From Agency to Structure:
Analysis of an Episode in a Facilitation Process[1]*

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In recent publications in organizational communication (Cooren, 2000, 2001a&b, 2004, Cooren, Fox, Robichaud & Talih, 2005, Cooren & Fairhurst, 2004, Putnam & Cooren, 2004), the phenomenon of nonhuman agency has been highlighted as a key element whose recognition might allow researchers to better account for the nature and functioning of organizations. Based on Michel Callon's (1986), Bruno Latour's (1996, 1999, 2004) and John Law's (2001) groundbreaking work, this approach consists of showing that the roles machines, tools, documents, architectural elements, and artifacts more generally play in collectives tend to be neglected in social sciences in general and organizational studies in particular, and that recognizing the active contribution of these elements might help us solve both theoretical and analytical problems. The strength of this approach, in comparison to others like Structuration Theory (Giddens, 1979, 1984; McPhee, 1989, 2004; McPhee & Zaug, 2000; Poole, Seibold & McPhee, 1985; Poole & De Sanctis, 1990), for instance, is that its theoretical developments tend to be more easily operationalized, since it principally consists of accounting for what seems to make a difference in a given situation, whether this difference comes from humans or nonhumans, in order to identify how these different contributions articulate with each other to form an organized whole.

By highlighting these different forms of agencies, the analysts can then account for how human and nonhuman contributions articulate with each other, creating what could be called, following Pickering (1995), the dance of agencies that compose and structure our world. This perspective thus consists of starting from what humans and nonhumans do (the explanans, i.e., what does the explaining) in order to account for how our reality is fundamentally structured (the explanandum, what needs to be explained) (Latour, 2002). It invoves no agency/structure dualism or duality à la Giddens (1984), since all sources of explanation come from this articulation of agencies. In other words, the world as we know it is structured and organized, but this organization can be accounted for just by identifying different entities (human and non-human) that happen to

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contribute to this structuring. This bottom up approach requires analysts to show to what extent we do live in a world filled with agencies, i.e., a plenum, as Garfinkel (1988) so nicely calls it. A plenum, in the specific sense we want to use this term, is a world in which entities with many different ontologies can be said to make a difference, that is, to act or do things.

In what follows, we propose to analyze an exercise in a facilitation process by showing that the structuring of this episode can be studied just by highlighting how different forms of agency (human and non-human) articulate with each other. The objective of this study can be said to be threefold: first, it aims at showing that structuring effects can indeed be identified through a bottom up approach without resorting to any form of duality or dualism, as it is common to think in the traditional literature in organizational studies (Conrad and Haynes, 2001); second, through this analysis, we want to illustrate the analytical power of such an approach by showing how it allows us to identify specific strategies used by the facilitators to do their work, especially in the way they select who or what is acting in a chain of agencies; third, we intend to illustrate how the attribution of agency to artifacts allows human participants to progress throughout the facilitation process by enabling them to objectify what they are supposed to think and wish for, a process that Weick (1979) has identified as the bulk of organizing processes.

From Agency to Structure

Given that agency is a trait that tends to be reserved to human beings and only human beings (Giddens, 1984), claiming that nonhumans like machines, documents, texts, or signs do act can appear quite hubristic to many scholars (McPhee, 2004; McPhee & Seibold, 1999). However, by agency, we do not mean that inanimate objects have a soul or that there is a ghost in the machine (this type of "ontological bet" is of no interest to us). What we simply want to acknowledge is that objects do things, that is, that they contribute, in their own way, to the emergence of organizational and social processes. For instance, once we recognize that entities other than humans do indeed do things, we can observe how a sign indicates visitors how to get where they want to go when they enter a building, how a memo informs employees about a decision just made by the top

managerial team, how a website asks users to click on a hyperlink, or how a camera allows a security guard to monitor a given remotely located area.

All these verbs (indicate, inform, ask, allow) do refer to nonhuman contributions that are, we think, absolutely essential to the mode of being and acting of social and organizational forms. Get rid of the sign, and all the visitors suddenly inundate the concierge with questions, creating a growing congestion at the entrance of the building. Eliminate the memo, and each manager ends up having to waste time informing his or her subordinates in person about the decision. Remove from the website the capacity to tell us to do things, and any average user finds herself or himself completely lost in the meanderings of the Internet. Eliminate the network of cameras, and it becomes necessary to hire maybe ten more security guards to do the same work. As we see, we live in a world filled with artifacts that actively contribute to the processes humans conceive of and design.

However, this animated world[2] that our analysis presumes has traditionally been downplayed or even ignored because of our reluctance, as analysts, to attribute any form of "doing" to objects. For instance, proponents of Structuration Theory (Giddens, 1979, 1984; McPhee, 2004) do orient to objects as resources and constraints, but their starting point always is human agency (the knowledgeable and competent actor from which all sources of agency is supposed to come), an analytical gesture, common with ethnomethodologists and conversation analysts, that leads them to neglect what the artifacts humans create actually do in this world. When objects are reduced to resources and constraints, their contributions indeed tend to be passed over in silence. For instance, to orient to a contract as a resource and/or a constraint means that we, as analysts, acknowledge that the persons who signed it bound themselves through an agreement that is enforceable by law, but such an analysis neglects what the contract typically does, which precisely is to commit its signatories to do specific things. It is this specific form of agency, which, as we will see, does not consist of neglecting the humans' contribution, that is of interest to us.

On the opposite side of the epistemological spectrum, the critical perspective, as represented, for instance, by Deetz (1992), Fairclough (1992, 1995), and Reed (2000), is typically going to highlight structural effects to the detriment of human agency, but this analytical gesture will also tend to neglect what objects do by mobilizing expressions like "material conditions" or "structural relations." For instance, commenting on a critical realist approach to discourse analysis, Reed (2001) writes that it is,

> primarily focused, in its analytical means and explanatory objectives, on the complex ways in which discursive practice and formation is constrained by and unavoidably reflects existing power structures inherently resistant to linguistic reconstruction" [emphasis added] (p. 19)

In other words, critical scholars do know that human agency cannot indeed be the absolute starting point of analysis, but highlighting what make people act the way they act or speak the way they speak usually leads these scholars to speak in terms of structural effects or material conditions, without necessarily dwelling on what remains hidden behind these general terms. In other words, they also reproduce a form of dualism in which the human agent appears prisoner of "structures," whatever this means, in which he or she evolves (see Putnam and Cooren, 2004), while our perspective precisely consists of showing that as soon as we speak of structural effects, some form of nonhuman agency actually is hidden.

Recognizing nonhuman agency can thus be identified as an epistemological position that consists of acknowledging that we share our world with entities that do things in some specific circumstances. This does not mean, however, that they always make a difference. For instance, if nobody looks at the sign, this latter cannot be said to indicate to anybody where to go. To do something – and this is a general property of action, valid for all types of interactants (humans included) – others have to proceed (Latour, 1996). As we just saw, if nobody looks at the sign and reads it, there is no way the sign can be said to do what it was designed to do. Indicating, as a speech act, presupposes that the visitor not only reads what is said, understands it, but also knows where she wants to get to. Not only that, but visitors will tend to pay more attention to the

sign if this latter appears to be official, that is, coming from some authorities who had it especially designed for that purpose. In other words, what the sign does (informing) can also be attributed to what building management does. As we see in this illustration, living in a world of agencies implies that actions are shared between different entities.

As Latour (1999) again notes, actions are hybrid, which means that they can be attributed to – or appropriated by – many different entities depending on the situation. A good example can actually be found in the way we tend to speak about articles, books documents, and texts in general. Nothing indeed prevents us from saying that an article or a book claims or proposes something. These are widely used expressions that we keep finding in academic and non-academic work. Just by scanning the first pages of *The New Handbook of Organizational Communication* (Jablin and Putnam, 2001), we can find sentences like, "Finally, our analysis suggests that…" (Tompkins & Wanca-Thibault, 2001, p. xxix), "This essay hopes to foster useful discussions …" (Deetz, 2001, p. 4) or "This work critiques views of…" (Conrad & Haynes, 2001, p. 64). Certainly, Tompkins and Wanca-Thibault could just as well have written, "Finally, we suggest that…," Deetz's book chapter could have read, "I hope to foster useful discussions…," and Conrad and Haynes could have said, "these scholars critique views of…," but this is precisely our point. Once humans create entities like articles or books (and many other things), these entities can be attributed agency (they can be said to be doing things, like suggesting, critiquing, or even hoping!), but what they do can, of course, be attributed to their authors, who end up acting from a distance and from the past.

Speaking about nonhuman agency does not mean that objects become completely autonomous and that humans are reduced to puppets. On the contrary, as illustrated by the sign example, their mode of action usually requires human participation. For instance, when we enter a bank and see a small hallway delimited by a cord that visitors are supposed to follow in order to be served by the cashiers, this hallway cannot be said to be determining completely our behavior. It needs our participation / collaboration / consent. Certainly, this hallway enjoins us to follow a specific pathway, but enacting this type of behavior still is a matter of personal decision (for instance, if no other client is in the line, we could directly go to a cashier and be served). Using the vocabulary of Gibson (1979,

Norman, 1988), objects afford or allow specific types of behavior on our part and it is this affordance that needs to be better recognized and acknowledged.

Furthermore, even if this hallway is indeed structured and organized (it has parts that are articulated with each other in an orderly way) to speak about it as a structure does not add anything to the comprehension of what is happening. However, if we acknowledge its mode of being (the fact that it is a hallway) and its mode of action (the fact that it enjoins people to follow a specific pathway), we can then start to acknowledge how the clients of the bank orient to this specific object and how this latter participates in the structuring of the situation. We thus agree with critical scholars that everything cannot be reduced to human agency, but we disagree on how to describe such structuring effects, since our perspective still consists of taking a bottom up perspective by highlighting who or what is making a difference, whether this difference comes from prejudices, architectural elements, ideas, documents, or tools. Similarly, we agree with ethnomethodologists and conversation analysts about the necessity to start from agency, but we disagree with them on the extension of this concept by acknowledging a capacity of doing to entities other than humans.

Moreover, we see in the hallway example how it is often through the contribution of nonhumans that organizations (and collective actors in general) can be said to be doing things. Instead of saying that the hallway enjoins the visitors to proceed in a specific way to be served, we could just as well have said that it is, in fact, the bank that is enjoining us to enact this ordered behavior. Both descriptions are correct, though the latter illustrates the selection of an actor upstream in the chain of action. Acting on behalf of the bank, some people in position of authorities decided to have these hallways installed to regulate the services in the bank and it is because of this chain of actions that an upstream or downstream identification can be selected. To a certain extent, it is also because we know that the hallway was put there by people working for the bank that we orient to this artifact as enjoining us to proceed in a specific way.

In other words, speaking of nonhuman agency does not mean that we stop thinking about the humans who designed and set them up. On the contrary, most of the

time, we attribute agency to nonhumans because we know that they were humanly created for a specific purpose. For instance, if we say, “This article incriminates the president,” we, of course, know perfectly well that articles are texts that journalists write, and it is actually because we know this fact that we can specify what the article is doing, whether the journalist intended it or not. Our position thus consists of defending the externalist thesis, as proposed by scholars as diverse as Peirce (1955), Ryle (1949), and Wittgenstein (1953), in opposition to the internalist thesis, as defended by Giddens (1984), McPhee (2004), and Searle (1980a, 1980b, 1984). According to the externalist thesis, intentionality is not a phenomenon that should be reduced to what happens in people’s head, but should also be expanded to include all the objects that are produced by human beings. In other words, texts, machines, tools and artifacts in general are all intentional objects (see Descombes, 2001; Robichaud, in press) and this intentionality is taken into account when we orient to them as doing something in a specific context.

Interestingly enough, recognizing this human and nonhuman “dance of agencies” seems to have some analytical payoff, not only when we set out to describe the world of actions, but also when we look at the way humans speak about or represent this world (which, incidentally, is also a way to look at actions, i.e. speech actions). Once human beings describe the world, there is always a choice to be made regarding what entity they want to attribute agency to, a choice that, of course, can have important rhetorical implications (see Conrad, 2004, especially p. 433). For instance, saying, “This letter just informed me that I was fired” is rhetorically different from saying, “The goddamn Director of Human Resources just informed me that I was fired” or even from saying, “The Company just informed me that I was fired.” These three ways of describing what happened are all potentially correct, but they illustrate a selection in a chain of agencies: the letter acts on behalf of the Director of Human Resources, who herself acts on behalf of the organization. Selecting among these agencies can be a matter of strategy. Similarly, saying, “You do not make any sense!” vs. “What you just said does not make any sense!” can frame a debate in a specific way, by distancing or not the speaker from what she said. As we see in these examples, conceptualizing the social and organizational world as a dance of agencies leads us not only to decenter the analysis of action (the

human actors becomes one category of actors among others, even if these other actors have been humanly created), but also to show how human actors speak about this world.

To summarize, we can thus propose the following principles:

- The world is filled with human and nonhuman agencies;
- By agency, we mean the capacity to make a difference, that is, to produce some kind of change/transformation in the chain of actions;
- When a given (human or nonhuman) actor makes a difference, i.e., does something, this action can always be appropriated by or attributed to another actor (whether collective or individual) who can be identified in the chain of action;
- This identification can be a matter of rhetorical strategy in the way humans depict the world.

What remains to be shown, however, is how this new way of conceiving of the social and organizational worlds allows us to depict phenomena that might have been passed over in silence by other approaches. To do that, we now propose to analyze an interactive episode, which we think illustrates the different principles that have been put forward.

The Case Study

In April 2003, a group of managers representing various branches of a State's criminal justice system[3] were tasked to provide their director with a web portal strategy that would allow the delivery of data to customers from disparate systems in multiple agencies in a seamless and transparent way. The goal, defined by the director, was to collectively develop a framework through interagency technology coordination and realization of the portal strategy to ultimately fulfill the objective of giving users of criminal justice data and information systems "one-stop shopping" access to the information needed to accomplish their mission. In order to assist the development of this project, a center affiliated with a university in a state in the northeastern US was asked to facilitate the process by organizing a series of bi-weekly or sometimes monthly meetings

of representatives of these agencies. Although we are planning to analyze many different aspects of the process in future studies, the present paper will focus only on a specific episode of the first meeting, an episode that happens to illustrate very well this dance of agencies we would like to account for. More precisely, we propose to concentrate on what was called the “Hopes and Fears exercise,” which was organized at the beginning of this meeting. This first meeting, like all the others, was entirely tape recorded and transcribed. To facilitate the attribution of turns and the general description of the event, two observers were in charge of noting carefully who was speaking at what time and what was happening during the meeting. This information proved to be extremely useful, given the large number of participants in the meeting and the nature of the exercise studied here.

This exercise has been deliberately selected, not because of its representativeness, but because of its analyzability. Since it constitutes a rather short episode, easily circumscribed in terms of space and time, with clear and well-defined objectives, the entirety of the structure could be analyzed in a straigtforward way. Our objective was to account for the organization of the episode (the explanandum) through mobilizing a plenum of agencies to be identified (explanans). More complex and less bounded episodes would have been too messy and more difficult to clearly analyze in the available space of a single article, even if we are convinced that the analytical framework proposed in this article could also have revealed their structure and organization.

In what follows, we use the theoretical framework presented previously to show to what extent this approach can contribute to our better understanding of what is happening in such a collaborative process. The operationalization of our perspective requires meticulous analysis regarding what is taking place during the studied exercise, that is, what or who appears to be making a difference in the given situation. Our focus will be threefold: first, we will concentrate on the dance of agencies and its relationship with the sequencing that occurs during this exercise; second, we will look at how nonhuman entities can be said to contribute to the development of the episode; and third we will highlight the way participants themselves speak about these nonhuman contributions.

Two aspects of the exercise are examined. First, and in connection with the first objective of this article, we look at the general structure of the episode (explanadum) by focusing on the link between agency and sequencing, a link that demonstrates how we can illustrate empirically our bottom-up approach (from agencies to organization) without having to resort to the concept of "structure" as an explanans. Second, we analyze a specific episode of the exercise – called the Labeling Sequence – during which phenomena of (ex-) appropriation, (non-) contribution, and nonhuman agency will be particularly examined. Throughout this second section, the role played by artifacts is therefore highlighted in connection with the second and third objectives of the article, i.e., identifying specific strategies used by the facilitators to do their work, and showing how the acknowledgment of nonhuman agency by the participants enable them to progress in the facilitation process.

General structure of the exercise: Agency and Sequencing

At the beginning of the exercise, the main facilitator, Kathy, describes the exercise to the participants. She explains that it will consist of asking them to write on sheets of paper what their hopes and fears are regarding the work they are about to begin together as a team. Another facilitator, Rosa, will then be in charge of clustering these hopes and fears on the board and a general discussion will then follow based on what is on the board. Kathy asks them to start with the hopes and leaves them 15 minutes to write them down. After 5 minutes, she asks them to read or tell her what they wrote. The interaction functions according to the logic of double interacts or schemata (Cooren, 2000; Cooren & Fairhurst, 2004; Weick, 1979), typically encountered in coordinative efforts:

T1 Kathy gives the floor to a participant (**Manipulation= initiation of a sequence**)

T2 The participant reads the hope he/she wrote and hands the sheet to Rosa (or sometimes to Kathy who then hands the sheet to Rosa). **(Performance by a participant**)

T3 Kathy acknowledges what was said by (1) just nodding, (2) saying "Okay," "Thank you," or even "Great" or (3) by repeating the participant's hopes (this enables Rosa to have some time to post the hopes on the board). (**Evaluation/sanction/acknowledgement of the performance**)

T4 In some cases, Kathy reacts to what was said or asks for some clarifications. **(Initiation of other sub-sequences)**

T5 Once T3 or T4 is completed, Kathy gives the floor to another participant by turning to this person and sometimes saying his or her name. **(Opening of a subsequent sequence)**

Here are some illustrations:

Excerpt (1)

	T1	Kathy:	Okay, Bob (**Manipulation** = **initiation of a sequence**)
	T2	Bob:	((reading his sheet of paper)) Achieving the goal of creating a criminal justice integration process. (**Performance by a participant**)
➔	T3	Kathy:	((looking at Rosa who is posting the hope on the board)) Achieve the goal of a true integrated criminal justice information process (**Acknowledgement of what was said = Sanction**)
	T4	Kathy:	((turning to Charlie)) Charlie? (**Initiation of another sequence**)

As we see here, the sequence functions as follows:

T1 Kathy gives the floor to one of the participants (Bob) (**Initiation**)

T2 The participant (Bob) states one of his hopes by reading what he wrote some minutes ago (**performance**)

T3 Kathy repeats the participant's hope while looking at Rosa who is posting Bob's sheet on the board. (**Acknowledgement**)

T4 Kathy turns to the next participant and gives him the floor by pronouncing his name. (**Initiation**)

As we see in T3, the repetition of the participant's statement can be said to function as an acknowledgment/sanction of what has just been said. In some cases, this acknowledgment can also be more explicitly and directly expressed, followed or not followed by a repetition of the participant's words. Here is an illustration where an explicit acknowledgment is followed by a repetition:

Excerpt (2)

	T1	Kathy:	((turning to Charlie)) Charlie
	T2	Charlie:	((reading his sheet of paper)) More timely exchange (1.0) of information that already exists between agencies
➔	T3	Kathy:	Okay
			(1.0)
➔	T4	Kathy:	((looking at Rosa who is posting the hope on the board)) More timely ex- exchange
			(1.0)
	T5	Kathy:	((turning to Jo-Anne after Rosa has finished)) Jo-Anne?

In excerpt (2), the acknowledgment could be said to trigger the closure of the sequence but this latter can only be considered closed when Rosa posts the statement on the board, which corresponds to the moment Kathy turns to the next participant.

Finally, there are also cases in which Kathy does not repeat the participant's hope, waits until Rosa has finished to post it on the board, and then turns to the next candidate.

Note that in T4, the name of the next participant is not even pronounced. By just physically turning to the next participant, Kathy opens a new sequence while closing the previous one.

Excerpt (3)

	T1	Kathy:	((turning to Jo-Anne)) Jo-Anne?
	T2	Jo-Anne:	Improve cross-agencies data sharing and process integration.
	T3	Kathy:	Okay
			(2.0)
➔	T4		((Kathy turns to Helene))
	T4	Helene:	Interagency cooperation

As the main facilitator of the debate, Kathy thus appears to control most aspects of the process. Throughout this exercise, she prompts and assesses the different hopes voiced by the participants, which consists each time of initiating and closing a mini-sequence. She allocates the turns (but note that, to do that, she actually follows the order in which the persons are seated) and often sanctions them explicitly. In one case, Kathy positions herself as assessing what can be said during the meeting. Here is the passage:

Excerpt (4)

	T1	Kathy:	That was it? No other? ((seeing Bob who indicates that he would like to say something)) Okay
➔	T2	Bob:	This is a selfish one
➔	T3	Kathy:	That's okay
	T4	Bob:	Get money to fund projects within other agencies that would benefit our agencies in the xxx
	T5	Kathy	Okay ((gives the floor to Rosa))

In this excerpt, we see Bob warning Kathy (and indirectly the other participants) that the hope he is about to propose is a selfish one. Kathy orients to Bob's warning by responding, "That's okay," which positions her as voicing what is acceptable or okay to say in this meeting. This is congruent with some other excerpts, in which Kathy acknowledges what is said by assessing it ("Okay," "Great"). Here, the organization of this sequence could thus be depicted as follows:

Sequence 1

Manipulation 1: Kathy checks if anybody else around the table has anything to say

Commitment 1: Bob raises his hand to mark that he wants to say something

Competence 1 **= Sequence 2**

Manipulation 2: Bob warns Kathy that this is a selfish hope

Performance 2: Kathy tells Bob that this is okay, i.e., that he can voice selfish hopes.

Performance 1: Bob voices his hope (by reading his hope sheet)

Sanction 1: Kathy acknowledges what he said

Meanwhile, each time a participant voices the hope he or she wrote on a sheet of paper, this latter is posted on the board by Rosa, a process that could be called visualization. By being posted on the board, hopes can be said to be concretized or even reified, i.e., transformed into something that people can manipulate: they become and stay visible to the participants during the time of the meeting and can be collected and recorded at the end by the organizers.

Toward the end of the exercise, Kathy uses this property of the participants' hopes. Having verified that nobody among the participants wants to voice any more hope, she asks them if they are surprised by the results:

	Kathy:	Dan. Any other?
		(2.0)
	Kathy	xxx no? No other? (0.5) Okay
		(2.0)
➔	Kathy	Are you surprised?
		(1.0)
➔	Kathy	by what you see up here?

"What you see up here" are the hopes that have been clustered and organized by Rosa on the board. They are now discursive entities, physically severed from their producers, entities to which the participants are now asked to react. Illustrating Weick's (1979) famous maxim, everything happens as though the participants had to see what they say in order to know what they mean. They produced "things," here sentences on sheets of paper, which they can now contemplate and assess. We will come back to this question in a later section of the analysis

In terms of sequencing, we see in these illustrations how the exercise appears, at first sight, extremely structured by Kathy's intervention. She allocates turns, asks sometimes for precisions if judged necessary, and then closes each turn by opening the next one. This sequencing can thus be said to be performed / produced by Kathy. She serves as the "master of ceremony," directing the whole exercise as a conductor would do with her orchestra. However, we can note that she is not the only one who can be said to produce the exercise, since the sequences also are performed by other individuals present in the room. Following an invitation by Kathy, we see, for instance, that the participants have all written their hopes on green sheets, and then read their hopes when prompted by her. According to a sequential analysis, the whole exercise could thus be described that way:

Sequence 1

Manipulation 1: Kathy opens the sequence by explaining the exercise

Competence 1 = Sequence 2: Writing down the hope sheets

Manipulation 2: Kathy asks the participants to write down their hopes on the green sheets

Performance 2: The participants write their hopes on the green sheets

Sanction 2: When Kathy sees that most of the participants have finished writing, she says that she is going to start the next part of the exercise.

Performance 1 = Sequence 3: Voicing/posting the hopes

Manipulation 3: Kathy allocates turns to the different participants

Performance 3: The participants voice their hopes, which are then posted on the board by Rosa

Sanction 3: Kathy acknowledges what is said

Sanction 1: the exercise is declared closed

As we see through this sequential representation, the whole exercise can be said to be the result of the joint production of Kathy, the participants and Rosa. What positions Kathy as the master of the sequencing is that she appears to be always the one who triggers the different sequences, whatever their hierarchical position appears to be; in other words, she seems to be the prime mover. She is the one who initiates the whole exercise (Manipulation 1) and she is the one who asks the participants to write down and voice their hopes (Manipulations 2 and 3, respectively). In that specific sense, she can be said to be the one who structures the exercise. However, as Latour (1996) notes, even a puppeteer needs the puppets' agency to complete her work; in other words, she needs, of course, the participants' collaboration / contribution / participation throughout the exercise, as she also needs Rosa's.

As we see, the structuring of the exercise thus appears to be completely at the mercy of the different agencies present. Each agency can be said to be brought about by another agency. We are again close to what Latour (1996) talks about when he declares that "faire, c'est faire faire" (to do is causing to do) or Taylor and Van Every (2000) when they note that the term "agent" implies "to be agent for something or someone." If we look carefully at what is happening in this exercise, we can observe that each agent (and this, as we will show, also includes Kathy) is actually led / prompted / incited to do what he/she is seen as doing. Each contribution thus appears to be triggered by a previous contribution. This is, of course, very clear with what happens with the participants. As we saw in our sequential analysis, even though their contributions appear central (they constitute what is looked after by Kathy), they are also always embedded in Kathy's.

Similarly, we see that Rosa's contributions, which mostly (but not uniquely) consist of posting the hopes on the board, are also embedded by Kathy's and triggered by each participant's contribution. Each time a participant has finished voicing / reading a hope, his / her green sheet is taken by Kathy, who hands it onto Rosa, who then posts it on the board. Rosa definitely displays agency – she contributes to the deployment of the exercise – but her agency is again triggered by a previous one, which is itself triggered by a previous one, etc. We are in the flatland described by Latour (1999), a dance of agencies in which a series of entities happen to make a difference in a given situation, that is, participate in the deployment of a sequence.

Recognizing this diversity of agencies does not mean, however, that the different contributions make an equal difference. In other words, some agents seem, so to speak, more equal than others![4] If Kathy is the one who appears to run the show, it is, of course, because she was previously designated to hold this responsibility and the participants know or at least can guess it. But here again, no need to speak in terms of a priori structure that would pre-determine what is happening in this episode. What we have is different statuses to which the different participants implicitly orient throughout the exercise by complying with what Kathy says and following her lead. In other words, statuses appear to make a difference in this situation, not because they would represent or embody an overarching structure that would a priori constrain everything that happens

throughout this episode, but because these titles literally do things during the whole exercise, i.e., they make a difference. Taking the dance of agencies as the analytical starting point thus consists not only of showing what the humans do throughout the exercise, but also what the different statuses in presence make them do[5].

But is this description exhaustive? Haven't we forgotten something in our entity count?

If we continue our description exercise, we can indeed point out the presence and agency of other entities that could be easily passed over in silence, but that happen to also make a difference in the process. For instance, the green sheets definitely appear to participate in / contribute to the sequence initiated by Kathy. By their staying capacity – their "restance" (Derrida, 1988) – we see that they enable the participants to concretize / reify their hopes. The hopes are still the participants' hopes, but also hopes that can now be posted on a board, manipulated by Rosa, and oriented to by everyone. Not only that, we also see how these sheets can then be said to be literally doing things within the process.

Once filled in, the green sheets are, we remember, read by the participants when these latter are prompted to do so by Kathy. This description highlights the passivity of the sheets, but another way to look at the situation consists of saying that the participants read what their green sheet says. In other words, having been filled in by the participants, the green sheets can now display a form of agency: they literally say things. To be sure, the participants appropriate what the green sheets say – after all, these are the hopes they objectified by themselves – but we see how this appropriation tends to mask the contribution of these non-human entities, a contribution that will be mobilized several times throughout the exercise (see next section).

Interestingly enough, this reflection on textuality leads us to question the status of "prime mover" that was initially ascribed to Kathy. Anyone who is familiar with facilitation processes is aware that all these exercises tend to be carefully prepared beforehand. By serving as the master of ceremony, Kathy is actually following a procedure that has been defined in advance by the facilitators. In other words, the hopes

and fears exercise has, in a way, been “written in advance” or pro-grammed. Certainly, not everything is written in advance, but if Kathy can be said to be following a pro-cedure or a pro-gram, it also means that she can logically be positioned as being led to do things in a specific way by the procedure or program she memorized. Indeed, when you are following something or someone, it logically implies that this thing or person is leading you.

As we see, the procedure cannot simply be reduced to a resource or a constraint, as proponents of Structuration Theory would contend, since this would consist of highlighting what Kathy is doing (following) to the detriment of what the procedure is doing (leading). Similarly, we see how speaking of the pre-structuring of the interaction, as critical scholars would typically do, does not do justice to the complexity of the situation, since it would consist of attributing agency to a “structure” without specifying what is hidden behind such a term. As we see, behind this term, these is indeed something, a procedure, which is itself structured, but this procedure does something (leading) to the extent that the human agent (here, Kathy) orients to it by following it. In other words, the procedure sometimes seems to make a difference, while at other times it tends to be bracketed or even ignored by the participants.

Our reflection on the procedure’s agency does not therefore mean that Kathy is at the total mercy of this text written in advance. On the contrary, by following the procedure, she also displays agency (and this is a crucial part in our argument). Like a person following signs to get somewhere, following a procedure implies an active contribution from the person who is led to do things in a specific way. However, we see here how this reflection on agency leads us to problematize the identification of the prime mover. Is it Kathy, as we originally thought? Or should we extend this identity to the procedure, which, to a large extent, defines what Kathy is doing in this exercise? Or should we go even further and ascribe the identity of the prime mover to the persons who originally created and designed the exercise? As we see, as soon as we focus on the phenomenon of agency, we end up problematizing the identification of what comes first. There is no origin to action, just a flatland of agencies in which entities with many different ontologies can make a difference.

As we see in this short analysis of the exercise sequencing, "structure" does not need, at any moment, to be used as an explanans, but is definitely the explanandum. Even the procedure followed by Kathy throughout this sequence does not exhaust the event that constitutes the exercise once it is completed. While this procedure can be said to lead Kathy to adopt some specific types of behavior and not others, it constitutes just one agent among many others (the participants, the facilitators, the green sheets), including some aspects of the furniture and the general organization of the room. For instance, throughout the exercise, we saw that Kathy will follow the order in which the participants are seated to allocate them turns. Also, she will not hesitate to interrupt the course of events to address questions raised by the participants or exchange jokes or anecdotes with them. The exercise, in the end, can be said to be the result of all these contributions.

Again, if we compare our perspective with Giddens's (1984) Structuration Theory, we can see how recognizing multiple forms of agency allows us to decenter the analysis by highlighting all the entities (human, textual, procedural, etc.) that happen to be doing things in this situation. By being prisoner of their internalist conception of agency (McPhee, 2004), Giddens and his followers always tend to start their reflection from what humans do, while we see that our perspective allows us to account also for what leads them to do things. In other words, humans indeed act, but they are also led to do things. There is no absolute point of origin to action. This, incidentally, is also what differentiates our perspective from Garfinkel (1967, 2002) and most ethnomethodologists and conversation analysts, since these latter also tend to remain prisoner of the same internalist conception (see, for instance, Heritage, 1984)[6].

The Labeling Sequence: (Ex-)appropriation, (non-)contribution and nonhuman agency

During the exercise, the green sheets have not just been haphazardly put on the board, they have been, as we saw, organized in clusters, i.e., grouped together by Rosa, according to what she presents as being their common themes. Since none of the participants reacts to what has been put on the board, Rosa decides to comment herself on the clustering and the names she proposes. Here is what she says:

Rosa	Okay It seems it seems to me this is what I heard uh (0.5) from from what you're saying. That does uh (2.0). The sort of (2.0) big cluster in the middle is about (1.0) hum (2.0) It's about inefficiencies. It's about redundancies. It's about processing, it's timely access, quality, completeness, so it's about- it's the characteristics (0.2) of the system in terms of the data. (0.2) and information uh that that that's being shared. It's about uh improving service delivery, eliminating duplicating efforts, improving cross-agencies data sharing, quality, completeness, timeliness uh. So this is ((pointing to the cluster in the middle of the board)), this seems to be about the efficiency (1.0) kinds of directives. The things that we believe if we if we address these, it seems to me, that some of these outcomes will will be realized ((showing another cluster on the right side of the board)). Restitution for victims is increased, uh en- enhanced customers services at a reasonable cost (0.3) access to e-justice is available to all practitioners. So there is a sort of outcomes (0.5) and a process kind of cluster here. These are the things we have to attend to (0.3) uh in this process. Does that-? ((looking for feedback in the audience?))
	(4.0)
Rosa	-ring true? ((commenting the efficiencies cluster)) save time, money and human resources by eliminating inefficiencies (0.5), overlaps and gaps, more timely exchange of information (0.5) uh that already exists uh (1.0) uh (0.5) This is also about customers xxx It seems to be about internal processes ideas and and uh delivery concept)
	(3.0)
Kathy:	So outcomes to process?
Rosa:	Well, >I don't know< (1.0) I think I think they are still thinking.

At the beginning of her intervention, she presents her clustering work as "what-she-heard from-what-the-participants-are-saying." Since a reorganization has been operated between what-was-said and what-she-heard, the clusters she presents can be said to represent her own translation of the exercise. As in any translation, at least one thing is supposed to remain constant, while the rest is transformed. Here, the hopes voiced by the participants have been regrouped according to what is implicitly presented as their

common themes, which therefore are supposed to function as what is constant in a cluster of hopes.

She starts by listing the elements of the "big cluster in the middle." She comments, "It's about efficiencies. It's about redundancies. It's about processing. It's timely access. Quality, completeness." Here, we could say that a transformation is taking place, since she is verbally reducing the different hopes voiced by the participants to a list of one or two words: inefficiencies, redundancies, processing, timely access, quality, completeness. This work of reduction is then completed by a tentative conclusion, in which she reduces again what these diverse themes supposedly are all about: "so it's about- it's the characteristics (0.2) of the system in terms of the data. (0.2) and information uh that that that's being shared." She then starts to list again some sheets regrouped in this cluster ("It's about uh improving service delivery, eliminating duplicating efforts, improving cross-agencies data sharing, quality, completeness, timeliness uh.").

Rosa then establishes a connection between the cluster she was just commenting on and another that she is now introducing. As she says, "So this is ((pointing to the cluster in the middle of the board)), this seems to be about the efficiency (1.0) kinds of directives. The things that we believe if we if we address these, it seems to me, that some of these outcomes will will be realized ((pointing to another cluster on the right side of the board))." After having regrouped the hopes in clusters, she is now articulating them with each other. The hopes voiced by the participants have now been translated into two sets connected by a causal link. According to Rosa, if the process-related hopes are addressed, the outcomes-related ones will be fulfilled. Commenting on the Outcomes cluster, she then mentions some of the hopes regrouped in this set, "Restitution for victims is increased, uh en- enhanced customers services at a reasonable cost (0.3) access to e-justice is available to all practitioners."

Having presented her two clusters, Rosa mentions them again and invites some reactions from the audience: "So there is a sort of outcomes (0.5) and a process kind of cluster here. These are the things we have to attend to (0.3) uh in this process. Does that-?

((looking for feedback in the audience?)) (4.0) ring true." As we see, nobody seems to react during the four long seconds she extends to the audience so that they can reply. She then goes back to the board, comments once more on the clusters and again leaves the floor to the participants without success. After three seconds, Kathy breaks the silence by putting forward her own interpretation ("So outcomes to process?"). Interestingly enough, Rosa refuses to position herself as validating or not validating this interpretation ("Well, >I don't know< (1.0)"). For her, this validation must come from the participants themselves and not from her ("I think I think they are still thinking.").

As we see through this sequence, Rosa seems to position herself as proposing an interpretation that the audience is supposed to validate or not. An appropriation work is expected to be done by the participants, but it does not seem to be happening so far. Instead, a form of resistance seems at stake here, since the participants appear to resist the invitation to speak twice. Displaying agency thus also consists of not doing anything, since in this specific case their silence makes a difference, first, by leading Rosa to repeat her comments, and second, by prompting Kathy to offer an interpretation. Everything seems to be designed so that the participants look at a reorganized version of what they said and appropriate the result. "This is what we said" would be the ideal result of such an activity. In this hypothetical case, Rosa's work could almost be considered transparent, that is, her contribution would have then consisted of revealing what they were actually saying more than adding anything to the game. Interestingly enough, this work of revelation is, of course, a contribution, a strategic reinterpretation, but it is almost meant to be a non-contribution, since the participants are supposed to see what they actually meant when they came up with their hopes. It is this game of "exappropriation," to use Derrida's (1985) terminology, that the exercise seems to rest on. Throughout the exercise, a process of expropriation has first taken place when their hopes have been clustered and organized (Is it still what they mean? Can they appropriate what is on the board? Is it them?). Then, at the end, they are asked to appropriate what was initially expropriated. The clustered hopes are now supposed to be theirs. It is presented as what they meant.

We could therefore say that Rosa's contribution is meant to remain almost invisible, that is, it is supposed to be what Callon (1991) calls an intermediary. In reality, she is of course contributing something to the exercise through her translation work. In other words, what is supposed to be an intermediary actually is a work of transformation. Everything happens as though this real contribution was meant to be a non-contribution, since nothing is supposed to be truly added: it was already there, but it is now revealed through Rosa's work. We think that one of the key aspects of the facilitator's work -- adding something without appearing to add anything, contributing without appearing to contribute, in one word, revealing – lies in this dynamic.

Following this unsuccessful episode, Rosa then decides to forge ahead by putting names on the different clusters. Here is what happens:

Rosa	If we were gonna put, and we are, uh put a label on each one of these clusters, would the- would the label that says something about (0.5) uh uh internal processes. (0.5) What- what does this cluster look like to you if I put -((turning to Kathy?)) What do you call it again?
Kathy:	Process. I just put "process" but we could put "internal processes"
Karl:	xxx effic- efficiencies xxx
Rosa	Efficiencies?
Karl:	Yeah
	(13.0)

As we see, Rosa proposes this time to officially label the different clusters, starting with the one she already identified as the process cluster. To do that, she asks for the audience's feedback about names that she and Kathy propose: "process" or "internal processes," to which one of the participants – Karl – finally reacts by putting forward the term "efficiencies." Following this proposition, two labels are put on the cluster.

After 5 minutes of discussion on these first two labels, another cluster will be named, but this time with a kind of humor or irony. Here is what happens:

Kathy	So that (.) cluster over there, which is the (1.0) goals on time, it says timeframe, what would be the (0.3) label for that.
Alan	Keep your job
	((laughter))
Rosa	What is it?
Kathy	Job security=
Rosa	=Job security ((laughing)) Anybody object?
	(1.0) ((laughter))
Kathy	This is all internal. This is just for us xxx[xx
Rosa	[xx job security?
(male voice)	Yeah
Kathy	Okay
	((Rosa writes “job security” on the cluster))

As we see in this sequence, Kathy prompts the audience to provide a label for a cluster in which many hopes speak about the importance of achieving the goals, to which Alan half jokingly answers, “keep your job.” This label is then translated into “job security” by Kathy and surprisingly taken up by Rosa who ends up labeling the cluster with this name after checking (rapidly) if anybody objects in the audience. Just after this sequence, Rosa proposes to directly write the label “outcomes” on one of the labels without this time asking for approval in the audience (one could speculate that she does not ask for the audience’s input because she does not want similar ironical responses). Here is what happens:

Rosa	= this here seems to be about outcomes
	((Rosa writes “outcomes” on the cluster))
	(2.0)

Kathy Is it specific assessment or just outcome.

Rosa Uh:: just- It's it' what- (0.5) In my mind, it's these five-items here that talk about what are the other things we want to have happened as a result of this. (0.5) Reduction in crime, provide access:: to information to all the necessary practitioners, improve customer access to to xxxx, enhance services to customer at reasonable cost, restitution for crime victims. So some of that, some of the out- some of the the people that are served by this are internal (0.5) all the justice practitioners, some people are are external, the victims.

(1.0)

Rosa But ultimately this is what we want to happen, to make possible by this

(2.0)

Rosa xxxx involved

(3.0)

Here, we can note that the discussion about the label just involves Rosa and Kathy. The participants are just spectators of what is happening. Finally, at the end of the exercise, the labeling process takes an interesting turn. Here is what happens:

Rosa My sense is we should just start the fears

Kathy Okay

Rosa These speak for themselves, right here, equitable resource allocation. It's about funding. This is almost the label for it. Get money to fund projects within agency that will benefit other agencies and whole initiative. Equitable resource allocation

(1.5)

Kathy Okay, I am passing out green now for your fears

As we see, Rosa proposes to switch to the fears exercise by noting that the last hopes "speak for themselves," which implicitly means that these hopes do not need her intervention and the label that would result from this intervention would be able to speak. As she notices, one of them "is almost the label for it." The clustering exercise therefore ends with what is presented by Rosa as a sort of self-labeling process in which no

translation on her part appears to be required. While the other clusters were given labels that were supposed to speak on behalf of the hopes they contained, this cluster does not need any (according to Rosa), since the hopes it contains are said to speak for themselves. This confirms the process of concretization highlighted earlier, but also highlights something else. By being written on sheets of paper, the hopes produced by the participants have indeed been objectified, but this objectification, which makes the hopes visible to all, appears to lead these sheets to do things.

Though we had not highlighted this dimension so far, one can now indeed notice that, throughout the exercise, Rosa and Kathy do not hesitate to say that the clusters they created and the sheets they posted on the board (whether they are hope sheets or labels) are actually doing things**.** Here are some interesting excerpts:

Rosa	If we were gonna put, and we are, uh put a label on each one of these clusters, would the- would **the label that says** something about (0.5) uh uh internal processes. (0.5) What- what does this cluster look like to you if I put -((turning to Kathy?)) What do you call it again?
Kathy	So **that** (.) **cluster** over there, which is the (1.0) goals on time, **it says** timeframe, what would be the (0.3) label for that.
Rosa	Uh:: just- It's it' what- (0.5) In my mind, it's **these five-items here that talk about** what are the other things we want to have happened as a result of this
Rosa	**These** [speaking about hope sheets regrouped in a cluster] **speak** for themselves

As we see, Rosa and Kathy do not hesitate to ascribe agency to the non-human entities that were created during this exercise. These entities are "clusters," "items," "hope sheets," or "labels," that is, entities that have been produced by the participants or identified by the facilitators. Everything happens as though the participants and

facilitators have created textual entities that are now playing an active role in the process: they speak for themselves, they talk about things and they say things.

An alternative analysis could point out that this is actually Rosa and Kathy who make these textual entities speak. We do not contest this interpretation, since this consists of highlighting the chain of action in which these texts' contribution is inserted. What is true of human beings remains true of non-humans, that is, their agency can always be attributed to what leads them to do what they do. For instance, when Rosa says, "these [hope sheets] speak for themselves," we (and the participants) know that she is the one who makes them speak, but recognizing Rosa's agency should not lead us to ignore what the sheets are supposed to do, according to her. This situation is similar to the one where a scientist would say, "these facts speak for themselves," so nicely analyzed by Latour (1987). Reducing the fact's agency to the scientist's would be considered hubristic or even offensive to a scientist. In other words, even if the scientist makes the facts speak for themselves (through what Latour (2004) calls phonation device), it does not prevent the facts, according to this scientist, from speaking for themselves. As it is true for any statement, this one is, of course, open to rebuttal and some of his colleagues might end up showing that these facts actually do not do what the scientist says they do, but the claim is there and, if it becomes confirmed, the facts can indeed be said to be speaking for themselves.

The same analysis applies in this exercise we analyze. Any statement made by Rosa or Kathy about what the texts are doing is subject to rebuttal or rejection, but if no objection comes from the other participants, then one could say that the text's agency is established and taken for granted. Of course, this is often a matter of rhetorical strategy, and ascribing agency to specific forms of entities obviously plays a role in the development of the episode we studied, but our analysis precisely consists of highlighting the chain of agencies in which people can strategically select what meets their interest or objectives. Although we cannot prove it, we could for instance imagine that Rosa decides to say that the sheets speak for themselves because she is running out of time and does not want to open the gate to alternative proposition on the group's part. What is important

to remember, however, is that this claim, as rhetorical and strategic, still is open to contestation and could have been rebutted by any of the participants.

Conclusion

Now that we have illustrated how many different types of agencies appear to participate in the structuring of an exercise like the one we studied, there remains to be shown what kind of payoff can be said to result from such an approach. After all, some readers might point out that, though this new reading does appear to increase the number of contributors to the process, it might not really add anything to its comprehension. So what have we learned from this analysis? Let us return to the three objectives laid out in our introduction.

First, we can say that we were able to show that it was unnecessary to introduce any forms of duality, dialectic, or dualism to account for the production of the exercise. All we needed to do was to account for how many entities seemed to make a difference in the situation, whether these entities were humans or nonhumans (procedure, spatial organization of the room, green sheets, etc.). To be sure, it is highly possible that we downplayed some aspects of it, but this is just a matter of accounting for further active interactants that might have been originally neglected and not suddenly introducing a Deus Ex Machina called “structure,” which would be in a dual relationship with the actions taking place. Everything is constructed from bottom up, but this construction should not be reduced to what humans do. As we saw, humans are in fact very good at building or designing things that, in turn, will make them do things.

What we, as analysts, tend to call “structure” (whether to speak in terms of material conditions, ideologies, power, economic forces, etc.) always takes the form of a specific entity (a procedure, an idea, a presupposition, a title, a document, an architectural element, etc.) that participates in the structuring of our world. Certainly, these entities are themselves structured and organized (in a way, all our world is, to a certain extent, structured and organized), but we think this is precisely what needs to be explained (explanandum) and not what does the explaining (explanans) (Latour, 2002). Our perspective thus consists of showing what or who seems to make a difference in a given

situation and to translate this difference into a "doing" whether this "doing" comes from a human, a tool, an architectural element, a document, a preconception, a procedure or a rule (just to name a few). It thus requires, methodologically speaking, that we pay attention to all the details of interaction in order to do justice to the diversity of entities (discursive, physical, ideational) that actively structure our world.

As to our second objective, illustrating the analytical power of our approach, this ontology of the social enabled us to account for an interesting strategy used by the facilitators throughout the exercise, that is, a strategy that consists of positioning oneself as a non-contributor while contributing something. Although we live in a world full of agencies, it can be rhetorically interesting to position some specific entities as "not full-fledged" participants. In other words, any description or account of what is happening implies an act of selection that can pass over some contributions in silence. For instance, we saw how the facilitators tried repeatedly to position themselves as non-contributors to the exercise, while our analysis does reveal how often they intervene in its unfolding. Although this strategy has already been acknowledged (see, for instance, the excellent article by Aakhus (2001) on GDSS facilitators), our analytical position enables us to show that the representation of what counts and what does not count as a contribution can also be a matter of rhetorical strategy, which might impact how people position themselves and others throughout an interaction.

In other words, since our perspective consists of claiming that we live in an animated world in which several different entities (human and nonhuman, textual or physical) can be said to be doing things, it allows analysts to highlight how human actors choose to select who or what is making a difference in this web of agencies. As we see, highlighting this diversity of agencies does not lead us to downplay human beings' contributions and strategies. On the contrary, humans, of course, not only design most of this animated world[7], but also decide, in many respects, who or what makes a difference in it. As pointed out by Conrad (2004),

> organizational members can use the 'textual' character of inanimate objects rhetorically and strategically. Regardless of their creators' intents, documents

> such as mission statements can be – and often are – used to justify virtually any organizational policy or action, and eventually can take on a 'life on their own' that can ensnare even their creators. (p. 433)

It is therefore always possible to emphasize how humans appropriate the texts and artifacts that have been created, that is, what they make these entities do. Because of our externalist conception of agency, we can precisely account for such strategies, since we saw that agency has no absolute point of origin and is always something shared with others.

Finally, and in line with what we said about positioning, we see how attributing agency to artifacts and including them in the selection in the dance of agencies can precisely help participants define the situations for others and themselves. For instance, by reifying the hopes and fears, i.e., by making them objects that can be manipulated and visualized, the facilitators were able to create a distance between the participants and their feelings, an effect of distanciation/reflection that would have been difficult without the intervention/design of the sheets. Everything happens as though the artifice of the sheets of paper enabled the participants to see who they are, what they feel, what they think. These sheets of paper, while severed from their creators, still re-present (make present again) their hopes and their fears. It is precisely in this game of expropriation – appropriation that the beauty of the exercise seems to lies. "How can we know what we think until we see what we said" should be taken literally, that is, through the recognition of this hybrid dance of agencies that populates our common world.

A Postscript on Limitations

We want to highlight that, given our theoretical premises, our analysis is by definition circumscribed to what appears for us to make a difference in a given situation, whether it is through the participants' discourse or through our observation of the general setting of the exercise. In other words, we have no doubt that some forms of agency must have been either downplayed or even completely neglected in our analysis. Things like personal motives, past conflicts, or interdepartmental alliances might have played a role in this episode without our noticing them. In a way, our limitations can be compared with

the one traditionally associated with ethnomethodology and conversation analysis. For some scholars associated with these two movements, if something is not problematized by the participants in their interaction, it almost does not exist! Even if we are not going that far, we recognize that our analysis is limited to what appears to make a difference, that is, to the different forms of agencies that can be unveiled by observing and listening to what is said during this exercise.

Another limitation that needs to be addressed is related to our general position on agency. If there is no absolute point of origin to action, as pointed out by Latour (1996), this means that, theoretically speaking, we can never stop identifying agencies at some point in a study. For instance, if we start wondering what or who led Othello to kill Desdemona, we can identify Othello's jealousy, Iago's hatred, or Desdemona's missing scarf. All these "things," in one way or another, participate in this chain of agency that leads to this tragedy, but we could go, of course, upstream and identify what predisposes Othello to be jealous or what or who instigated Iago's hatred. Theoretically speaking, it is impossible to end the analysis. However, practically speaking, explanations need to end somewhere and all depends ultimately on what our objectives are and what chain of agencies we can trace back upstream and downstream. In other words, this limitation regarding the absence of analytical limits can be transformed into an asset, since it means that every situation potentially is overdetermined, making our analyses potentially infinite. In one of his letters written in 1845, Gustave Flaubert (1926) says, "For something to become interesting, one just has to look at it long enough" (p. 192). By looking at situations long enough, agencies can reveal themselves and hopefully make our analyses interesting, and even useful.

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Endnotes

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[1] The data analyzed in this article were collected during a research project supported by the National Science Foundation (Grant number ITR-0205152)

[2] We want to thank one of our reviewers for suggesting this expression (animated world), which we hope helped us strengthen our position and argument.

[3] For the purpose of this article, the organizations' and the participants' names have been changed.

[4] We would like to thank one of the reviewers for highlighting this important point about status issues.

[5] Here, we are not implying that statuses do things by themselves. In a way, no agent (human or nonhuman) ever does something by him-, her-, or itself. As Latour (1996) points out, when one acts, others proceed to action. In other words, action always is something that is shared between different entities. Statuses are titles held by people and it is precisely in this association that the dance of agencies takes place.

[6] See, for instance, Garfinkel's (1967, 2002) insistence that people do not follow rules, as if "following" was not a matter of agency. As we see in our example, following a procedure indeed requires agency, but this is true precisely because the procedure itself is doing something. When we are following something (an arrow on the wall, a procedure, etc.) or someone, this means that this thing or person is leading us somewhere. As we see, highlighting one agency always leads us to discover another one.

[7] In this sense, we could say, despite Max Weber's (1948) claim about "the disenchantment of the world" (p. 155), that our reality has never truly been disenchanted and that a certain form of "animism" always pervades the way we speak and conceive of the world.