TOWARDS A RELATIONIST THEORY OF ORGANIZATION

THE AGENCY OF EXTERNAL ACTORS IN COMMUNICATIVE CONSTITUTION

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when I fulfil my obligations as brother, husband, or citizen, when I execute my contracts, I perform duties which are defined externally to myself and my acts, in law and in custom.

(Durkheim, 1938: 1)

Abstract

I de senere år har et kommunikativt perspektiv på organisationers eksistens vundet betydelig anseelse. I dette perspektiv opstår organisationen som en kollektiv enhed og struktur igennem kommunikative processer. Her ses 'interne' aktører (herunder først og fremmest organisationens medlemmer) som konstituenter af 'deres' organisation. Om end en kommunikativ tilgang på mange måder viser sig lovende for organisationsteorien, demonstrerer jeg i dette teoretiske speciale, hvordan et fokus på 'interne' aktører alene i organisationens kommunikative konstituering må anses som et begrænset perspektiv. Ved inddragelse af den institutionelle teoris forståelse af relationen mellem en organisation og dens omverden problematiserer jeg dette fokus på 'interne' frem for 'eksterne' konstituenter og illustrerer, hvordan organisationens kommunikative konstituering med fordel kan anskues som en 'åben' proces, hvor enhver aktør i princippet kan deltage. På denne baggrund undersøger jeg, hvordan situationen er anderledes i praksis, hvor forhandlinger mellem aktører, der evaluerer hinandens legitimitet gennem inddragelse af præetablerede referencerammer, resulterer i begrænsningen af anerkendte talspersoner. I denne teoretiske model fremstår organisationen i mindre grad som en entydig, veldefineret størrelse; snarere giver definition af organisationen potentielt anledning til kontroverser mellem en heterogen masse af aktører, hvoraf organisationen 'selv' og dens medlemmer kun udgør én (eller få) af stemmerne.

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1   Introduction

This thesis finds its starting point in two major developments within organizational theory. On the one hand, communication and discourse has since the 1980's progressively taken center stage in defining what an organization *is*, leading to a view of organizations as inherently communicative phenomena (Taylor & Van Every, 2000). On the other hand – following especially open systems perspectives on organizing – organizations are increasingly viewed as entities relative to and intimately connected with their social environments; a perspective that is gaining relevance as globalization and technological developments intensify and societal expectations of corporate behavior become ever more vocalized by a plurality of actors to which the organizations must adapt to survive (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

Both of these developments seem valuable in their own right to account for dynamics of organizing and organizational constitution, and consider which actors participate in and shape these processes. One brings us closer to understanding organizational existence and pinpoint the exact moments when the organization is constituted through communication; the other urge us to view organizations in a broader societal context, thus promoting a *relationist* view of organizing which extends beyond individual organizations and instead view these relative to and as connected with other actors in their social environment. However, given their diverging ontological claims, these perspectives have not yet been integrated in a coherent theory. This shortcoming exposes the weakness of each perspective in not seeing clearly what the other sees. For example, understanding and accounting for organizations individually risks to attribute them a vacuum-like existence; a perspective that may fail to take into account the various environmental contingencies that continuously affect and shape organizations. Equally, the relationist (first and foremost *institutional*) perspective defines itself as a 'macro-theory', thus legitimizing descriptions of general, societal power dynamics which organizations are often subjected to in terms of 'societal pressures' and 'forces', while making little effort to demystify these abstract concepts by pinpointing the exact instances where such dynamics of power can be observed. It would seem that what the former perspective lacks in terms of *relationism*, the latter lacks in *realism* (or rather, as we shall see, in *materialism*). These are issues that attempts of theoretical integration should address.

At least one line of unanswered questions about organizational existence seems to result from this current lack of theoretical integration: First, if organizations are indeed communicatively constituted entities, in which sense are communicative organizations distinguished from a communicative environment? And secondly, if organizations are indeed better understood through a relationist

approach considering not only the organization in isolation but as submerged in a multitude of networks and actors (governments, legal institutions, other businesses, the media, NGOs, etc.) that *affect it* and which *it affects*, should we not consider the possibility of external agencies directly engaged in organizational constitution? In other words, which constitutional dynamics are at stake when non-members speak of the organization and thus mobilize it in communication? Together, these considerations lead me to the problem statement guiding the theoretical and conceptual exercise of this thesis:

Viewing organization as a communicatively constituted phenomenon, how to re-conceptualize the nature of this constitution to account not just for the agency of 'internal' actors, but also for the agency and contributions of other 'external' actors potentially involved?

By addressing this question, I hope to show that research might benefit from not discriminating *a priori* between which actors *can* and *cannot contribute* to organizational constitution. Further, I seek to investigate the possibility that what some macro-theories term 'societal pressures' which may deeply affect organizational realities can be viewed as attempts of external actors to *re-define* (and thus *reconstitute*) *the organization communicatively.* Thus, this thesis considers the basis for modifying existing theory of the communicative constitution of organization to better perceive of an extended range of actors, including non-members and other potential 'external' agencies, and their involvement in shaping organizational existence. As I hope to show, extending the perspective of existing theory in this way may further the theoretical basis for understanding the *communicative constitution and organization of society* as well as the constitution of individual organizations along with establishing the conceptual foundation for considering how these processes intersect.

The thesis is structured as follows: I start out by introducing the perspective of the communicative constitution of organization (or "CCO") represented by the Montreal School. This perspective is chosen as a starting point as its performative approach to organizational constitution, in my view, represents a promising way out of previous theoretical struggles regarding how communication may constitute organization. However, by briefly considering some of the main relationist intuitions of institutional theory in an evaluation of the Montreal School's perspective, it seems its explanation of organizational constitution is also limited by a tendency to focus on 'internal' actors (primarily organizational members) as the only possible force of constitution.

Based on this critique, I continue by exploring the seeming theoretical compatibility between the Montreal School's organizational theory and the sociology of Actor-Network Theory (ANT). ANT is often mobilized by the Montreal School to *sociologize* its perspective and the two theories have been described as "globally compatible", i.e. based on similar ontological and epistemological assumptions about organizational existence (Schoeneborn et al., 2014). I venture to explore this potential compatibility while demonstrating how ANT allows for a particular dynamic of 'external constitution' which the Montreal School apparently does not. Tracing this difference of perspective, I consider the basis for reconfiguring the Montreal School's perspective by adopting the possibility of external constitution into its general framework.

On this background, I demonstrate how inter- and extra-organizational dynamics described by institutional theory can be deconstructed and redefined in terms of communication and, thus, explained within the Montreal School's organizational theory. In this way, I seek to add to the relationist perspective of the Montreal School's model by extending it to consider, potentially, the agency of *any actor* involved in and affecting communicative constitution. Further, I argue that where any actor may affect organizational constitution *in principle*, the amount and variety of actors able to shape organizational existence becomes limited *in practice* through the involved actors' negotiations and evaluations of each other's legitimacy.

This analysis leads me to present an alternative model of the communicative constitution of organization which can be seen as both an extension of the Montreal School's model and a reconfiguration of the relationist intuitions of institutional theory in terms of communication. In the following discussion, I highlight both some of the potentials and limitations of this model. Finally, I conclude the thesis and consider some implications and perspectives for future research.

I will start out by introducing theory of how organizations can be understood as communicatively constituted phenomena along with viewing the particular reconfiguration of communication and organization characteristic of the Montreal School.

2   Organization *as* communication

The increasing importance attributed to communication and discourse in explaining organizational existence has a history dating at least 30-40 years back. Since the interpretive turn in the 1980s and the discursive turn in the 1990s, the attention paid to the relationship between communication and organization has been increasing. As a result of this theoretical development, communication has progressively taken center stage as the main phenomenon through which organizations emerge (Taylor & Van Every, 2000; Cooren, 2006). Scholars representing contemporary perspectives on the communicative constitution of organization (CCO) within organizational theory can today be seen as the main representatives of this general theoretical development. To representatives of the CCO perspective, communication cannot be considered merely one of many elements involved in organizing, nor can it be reduced to practices of expressing and describing pre-existing realities. Rather, it is regarded as the means by which organizations are established, composed and sustained. In other words, organizations cannot be seen as neatly delimited entities 'within which' communication occurs. Instead they are continuously realized, defined, experienced and identified *in* communication processes (Cooren et al., 2011).

Despite the growing success of such communication-based perspectives, CCO has been criticized for making too bold ontological claims regarding what constitutes organizational existence. Some scholars, for example, argue that reducing organization to discourse and communication amounts to neglecting the material conditions of its production. According to this view, one cannot explain 'organization' without mobilizing ideological and material structures along with the relations of power which are traditionally used to account for what shapes discourse and communication in the first place (Reed, 2000).

These critiques have been tentatively answered, however, by representatives of the Montreal School – a group of researchers arguing for a particular perspective on CCO in which communication is understood as an act of *linking*; but where the entities being linked may be material as well as symbolic. Thus, to the Montreal School, communication between organizational members should not be regarded merely as 'talk' or 'language use' but rather as a complex performance of enacting organizational structures by linking together a variety of elements including (potentially) both those ideological structures, relations of power and material entities considered central to organizing by the materialist critiques exemplified above. Thus, by taking such an inclusive, performative approach to communication and organizational constitution, the contributions of the Montreal School represent an attempt to overcome the theoretical divide between materialism, on one hand, and

socio-constructivism, on the other; an approach which, in turn, enables it to address and reconfigure a number of previous issues in organizational theory.

In the following sections, I present the Montreal School's perspective on the communicative constitution of organization in some detail. This presentation enables me to consider the potentials and shortcomings of their organizational theory, thus illustrating the need for including the agency of external actors in its theoretical model of communicative constitution.

2.1   The Montreal School's concept of communication

In order to overcome the theoretical divide between materialism and socio-constructivism in accounting for the communicative constitution of organization, the Montreal School conceives of communication, first and foremost, as a kind of *action* (Cooren, 2006). To conceive of communication as action, the Montreal School seeks inspiration in the work of Bruno Latour, who consider action to be something that is *shared between actors* in the way that 'doing something' necessarily means 'making something else do something' (Latour, 1996). Since action, in this view, always necessarily involves at least two actors 'acting upon each other' – or *interacting* – in various ways, notions of 'action' and 'communication' start looking increasingly similar. As Francois Cooren, one of the primary authors of this school's perspective, has stated, speaking in terms of 'action' and 'agency' is, to the Montreal School, equal to speaking in terms of 'communication' (Cooren, 2006).

How can action and communication be viewed as parallel in this way? To understand this, communication, according to the Montreal School, should be considered in a minimalist sense as *the creation of a link between two entities*. To better illustrate this inclusive notion of communication proposed by his school of thought, Cooren uses the example of a man driving the wheel of his car into a pothole in the road. Here, the hole in the road may *communicate* to the man in the car that the road needs fixing. One may notice, that the hole does not directly *encode* this message to the man; however, this does not stop him from *decoding* this particular message. In this way, the Montreal School's perspective distances itself from instrumental theories viewing communication as a direct transfer of meaning (Cooren, 2000). Further, the example serves to illustrate another of the Montreal School's proposals, that communication – and action in general – should be considered a *hybrid phenomenon* potentially involving not only the agency of human actors and language based discourse but equally material objects, abstract entities or indeed any kind of *actor*; i.e. whatever appears to act, that is, *make a difference* in the situation (in the above example these actors could be

the man, his car, the road and the pothole). Seeking inspiration again from Latour, the Montreal School refers to any actor that is not human broadly as *non-human actors* (Cooren, 2006). Thus, seeing communication as the creation of a link between two entities it should be understood that these could indeed be *any two entities* no matter their respective ontology as long as they appear to make a difference in a given situation. Also, just as the type of actor may vary, so may the type of linkage established between actors as these links, in Cooren's words, can be *physical* as well as *discursive* (Cooren, 2000: 67). For example, we may speak of communication between a car and a pothole through the creation of a physical link, on one hand, and of communication between a manager and an employee through the establishment of a discursive link, on the other (ibid.). Thus, what matters is not whether or not these links exemplify communication but rather attention paid to the type of actors involved along with the type of link established.

This conception of communication as linking proposed by the Montreal School is largely what enables its representatives' attempts of overcoming the traditional materialist versus socio-constructivist dilemma in organizational theory since this conceptualization of communication is broad enough to consider the linking of any kind of element (e.g. material, discursive, abstract, human, or non-human) along with several kinds of linkages (including both physical and discursive links). This view of communication paves the way for understanding organizational constitution as a complex communicative process of linking together a variety of elements of different ontologies, ranging from human managers and employees to buildings, charts, documents, capital, and so forth. Here, in the kind of discourse-based interaction between humans, that we tend to imply when speaking of 'communication', *language* and *discourse* can be understood as a means of humans to *mobilize* a number of other entities (i.e. actors) and make these 'say' things or act in different ways. As Cooren states:

> "[…] *communication should not be considered an activity that only concerns human beings. Many other things get communicated through what people say, write, or do: emotions, ideas, beliefs, values, positions, but also – and through the latter of these – situations, facts, realities, and so on.*" (Schoeneborn et al., 2014: 290).

This perspective is what makes the Montreal School argue for viewing even inter-human communication as a hybrid phenomenon since other entities are always at play *through* what people say (Cooren, 2006). This presentation of the Montreal School's conception of communication creates

the basis for understanding its (according the Montreal School) inherent *organizing properties.* Just how *organization* is achieved through processes of communication will be the subject of the following sections.

2.2   How communication constitutes organization

To understand the Montreal School's view of how organization is accomplished through communication, we first need to pay attention to two dimensions of communication which, according to the Montreal School, gives communication certain *organizing properties.* Communication is seen as having 1) a *transactional dimension* and 2) a *representative dimension.* As we shall see, these two dimensions lead the Montreal School to speak equally of two dimensions of organizational constitution; 1) processes of *organizing,* and 2) the constitution of the organization as a *collective entity* (see Schoeneborn et al., 2014). The Montreal School, thus, takes into account both process-like and entity-like aspects of organization.

2.2.1   Transaction in processes of organizing

First, members of the Montreal School insist on a *transactional dimension* of communication involved in any exchange. This dimension implies an inherent asymmetry in the act of communicating which manifests as a sense of obligation, debt or expectation on the part of the persons interacting (ibid.). Cooren presents the following example:

> *"For instance, let us imagine a situation where X asks Y something. Responding to X's question or request implies that Y decides to answer – or not – X's question or comply or not with X's request. This response consequently implies that X* reacts *to what Y answered or did* for *him or her (by thanking or sanctioning Y). As we see in this mini-sequence, communication creates organizing to the extent that a sequence of actions – what Y did for X – is* subsumed under *and even* embedded within *another sequence of action (X asking Y something and X thanking or sanctioning Y for what he or she did or said). Proponents of the Montreal School argue that these effects of submission, imbrications, and embeddedness constitute the essence of organizing."* (ibid.: 292).

This example serves to illustrate what the Montreal School terms the transactional dimension of communication along with how this dimension is what enables communicative processes of *organizing.* Thus, organizing is said to occur to the extent that an actor (here, person X) is able to make another actor (here, person Y) submit to or comply with a given request. In other words, when viewing communication as transaction, organizing results to the extent that the *response* of Y is in line with and thus determined by the *request* of X. Because of the sense of debt or obligation created through any act of communication, a certain response is expected which, when realized, leads to a *hierarchy* in the contributions. In other words, some contributions become *subsumed under* others as some actors become able to make other actors comply with their requests. Thus, the transactional dimension of communication enables the Montreal School to explain processes of *organizing* accomplished through communication*,* as certain actors are *submitted to* the programs of others, resulting in a *hierarchical structure* established through processes of communication. As indicated, the establishment of these *sub-missions* in a hierarchical structure becomes, to the Montreal School, the essence (and objective) of organizing (Cooren, 2000; Schoeneborn et al., 2014).

Now, how can this transactional dimension of communication along with its structural results be observed in communication? According to Cooren, although all communication involves inherent asymmetries, some kinds of communication are more directly constitutive of processes of organizing than others. With reference to classical speech act theory (see Austin (1962), and Searle (1979)), Cooren explains how the interplay of discursive acts such as *directives* (e.g. giving someone an order) and *commissives* (accepting or committing to e.g. a given order) directly constitutes *organizing,* as the performance of these acts are usually linked (a commissive is almost always a *response* to a directive) and comes to have asymmetrical – or *hierarchical* – implications and effects (as Y's act of *committing to* X's *directive* constitutes Y's *submission to* X; an exchange which thus results in the kind of asymmetry and hierarchy described above). Importantly, a given communication's status as a directive or commissive depends on its *modalization* and/or *interpretation* as such. As Cooren describes, a directive can be understood as a speech act modalized by the speaker and interpreted by the listener as giving a 'having to do' (e.g. giving an order), and a commissive as a speech act modalized and interpreted as committing the speaker to such a 'having to do' (e.g. committing to carrying out the order) (Cooren, 2000). In this way, communicative exchanges of directives and commissives become manifestations of the transactional dimension of communication and directly constitutes processes of organizing as perceived by the Montreal School. However, to

fully comprehend the general model of organizational constitution proposed by the Montreal School, a second dimension of communication as *representation* has to be elaborated.

2.2.2   *Representation in constituting the collective entity*

The above presentation of the transactional dimension of communication enabled viewing the Montreal School's conception of organizing processes (or the process-like nature of organization). To understand, on the other hand, the organization as a collective actor in and of itself (by considering the more entity-like nature of organizations), one will have to consider equally the *representative* dimension of communication.

Where *organizing*, as we have seen, may result from processes of communication constituting a certain *structure*, the organization, according to Taylor & Cooren (1997), is equally constituted as a *collective entity* through the actors that *represent* it. More precisely, an organization is constituted as a collective whole when it finds expression in identifiable actors and these actors are recognized by others as legitimate expressions of such representation. Thus, constituting the organization as a collective entity takes an actor, X, to *associate* him-, her-, or itself with the organization as a collective entity – thereby *representing* it – as long as this representation is recognized by others as legitimate (i.e. for others to equally associate X with that organization). The constitution of collective entities is thus dependent upon human *spokespersons* (and *representatives,* more generally, as these include non-human actors like logos, buildings, products, etc.) to *speak on behalf of* (thus *representing*) the collective in question. Organizations are thus constituted as collective entities through all the actors that are, in one way or another, made to represent them (ibid.; Cooren, 2006).

Importantly, where certain communications seemed more directly implicative for processes of *organizing* than others (see above section), *any communication* involving organizational representation may in principle come to redefine (and thus reconstitute) the organization as an actor in terms of what it is and does. As Cooren exemplifies:

> *"By claiming that his or her organization should not be deemed entirely responsible for*
> *an ecological disaster (assertive speech act* [i.e. asserting something as true (Searle,
> 1979)])*,a spokesperson constitutes that organization as not entirely liable in this inci-*
> *dent (whether or not this claim will be accepted is another story, of course. This has to*
> *be negotiated through communication)."* (Schoeneborn et al., 2014).

In this view, mere assertions made to represent the organization in a particular way may come to constitute it depending on whether this expression is considered legitimate by others or not. Also, for example hiring, promoting or firing an employee (declarative speech acts; i.e. bringing into existence a new state of affairs by declaring it to be so (Searle, 1979)) are acts that re-constitute and re-define the organization in various ways (Schoeneborn et al., 2014). While some communications may definitely become more consequential than others in bringing the organization into existence as a collective agency and a social reality, each act of communication representing the organization constitutes it (at least to a minimal extent) for "another next first time" (Garfinkel, 2002: 182). One may note, however, that representatives of the Montreal School tend to focus on utterances and performances of organizational members and non-human representatives themselves (including objects directly associated with the organization) (see e.g. Cooren (2006) or Schoeneborn et al. (2014)); an aspect of the Montreal School's theorizing to which I will return below. Based on this section, we may sketch out the general model of organizational constitution proposed by the Montreal School.

2.3   The general model of communicative constitution

The two previous sections has allowed me to illustrate how the Montreal School perceives of organizational constitution in terms of both the process-like and entity-like character of organizations. Thus, organizational constitution can be observed along two dimensions of communication; one of transaction and one of representation. Depending on which dimension is attributed attention, one will be observing either processes of organizing or the constitution of organizations as social entities. This is important, since, depending on the instance of communication under observation, both dimensions may present themselves simultaneously. For example, an employee wearing a company uniform may be interpreted as that employee *constituting his or her organization as an entity* by *representing* it (by wearing a representative uniform). However, wearing the uniform could be equally interpreted as that employee *committing to* a *directive* given by a line manager; that is, as an example of *organizing* where the employee *submits* to the request or order given by the manager to wear the uniform at all times. In this way, we see that both the representative and transactional dimension may be at play in the same instance of communication, although they remain theoretically distinguishable. Another interesting implication of the Montreal School's conception of organizational communication is that many instances of communication outside of formal organizational contexts may be considered 'organizational'. For example, a person may represent her family by

having a certain last name or submit herself to 'the good of the family' by carrying out a request given to her by her mother. In the Montreal School's perspective, such interactions could be considered 'organizational' in nature (see e.g. Cooren (2000)).

Further, as previously noted, the Montreal School insists that organizational constitution cannot be understood without ascribing agency to non-human as well as human actors. Again seeking inspiration in the philosophy and sociology of Bruno Latour, the argument is that the stabile existence of human societies or organizations cannot be explained without taking various material objects and other non-human actors into consideration. Considering the difference between a society of simians and human society, Latour notes, that where simians have to constantly renegotiate relations, roles and hierarchies, human society is to a larger degree characterized by stability of order and steady organization. To be sure, human and simian interaction has a lot in common, but contrary to simians, humans mobilize both *physical* and *symbolic frames* which enable us to organize and stabilize our interactions in time and space (Latour, 1996).

This general intuition is adopted by the Montreal School, who argues for analyzing processes of organizational constitution at the interplay of *conversation* and *text*. Conversation indicates the communicative site where organizing is carried out and where agency and text are generated. Text, in turn, implies the establishment of such physical and symbolic frames which enable and constrain future conversations by manifesting and stabilizing organizational structures over time (Taylor & Robichaud, 2004). Through their particular 'staying quality', these texts and similar objects (e.g. organizational diagrams, policies, contracts, etc.) enable the humans who manufacture them to create stabile structures (or, in Latour's words, *frames*) used to stabilize human interaction through time and space (Latour, 1996; Cooren, 2000). These non-human entities – often in the form of *texts* - act to the extent that they come to *make a difference* in a given situation (Schoeneborn et al., 2014). Non-human entities thus contribute to organizing to the extent that they are mobilized in, participate in and come to frame the communication and interaction that constitutes organization. For example, a manager may *speak on behalf of* a certain organizational diagram or policy and how *it structures* the organization. Similarly, a memo or a similar document containing a written order may *speak for* a manager *telling* employees in a geographically distant affiliate what to do next. Thus, in the perspective of the Montreal School, these objects should be considered *full-fledged actors* in and of themselves that both structure and become modified through human interaction. By enacting relatively permanent manifestations of the organizational structure (such as the distribution of roles, responsibilities, authority and tasks), these texts stabilize organization and channel

processes of organizing by creating predictability in exchanges of directives and commissives between e.g. managers and employees (Cooren, 2000).

To be sure, human actors still play a central role in organizational constitution. Human actors are at the same time those who *mobilize* various texts and through whom these pre-established structures manifest themselves. Thus, on the one hand, by focusing on agency, organizational texts become resources for human interaction. On the other hand, by focusing on text, agency becomes manifestations of pre-established socio-semantic meanings and structures (Taylor & Robichaud, 2004). The reader may recall how this dynamic is achieved through communication when viewed as a hybrid phenomenon involving the speaker's mobilization of various other actors such as positions, identities, things, situations, ideologies or even realities. Organizing and organization could thus be equally viewed as hybrid phenomena where human spokespersons draw on a number of entities of variable ontologies which are all made to represent and contribute to the enactment of the organized form (Taylor and Van Every, 2000).

2.4   Reconfiguring notions of scale

An important aspect of the Montreal School's theorizing (and generally a central promise of CCO according to Kuhn (2012)) remains to be presented before venturing to evaluate its theoretical program. This aspect, interestingly, is also inspired by Latour and his work with Michel Callon in establishing what they term a sociology of translation (or, conventionally, Actor-Network Theory). This concerns the Montreal School's ability to overcome the 'micro-macro divide', i.e. answer the question of how 'local' interactions (micro-level) may result in 'global' organizations (macro-level). Starting from Hobbes' notion of the state as a monstrous Leviathan built upon and represented by the many bodies who authorize the few, Callon & Latour (1981) argue that any macro-actor (including large corporations) can be seen as a 'many-headed' Leviathan in a similar way. However, to fully account for the existence of macro-actors, one has to take into account the non-human entities (including material objects) which provide the final necessary contribution by stabilizing the macro-actor's existence over time (ibid.).

We see how Callon & Latour's account of the existence of macro-actors is very similar to the Montreal School's description of the "materiality" of organizations (i.e. all the entities, humans and non-humans that act and speak in its name). In this view, the notion of "level" in regard to micro- and macro-actors is considered misleading. Although we may still speak of "micro-" and "macro-

actors", we realize that the macro-actor will always depend on an authorized agent to speak for it. Thus, "scaling up" from micro to macro is something that individual actors are capable of doing (and continuously do) through interaction and communication (Schoeneborn et al., 2014). For example, a person may be speaking on behalf of herself at one moment and on behalf of an organization at the next (e.g. by mobilizing her position as CEO), thus immediately 'scaling up' and – we might say – engaging in a macro- rather than a micro-exchange. Thus, when the Montreal School urges us never to leave the *terra firma* of interaction they are not arguing that we should only consider micro-interactions. Rather to analyze organizational phenomena they are proposing to identify these macro-events *in* communication and analyze them as they are enacted by various agents. This view has radical methodological consequences since the agency of macro-actors becomes, in a sense, *as easily observable and analyzable* as the agency of the micro-actors who act them into being (Callon & Latour, 1981).

This section has served to present the general perspective of organizational constitution represented by the Montreal School. I will continue by reflecting upon and evaluating some of the promises and problems of this perspective in relation to understanding how organizations may be affected, reconstituted and re-defined by external actors.

2.5   The Montreal School – promises and shortcomings

Based on the above presentation of the Montreal School's perspective on organization and organizing, we should be able to consider some of the immediate potentials of its perspective. First of all, bridging the gap between materialist and socio-constructivist models of organization seems a valid theoretical endeavor. By questioning the material world / social world dichotomy – which, as we have seen, entails a reconfiguration of notions of agency and communication – the Montreal School shows how communication should not be viewed as separate from any 'underlying' materiality or 'overarching' structures. Rather, communication should be viewed as a hybrid phenomenon which involves the mobilization of a multitude of entities of variable ontologies through communicative processes (human as well as non-human, micro as well as macro). Only by mobilizing other entities (including other humans as well as material objects and texts) can humans produce stabile organization. Through this particular view of communication, the Montreal School is able to locate instances of organization *in* communication and thus to create accounts based on positive empirical observations while never having to consult commonly used analytical shortcuts such as 'cultures',

'structures', 'systems', 'ideologies' etc. – generalizations which are rarely substantiated by empirical findings – unless, of course, these are actively mobilized and made present as actors in a given interaction. This can, in my view, be seen as a general *demystification* of the existence of social structures. The Montreal School thus radically reconfigures conventional perspectives of organizational existence while enabling accounts of organizational constitution in minute detail by analyzing how these moments of constitution happen in interaction, ranging from micro to macro events all depending on the actors involved (e.g. two humans) and their mobilization of yet other actors (positions, titles, authorizations etc.) in various constellations. Also, one may note that the extremely inclusive conceptualization of communication argued for by the Montreal School enables one to consider *any kind of entity* as a potential actor no matter its respective ontological state. This extends communication to include e.g. various resources and monetary transfers, the construction of new headquarter buildings or organizational uniforms as communicative and potentially constitutive of organization.

However, there seems to be a tendency among representatives of the Montreal School to attribute organizations with an almost vacuum-like existence, never explicitly considering what kind of role various external constituents might play in regard to defining and shaping organizational existence (see e.g. Cooren (2006) or Schoeneborn et al. (2014)). One exception is Kuhn (2008) who describes how the authoritative texts of one organization may "*blend with, and perhaps replace the texts of others*" (ibid.: 1243) as a consequence of extra-organizational interaction; a process he terms textual *saturation* (ibid.). While recognizing Kuhn's notion of saturation as a welcome attempt to add to the relationist perspective of the Montreal School's theory, this notion of 'saturation' does not, in my view, capture the possibility that the communication of 'external' actors might, potentially, be *as directly* involved in defining and constituting organizations as 'internal' actors' communication. The notion of 'saturation' is presented as the "*means by which firms bridge boundaries*" (ibid.); the concept, thus, rests on the idea of an *a priori* existing boundary between an organization and it's environment, a perspective that assumes some *fundamental* difference between 'internal' and 'external' actors. However, if organizations exist *in*, *as* and *through* communication (as argued by the Montreal School), how exactly should we conceive of organizational boundaries? In other words, is it only the communication (i.e. communicative transactions and representations) of members and representative objects that may constitute an organization or can external agents display a similar ability to redefine, reconfigure and reconstitute the organization through communication? What is at stake, for example, when non-members speak of the actions of organizational

members in various situations, thus *mobilizing* the organization as an actor in their conversations? What happens when organizations become portrayed in news articles or subjected to a verdict by a court of law?

As we have seen, processes of organizing, for the Montreal School, involves the enactment of hierarchical structures through particular kinds of communication and speech acts where exchanges of directives and commissives lead to the submissions of some actors relative to others; exchanges that result in a general hierarchical structuring of members and activities. Also, organizations are constituted as collective entities through communicative acts of representation, where members and other entities associate *themselves* with the organization in various ways. However, in this picture, organizational members gain *a priori* primacy in regards to defining their organization, and organizational management (as the actors usually considered the primary sources of directives and power within organizational settings) comes to look *sovereign* within the confines of the organization; a picture that seems unrealistic when taking various environmental contingencies into account which may deeply affect and shape managerial decision-making. As we shall see, theory concerned with the interdependencies between an organization and its environment often depict organizations as both *subject to* and *manipulator of* various environmental actors; extra-organizational dynamics and interdependencies to which the Montreal School does not pay much attention.

In the following section, I draw inspiration from the field of institutional theory to exemplify these dynamics largely unaccounted for by the Montreal School's perspective. I am not arguing that other perspectives might not be equally relevant, but focusing on institutional theory allows me to draw attention to the particular dynamics I find interesting. This presentation of institutional theory enables a more focused critique of a potential shortcoming in the Montreal School's theory of organizing.

3   Relationist intuitions of institutional theory

In persistently viewing organizations relative to their environments, the perspective of institutional theorists largely differs from that of the Montreal School's organizational theory which tends to focus on the organization in and of itself. Research on institutionalization considers how taken-for-granted (i.e. *institutional*) rules, myths and beliefs which permeate societies tend to affect organizational realities to a point where organizations arise as mere reflections of their institutional environments. In this view, organizations tend to disappear as distinct units as they relate to and incorporate their institutional contexts in numerous ways. Adopting externally legitimized institutional rules into the organization's formal structure is seen as a way to ensure organizational legitimacy and lack of institutional integration may equally result in decreased legitimacy. Thus, organizations adapt to their institutional environments in order to survive. To account for these legitimacy-related dynamics, institutional theory speaks of 'institutional pressures' affecting the organization. These are not only pressures enacted by the state and professions but also other organizations, interest groups of various kinds and the voice of public opinion in general (Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

According to DiMaggio & Powell (1983), because of institutional pressures enacted upon and/or experienced by organizations in general, various individual organizations tend to present themselves as rather similar in processes and structures to other organizations. To explain this phenomenon, DiMaggio & Powell describe how three kinds of *isomorphic processes* (i.e. processes of adaptation whereby organizations become increasingly similar by abiding to the same institutional rules and structures) may result from different types of pressure or force exerted upon or experienced by organizations. First, *coercive isomorphism,* according to the authors, result from formal and informal pressures exerted on the organization by other organizations on which they are dependent and by cultural expectations in the society in which the organization functions. Secondly, *mimetic isomorphism* can be seen as organizational responses to uncertainty whereby organizations model themselves by drawing inspiration from other legitimate organizations. Thirdly, *normative isomorphism* results from processes of professionalization as members of a certain occupation negotiate among themselves to define the conditions and methods of their work (ibid.). Interestingly, definitions of what constitutes these 'institutional pressures' remain either vague or absent. For example, Oliver describes these pressures as "invisible" (1991: 147) thus enabling their existence to remain mystical, undefinable and of course, one would think, *unobservable*. One might rightfully wonder how an entire theoretical field have been preoccupied with studying these pressures and their consequences for organizations if the pressures themselves *cannot be observed.* This issue seems to

derive from the fact that institutional theory identifies itself as a 'macro-theory', thus often purpose-fully delimiting itself from considering 'micro-phenomena' such as the human and non-human interactions considered by the Montreal School.

Institutional theory has itself been subject to criticism, much of which concerns questions of organizational *agency*, i.e. whether organizations are always submitted to external pressures and expectations or if they can manipulate their institutional environments in ways favorable to the organization. This question has been addressed by Oliver (1991) who argues that organizations may passively conform to environmental demands and expectations just as they may actively seek to manipulate and shape their environments in response to institutional pressures. In Oliver's view, the organization may thus play the role of both *manipulator* and *manipulatee*, submitting others to its social schemes while itself being submitted to the programs of other actors. Oliver's article – like most contributions to institutional theory – retains a macro-perspective never considering how institutional processes manifest in interaction. Further, environmental pressures are conceived of as rather unambiguous; a view which neglects the fact that external demands might be communicated and interpreted in different ways by different organizations.

More novel contributions have indeed sought to draw attention to how institutionalization happens through human interaction and to questions regarding the diffusion of institutions among organizations. Such a perspective – which comes closer to the perspective of the Montreal School – may be found in Lawrence & Suddaby's (2006) article on *institutional work*. They argue that institutional research has for many years been concerned with processes whereby an object (e.g. a pre-legitimized element of formal structure) is *diffused* by first becoming recognized, then accepted by a relatively few actors and finally widely diffused among large numbers of organizations. As Lawrence & Suddaby state:

> *"What these discussions of diffusion tend to gloss over, however, is the practical, crea-tive work necessary to make diffusion happen: organizations rarely take on the struc-tures and practices of other organizations wholesale, without conflict and without ef-fort. Rather, the diffusion of innovation throughout a field involves substantial institu-tional work on the part of organizational actors who must persuade others in their or-ganization of the merits of the innovation, experiment with the innovation in an effort to understand it and how it might apply to their own situations, modify it in order to gain*

internal legitimacy, and forge practical connections for the new structure or practice."
(ibid.: 247).

This quote displays a for institutional theory rare attention paid to questions of agency and the role of individual human actors in shaping, communicating and implementing certain pre-legitimized structural elements across organizations, thereby slowly turning them into institutions. One may note, based on this example, that what may be an institutional, *taken-for-granted element* for one group of actors may be perceived as an *innovation* by others (here, the organizational agents in question). Thus, to become implemented and institutionalized in a new context, this innovation has to undergo a series of transformations, translations and modifications before finally being structurally implemented. However, looking back on DiMaggio & Powell's (1983) list of isomorphic processes one might pose a question regarding the origins of the "innovation" in question, i.e. the element that has to be implemented. Where does this come from? And in what kind of "package" did it arrive to the hands of a few organizational members? In other words, what kind of *pressure* is, in this case, causing organizational members to attempt integration and implementation?

3.1   The Montreal School versus institutional theory

Until now we have seen, on one hand, how the Montreal School in its communication-based organizational theory does not seem to consider what is at stake when someone or something other than an organizational representative speaks of and refers to the organization. If communication is constitutive of organizations, does a mention in a newspaper in any way constitute the organization? Does a ruling by a court of law on the legality of organizational action? Does societal expectations in general affect organizational realities? On the other hand, we have seen how institutional theory seems very concerned with these dynamics through which an institutional environment continuously affects organizations to considerable degrees. However, these theorists' characterizations of institutional pressures as 'invisible', while only hinting somewhat at what this notion of 'pressure' entails, seem disappointingly unspecific compared to the minute descriptions by the Montreal School that enables one to locate (more or less precisely) the moments of organizational constitution in communication processes.

Based on these observations, what I want to suggest in this thesis is that these 'societal' or 'institutional' pressures actually present themselves in various ways as attempts of external agents to

redefine and thus reconstitute the organization communicatively. Further, by considering this proposition in more detail, I seek to demonstrate that the perspective on communicative constitution held by the Montreal School can and should be extended to include non-members (and other 'external' actors) whose communications may affect what an organization is and does if they prove able to redefine it communicatively. This potential of *extending* the Montreal School's theoretical model to include non-members has been suggested by Shoeneborn & Scherer (2012: 965), and this thesis may be seen as a response to this general intuition. By considering instances where other actors actively attempt to redefine organizations communicatively although not being members themselves, we might become able to understand 'institutional pressures' (including dynamics of isomorphism) as processes involving communicative *negotiations* of the organizational definition (what the organization is or does, has been and has done, should be and should do) among a multitude of actors where the organization 'itself' can be seen as representing just one of many voices.

To consider such a reconfiguration of the Montreal School's perspective, I will attempt to show how such dynamics of external constitution – although currently improbable within the Montreal School's theory – are considered possible and even likely within the framework of Actor-Network Theory (ANT); a sociological theory that the Montreal School has claimed to be globally compatible with its own perspective (Schoeneborn et al., 2014). In the following section, I first introduce the basic theoretical tenets of ANT and illustrate how the possibility of external constitution is explained within this framework. Secondly, I briefly review a potential incongruence between the two perspectives to consider the possibility of accepting (theoretically) such dynamics of external constitution within the Montreal School's perspective. By illustrating how theoretical congruence may be ensured through a particular interpretation of both theories, I provide the conceptual basis for accepting external actors as potential spokespersons in the Montreal School's organizational theory.

4   Actor-Network Theory and its definition of 'spokesperson'

As previously noted, the perspective and framework of Actor-Network Theory has been described as globally compatible with that of the Montreal School by its own representatives in that the two theories start from the same ontological and epistemological assumptions about organizational existence (Schoeneborn et al., 2014). Consequently, the two theories view the constitution of collectives like organizations in very equal ways. Indeed, the Montreal School has in many ways been inspired by ANT and the work of, especially, Bruno Latour (as described in the theoretical presentation above). The main difference between the two theories is, primarily, that the Montreal School focuses on the organization as its object of research while ANT (as a sociology) considers the emergence of society as a whole.

Similarly to the Montreal School, ANT starts from performativity and agency to explain the existence of society and societal structures. Within this framework, 'society' cannot serve as an explanation for the agency and movements of various actors; on the contrary, it is the existence of society itself that needs to be explained (Latour, 2008). Power, social structures and organizations, for example, are viewed as *consequences* rather than *causes* of action (Latour, 1986). Such an approach to social theory distances ANT from sociological theories of existing societal structures in the way that ANT deliberately refuses to anticipate any 'structure' *a priori,* and instead commits to observing and accounting for how interactions between human and non-human actors lead to the constitution of structures *in practice* (ibid.; see also Callon (1986)).

The main assumption proposed by ANT is the claim that modern societies cannot be described without recognizing them as having a *network-like* character which is never captured by notions of levels, layers, territories, categories, structures, or systems. Thus, ANT first and foremost argues for a change in topology, where collective entities (like societies, organizations, groups) instead of being described as 'surfaces' or 'spheres' are viewed as *nodes with as many dimensions as they have connections* (these 'nodes' being *actors* to which we will return) (Latour, 1997).
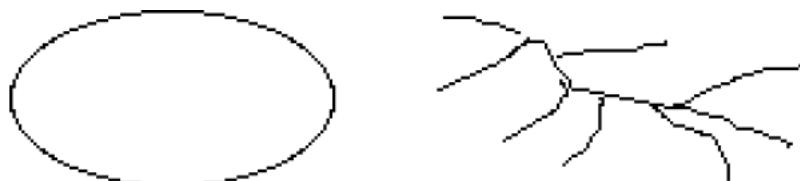

Figure 1: ANT's change of topology (Latour, 1997: 2)

Importantly, what is implied by "network" is not necessarily anything like a technical network as such a network only constitutes one possible *final* and *stabilized* state of an actor-network. An actor-network may be local, it may have no compulsory paths, it may be unstable and in process, thus sharing little similarity with technical networks (ibid.). Like the Montreal School, ANT accepts (communicative) linkages which are both physical and discursive. In this way, the continuous constitution of an organization may take on a network-like shape, but so may e.g. the constitution of law (Latour, 2010), or the construction, production and marketing of the KODAK camera (Latour, 1991). Indeed, the formation of any particular entity (including 'society') may be described in terms of a *net-work* provided this formative work of constructing and socializing the entity involves drawing a number of linkages and connections (or *associations*) with other entities. Parallel to the Montreal School, any kind of actor (human or non-human) might become, in one way or another, linked to other actors in a network depending on the way it *acts* – that is, *makes a difference* – in a given situation. The ANT-framework says nothing about who the various actors are, what they do, or which constellations certain actors are more likely than others to participate in. Instead focus is on providing a general toolbox of concepts to describe these processes through which non-social entities become *socialized* through the establishment of links to other entities. In this way, ANT proposes a particular topology of 'the social' (in terms of networks of actors with many or few, stronger or weaker connections) along with a conceptual toolbox to analyze such phenomena, but says nothing about the shape or content of existing networks (which actors establish which links to others) insisting that these remain empirical questions (Latour, 1997).

This change in topology from traditional social science has a number of implications for how social entities are viewed and understood. First of all, *strength*, in ANT, is not achieved through unity or purity but rather through dissemination, heterogeneity and hybridity through the establishment of links between actors of variable ontologies. Secondly, it implies a background/foreground reversal; instead of starting from universal structures or laws assumed to constitute society as a whole, it starts from irreducible, incommensurable and unconnected localities which may or may not be connected and made provisionally commensurable. Thus, to ANT, universality and order is rather the exception than the rule. Instead of trying to 'fill in' the entire surface (of society) with order, ANT perceives local pockets of order and the thin filaments connecting them without ever trying to 'fill in' the surrounding space. Nothing is perceived "outside" of these networks. In other words, there is no *context* in which a network is *immersed* (ibid.). This network-based perspective allows avoiding three conventional *a priori* distinctions that, in Latour's view, hamper analyses of 'the social':

o   Far/close (or questions of *proximity*)

According to Latour, the first advantage of thinking in terms of networks is the lifting of the *tyranny of distance*. As he states: "*I can be one meter away from someone in the next telephone booth, and be nevertheless more closely connected to my mother 6000 miles away.*" (ibid.: 3). Thus, when thinking in terms of networks, entities that are close when disconnected may seem very remote when their connections are analyzed. Conversely, elements that appear distant from each other may seem close when their connections are re-established. E.g. geographically distant departments of a multinational corporation may be more closely connected with each other than with departments of another organization across the street. In this way, the definition of proximity held by geographers is, in ANT's view, only one of many possible definitions and thus becomes one of many types of connection tying 'localities' together. The notion of network, in this way, enables the researcher to conceive of space merely in terms of *associations*. Here, the *type* and *strength* of links established is of great concern to ANT. E.g. a representative may speak of an organization's responsibility for the surrounding environment, thus creating a discursive link between the organization and its environment in terms of 'responsibility'. However, whether and how this discursive link is followed by other more costly, non-discursive linkages enacting such a responsibility is a very different question.

o   Micro/macro (or questions of *scale*)

According to Latour, dissolving the micro-macro distinction frees social theory from a problem that has haunted it since its inception. According to Latour, any *a priori* distinction between societal layers and levels has three features which are harmful to any account of society. 1) It implies an order relation ranging from 'top to bottom', 2) it further implies that macro-phenomena are somehow different from micro-phenomena and should be analyzed differently, and 3) it is unable to account for how an element can go from being individual (e.g. a shoe) to collective (e.g. a NIKE shoe) and back. The notion of network results in a different social theory. One without any *a priori* order relation, one that is not tied *beforehand* to the myth of a societal top and bottom, one that does not assume *beforehand* whether any element is micro or macro, individual or collective, and does not use different tools to account for the former versus the latter. Rather it retains an ability to follow the

transformation of a poorly connected element into a highly connected one and back. Further, one may study how a given element becomes strategic through the number of connections it commands and how it loses its importance when losing these connections. Thus, a network is never *bigger* than another network, it is rather *longer and more intensively connected.* A network notion is thus well suited to follow *any* changes of scale because the analyst does not pertain to any one *a priori* scale (ibid.). This scaling – i.e. the type, number and topography of connections established – is, as we shall see, left to the actors themselves. As for the Montreal School, the question is not one of studying hierarchical structures as if these existed *a priori* but rather how these *effects* of order are achieved through communication.

o   Inside/outside (or questions of *boundaries*)

A final important distinction that is dissolved by ANT's notion of network is that of inside/outside. Where a surface is characterized by an inside and an outside separated by a boundary, networks have no inside or outside (see Figure 1 above). The important question is whether a link is established between two elements and what characterizes this link. For example, an actor being characterized as 'internal' or 'external' to an organization establishes two different relations between that actor and the organization. However, a link or relation is established in both cases. Either two networks become connected (meaning that the network is expanding) or no relation exists. *Network* is thus a positive notion needing no negativity to be understood. Again, a notable consequence of this perspective is that any notion of 'context' becomes superfluous (ibid.).

Through the above depicted consequences of introducing a network-based perspective, ANT gives up a number of traditional spatial metaphors (close/far, top/bottom, local/global, inside/outside) and replaces these by *connections* and *associations*. Importantly, ANT does not suggest that structure, order, culture etc. do not exist. Rather, ANT works from the assumption that in order to create and obtain these *effects* of distance, proximity, structure, hierarchies, connectedness, outsideness and surfaces, a considerable *supplementary* work has to be done (ibid.). In other words, these effects are present only to the extent that they are *enacted*.

Because all this work can never be described simply through the notion of networks, another concept is introduced: that of an *actor* that *does some work* – a theoretical maneuver with important ontological consequences for ANT. According to Latour, an actor-network is a theoretical construct

that enables one to move from the static and topological properties of networks to dynamic and ontological ones. Further, counter to mathematical or engineering networks that are traced by either the mathematician or engineer him-/herself, an actor-network is an entity that *itself does the tracing and the inscribing*. The researcher's role is thus not to insert the actors in his/her pre-defined network but instead to *follow the actors* and describe how they themselves create and trace their networks. Here, an *actor* is defined as something that acts or to which activity is granted by others. In this way, an actor can be anything provided it is granted to be the source of action (ibid.; Latour, 2008) (a definition parallel to that of the Montreal School).

4.1   Comparing the Montreal School and ANT

Having introduced the basic notions defining of actor-networks, it is now time to consider the theoretical congruence between the Montreal School's organizational theory and ANT. As previously noted, the Montreal School's perspective has been characterized as globally compatible with ANT (Shoeneborn et al., 2014). First of all, with Cooren's conceptualization of communication as acts of 'linking', communication can be understood as an activity that *links* or *associates* various elements with others and, thus, an activity of creating and tracing networks. Note, that when we think of networks merely in terms of nodes (actors) and connections, a narrative may take a network-like shape as certain actors become linked to other actors throughout a story, but so may a computer network or a multinational corporation as these are constituted through a number of connections and associations. In fact, following Latour, any action may be analyzed as a minimal network since, as Latour states: "*"Faire c'est faire". To do is to make happen. When one acts, others proceed to action.*" (Latour, 1996: 237). In this view, any action will always involve at least two actors that *interact* (as equally noted above). Action is thus always *shared* between actors (Latour, 2008).

   We may recall Taylor & Cooren's (1997) definition of organizational communication as instances where the organization finds expression in an identifiable actor (or *spokesperson*) who *speaks on its behalf*, thus *associating* herself with the collective entity to constitute its existence. Other obvious parallels between the two perspectives are the inclusion of non-humans in accounting for organizational existence and theoretical attempts to overcome the micro-macro gap. Thus, for both the Montreal School and ANT, there is no structure outside of the interactions that enact and mobilize them; interactions that involve both human and non-human participants. In this way, organizations take on a similar network-like shape for both the Montreal School and ANT. One can,

however, in my view, pinpoint certain theoretical aspects where the willingness of the Montreal School to completely adopt the ANT framework seems limited.

An especially notable difference can be found in the conception of 'spokespersons' mobilized by the two theories, i.e. the human actors who talk collective entities like organizations into existence. Accounting for the entities that constitute an organization, the Montreal School tend to limit the title of 'spokesperson' to people who are themselves representatives of the organization, or, in other words, linked to the organization in terms of *membership* which usually comes with an intra-organizational role (a manager, an employee etc.) (see e.g. Cooren (2006) or Schoeneborn et al. (2014)). To the Montreal School, these spokespersons display an ability to constitute the organization legitimately by expressing their own association with the organization. However, within the ANT framework, the notion of spokesperson is extended to include in principle *anyone* who *speaks for the existence of* a given collective entity. As Latour states:

> "*If one wishes to describe a group, one will* […] *need representatives who 'speak for' the group's existence: spokespersons who are usually incredibly talkative* […] *To* [these] *spokespersons, who make a durable definition of groups possible, one will have to include social researchers, the social sciences, social statistics and the social journalism […]* [For example:] *In the developed world, there is not a single group who has not at least one tool pinned to it stemming originally from the social sciences.*" (Latour, 2008: 56 (own translation)).

Thus to ANT, there is no *a priori* distinction between who can and cannot possibly *contribute to* or *participate in* the constitution of collective entities as anyone speaking for the existence of a certain collective is *to some extent* redefining and reconstituting it. Letting go of any inside/outside distinctions means that members lose (at least theoretically) any *a priori* privilege in defining what their organization is or does. This, however, seems a radically different view from that held by the Montreal School. Before continuing to investigate the potential consequences of such a theoretical extension for organizational theory, it may be worthwhile to attempt to trace where the remarkable difference between ANT and the Montreal School derives from (recall that these theories have by the Montreal School been claimed to be globally compatible).

Because of ANT's radical methodological formalism, this theory seems a logical place to start in order to spot potential divergences between the two perspectives. For ANT, the dogmatic approach

to social research is largely illustrated by three methodological principles proclaimed by Michel Callon at an early stage of ANT's theoretical development. According to Callon, only by committing to these three principles can sociological analyses gain sufficient flexibility to account for the action of the actors under observation without privileging or censoring certain viewpoints, differentiating the analytical approach to accounting for divergent viewpoints, or assuming *a priori* distinctions which do not make a difference to the actors. The principles are:

- o Agnosticism (impartiality between actors)
- o Generalized symmetry (the commitment to explain conflicting viewpoints in equal terms)
- o Free association (abandonment of all a priori distinctions) (Callon, 1986)

Considering this methodological foundation, the principle of 'generalized symmetry' might seem to entail a difference in perspective from the Montreal School, who (as noted above) considers communication to always involve an inherent *asymmetry* and thus often constituting – to some extent – both *hierarchies* and *structures*. In fact, Cooren stated:

> "*It is important to note the difference in perspective. While they refuse to speak in terms of "structure" (they deliberately use the term "network" as an alternative), my own work is directly geared to modeling the* structuring *or* organizing *property of communication. Where Callon and Latour see only* [flat] *networks, I want and am seeking a* structure *or* organizing *principle.*" (Cooren, 2000: 188).

This difference between the Montreal School and ANT seems to challenge claims of global compatibility between the two theories (interestingly, as we have seen, these claims have been made by Cooren himself). Thus, understanding this potential difference in perspective and the extent to which it separates the two perspectives is central for evaluating the congruence between the Montreal School's organizational theory and ANT. This difference, at first glance, seems rather important – fundamental, even: How can the Montreal School claim theoretical congruence between its own perspective and ANT if there is disagreement on such a basic level of seeing only networks versus seeing only structures?

  In spite of this apparently significant difference in perspective, all hope to retain theoretical congruence might, however, not be lost. Cooren continues by explaining how all organizing takes the

imposition of one description in order to constitute an organizational hierarchy, i.e. the communicative establishment and insertion of a number of actors in a program of *submission* by their *committing* to carry out various *directives* from other actors. To provide an example, when person X gives person Y a directive – e.g. telling Y to gather a certain information – which Y commits to, X is constituting a situation and *inserting* Y in a structure that does not take into account the intermediaries that Y will have to go through or mobilize to finish his task (acquire the information for X). For X, what counts is the result of the schema (receiving the information from Y). The description thus leaves out what happens between the *input* (Y's commitment) and the *output* (receiving the information from Y). Y's quest is thus *submitted* to X's request, this *submission* being essential for what Cooren calls the organizing (or *structuring*) property of communication. By giving a directive, X does nothing other than request a certain action of Y (here gathering information). In other words, Y's action (gathering information) – assuming Y indeed carries out X's request – is now *submitted to* or *inserted* within X's program. Such exchanges exemplify, according to Cooren, the organizing property of communication as the submissions of some actors relative to others create *effects* of structure (see Cooren (2000), or Schoeneborn et al. (2014)). However, this structural entity can only be perceived through the *imposition of a description*. Considering X's role in the above example, we see that X's speech act constitutes an attempt to impose a structure; i.e. here a program of action in which Y is eventually inserted and mobilized. However, Y's *insertion* into X's program only makes sense when viewed from X's perspective. In this light, such an organizational hierarchy – as described by Cooren – constitutes only *one way of seeing* a large network of associations. As he puts it self-reflectively: "[…] *in a way, there are as many organizational processes as actors.*" (Cooren, 2000: 189). In other words, the perspective (and thus the description) could in principle be reversed at any time by any actor. For example, a manager might 'submit' an employee to a certain cause of action. However – reversing the perspective to that of the employee – taking this task might not be experienced as a 'submission' at all; maybe the employee had secretly influenced or manipulated the manager to give him or her this particular task. From that perspective, the employee would be the one 'submitting' the manager to his or her program, thus reversing the organizational hierarchy. So, in Cooren's view, organization always entails an attempt to impose one single description, one single *hierarchy*, *one direction* of organizing (i.e. of attributing tasks and appropriating other's action), although these dynamics might, in practice, involve as many *possible* descriptions and directions of organizing as there are actors involved. Thus, Cooren purposefully

focuses on the one description *necessary* to explain organizing in its minimal (or *ideal*) form while paying less attention to other *possible* descriptions at play.

Based on this reflection, we see the difference between ANT's principle of generalized symmetry and the Montreal School's principle of generalized asymmetry to amount to a methodological decision about what one wishes to see. To account for organizational structure, the Montreal School needs one imposed description. ANT on the other hand refuses to deliberately impose any description rather than another (a *decentered* perspective linked to the principle of agnosticism). What is important, however, is that ANT (as mentioned previously) does not consider structures and asymmetries impossible; rather, ANT deliberately leaves the work of constituting these structures and asymmetries to the actors themselves. So, to the ANT-minded scholar, when Cooren describes how organizations may evolve through communicative activities that constitute hierarchical asymmetries and structures, he is in fact *anticipating* the work of the actors themselves. That is, he is describing a communicative mechanism *before* it happens. To resolve this dilemma, I believe ANT's principle of generalized symmetry should not be interpreted (as Cooren seems to do when criticizing ANT) as an ontological statement as much as be understood as a necessary methodological preset adopted by the researcher *before* observing the actors, their communications and the *resulting* asymmetries. In this way, the two perspectives actually remain compatible on the condition (for ANT) that a researcher studying organizational phenomena is careful not to define beforehand, subscribe to or give primacy to any one description or perspective, thus purposefully neglecting other descriptions at play in the situation.

As the reader may have gathered, these paragraphs are central to the argument of this thesis. The question is whether a single description – although it might be enough merely to *explain* organizational phenomena – is sufficient when accounting for organizational constitution. In my view, Cooren's tendency to assume one imposed description of the organization when explaining organizational phenomena risks resulting in the unfortunate neglect of those potential forces of constitution that any organizational self-description would term 'external'. Thus, perceiving of an organization through 'its own' description amounts to analyzing it as though existing in a vacuum where no other descriptions or points of view are possible. Considering the many diverging interests, conflicts and controversies involving various 'societal' actors which surround and deeply affect contemporary organizations, this seems to be a limited perspective. Further, giving primacy to a primary organizational description amounts to reconstituting the same internal/external boundary as enacted by the organization itself (as though organizations constituted domains that were 'their own' in

some final, metaphysical sense). What if some actor suddenly challenged such a description by drawing attention to new regulation changing those particular rules considered 'fundamental' to the organization and its activities? The organization would suddenly stop looking *sovereign* within its 'own domain' and instead come to seem *submitted to* or *embedded within* the program of another actor (the government). Thus, retaining the ability to shift perspective at the moments when the actors themselves do so seems important in order to understand and account for practices of organizing. Such a more flexible approach seems implied by the ANT framework through the principle of free association (the abandonment of all *a priori* distinctions). In my view, this is an important principle of ANT since by avoiding to impose such anticipated distinctions, scientific accounts stop trying to limit the actors by predicting how they *should behave* and instead (by making no assumptions at all) gain a much wider spectrum of potential observations of associations many of which may seem completely 'out of order' when viewed relative to other descriptions. Seeming 'out of order', however, does not make the *existence* of these alternative descriptions any less definite. I would think that only by allowing for such surprising descriptions, agencies and their previously uncharted paths of action can organizational research eventually gain maximum of richness.

Allowing for the possibilities of other potential descriptions portraying the organization in question in potentially numerous and much more heterogeneous ways could serve to widen the organization-centered perspective of the Montreal School and invite the potential benefits of the more decentered perspective of ANT without, of course, completely letting go of the organization as our point of focus. However, by allowing for multiple descriptions and perspectives that may play a role in constituting any one organization without giving *a priori* primacy to organizational members results in the possibility of a much increased number of potential spokespersons whose communications may become directly constitutive of the organization (at least theoretically). What I am proposing – following the logic of ANT – is an *extension* of the Montreal School's notion of 'spokespersons' to include *in principle* any actor who *mobilizes* the organization in communication. As for now, the perspective of the Montreal School seems to depict the organization as a relatively closed network primarily constituted by its membership. Latour, on the other hand, conceives of these constitutive networks as *potentially* wide open for any actor to participate in directly. We have seen how Latour purposefully abandons any inside/outside distinction. Consequently, as a point in a network the organization's existence can *in principle* just as easily be enacted from an outside position as from an internal position (only the *type of linkage* changes). At the same time, no clarification of

any internal/external position seems *necessary* for actors attempting to define the organization in question.

Having slightly reconfigured the traditional perspective of the Montreal School's organizational theory, we may now, on this background, consider the possibilities of how organizations can be defined and constituted through the agency of external actors. First we consider, which possibilities exist *in principle* and how they work. Secondly, we continue by tempering this principled analysis by considering the ways in which some definitions are likely to become more legitimate, stable and diffused than others.

5   Possibilities of external constitution *in principle*

Following the extended notion of 'spokesperson' capable of mobilizing and defining the organization in communication to potentially any actor, it is now time to consider how processes of external constitution might look and be accounted for. At this point, the reader will have to recall the possibilities of organizational constitution proposed by the Montreal School. To consider how external actors may be directly involved in shaping organizations through communication, these possibilities of communicative constitution seem a logical point of departure for our analysis. The Montreal School distinguishes between 1) processes of *organizing,* and 2) the definition and constitution of the organization as a *collective entity*. We will start with processes of organizing involving external actors.

5.1   Processes of organizing involving external actors

According to Cooren, processes of *organizing* are reducible to X submitting Y to X's program of action through a communicative exchange which is modalized (and interpreted as) a directive-commissive dynamic (where X attempts to submit Y by giving a directive, and Y submits to X by committing to X's directive). In Cooren's words, such a communicative exchange constitutes *organizing* (Cooren, 2000). Keeping this in mind, one may consider the following example:

Situation A: "Your organization should take responsibility for its actions."

If, in Situation A, the speaker is positioned as an external actor, the recipient is positioned as an internal actor (that is, an organizational representative), and the communication is modalized by the speaker and/or interpreted by the recipient as a directive being given followed by a commissive to that directive by the organization in question (the organization committing itself to take such a responsibility), then, we should have to say, the organization (or part of the organization at least) is effectively *submitted* to the directive given by an external party.

Interestingly, what we realize is that such a situation, where an external agent successfully *submits* the organization to its program of action, seems similar to processes of *coercive isomorphism* as described by DiMaggio & Powell (1983). As we have seen, in institutional theory, coercive isomorphism results from the formal and informal pressures exerted upon the organization by other organizations. The examples of coercive isomorphism provided by the authors describe a number of

authority relationships between 1) government and organizations, 2) parent corporations and sub-sidiaries, and 3) more subtle and less explicit instances between various egalitarian organizations and more hierarchical ones. To trace these dynamics of inter-organizational relations and the change they may lead to, I will consider DiMaggio & Powell's examples and review them in light of the Montreal School's theory of communicative organizing. Considering, first, their description of the relation between government and organizations:

> *"In some circumstances, organizational change is a direct response to government mandate: manufacturers adopt new pollution control technologies to conform to environmental regulations; nonprofits maintain accounts, and hire accountants, in order to meet tax law requirements; and organizations employ affirmative-action officers to fend off allegations of discrimination."* (ibid.: 150).

The above example describing how coercive isomorphism results from government-organization interactions focuses primarily on governments' ability to *regulate* organizational activities (here, to minimize pollution, ensure tax payments, or penalize discriminatory practices). In this case, *regulation* might be interpreted as government *giving a directive* to the organization which may or may not *commit* – and thereby *submit* – itself by changing its practices according to the law. If the organization commits to government regulation, we would have to say, the organization is *submitted to* or *organized by* the government. Although such an analysis (or choice of words) may at first sound counterintuitive, it is very much in line with Latour's observation that "[…] *one could consider all law as organization.*" (Latour, 2010: 275).

Next, we may consider DiMaggio & Powell's description of coercive isomorphism between parent corporations and subsidiaries or organizations that depend on the resources of others:

> "*Subsidiaries must adopt accounting practices, performance evaluations, and budgetary plans that are compatible with the policies of the parent corporation. A variety of service infrastructures, often provided by monopolistic firms – for example, telecommunications and transportation – exert common pressures over the organizations that use them.*" (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983: 151).

What is stressed by DiMaggio & Powell is the resource dependency of some organizations upon others which allows those in possession of capital to pressure those depending on that capital to adopt certain practices. Again, the 'pressure' that is 'exerted' by those in possession of capital upon those depending on it could be interpreted as the *giving of directives* to which the others may or may not commit. Here, it is understandable why the demands exerted upon dependent organizations may be interpreted as 'directives' – or, as Cooren also describes them, 'having to do's' (Cooren, 2000) – since dependent organizations may experience that they *have to* commit as a consequence of their resource dependency. Thus, in instances where these dependent organizations do commit to directives given by organizations in possession of capital, we might say that the dependent organizations become *submitted to* or *organized by* those organizations in possession of capital.

Finally, we may consider the more subtle instances, described by DiMaggio & Powell, where egalitarian and collectivist organizations interact with more hierarchical ones. They exemplify:

"*In general, the need to lodge responsibility and managerial authority at least ceremonially in a formally defined role in order to interact with hierarchical organizations is a constant obstacle to the maintenance of egalitarian or collectivist organizational forms.*" (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983: 151).

The reasons for egalitarian organizations to interact with more hierarchical organizations are generally described by DiMaggio & Powell in attempts to 'get their support' or simply to 'negotiate' (ibid.). In any case, assuming that this need for egalitarian organizations to adopt certain formal structures results from *demands made* by the hierarchical organizations with which they interact, it seems plausible that these communicative interactions could also be interpreted as exchanges of directives (given by the hierarchical organizations to the egalitarian ones) and commissives (by the egalitarian organizations to these directives). Thus, again we might say, the egalitarian and collectivist organizations are *submitted to* or *organized by* the more hierarchical ones.

Having reinterpreted three examples of coercive isomorphism described by DiMaggio & Powell in terms of exchanges of directives and commissives, a few implications may be synthesized. First, it seems possible to provide a communicative explanation and account of inter-organizational processes of isomorphism. Secondly, we have seen how such an account enables viewing actors conventionally termed 'external' as *directly involved in shaping processes of organizing*. Thirdly, we may start to see that the *pressures* leading, potentially, to organizational change can be located *in*

communication; in the *modalization* and/or *interpretation* of a communication as a directive. Here, it seems plausible that directives could be experienced as 'pressures' since a directive inherently implies an attempt of one actor to modify or determine another's action. Thus, these 'pressures' are not really 'invisible' or 'unobservable' as much as they are *modalized* and *interpreted*. This difference seems important since this modalization and interpretation of directives would likely be *visible* and *observable in* the communication of a given actor. Fourthly, following this perspective, the *mystical aspect* of the 'macro-ness' or 'overarching structural' character of these pressures disappears from analysis, as pressures are located as directives *in* communication. Being defined communicatively, these pressures gain *materiality* (and thereby, as we have seen, *observability*).

A few final points can be made. The above analysis purposefully followed the argumentation and examples of DiMaggio & Powell (1983) to illustrate how their perspective can be reconfigured to fit the communicative view of organizational constitution represented by the Montreal School. However, their examples, first of all, focus on *isomorphic* change (processes whereby organizations become increasingly *similar*) rather than change in general. The approach I propose of viewing these processes of change as resulting from exchanges of directives and commissives should, it seems, be applicable to processes of change *in general* (i.e. not only *isomorphic* change). In other words, if this perspective allows for accounting for processes of isomorphic change, there is nothing to suggest it should not equally be suited for describing coercive change in general resulting from inter- or, more broadly, extra-organizational exchanges. Secondly, DiMaggio & Powell's analysis tends only to include examples where organizations *conventionally* deemed authoritative – or 'powerful' – relative to others (e.g. the government relative to organizations within its political domain) display abilities to define these 'less powerful' organizations. But what about instances where seemingly 'less powerful' organizations succeed in pressuring those 'more powerful'; e.g. instances where organizations successfully make governments redefine certain policies and regulations? Depending on the case, any such "surprising" instance (although instances of effective lobbying are hardly surprising today) would be equally analyzable in terms of directives and commissives. Thirdly, instead of *unidirectional* 'pressures', what we see when paying attention to exchanges of directives and commissives might come to look exactly like this, i.e. as *exchanges*. Thus, for example, for the egalitarian organization *committing* to adopt a certain formal structure to gain the support of a hierarchical organization, this implementation might result in the hierarchical organization *committing* to lending the egalitarian organization its support. Any *pressure* involved goes from seeming *unidirectional* to, potentially, *multidirectional*; a shift that might lead to more nuanced

accounts of power relations between organizations (and actors in general). Finally, this model is based on a conception of power as a *consequence* rather than a *cause* of action which is completely in line with the framework of ANT. This means that the researcher should not attempt to decide *a priori* which actor is most likely to submit others to its program of action. Instead, focus should be on mapping the communicative interactions between actors (which could be macro-actors like organizations as well as individuals or other entities) and their attempts to enroll each other in various, potentially diverging, programs of action (see Latour (1991)).

We have seen, how coercive isomorphism (or coercive change in general) may be described as a process whereby an external actor *submits* the organization to a program of action by giving a directive to which the organization commits. Thus, we have successfully (of course, I hope the reader will agree) proposed an account of coercive change in terms of communicative organizing where an external party plays a significant role. At this point, we might wonder if a similar reconfiguration can be made of DiMaggio & Powell's descriptions of processes of *mimetic* and *normative isomorphism* or at least how these processes could be explained within the same logic? One may note, how both of these processes seem, in a way, less like the processes of obvious external constitution that I am trying to trace in this thesis as most of the work *may* be done, in both processes, by organizational members themselves as they actively draw inspiration from events in their environment. However, as we shall see, external actors are in fact at play in these isomorphic processes as well, although in a different and less obvious way than in instances of coercion.

To start, let us consider processes of mimetic isomorphism. As we have seen, according to DiMaggio & Powell, mimetic isomorphism entails organizational responses to uncertainty whereby organizations model themselves by drawing inspiration from other legitimate organizations. Obviously, these processes are very different in outlook from coercive isomorphism, as this mimicry may be carried out by organizational members themselves without any apparent participation of external spokespersons forcing the organization's hand (like in processes of coercion). Although external spokespersons are not *necessarily* involved in organizational mimicry – and these processes thus seem more distant from the main purpose of this thesis – it becomes clear that at least *some kind* of external agency is involved as mimicry is always enacted relative to other entities and thus cannot be explained in a for the organization existential vacuum. To explain this external agency at play in mimetic isomorphism, let us consider DiMaggio & Powell's description of the phenomenon:

> *"Not all institutional isomorphism, however, derives from coercive authority. Uncertainty is also a powerful force that encourages imitation. When organizational technologies are poorly understood* […], *when goals are ambiguous, or when the environment creates symbolic uncertainty, organizations may model themselves on other organizations.* […] *Modeling, as we use the term, is a response to uncertainty. The modeled organization may be unaware of the modeling or may have no desire to be copied; it merely serves as a convenient source of practices that the borrowing organization may use. Models may be diffused unintentionally, indirectly through employee transfer or turnover, or explicitly by organizations such as consulting firms or industry trade associations."* (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983: 151).

As the authors note, the organization which is being mimicked by another organization, may be completely unaware of this modeling. However, what is interesting is that, according to DiMaggio & Powell, the *incentive* to engage in mimicry in the first place still seems to derive from environmental factors. Here, the environment is represented by a notion of 'uncertainty'. As they note in the above description: "*Uncertainty is also a powerful force that encourages imitation* […] *Modeling, as we use the term, is a response to uncertainty*" (ibid.). Attempting to translate this incentive, or *pressure*, into a communicative framework, what is *causing* processes of mimetic isomorphism is largely dependent on the organizational members' own *interpretations* of environmental events and state of affairs. In other words, organizations are likely to model themselves in accordance with their *translation* of the state of affairs in their environment.

At this point, we should consider what *constitutes* the environment of an organization? Like organizations, the 'environment' does not exist apart from its representatives (including, importantly, its spokespersons). Think of organizational tools like stakeholder mappings and customer surveys. These serve as environmental representations which are constructed by organizational members themselves in order to *make sense* of otherwise uncertain or illusive surroundings. The environment rarely introduces itself as 'the environment', but as representatives of other organizations, politicians, scientists, journalists and so on. Creating illustrations of all these actors into respective positions *relative to* the organization within an overall 'environment' is often an accomplishment of organizational members themselves. As Weick noted, organizations *enact* their own environment into various representations which in turn affect the organization's future action (Weick, 1979; see also

Christensen (1994)). In this way, organizational members often *speak on behalf of* their own environment when attempting to interpret its state of affairs and make decisions accordingly.

Although mimetic isomorphism may be, in a sense, carried out exclusively by the organizational members themselves, we realize that even in this case 'the environment' is *made present* in communication as organizational spokespersons transform themselves into spokespersons for the environment and back. Thus, we may yet understand organizational mimicry (along with potentially a number of organizational decisions in general) as the organization *committing itself* to various *environmental directives* which is *mobilized* in communication by organizational representatives themselves as they *speak for* both the organization and its environment. Thus, organizational representatives may at times constitute themselves as a hybrid character; at the same time, an 'internal' and 'external' spokesperson. In this way, 'the environment' can end up affecting organizational practice even when only organizational members are communicating amongst themselves; that is, when members *interpret* a communication as holding an *environmental directive* to which they believe they have to commit. Thus, *who speaks for the environment* should be considered as open a question as *who speaks for the organization.* To be sure, as DiMaggio & Powell note in the above quotation, actors like consultancy bureaus, trade associations or others may equally play a role in defining the future actions of an organization relative to its environment; i.e. processes of mimetic isomorphism does not necessarily involve *only* organizational members. However, the only way to understand such "pure" intra-organizational decision-making which accounts for environmental factors, is to (theoretically) allow organizational members to act as both spokespersons for the organization and spokespersons for its environment in turn.

Before summing up what is gained from this theoretical exercise, let us briefly consider processes of normative isomorphism within the same logic used to review coercive and mimetic processes. As we have seen, normative isomorphism, according to DiMaggio & Powell, results from processes of professionalization as members of a certain occupation negotiate among themselves to define the conditions and methods of their work. DiMaggio & Powell provide the following description of such processes:

> "[…] *we interpret professionalization as the collective struggle of members of an occupation to define the conditions and methods of their work, to control "the production of producers"* […]*, and to establish a cognitive base and legitimation of their occupational autonomy.* […] *Two aspects of professionalization are important sources of*

isomorphism. One is the resting of formal education and of legitimation in a cognitive base produced by university specialists; the second is the growth and elaboration of professional networks that span organizations and across which new models diffuse rapidly." (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983: 152).

Considering this description while attempting to locate directive-commissive exchanges, it seems clear that the spokespersons at play in relation to normative isomorphism may be both organizational members and non-members alike. DiMaggio & Powell identify profession-based collectives of individuals that 'span organizations' – thus containing both members and non-members – within which processes of negotiation lead to definitions of their occupation (legitimate work conditions, methods, education etc.). Further, they note how university specialists are equally engaged in defining organizations and organizational models; what they are, what they do, how they are supposed to work, and so on. All of these negotiations between members and non-members, it is argued, affect organizations in general as they hire employees who as well as representing the organization also represents (or *speaks on behalf of*) their profession. A process of normative isomorphism would thus entail an organization being *submitted* to the legitimate models of an occupation or profession when *committing* to a *directive* enacted on behalf of such a profession. Take for example the utterance: "*We should use Kotler's model to orchestrate our marketing initiatives.*" This sentence, if interpreted as a directive (we *have to* use this model) followed by a commissive (the organization starting using Kotler's model in their marketing efforts), could be analyzed as the marketing profession shaping the organization in question. This utterance would exemplify negotiations between members who speak of both their organization and their professional environment (represented by Kotler's model) in order to accomplish effective organizing. Equally, a non-member could recommend use of this model to the organization; e.g. a consultant stating "*You should use Kotler's model* [...]", whereby the consultant would be *speaking for* the organization by attempting to define it (the organization) in terms of *what it should do.* Thus, reviewing processes of normative isomorphism through the same logic as used to analyze coercive and mimetic processes seems to confirm the proposed analysis. That is, in order to understand how external influences may participate in and shape communicative processes of *organizing* the researcher should pay attention to *pressures* resulting from the modalization and interpretation of *environmental directives* to which an organization may *commit*, thereby *submit* itself to environmental demands. Further, this enactment of environmental

directives may be carried out by members and non-members alike as these come to *speak on behalf of* both the organization and its environment in turn.

Having demonstrated how the three isomorphic processes depicted by DiMaggio & Powell can be explained within the framework of the Montreal School's communicative perspective on processes of *organizing,* it is now possible to provide a list of findings. Most of these, as we have seen, could be deducted on the background of the analysis of coercive isomorphism:

1) It is possible to provide a communicative explanation of inter- and extra-organizational processes of isomorphism, adaptation and change in general.

2) Such an account enables viewing actors conventionally termed 'external' as directly involved in defining and shaping processes of organizing. These actors can be described as spokespersons similar to organizational members when they actively *speak for* the organization and attempt to *define* and *modify* (i.e. reconstitute) it and its course of action.

3) Those 'environmental pressures' that institutional theorists deemed 'invisible' can be located in the *modalization* and *interpretation* of communication as *directives*. Thus, 'environmental pressures' become directly observable *in* communication events. If the organization *commits* to an environmental directive, organizational change results from external intervention whereby the organization is, in a sense, *submitted to* or *organized by* its environment.

4) By localizing these pressures in communication, any mystical 'macro-ness' of these pressures disappears from analysis as they regain *materiality* in communication.

5) It is possible to observe communicative interactions and exchanges of directives and commissives without subscribing to any *a priori* definition of certain actors being more or less powerful than others. This amounts to an analytical preset allowing for any actor to potentially modify another actor's course of action. Further, a single interaction may involve directives and commissives being exchanged by both parties which one can analyze by allowing for multiple rather than a singular perspective. Thus, 'pressures' go from seeming *unidirectional* to seeming, potentially, *multidirectional*. Further, this view is in line with Latour's proposition of viewing power as a consequence rather than a cause of action.

To this list, one additional aspect can be added after having reviewed processes of mimetic and normative isomorphism:

6) The fact that environmental directives may be mobilized in communication involving only organizational members can be explained as the members may act as spokespersons for the organizational environment. They engage in interpretations of environmental states of affairs to decide how to organize themselves in response to external uncertainties (an observation parallel to the one that external actors may, as we have seen, speak for the organization). Thus, the question of *who speaks for the environment* should be considered as open as that of *who speaks for the organization.*

This last consideration is of importance to the general model of communication from which one seeks to explain organizational constitution. In this model, any actor may *in principle* act as a spokesperson for any other actor by attributing agency to it via communication. This idea is accepted in ANT through the principle of 'free association' (the giving up of all *a priori* distinctions) but seems somehow neglected by the Montreal School as their perspective until now has tended to give primacy to the representations of organizations as enacted by their membership and non-human representatives.

This list concludes the analysis of how actors conventionally termed 'external' may be directly involved in processes of *organizing*. We now turn to the second part of this analysis by considering how these same 'external' actors may be involved in defining and constituting the organization as a *collective entity*.

5.2   External actors involved in defining the collective entity

According to Taylor & Cooren (1997), constituting the organization as a *collective entity* is reducible to any act of communication where the organization finds expression in an identifiable actor and this actor is recognized by others as a legitimate expression of such agency. To Cooren and the Montreal School in general, this definition seems to imply that *it is a representative communicating*; i.e. that the organization can only be expressed by a physically present actor that him-/her-/itself *represents* the organization through communication. However, extending the notion of spokesperson to potentially any actor, it seems that any communication defining the organization, its membership, or its actions may constitute that organization as a collective entity *whether the speaker is a member or not.* Consider the following example:

Situation B: "Shell did horrible things in Nigeria."

If, in Situation B, the interpreters consequently identify and associate Shell (in Nigeria) with 'horrible things', then Shell is defined as having done horrible things in Nigeria among those interpreters *no matter their position* (e.g. 'internal' vs 'external') *relative to the organization.* Also, the speaker, it seems, might be anybody regardless of his or her relation to the organization. Thus any actor (A1: the speaker) may prove able to associate another actor (A2: the organization) with yet other actors (A3: here, 'horrible things') which are *identified with* and therefore become *representative* of the second actor (A2: the organization) on the condition that the people present to interpret the utterance agree with this proposed representation.

Whether the speaker is a member or not of the organization in question (here, Shell) would amount to a difference between *auto*-referential definition (i.e. the form '*we* are …') versus *allo*-referential definition (i.e. the form '*they* are …'). However, although these two utterances certainly position the speaker in different ways relative to the organization (as either 'internal' or 'external') and thus provide different meanings and implications for the speaker (and potentially for Shell), it does not seem as though auto-referential definitions are *necessarily* more legitimate than allo-referential definitions. For example, regulation with the purpose of determining the practices of an organization might very well be considered more legitimate than the organizational members' arguments why this regulation is harmful to their business. Thus, organizational representation (or, in Taylor & Cooren's (1997) terms, 'the identifiable actor' – in the above example 'horrible things') *can possibly,* it seems, be "pinned to" the organization from any speaker-position ('internal' or 'external'), where the success of the definition will rather depend on the people interpreting the speech act viewing the association of the organization and some representative actor as legitimate (or, indeed, 'true'). The position of the speaker may not even be clarified by a given utterance defining the organization (like in the above example, the speaker could be a member or a non-member).

To be sure, one example where the position of the speaker as 'internal' or 'external' seems to matter considerably for the success of the statement is in formal, declarative speech acts through which the organization is constituted. For example, the declarative act of hiring a new employee could be exemplified by the statement: "Maersk hereby recruits John" through which John becomes hired by Maersk. In such cases, for the speech act to make sense, the human speaker or non-human representative (e.g. a contract) has to be seen as an authorized representative of Maersk. A journalist with no formal affiliation with Maersk could not hire a new employee on behalf of Maersk –

note, however, that the journalist working undercover as a Maersk manager might prove able to hire someone if her cover remained intact, i.e. if others perceived the act as legitimate). However, it seems that other speech acts like directives (defining the organization in terms of what it should and should not do) and assertions (defining the organization by describing what it is) that do not involve the kind of formal representation on which the success of declarative acts depend could, potentially, be expressed legitimately by any actor no matter his/her/its position relative to the organization. Commissives, interestingly, seem to function like declaratives in this regard since defining the organization in terms of what it *will do* seems to involve a kind of declaration or promise. This curious detail I will not be elaborating here other than observing that commissives – like declaratives – defining an organization only makes sense when uttered from an internal position of the speaker. Importantly, declaratives uttered on behalf of other actors (e.g. institutional actors like a court of law) might prove able to define an organization in a particular way (e.g. as 'guilty' or 'not guilty' of a given legal transgression).

What really matters for the success of organizational definitions in general, however, seems to be the interpretation of a given definition as either legitimate or illegitimate by those actors interpreting it. The extent to which the utterance "*Shell did horrible things in Nigeria*" constitutes and defines Shell will depend on the amount of interpretations accepting this assertion as true no matter whether these interpreters are members of the organization or not. In principle, *to any actor*, X, Shell will have done horrible things in Nigeria if this is interpreted as true by X. Such an analysis could account for why an organization like ISIS could be said to be more evil than good, since more people define ISIS as 'evil', although these people are likely all non-members. Note, however, that the mere evaluation of 'good' vs. 'evil' depends on such a pre-established frame of moral categories; an important aspect to which I shall return later.

On this background, considering the roles of members and non-members in constituting a given organization in terms of what it is and what it does, there seems to be three possible scenarios of constituting the organization as a collective entity: This may happen through both 1) interactions among members, 2) interactions among members and non-members, and 3) interactions among non-members (where members are only involved by reference and/or implication). In this perspective, there is no reason to suggest that definitions of the organization proposed by non-members should be considered any less 'true' or 'legitimate' *a priori* than definitions proposed by members. Which definitions end up seeming more legitimate than others will depend on further communication and negotiation (an evaluative process upon which I elaborate in the next section of this thesis).

Further, depending on the way certain (e.g. critical) environmental definitions are interpreted by organizational members, such definitions might cause the kind of 'societal pressure' described above as a critical definition could be viewed as 'holding' a directive demanding organizational change.

These two sections discussing organizational constitution through processes of organizing and constitution of the organization as a collective entity have considered the possibilities of the involvement and participation of external agencies *in principle*. As we have seen, this analysis requires accepting ANT's perspective that *any actor may become a spokesperson* with the potential ability to define what the organization is and does. The extent of each actor's ability to constitute the organization will depend on the legitimacy attributed to his/her utterance by other actors no matter either's position relative to the organization. This may, however, be different *in practice* where the question of each actor's ability to define the organization becomes that of which organizational definitions end up *counting* and how? Here, we may pay attention to the mechanisms through which some definitions become accepted, diffused and stabilized while others simply are discarded and forgotten about. What ensures the dominance of single definitions over others? In the following section I will consider *ways of tracing* these conditions that make various definitions pass or fail.

6   Constitution *in practice*: Tracing conditions of felicity

The earliest contributions providing the foundations for the field of speech act theory were aware that some communications or speech acts seemed more consequential than others in their ability to constitute new situations and structures. For example, a priest may marry two people by declaring them 'married' and thus constitute a new reality in which these people are defined as a married couple. However, as Austin (1962) noted, things can go wrong that prevent the marriage of two people – i.e. the new social structure – to be considered legitimate. The legitimacy of the marriage might be questioned by someone if the role of the priest was played by someone not ordained as such, if the ceremony took place outside the confines of the church, if the two people getting married were not legally allowed to marry, if something during the ceremony went terribly wrong or if someone had the wrong intentions for marrying in the first place. These considerations made Austin state that speech acts are only likely to be successful if they are performed in the right circumstances, in the right way and with the proper intentions of the actors involved (ibid.: 14-15). All these circumstantial conditions that have to be *satisfied,* in one way or another, for a given speech act to be considered legitimate, Austin termed its *conditions of felicity* (ibid.).

This notion of felicity conditions that actors use to determine the legitimacy of a given speech act allows one to see that utterances do not simply constitute social structures and realities automatically or all by themselves; rather speech acts depend on the circumstances of their enunciation and become meaningful (and potentially either consequential or dismissible) in light of these circumstances. In terms of the communicative dynamics that may lead to organizational constitution for which we have until now only investigated the possibilities *in principle* (thus realizing that *any actor* may be involved in constituting organizations in various ways)*,* the notion of felicity conditions seems helpful when considering the fact that not just any actor seems to be involved *in practice*; i.e. some actors (most obviously organizational members but perhaps equally institutions of government, law, science, and, perhaps, media) seem to be often *more involved* and *more capable* in shaping organizational definitions than many other actors. However, although the original notion of felicity conditions thus seem valuable to us at this point when we discuss how to account for organizational constitution *in practice*, certain theoretical readjustments will have to be made in order to 'fit' this concept into the overall theoretical and analytical framework argued for in this thesis.

The first problem stems from Austin's original definition where felicity conditions are generally described as those circumstantial conditions that *necessarily* should be satisfied in order for a given speech act to be effective. For example, for someone to succeed in declaring two people married,

the person declaring should be a priest, he should perform the ritual in the right way and with the right intentions. However, it does not seem *impossible* to imagine instances where a marriage might be considered legitimate although the person declaring the marriage was not a priest, performed the ritual in the wrong way or with bad intentions. In other words, speech acts *may work* outside their conventional conditions of felicity (for a similar, extended critique of traditional speech act theory's conception of felicity conditions, see Derrida (1988)). Because conventional felicity conditions are not as such *necessary* for a speech act to be regarded as legitimate, we might conceive of felicity conditions more broadly. Thus, instead of paying special attention to any *a priori* necessary conditions that, to the analyst, *should be* 'in place' for a given speech act to be effective, we may define felicity conditions more broadly as those points of reference that the actors take into consideration when interpreting a given speech act as legitimate or illegitimate in practice (without assuming anything in advance of what these points of reference may be). I will exemplify this approach below.

The second problem of Austin's original conception is the inclusion of the actors' *intentions* as a determining factor in evaluating the legitimacy of a speech act. Here, it seems that people present to interpret a given speech act never have access to the intentions of the speaker. For example, as noted above, a marriage is likely to be successful even though the priest does not really want to marry two people as long as he still performs the marriage ritual in a satisfying manner. Nobody present at the wedding would know what the priest was thinking since they would not have access to his thoughts. What they do have access to, however, are the remaining circumstances of the wedding. If the audience interprets the scene of the wedding as involving the right things being in the right place and rituals being performed in an acceptable manner, they will deem the wedding legitimate regardless of the intentions of the priest which nobody knows about (for similar critiques of speaker-intentions see Livet (1994); e.g. as presented by Cooren (2000)). Thus again, instead of deciding *a priori* which felicity conditions should necessarily be fulfilled in order for a given speech act to be successful, we should focus instead on the work done by the actors themselves in actively selecting and prioritizing amongst the available circumstantial aspects (e.g. of a marriage ceremony) to evaluate whether the speech act should be considered legitimate or not.

Having considered these two aspects of traditional speech act theory, what we are left with is a general model that – in accordance with the theoretical perspective of ANT – says nothing about the particular *shape* or *content* that constitutes legitimate versus illegitimate speech acts but only something about the *topology* of such evaluations in that this 'legitimacy' of the act is likely to depend not just on the utterance itself but on various other circumstantial conditions to be 'satisfied'.

Such a model may be made sensible within the framework of the Montreal School's organizational theory. The reader may recall how the Montreal School describes communicative organizing as a text-conversation dynamic where a textual frame shapes and constitutes the circumstances of conversations and negotiations; continuous communicative practices which, in turn, shapes and reconstitutes the textual frame. Using these concepts, we might say that the conversational process of evaluating certain speech acts (here, mainly, organizational definitions) are always enabled as well as constrained by an existing textual frame according to which new definitions become meaningful and can be deemed more or less legitimate. Thus, for example for a judge to define an organization as guilty or not guilty of a certain crime (conversation), she will have to review documentation of what the organization did or did not do along with consulting the law and annals of previous trials concerning similar legal issues (textual frame). To constitute a new text (a verdict of the organization as guilty or not guilty) she will have to review and take account of existing texts to make a judgment. Making this comparison enables the judge to evaluate whether the right conditions are in place for judging the organization as either guilty or not guilty (exemplifying how texts may shape conversation). Depending on the case, however, it might provide grounds for establishing new precedence, influencing similar future cases (exemplifying how conversation may lead to redefining its textual frame). To make a verdict of an organization and its actions (i.e. to decide on an organizational definition), the judge might refer to similar cases in the past, to the law which applies to these matters, to the special circumstances of this case, to the especially ethically despicable character of the act in question, and so on.

In this example, we see that the judge's work of evaluating the act as a legal transgression or not involves drawing a set of *new associations* which eventually comes to serve as a *frame of reference* enabling the judge to pass judgement in the *right way* depending on the mobilized textual frame. In the above example, by mobilizing a frame of reference, the judge is considering the felicity conditions for a verdict of 'guilty' or 'not guilty' according to conventional legal texts. This particular evaluation process of defining something as 'legal' or 'illegal' exemplifies a *formalized* evaluation, where the judge's personal opinion does not matter much; rather she would be mediating a conventional legal program (equally exemplifying an established textual frame) to make a legitimate verdict on behalf of the court. However, one could just as well think of *informal* evaluations; e.g. when a layman evaluates the morality of the acts of a weapons manufacturer by drawing upon pre-established concepts of 'good' and 'bad' (note that morality, here, also constitutes a pre-established textual frame which both enables and constrains any moral evaluation). What these examples help us

see is that every actor-network surrounds itself with a frame of reference, a definition of referring, of framing, and of explaining (Latour, 1997). Thus, instead of seeking to *explain* the actors' evaluations in terms of various structures or norms decided upon *a priori* (like Austin was initially trying to do by defining a set of necessary conditions for speech acts to take effect), the researcher's task becomes one of observing how the actors themselves explain their work by mobilizing various pre-established texts and categories that provide the conditions for evaluating new definitions. As described in the theoretical introduction of the conversation-text dialectic, by focusing on agency, organizational texts become resources for human communication, and by focusing on text, agency becomes manifestations of pre-established socio-semantic meanings and structures (Taylor & Robichaud, 2004).

To help illustrate such an analysis, it may be worth considering a few empirical examples of cases where organizational constitution involves the participation of other actors than the organizational representatives themselves. However, deeming it, as I have done, improper (or, rather, *impossible*) to define a number of necessary conditions of felicity for various attempts of organizational definitions *a priori*, my aim in the following paragraphs is instead merely to consider a few situations to exemplify how actors mobilize various conditions of felicity to evaluate attempts of communicative constitution as either legitimate or dismissible. To briefly sketch the layout of the proposed analytical approach, I present two examples; one apparently *simple* in which one definition seems to prevail, and one apparently more *complex* in which no one definition becomes dominant.

Interestingly, the first example I wish to present is provided by Cooren in an article presenting the Montreal School's view of the communicative constitution of organization. According to him, it is gathered from an article in the Toronto *Globe and Mail* on March 26th 2004, which comments on the Supreme Court of Canada's verdict of a Roman Catholic diocese's responsibility for the years of sexual abuse conducted by one of its priests. The article stated:

> *"A Roman Catholic diocese in Newfoundland is liable for hundreds of sexual assaults committed against young boys over a 30-year period by one of its priests, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled yesterday. A 9-0 majority said a diocese is much more than a faceless, landholding entity. It is instead a central authority intimately linked to the lives of parishioners, especially in isolated areas where its priests enjoy godlike status. The court concluded that the Roman Catholic Episcopal Corp. of St. George's is both directly and vicariously liable for the failure of two successive bishops "to properly direct*

and discipline" Rev. Kevin Bennett during his prolonged sexual rampage. "All temporal and secular actions of the bishop are those of the corporation," Madam Justice Beverly MacLachlin wrote. "This includes the direction, control and discipline of priests, which are the responsibility of the bishop." (Cooren, 2006: 87).

The reason I find it worthwhile to re-use this citation provided by Cooren in a previous paper is that to me, this quote displays a clear example wherein external agents (here the representatives of the Supreme Court of Canada) comes to define the organization in question (the Roman Catholic diocese) in spite of the attempts of self-representation enacted by its membership. As Cooren himself summarizes the situation:

"Although the diocese tried, through the bishops who spoke in its name, to dissociate itself from the priest's action, and thus to stop the chain of actions at the priest's level, the judges of the Supreme Court of Canada decided to incorporate the bishops and the diocese itself in this picture. […] *Note* […] *that saying what she* [Madam Justice Beverly McLachlin] *did does not consist of exonerating the bishops' or the priest's responsibility, but on the contrary, extends their responsibility to the diocese they, in their own way, represented."* (ibid.: 87-88).

This quote constitutes one example where I find that Cooren and the Montreal School close in on the topic considered in this thesis, i.e. discussing the possibilities of external agents' involvement in organizational constitution that we have been studying. To my knowledge, however, Cooren never considers the full implications of the particular view this analysis proposes. Based on the dynamics of external constitution we have considered here, what may catch our attention in this example is how the organizational definitions proposed by the organizational members themselves (the bishops of the diocese) are effectively *overwritten* or *replaced* by the ruling of the Canadian Supreme Court. This ruling constitutes the diocese based on a definition which "extends the responsibility" of the one priest's actions to the organization itself – and which is exactly the association that the bishops were trying to avoid. Thus, the diocese is defined by an external party *contrary* to the definitions proposed by its membership. In other words, the diocese is *submitted* to the description decided upon by the Supreme Court. Of course, whether this new definition of the diocese is in any way "final" or unquestionable remains uncertain and always depends on the continuous negotiations

among the participating actors; i.e. whether and to which degree the diocese submits itself to the Supreme Court's verdict.

What might enable the Supreme Court of Canada to impose its description and constitutional definition of the diocese and its representatives? In this case, the ability of the Canadian Supreme Court to define the organization most likely derives from its *formal authority* to legitimately enact such verdicts and re-define other actors (like organizations) in the name of the law. Note that this formal authority is not made explicit in the above citation. However, it seems that this mandate still *makes a difference* in this situation as it might seem odd – or *out of place* – if an un-authorized individual were attempting to pass formal judgment on the diocese instead of the authorized representatives of the court. This mandate might be seen as constituting a kind of 'silent actor', or, as Latour would call it, a *black box*; a linkage that over time has become a matter of indifference or taken-for-grantedness and thus does not have to be negotiated to the same extent as is the case for newer and more uncertain links. Even these black boxes, however, are never completely certain and may become reopened as matters of controversy (Callon & Latour, 1981); e.g. in case people suddenly started questioning the authority of the Supreme Court. In this case, the diocese might refuse to accept the verdict of the court but might then have to face the entire populous of actors who regard the court's authority as unquestionable. Because of the taken-for-granted status of this court's formal authority, this mandate could be considered a *matter of fact* (see Latour (1987)). This kind of formal authority potentially enabling courts of law to pass judgment and thus to redefine and reconstitute other actors including organizations 'against their will' exemplifies one possible condition of felicity which might radically affect the perceived legitimacy of a proposed organizational definition.

This first example has illustrated one of the more obvious and clear-cut examples of external constitution through the example of formal authority which (although never *certainly* or *necessarily*) might be considered one of those felicity conditions likely to make a difference in terms of the interpreted legitimacy of an actor's communication. But what about less straightforward cases involving a multitude of actors and where representatives of formal authority fail to enact their authority in a way satisfying to all the actors involved?

To view such a more complex example, one might consider a report produced by the critical journalistic medium Danwatch putting into question the legitimacy of a land acquisition deal between the international consortium Lake Turkana Wind Power (LTWP) and the Kenyan government. The deal agreed to by the Kenyan government in 2006 leases an area of 150.000 acres just south of the Lake Turkana in northern Kenya to the LTWP consortium for a period of minimum 33

years and has among other things led to the resettlement of the local community of Sarima. The project area is being turned into a large scale wind farm and represents the single largest private investment in the history of Kenyan development. However, according to Danwatch, the project fails to comply with international human rights standards along with those Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) standards with which the consortium accredits itself to secure financing. The reader may note that Danwatch's interest in the project is due to the fact that the Danish manufacturer Vestas is providing the wind turbines for the farm and has invested significant capital in the project. The central question raised by the report is whether or not local communities had more substantial rights to the land in question and thus if the process of consultation leading to the land lease deal between the international consortium and the Kenyan government was sufficient and in accordance with the relevant standards for proper consultation procedures. The report was released after local communities near Lake Turkana took the consortium and the local government to court for illegal land acquisition (or 'land grabbing') but before any court verdict had been reached (Danwatch, 2016). It provides an extensive portrayal of a case where the identity and authority of several actors is put into question. To illustrate, I have summed up the main conflict points in the model below. For every conflict point LTWP and Danwatch, respectively, each provide a definition of the situation along with a number of associations to various other actors mobilized to strengthen the argument:

	Description headed by LTWP		**Description headed by Danwatch**	
Conflict point	*Definition*	*Associations*	*Definition*	*Associations*
Compliance with legislation and standards?	The project complies with all relevant national and international legislation and standards.	o Kenyan constitution and law o UNDRIP* o IFC Performance Standards**	The project is not in compliance with national legislation or international standards.	o Kenyan constitution and law o UNDRIP* o IFC Performance Standards**
Proper consultation of local communities?	The project has from the beginning engaged local communities	o Kenyan government o Danish government***	Consultation does not seem to be in accordance with local legislation and	o Danish Institute for Human Rights

	in accordance with relevant legislation and standards.		international standards.	o CORDAID (NGO) o Sarima Indigenous Peoples' Land Forum
Presence of indigenous peoples?	The project affected communities are not indigenous peoples and therefore have no substantial land rights.	o Kenyan constitution and law	Four local communities qualify as indigenous peoples and therefore have substantial land rights.	o African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights o International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs
Land rights of local communities?	The nomadic pastoralists have *customary rights of use* to land pastures, however, have no recognizable legal claim to the land.	o Kenyan government	The land in question is *trust land* and thus the property of local indigenous communities although *held in trust* for them by local government.	o Kenya Land Alliance (NGO) o Leiden School of Law o Danish Institute for Human Rights
Attitude of local communities?	Most (if not all) of the local population is fully satisfied with the project. The Plaintiffs do not represent the local population though they claim to do so.	o Local community representatives	The local communities are dissatisfied with the project. The Plaintiffs represent the communities of Marsabit County: The Rendille, Samburu, El Molo, and Turkana.	o Local community representatives

Development potential of the project?	The project contributes greatly to the further development of Kenya and bring significant benefits to the local communities.	o Kenyan government o Danish government***	The project's impact on local communities has been a net negative effect.	o Danish Institute for Human Rights o Danish Institute for International Studies

*) *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)*

**) *IFC Performance Standards is a CSR standard required by the World Bank for projects that seek funding*

***) *Danish government represented by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Danish Export Credit Agency (EKF), the Investment Fund for Developing Countries (IFU)*

Considering this portrayal of the conflict as described by the Danwatch report, one observes how the two descriptions represented by LTWP and Danwatch, respectively, are *mutually exclusive*, thus constituting an, at this point in time, still *open* controversy. (The reader should note that even the "Description headed by LTWP" is presented here as portrayed in the Danwatch report and may thus differ from LTWP's own version; however, the point here is merely to consider this as an example of a controversy which has yet to be settled).

In this case, we see how two contrary descriptions are battling for primacy by attempting to undermine the other's explanation (by discrediting its frame of reference) allowing for defining the situation in a particular manner. Further, each description mobilizes the support of a plurality of actors to strengthen the legitimacy of the claim. Here, the LTWP-description mobilizes Kenyan and Danish government institutions along with one group of local representatives who are satisfied with the project. The Danwatch-description, on the other hand, mobilizes various NGOs, institutions of legal and human rights expertise, international human rights organizations and another group of local representatives who are dissatisfied with the project. Interestingly, both descriptions build their argumentation by referring to the same set of laws and standards as a frame of reference; i.e. Kenyan law, a United Nations framework on the human rights of indigenous peoples (UNDRIP), and the IFC Performance Standards which the project uses as a CSR model to organize the social

responsibility of the operation. Thus, these *texts* become the only actors *authorized* by both parties to define the situation in question in a legitimate manner. However, this frame of reference is, as we see, translated in very different ways enabling two mutually exclusive definitions of the situation and the actors involved. On this background we may consider what seems to be the felicity conditions at play for evaluating these definitions as more or less legitimate?

First of all, in this example as well as in the previous one, a question of *authority* of the various spokespersons seems to be at stake. Where the authoritative mandate of the court in the previous example seemed almost *certain* through its taken-for-granted state, we see here how the ability of the Kenyan government to enter a legitimate land lease deal with the LTWP consortium is questioned by a number of critical voices and thus becomes uncertain. At this point, the legitimacy of the project seems to change whether one attributes greater authority to the numerous spokespersons mobilized by either the LTWP or the Danwatch description. How one evaluates the respective authority of these groups of actors will affect the legitimacy attributed to one definition of the LTWP project (being 'in compliance' or 'not in compliance') over the other.

A second condition (which seems somehow related to the condition of authority) is one of the *representation* of actors. This condition concerns the question of whether one actor truly represents those it claims to speak on behalf of, i.e. whether it is truly *authorized* by them. For example, both the LTWP-description and the Danwatch-description claim to speak on behalf of the LTWP project, defining this as 'in compliance' or 'not in compliance' with relevant regulation and standards. Here, both programs also come to speak for those regulations and standards which are seen as relevant to the case; however, the interpretations of these standards differ considerably and are indeed contradictory at times. Further, through the interpretations of these standards (which is parallel to interpretations of the compliance vs. non-compliance of the project) both descriptions end up speaking in the name of yet other actors as the concepts mobilized by the standards are used to define both LTWP and its social environment. Thus, both descriptions mobilize representations of the LTWP project as 'in compliance' or 'not in compliance', but also of the identities of the local population, defining affected communities as either 'indigenous' or 'non-indigenous' when attempting to represent these people in accordance with the concepts used by the relevant standards. Also, the 'identity' of the land in question as 'trust land' or not (in accordance with Kenyan law) is represented in different ways by the two programs. Finally, the issue of representation is visible in the question of whether the Plaintiffs suing the LTWP project and the Kenyan government truly represent the local population affected by the project or not. Thus, representation is a central condition of felicity in

this case, as any interpretation of who *truly* represents whom is likely to deeply affect the legitimacy of either description. This condition of representation is also interesting for the theoretical considerations of this thesis as it exemplifies how one or a few actors may quickly come to speak in the name of many others (see Taylor & Cooren (1997)). In this particular case it is not an easy task to determine who is actually speaking on behalf of whom (recall that this entire illustration of the conflict between LTWP and Danwatch derives from the Danwatch report of the issue; in this way Danwatch may be seen as speaking for the entire set of actors in this example – or at least as translators of what other actors have previously said and done).

This leads me to one last condition of felicity which appears to make a difference in this case; one of *translation*. The question of whether LTWP's interpretations and translations of the relevant regulative frameworks and international standards are indeed legitimate (by being e.g. *accurate* and/or *sufficient*) is central in the attribution of legitimacy to one description rather than another. It concerns the question of whether these texts (as programs of action provided by external actors; the Kenyan government, the UN, and the World Bank) are properly implemented in the land lease deal and the LTWP consortium's operations. Interestingly, this condition of translation could, in this way, be seen as one of *submission*, i.e. the question of whether LTWP *truly* submits to (and thus allows its operation to be organized by) those regulations and standards which should determine the organization of a large scale infrastructure project such as this one. Here, LTWP claims to have already properly submitted itself to these texts (which could therefore be seen as exemplifying *environmental directives* as described above), i.e. LTWP claims to be *in compliance* (or *committed to* the structural directives of these texts). This state of compliance, however, is questioned by Danwatch (and the other spokespersons mobilized by their critical program) who argues that LTWP should be translating the directives provided by these frameworks in a different manner (for example, the consultation process should have been more extensive if the local population were – in Danwatch's opinion – *properly* defined as indigenous communities with substantial land rights).

This list of three conditions of felicity (authority, representation and translation) at stake in the conflict of defining the 'reality' of the LTWP project near Lake Turkana should not necessarily be considered exhaustive. However, this example enables us to observe how the question of "who defines whom" (or, indeed, which actors become able to speak on behalf of others), along with that of which definitions become either dominant or inferior, should be considered wide open at the beginning of analysis. It seems clear that the ability to define the "reality" of the LTWP project (whether it is 'in compliance' with relevant regulation and standards or not) cannot be reduced to the

competence of organizational members alone (here, representatives of the consortium). In a sense, every single actor involved in this controversy plays a role in defining the reality of the project in question. Again, in a sense, there may be as many potential interpretations and descriptions as there are actors involved in controversy. Further, it becomes clear that as the ability to define various actors may be *completely* open to any actor *in principle*, certain conditions of felicity become mobilized and negotiated by the actors involved to sort out legitimate and illegitimate claims *in practice*, thus actively reducing the number of potentially legitimate spokespersons able to speak for the organization in question. For example, depending on how authority is negotiated and distributed among actors, whether attempts of representation are deemed truly representative or void, and whether translation is evaluated as accurate and sufficient vs. inaccurate and insufficient, the legitimacy of one definition increases or decreases relative to the other. Instead of deciding which actors have or does not have the ability to constitute an organization *a priori*, the researcher might instead commit him- or herself to observe how the actors themselves negotiate each other's competence to define their own and others' identity, and describe – as accurately as possible – how this work of prioritizing definitions by their legitimacy is carried out in practice. Further, an important research object becomes those pre-established textual frames that enable and constrain both new definitions of actors along with evaluations of each definition's legitimacy.

Counter to the current perspective of the Montreal School which, as we have seen, prioritizes the constitutional competence of members (and non-human organizational representatives), the view that I have presented here argues, that to fully account for the communicative constitution of organization one has to look beyond the organization itself and consider how other actors (conventionally deemed 'external') actively participate in and attempt to shape processes of communicative constitution. In this view, defining and constituting the organization is a communicative process open, *in principle*, to any actor, although fewer actors may be regarded as legitimate spokespersons for various organizations *in practice*. However, as the example of LTWP and Danwatch clearly shows, attributing any *a priori* enhanced competence of defining the organization to those actors that identify with this collective (e.g. as 'members') would amount to an analytical mistake as we might – as in the above examples – only get half (or even less of) the story. The process of defining and shaping organizations may be simple (involving few, rather homogenous actors) and uncontroversial (based on compatible definitions) at times, or it may be complex (involving many, heterogeneous actors) and highly controversial (involving many, mutually exclusive definitions). Further, it will likely be difficult to speculate in regards to which definitions will end up as dominant or inferior (e.g. by

their relative diffusion and endurance), along with which actors will prove more able than others in determining the fate of any organization. These questions will be subject to continuous negotiations leading to the strengthening (i.e. *black boxing*) or weakening of some definitions relative to others. However, even a seemingly strong definition may become questioned (thus suddenly weakened) and a seemingly weak tie might suddenly come to be considered a matter of fact (thus strengthened). These negotiations constitute a continuous process, and although this process of communicative constitution may vary in complexity, negotiations are never 'settled' in any final way as organizational existence (being communicative) depends on its continuity. In this view, organizational definitions are never *definite* or *final*, nor can they be decided upon solely by 'internal' actors. Rather, definitions are inherently *uncertain, ambiguous*, continuously *evolving*, and constitute (as the above example illustrates) potential sites of controversy between a variety of different actors ('internal' as well as 'external'). These negotiations that constitute organizations, thus, come to seem increasingly complex and unpredictable in the proposed model. However, this view of communicative constitution as an open and, potentially, extremely heterogeneous process, involving organizational members as well as non-members along with both human and non-human entities, in my opinion, represents an interesting object for future research. Further, it is my opinion that this perspective pays tribute to CCO by recognizing the full (relationist) implications of proposing that organizations are constituted in and through *communication*.

7   Summing up the proposed model of analysis

Before engaging in a discussion of the proposed reconfigurations of the Montreal School's organizational theory proposed in this thesis, I would like to end the analysis by summing up the proposed theoretical model I have been arguing for. As mentioned, this model should be considered as a kind of add-on to or extension of the Montreal School's existing perspective that, in my view, will enable analyses of *extra*-organizational dynamics (or the relations between an 'organization' and its 'environment') as well as the *intra*-organizational phenomena on which its perspective has tended to focus until now. To be able to analyze, in general, the interdependencies between actors and, in particular, the ways in which organizations come to be defined by other 'external' actors, I have argued that the Montreal School's perspective should be extended to consider as possible that:

- o Just as *organizing* may result from intra-organizational communicative exchanges involving organizational members, similar processes can be observed in interactions between the organization and various 'external' actors. For example, actors representative of organization X may become *submitted* to a program of action defined by actors representative of organization Y. To pinpoint these moments of organizing through what we might term 'external constitution', the researcher should pay attention to communication *modalized* and/or *interpreted* as *directives* and *commissives* (to those directives). If organization X can be observed as *committing* to a *directive* given by organization Y, then organization X may be said to be (to some extent) *submitted to* and *organized by* organization Y. Note that just as an external agency may actively attempt to force the organization to change, so may organizational members themselves decide to change because of directives perceived (i.e. *interpreted*) in the environment (e.g. calculated changing market dynamics, perceived change in customer satisfaction, anticipated regulative changes, etc.). Here, environmental *pressures* aimed at or experienced by the organization can be observed in the modalization/interpretation of communications as directives demanding organizational change. In this model, any actor may *in principle* come to determine the practices of an organization.

- o Just as organizational representatives (e.g. members and other 'internal' actors like documents, buildings etc.) may, in one way or another, come to constitute the organization as a *collective entity* by associating themselves with the organization, so too may other 'external' actors succeed in associating yet other actors (e.g. certain actions, responsibilities, identities,

etc.) with the organization in question. By speaking on behalf of the organization in ways divergent from the self-representations enacted by organizational representatives themselves, the organization may become defined in ways initially unfamiliar to members and out of their control. By attributing this potential ability to define organizations to non-representatives, we, as researchers, become able to observe how the organizational definition is likely *always* a consequence of a negotiations between members and non-members (or, rather, representatives and non-representatives). Translating, for example, the definition of a computer manufacturer as the 'best in the market' or as an 'immoral producer', it seems that such definitions are unlikely to be established solely by organizational members, but depends, as Latour would say, on "*the transformations they undergo* later *in the hands of others*" (Latour, 1987: 258). Defining an organization is thus a collective process that cannot be limited to including only organizational members. Rather, in the proposed model, any actor may *in principle* come to define the organization as a collective entity.

o   Where any actor may *in principle* define any organization, the picture is obviously different *in practice* as actors engage in rigorous efforts to evaluate legitimate and illegitimate definitions. To account for this work of prioritizing definitions, the researcher should pay attention to the *conditions of felicity* (manifested as various *frames of reference*) that enable actors to as well as constrain them in evaluating one definition as more or less legitimate than others. These frames provide the conditions which, according to the actors, have to be *satisfied* for a given definition to be considered legitimate. Thus, the researcher may trace these conditions of felicity by paying attention to the actors' explanations of why one description is deemed more or less legitimate than another. Note that the notion of felicity conditions can be mobilized in analyzing the evaluated legitimacy of any kind of speech act and thus both for attempts of *organizing* and of constituting the organization as a *collective entity* as described above.

On this background, we may engage in discussing the proposed model by considering some of its seeming potentials and limitations.

8   Discussion

Through the theoretical exercise which has constituted the analysis of this thesis, I have considered the potential for extending the Montreal School's organizational theory to account for *extra*-organizational as well as *intra*-organizational processes of constitution. In this way, I have attempted to add to the relationist perspective of this theory by considering the involvement of environmental actors *directly* in communicative constitution. This has been done by drawing inspiration from institutional theory's relationist intuitions about organization-environment interdependencies and, eventually, explaining these dynamics in terms of communication. The analysis has suggested that interdependencies and exchanges between an organization and its environment can be explained within the Montreal School's conceptual framework as soon as external actors are allowed (theoretically) to play a direct role in shaping organizational constitution (as *spokespersons* parallel to organizational members, although their *relation* to the organization, as 'external' rather than 'internal', obviously differs).

Having presented the central tenets of this extended model, I believe it is time to evaluate some of the implications of reconfiguring and reinterpreting the Montreal School's perspective in this way. In other words, what are the seeming potentials and limitations of extending their theoretical model in the manner which I have proposed?

I have already considered some of the seeming potentials of reconfiguring the Montreal School's model. I have attempted to demonstrate, how, by not giving primacy to organizational members (and other potential 'internal' actors) in constitutional processes, one can begin to observe how external actors may play a role just as direct as internal actors' in shaping communicative constitution. Also, it seems to me that constitutional processes involving external agencies can be accounted for by mobilizing the existing conceptual toolbox of the Montreal School. In other words, organizational constitution involving the agency of members and non-members alike can be described through the two-dimensional model of communication (as both transaction and representation) proposed by the Montreal School. Importantly, stating that both 'internal' as well as 'external' actors may constitute the organization communicatively does not mean that their contributions will necessarily be *similar*. Since their relation to the organization differs, their communication should not be considered *equal*. However, what the *difference* between member- and non-member communication will be (e.g. in terms of legitimacy) does not seem given *a priori* and should, thus, be the object of empirical investigation. Further, I have stressed how various non-human entities (as *frames of reference* manifested, primarily, as various *texts*) may be mobilized in and come to structure interactions

involving non-members as well as members when these actors attempt to define and evaluate definitions of the organization.

In this way, my reconfiguration of the Montreal School's model can be seen as an attempt to *extend* their model to consider external agencies rather than to *challenge* it. This extension is achieved by demonstrating how some of the relationist intuitions of institutional theory can be understood and explained in terms of communication. For the institutional theorist, the theoretical readjustments proposed in this thesis might seem more radical. I have attempted to illustrate how those *environmental pressures* which institutional theorists deemed *invisible* can in fact be located *in communication*; more precisely as *environmental directives* to which an organization may or may not *commit* (thereby *submitting* itself to the programs of external actors). Importantly, these directives (i.e. a given communication's status as such) will inevitably depend on and be observable in actors' communicative *modalizations* and/or *interpretations* along with in their resulting *translations* of given communications (e.g. in the implementation of new structural elements resulting from experienced environmental pressures). Further, such an understanding of environmental pressures in terms of communication enables a view of such pressures as potentially equivocal rather than unequivocal, as potentially multidirectional rather than unidirectional, and as potentially stemming from any actor (not only those conventionally deemed more powerful than others) depending on how its communication is modalized and interpreted. Another important benefit of the proposed model is that it seems able to account for any such exchange between actors along with the resulting organizational change (whether leading to increased similarity between actors (isomorphism) or dissimilarity).

Through all these theoretical readjustments, the proposed model may seem more *complex* than the one proposed by traditional institutional theory along with the current model represented by the Montreal School. First, relative to the traditional perspective of institutional theory, the increased complexity in the model I propose seems to result from introducing a *communicative* perspective where modalization, interpretation and translation become added factors of analysis in any communicative exchange. As previously noted, in such a communicative model there may in theory be as many interpretations and potential descriptions as there are actors involved in organizing. This certainly demands increased analytical flexibility of the researcher who used to regard societal pressures as relatively unequivocal. Secondly, relative to the current perspective of the Montreal School, increased complexity results from the extension of *potential* agency to any actor in regard to communicative constitution. Again, this reconfiguration demands increased analytical flexibility on the part of the researcher who used to disregard external actors as automatically 'outside' of

communicative constitution. With the model I propose, the potential heterogeneity of actors involved in shaping the emergence of a given organization suddenly increases exponentially and indefinitely (in theory).

This increased complexity resulting from the proposed model may be seen as holding both promises and challenges. On the one hand, I believe any theoretical model should be as complex as the phenomena it attempts to explain. In this light, if the reader agrees with the argumentation of this thesis, the proposed communicative model of the organization-environment relation is merely *sufficiently* complex, where previous models (both institutional and CCO-based) lacked this complexity. On the other hand, increased theoretical complexity does demand increased analytical flexibility of researchers and might, in the worst case, lead to misunderstandings or conceptions of the communicative constitution of organization as too complex to analyze. For example, accepting the potential agency of *any actor* might intimidate attempts of accounting for "all of them" rather than motivate and inspire new research. Here, I would argue, that although the proposed model may seem extremely complex *in principle*, organizational constitution will, as we have seen, necessarily involve a limited number and variety of actors *in practice.* But then again, the work of describing how actors reduce complexity by evaluating various organizational definitions relative to certain established felicity conditions may well prove to be a complex task for any researcher. As Latour notes, analyzing the actors' explanations and evaluations, their mobilization of frames of reference quickly turns into a *mollusc of reference* (Latour, 1997). In my view, any research strategy when facing such potential complexity should *ideally* commit to maintaining at least the same degree of flexibility as displayed by the actors under observation. Failing to do so (e.g. by attributing primacy to organizational members and their definitions *a priori,* thus excluding the potential agency of non-members) might, as we have seen, limit the account of communicative constitution by overlooking important agencies at stake. However, as research is usually thematic and, thus, purposefully focuses on certain phenomena or interactions rather than others, this approach should be considered *ideal*, as it may not always be possible to consider all types of actors and linkages involved in a given case.

Another aspect which may add to the perceived complexity of the proposed model can be viewed in relation to the entrance of the researcher (as observer) and the institution of 'research' in a given situation. In the proposed (and largely ANT-based) perspective of this thesis, both the researcher and 'research' (manifested e.g. as various 'scientific' frames of reference) must be considered as actors in a given situation equal to the actors under observation. Thus, the observer should

account for his or her own involvement in shaping a particular situation parallel to accounting for the action of other actors. In this view, the researcher's presence and action cannot avoid affecting the observed situation in some way. In other words, the researcher should be considered a *co-constituent of the organization* under observation since practices like describing the organization in a research paper extends its existence to the scientific domain. Also, translating the organization's existence in accordance with scientific texts (perspectives, models, concepts, etc.) seems to constitute yet another example of organizational constitution involving the participation of external actors and their redefinitions of the organization.

Until now, I have considered the proposed theoretical model from the perspective that it makes the communicative constitution of organizations appear increasingly complex. However, it seems possible to also highlight a particular aspect, which may actually *decrease* analytical complexity. This aspect resides in ANT's assumption of the 'network-like' character of societies and collectives. The reader may recall how networks are viewed as a *positive* notion needing no *negativity* to be understood. In other words, only those links and connections which are actively enacted by the actors under observation – i.e. only those actors and connections that *make a* (positive) *difference* in the observed situation – should be considered. Again, stating that any actor may be involved in shaping the organization *in principle* should not be taken to mean that this is the case *in practice*. The complexity of networks is, thus, completely dependent on their enactment by various actors. In other words, networks are never *more complex than the actors make them.* Of course, in spite of this limitation of complexity, a given network (e.g. a multinational corporation) may still present itself as an extremely complex object of analysis, should one wish to map it in its entirety. However, a reverse implication of this perspective concerns entities which according to existing research may seem to be *missing*. For example, the researcher might be surprised, when observing a particular situation, that certain conventional structures which (according to existing theory) *should* make a difference did not seem to do so. Would this mean that those 'missing' structures should be considered irrelevant or non-existing? I would argue that it would be an interesting finding, in and of itself, that a certain structure (e.g. a certain text), in the eyes of the researcher, *should have been* mobilized according to existing theory but was not. At the same time, it is worth noticing how this evaluation involves the researcher him- or herself actively drawing a new link between theory and practice to translate the observed situation in accordance with a pre-established scientific frame of reference. I have already described how the active participation of researchers and their drawing new linkages should not necessarily be considered a limitation but rather a natural part of doing

research. However, it demands of the researcher that he or she self-reflexively includes and considers his or her own role as an actor and co-constituent of any given situation. It also requires a striving towards accurate attributions of agency to various actors – *including oneself* – and detailed descriptions of heterogeneous linkages and relations between actors when attempting precise observational accounts of how e.g. representatives of 'business', 'government', and 'science' interact. This task of providing detailed and accurate descriptions of actor-networks, characterized by their hybridity, heterogeneity and complexity, will likely constitute *the* general analytical challenge when mobilizing the proposed model as it demands heightened flexibility, considerations of multiple perspectives at play in "single" interactions, and enhanced descriptive precision of the researcher.

Finally, I would like to visit the seeming implications of extending the Montreal School's perspective to consider the agency of external as well as internal actors for our general understanding and accounts of the communicative constitution of organization. Based on the particular view of organizational existence proposed in this thesis, I believe an important promise of adding to the relationist perspective of the Montreal School is to enable analyses of both individual organizations as entities at once relative to and intimately related to various environmental actors, as well as the communicative constitution of *society* more generally. By theoretically allowing for external actors to become spokespersons able to redefine and reconstitute the organization, we become able to account for constitutional interactions between the individual organization and other actors; a perspective which insists on viewing these collective entities as emergent relative to (and potentially shaped by the communications of) other 'external' actors, thus avoiding to attribute a vacuum-like existence to the organization. Further, adding to the relationist perspective of the Montreal School seems to enhance a societal (or 'macro-like') perspective like that of institutional theory. Recall how one of the central promises of the Montreal School's model has been to overcome the traditional micro-macro divide by investigating 'macro-like' phenomena as they are enacted in 'micro-like' interactions. The Montreal School's organizational theory should thus be considered as *both* a micro and macro theory. This theoretical tenet seems to endure throughout the theoretical reconfiguration which I have proposed. Thus, just as the action of an individual organizational member may be *defined by* and *submitted to* the action of an individual manager, an entire organization may equally be *defined by* and *submitted to* the programs of government or other 'environmental' macro-actors. By adding to the relationist perspective of the Montreal School's theory in this way, the resulting model might further understandings of extra-organizational dynamics of communicative constitution to the potential benefit of organizational as well as sociological theory.

9   Conclusion

In this thesis, I have argued for a perspective of the communicative constitution of organization in which organizations emerge through their enactments by a plurality of actors ('internal' as well as 'external') and their respective mobilization of and interaction with various non-human entities. In this way, I have considered the potential for extending the theoretical model of the Montreal School to account for 'external' as well as 'internal' agencies engaged in defining and shaping organizations through processes of communication. The extension is achieved through the reconfiguration of the notion of 'spokesperson' to be applicable to non-members as well as members. This reconceptualization of the nature of organizational constitution enables an increasingly relationist view of organizations as, potentially, both subjects to and manipulators of various environmental actors and their programs of action. In this model, any actor may *in principle* prove able to redefine and reconstitute the organization communicatively. *In practice*, however, the number and variety of spokespersons decrease as actors negotiate the legitimacy of attempts at reconstitution through interactions with other actors, including those pre-established frames of reference (the 'structures' of society often manifested as various *texts*), which enable as well as constrain evaluations of legitimacy. The result is a view on the communicative constitution of organizations as a process potentially open to any actor's participation where defining the organization may evolve into matters of controversy and struggles for legitimacy between organizational members and non-members alike.

Just as the proposed model can be viewed as an extension of the Montreal School's organizational theory, it can equally be considered a conceptual reconfiguration of certain relationist intuitions of institutional perspectives in terms of communication. It is argued that those phenomena institutional theorists termed 'societal pressures', experienced by and sometimes deeply affecting organizations, manifest *in* communication as *environmental directives* to which organizations may or may not *commit* (and thus *submit*) themselves. Importantly, various communications' status as 'directives' and 'commissives' is determined by how they become modalized and/or interpreted by various actors as such. Further, in this model, organizations may be both sources and/or targets of such directives.

Through this *extension* of the Montreal School's model to include, potentially, any actor, and the *reconfiguration* of the institutional perspective in terms of communication (where modalizations, interpretations and translations become added factors to analyze), the proposed model presents as seemingly more complex than these previous theories of organization. Although this added complexity may problematize use of this model as it demands both increased descriptive flexibility,

precision and reflexivity of the researcher, it is argued that only by allowing the potential agency of any actor while simultaneously considering the multi-perspectived, heterogeneous and hybrid nature of communicative processes will accounts of organizational constitution be sufficient. Organizational existence, it is argued, *cannot* be explained from a less complex perspective.

However, just as this added complexity may present analytical challenges, the proposed model seems to bring promises as well. Adding to the relationist dimension of the Montreal School's theory, we are left with a model with the potential to improve accounts, in general, of the interdependencies between organizations and their social environment. More precisely, the communicative constitution of any organization becomes observable as a consequence of interaction, negotiation and, potentially, controversy between the organization and other 'external' actors. Further, having confirmed the endurance of the Montreal School's seeming ability to overcome the traditional micro-macro divide of organizational theory, the increasingly relationist perspective proposed here bears the promise of better understanding the constitution of individual organizations as well as of 'society', more generally. Here, following Latour (1986), we may conceive of society as the consequence of interactions between multitudes of actors, micro as well as macro, through which each is continuously defined and shaped by its own hands as well as the hands of others.

10 Implications and perspectives

Following the proposed relationist view of organizational constitution proposed in this thesis, an overall topic for future research becomes the ways in which organizations emerge through exchanges, negotiations and controversies between 'itself' and various environmental actors, and how each actor may attempt to define the organization. This overall area of research, as previously noted, seems relevant within studies focusing on particular organizations as well as studies of 'society' more generally; as investigations into multiple actors and their interdependencies. For example, research might consider organizational constitution through processes of interaction with various 'external' actors, like governmental representatives, journalists, scientists, various NGOs, etc., and account for these actors' ability to define and influence organizational practices and structures through communicative processes of negotiation and evaluation. Here, the simultaneous interactions between human and non-human actors (i.e. how various pre-established structures – these 'frames of society' – manifest in, channel and become modified through these conversations) become crucial sites for observing how this evaluative work is carried out in practice and explaining why some definitions gain endurance and become more widely diffused – i.e. becoming *black boxed* – while others are quickly forgotten. To the reader, these topics may not seem completely novel as, for example, institutional theorists have been preoccupied with explaining similar processes. However, I believe committing to a communicative perspective and mobilizing the analytical model proposed in this thesis might result in a renewed and potentially more fruitful approach to analyzing these dynamics.

Engaging in such empirical studies, the researcher should consider some of the seeming implications of mobilizing the proposed analytical model. Conceiving of organizations in terms of actor-networks constituted by 'internal' as well as 'external' actors, the researcher may have to give up a number of conventional *a priori* distinctions before commencing analysis and following the actors in tracing their networks. For example, the proposed view of organizations as definable through their 'external' as well as their 'internal' relations seems to problematize conventional distinctions between organizational *identity* (as definitions proposed by members) (Brown, 2006), *image* (as members' perception of non-members' definitions) (Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail, 1994), and *reputation* (as definitions actually proposed by non-members) (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990). As the example of the controversy between the LTWP consortium and Danwatch illustrated, actors involved in controversy do not distinguish between organizational definitions in this manner, rather each actor seeks *appropriating* a certain identity for itself while attempting to *attribute* certain identities to

other actors. Thus, just as an actor may (*auto*-referentially) *identify itself* with a certain definition, others may attempt to (*allo*-referentially) *identify that actor* with a different definition. In this picture, 'identity' stops being something an actor *is* ('essentially') but rather something it *has*, i.e. a definition which is both appropriated by and/or attributed to a given actor. This anti-essentialist view of organizational constitution as *possessive* in nature (see Bencherki & Cooren (2011)) seems more open to the possibility that actors conventionally deemed 'external' may, potentially, succeed in 'pinning' a particular identity to the organization. This possibility of external constitution, in my view, risks being overlooked if analyses subscribe to *a priori* distinctions between identity/image/reputation, as such a model neglects the fact that these categories all describe organizational definitions which are *identified with the organization* by those actors ('internal' or 'external') attempting to define it. The identity of a given actor is, in the proposed view, never 'up to the actor itself to define'. Rather it results from negotiations between that actor and other actors and, thus, constitutes a potential site of controversy as a plurality of actors with divergent interests attempt to define the identity of a given actor (e.g. an organization). Thus, relative to the view of organizational identity resulting from this thesis, I find Brown (2006) to be right in defining collective identities as 'sites of hegemonic struggle', but wrong in viewing such struggles as taking place 'within' organizations (ibid.: 4-6). These collective negotiations of organizational identity might, in my opinion, prove an interesting object for future research. Further, just as conventional distinctions between identity/image/reputation seem incongruent with the proposed perspective, it seems likely that a number of similar, conventional *a priori* distinctions might prove equally incompatible with an actor-network based perspective; something any author of empirical studies should consider.

Another implication of the proposed perspective concerns the conception of organizational boundaries. In the proposed view of organizations as constituted through communication by actors potentially positioned as 'external' as well as 'internal' relative to the organization, a viable research question becomes how organizational boundaries are enacted and established from 'both sides' and the techniques mobilized to stabilize or modify 'internal' and 'external' positions. According to Hernes (2004), boundary constitution can be viewed as *central* rather than *peripheral* to organizing. Here, attributing various identities and positions such as 'internal', 'external', 'stakeholder' (Freeman et al., 2010), or even 'risk' (Kytle & Ruggie, 2005) to various actors, it would seem, exemplify mechanisms mobilized by organizational members (or other actors like scientists, agents of government, etc.) to define the 'external relations' of the organization. These interactions through which various actors exchange (attribute and appropriate) identities (and with them, tasks,

descriptions, responsibilities, judgements, etc.) in order to, collectively, *locate* the organization and structure its social environment become another possible object for future research. Importantly, taking a communicative (thus, potentially, multi-perspective) approach to observing how organizational boundaries are enacted from at least 'two sides', it seems likely that the definition of organizational boundaries (like the definition of organizational identity) constitutes a potential site of controversy among various actors. Further, there seems to be something intriguingly paradoxical about the mere act of defining a given actor as 'external' relative to the organization as this act, in one sense, leading to the *exclusion* of that actor simultaneously, in another sense, results in an *inclusion* of the actor in the organization's worldview as this actor becomes *related to* the organization. This curious double-sidedness to the act of defining actors as 'external' might equally provide an object for future research, e.g. through investigations of how organizational decision-making is affected by the members' own enactments, interpretations and translations of agencies located as 'external' in a, to the organization, 'social environment'.

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