failure" would, in this case, be the only way to succeed. Participants have to learn how to say different things in different places; how and when to be cynical, timid, or combative; how and when to be friendly, intimate, or formal; which definition to muster where. Multiple, vague meanings are themselves the meanings that all but the most sect-like organization must reaffirm. Rather than a performance of extraordinary luminosity and fusion, people need to learn to perform these varied degrees of finely calibrated but undefined, vague attachment.

Further extending cultural sociology's reach, we argue that even if participation in most organizations works best and feels best when people calibrate their distance and are not carried away, this distance is not culturally meaningless. Participants have to do it with nuanced precision; the meaning and the practice are not just "decoupled," as organization scholars had once said. The precise method of "decoupling" word and deed eventually, if repeated often enough across enough different organizations,
becomes itself part of a shared repertoire of meanings. These everyday methods may never be ritualized, but they may be commonly recognized nonetheless.

**Using Cultural Sociology to See How People in Organizations Coordinate Action**

So, does all of this mean that we have reached the outer threshold of cultural sociology’s relevance? Does it mean that cultural sociology is good only for brief moments like the Aborigines’ seasonal gatherings, or moments when the whole world is riveted to the TV screen in judgment? No, it means that cultural sociology needs to find a way of talking about people’s everyday life methods of making definitions feel as if they cohere, in everyday life.

Just as the strong program objects to sociology’s usual treatment of “culture” as the soft stuff that is left over after all the causal structures have been pinpointed (Alexander 1999: 13), so does this chapter argue that patterns of interaction are not the soft stuff that is left over after cultural structures have been pinpointed. This is not a call for softening structuralism’s edges, blurring them so we can give room for people to make ad hoc adjustments to the structures. Rather, the argument is that the processes of adjustment follow, and create, meaningful, recurrent patterns, and the patterns “sediment” into enduring, shared expectations, even if a dramatic performance does not stamp it in solid cement. To grasp the very precise manners in which people methodically create and recreate these patterns of motion, we suggested the concept of “organizational style.”

In adding this dimension—time and motion—we have added three ingredients to both cultural and organizational sociology.

First, better sociolinguistic theories are needed than the ones currently in circulation in both organizational sociology and cultural sociology. We must see how normal everyday language use inevitably invokes and reinforces background knowledge about social institutions—about “momories” versus “shortstops” in relation to “babies,” for example.

Second, we need a theory of how people implicitly negotiate the borders between institutions in everyday situations, where the borders are not only never clear, but often must be kept intentionally vague, and not just vague, but vague in very precise ways. Part of how participants distinguish between one kind of organization and another is by relying on abstractions like “the differentiation of spheres,” but that is not enough: They need finer methods of distinguishing between different kinds of organizations, all of which, in practice, blend activities that adhere to many spheres’ implicit “logics.” We need to understand how actors draw borders between institutions pragmatically, so that people actually know what to do together, in the next few minutes, hours, or years. The borders between institutions can look solid for a few moments, in a public speech, but the instant a person enters

a real organization, maintaining any shared sense of “what is this organization a ‘case of?’” is much more difficult; the borders change minute by minute, and the upkeep that they require must be both more precise and more flexible than the kind that a public performance can suggest.

Third, new meanings can jell without any binding ritual that seizes participants. In a ritual, participants can recognize failure when they fail to become sufficiently engaged, ecstatically taken out of themselves, or convinced. In an organization, in contrast, participants can recognize failure when they cannot figure out how to do things together, when they cannot reach any agreement on how to judge their actions, or how to feel about them. Meaning-making in organizations works pragmatically; something is meaningless when action halts. Action might feel meaningless even before that, but the convincing “exit” is the pragmatic one: If people can act effectively together, the action inevitably bears some kind of meaning, even if the meaning as participants see it is “trivial, meaninglessness action.” This may look like a simple semantic argument, about whether to say that meaninglessness is a kind of meaning, apathy a kind of action, a quarter-note rest a kind of sound, and silence a kind of speech. But it is more than that: It is to say that if people can work together, shoulder-to-shoulder, over time, repetitively, they are also making meaning together. We see the cultural dimension of this meaning-making when participants can decipher each other’s actions enough to predict the future, fairly well.

For the study of organizations, our question has to be how to imagine the relationship between everyday sedimentation and the moments of high drama on the other. Our point has been that the marriage can be quite happy and stable, as long as we recognize that collective feelings and meanings also form and transform in more mundane practices, over time, as the layers and layers of subtle transformations build on one another. In all three additions, we argue that the concept of “typification” shows how actors coordinate action in the next few minutes, hours, or years. This does not mean that cultural categories are irrelevant; in contrast, it means that people must master the categories’ subtly different senses, in different situations, with different audiences. By taking this crucial pragmatic step, learning exactly how and where and when to couple or decouple, then cultural sociology and organizational sociology can marry.

**NOTES**

1. These seemingly bland and obvious insights inspire some of the most exciting recent social theory and research, and follow a long tradition in Western thought From Aristotle to Hegel, to contemporary theorists (Walzer 1983; Smiley 1988; Alford and Friedland 1985, 1990; Stone 1988). Theorists have challenged political philosophies that assume a decontextual sense of the good. Smiley, like Boltanski and Thévenot, does not say that goodness is all relative, that “anything goes,” but rather, that we can only start from the situations that we have, from the raw material we have. This is a materialized understanding.
of moral judgment. Boltanski and Thévenot place more weight than Alexander does on the incessant difficulties of getting from the justification (or the code, the cultural category) to the pragmatic "test," as they put it.

2. Boltanski and Thévenot place more weight than Alexander does on the incessantness of the difficulties of connecting the justification (or the code, the cultural category) with the situation, through the pragmatic "test," as the French authors put it. They call these different categories "justifications," making it clear that they are not talking about empirical categories. Their definition is more precise than the idea of "institutional logics" which includes, in some work, taken-for-granted practices, equipment, and rhetoric. A "justification," in contrast, might clash with the "equipment" that is in place in a real organization, when, to take our example, the volunteers must be counted and their hours documented on grant applications.

3. And, as in any organization, people creatively "repair" its boundaries, as one moral narrative—in this case, financial—inherently invades another—in this case, religious (Alexander 1999, 2001).

4. Similarly, when the government pays "community-based organizations" to do things that were formerly done by the government—preschool care or health care, for example—the organizations creatively blend political activism, to create a "political machine": The community-based organization supports local politicians and, in turn, the politicians dispense goods and services to the organizations that support them (Marwell 2004).

5. Schutz (1970) and Ricoeur (1991) both use the word this way, to make the same point. As Ricoeur puts it, "The rules change under pressure of innovation, but they change slowly and even resist change in virtue of the sedimentation process. . . . The rules that together form a new kind of grammar direct the composition of new words—new before becoming typical" (Ricoeur 1991:430). See Robin Wagner-Pacifici's insightful use of this insight about time, in her work on the back-and-forth of public conflicts (2001).

6. Some neo-institutionalists theory uses the term "schema" to describe this process, but the same authors' empirical research shows a much more sensuous process. Like typifications, schematic link cognition, emotion, and moral judgment (DiMaggio and Powell 1991, e.g.), and through them, members coordinate action to create new social structures. We emphasize that this everyday practical work is inseparable from the "things" that surround it. Vygotsky (1978) calls this network of people and things "activity systems"; it includes members' ways of gluing their "schema" onto everyday practices. As Vygotsky, Latour, and others emphasize, one thinks by means of a whole entourage of "things.

7. Similarly, an exhaustive and suggestive literature review of neo-institutionalism's varied stripes reveals a number of clear prescriptions for the analysis of institutional change: disaggregate institutions into schemas and resources; decompose institutional durability into processes of reproduction, disruption, and response to disruption; and above all, appreciate the multiplicity and heterogeneity of the institutions that make up the social world. . . . (Clemens and Cook 1991)

8. This is Bellah's concept of "symbolic realism" (1970).

9. The concept "organizational style" is like "group style," but the difference is important: A "group" is one unit that may or may not be part of a larger "organization." In a small, face-to-face group, there may be only one "style" in play, but in a large organization, there will be multiple subgroups, and part of how participants learn the style is by learning which "groupstyle" is in play in the different parts of the larger "organization." The "organizational style," in other words, includes this distribution of group styles across a range of sites within an organization. In other words, organizational style includes the "architecture" to which we referred earlier (see also Elsas 2011).


To the Memory of Clifford Geertz