The Anthropology of Organisations

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ASHGATE

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Acknowledgements

Series Preface

The International Library of Anthropology represents an important publishing initiative to bring together the most significant journal essays in contemporary anthropology. The series makes available to researchers, teachers and students an extensive range of essays that is indispensable for obtaining an overview of the latest theories and findings in this fast-changing subject.

This series consists of volumes dealing with the principal anthropological schools and theories, as well as with applications and developments in the subject's increasingly applied fields. Many of these are now coming to be regarded as subdisciplines in their own right. Each volume is edited by a recognised authority who has selected twenty or so of the best journal essays in the field of his or her special competence and has provided an informative Introduction. Each Introduction offers a summary of the field and discusses the relevance of the essays chosen. The original pagination is retained for ease of reference.

The difficulties of keeping on top of the steadily growing literature in anthropology are complicated by adjacent disciplines with which it now shares many of its concerns. Together with the development of new specialisms and subspecialisms of anthropology, many of which have their own journals (medicine, development and material culture, for example), it is now more necessary than ever to make necessary overviews that offer syntheses of the state of the art. These problems are addressed by the *International Library*.

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Introduction

Every few years anthropologists become self-conscious about the world of organisations, almost as if the discipline needs to catch its breath and reassure itself about its intellectual usefulness in and for the contemporary world. The history of anthropology is full of such reflexive gestures and epochal reawakenings. They are often reminiscent of older debates about anthropology's colonial heritage (Asad, 1973) or its service to industry and capitalism (Baritz, 1960; Burawoy, 1979a) and, although these reassessments take different shapes and forms, they are mostly to do with the 'uses of anthropology' (see, for example, Gildschmidt, 1979; Hill and Baba, 1998; Tax, 1964). Moreover, such self-evaluations tend to be circumscribed by a certain pragmatism, with the institutional worlds of policy-making and business coming close to defining the very spirit of the project (Bate, 1997; Hinshaw, 1980; Holzberg and Giovannini, 1981; Lewis, 1999; Linstead, 1997; Okongwu and Mencher, 2000). All in all, in their different ways, such periodical re-examinations are indicative of anthropology's larger uneasiness with the applications of its trade (Eddy and Partridge, 1978). Power and its institutions, it seems, make anthropologists uncomfortable (Wright, 1994, p. 20).

Perhaps this helps to explain why the institutionalisation of power has been a central concern of the anthropology of organisations from its earliest days. One could almost rebrand the discipline as the institutional ethnography of political philosophy. Anthropology's first incursion into industry, by Elton Mayo, was motivated and inspired by the latter's conservative political philosophy. 'Solidarity', 'cooperation' and 'spontaneous association' were all categories of social analysis applied by Mayo to the description of shopfloor sociality as a counterpoint to his dissatisfaction with the politics of democratic governance (see Bendix and Fisher, Chapter 2, this volume). The consequences of this surreptitious sliding of political philosophy into the anthropological vocabulary have been far-reaching and not always noted. Today, the entanglement of organisational life in the bureaucratisation of the democratic process has caught the attention of scholars under the heading of 'governmentality' (Burchell *et al*., 1991; see also Heyman, Chapter 14, this volume). But the study of the ways in which political and redistributive justice gets institutionalised has always been a concern – indeed, a driving motivation – of organisational ethnographers, and, in putting together this volume, it has been one of my aims to resurrect this tradition.

This introduction thus aims to introduce the volume through the lens of an institutional theory of social and political re-institutionalisations of justice (cf. Douglas, 1986). I do not provide an account of the history of the development of the anthropology of organisations because there are already good accounts at hand (Schwartzman, 1993; Wright, 1994) and also because I feel that the time is right for a political rereading of organisational ethnography in institutional terms. Two further aims, related to, and deriving from, my main aim, are to stress the analytical purchase of comparative ethnography (Holzberg and Giovannini, 1981) and to draw attention to the ongoing displacements and re-institutionalisations of knowledge in organisations.

My use of the terms 're-distribution' and 're-institutionalisation' is unusual yet central to the theoretical perspective that I aim to develop. Although much of what follows is dedicated to the task of fleshing out these terms, it is important to provide a working definition at the outset. I use the term 're-distribution' as an alternative to 'social relationships' and the relational analytic at large. I explain in detail my scepticism towards the relational analytic below. Briefly, re-distribution points to the way in which social life and knowledge gets shuffled around places and persons in different distributive guises: an attempt to describe analytically the way in which morality flows as a social fund. Re-distributions mark the ways in which 'society' appears to itself at different junctures and points of inflection – how it aggregates into specific forms to provide provisional (moral) accounts of itself. In this sense, 'social relationships', for instance, are the preferred mode of social self-consciousness among anthropologists: the form through which sociality appears to the anthropological eye.

The term 're-distribution' has a ring of political philosophy, and this is deliberate. Re-distributions are moral moments at which political values, social idioms and questions of justice fold on to one another, making space for the emergence of 'equity'. This can happen in various guises. A current example are ethical forms, where society holds out a mirror to itself and looks at its own image through the refracted lens of ethical idioms, such as 'transparency' or 'trust' – examples which I elucidate later on in this Introduction.

Finally, the term 're-institutionalisation' aims to capture the work of this re-distributive flow in an organisational context. I have coined the term in order to move away from the structural vocabulary and constraints of much organisational sociology. Re-institutionalisations are *ethnographic* moments, informed by the re-distributive flows (of affect, morality, power, knowledge) within any one particular organisational context. Insofar as they have an institutional dimension, however, these are also redistributive moments, because all institutions have the power to become moral adjudicators. The example that I develop towards the end of the Introduction deals with the recent rise of institutional ethics (transparency, participation, corporate social responsibility, governance) as an idiom of organisational reflexivity. My point is that the rise of the ethical marks the way in which our ethnographic contemporary describes itself: 'ethics' is the name taken by our re-distributive justifications when deployed in institutional contexts. There are some unsettling side-effects to this *institutional* use of the ethical, which I note later on.

The intellectual remit of the anthropology of organisations is, of course, far from being exhausted by the re-distributive approach to institutional polities. Organisations are available for all kinds of study; and an ethnography of an organisation renders all kinds of practices, artefacts, subjects and situations worthy of analysis. This book is full of examples. Aesthetics, aid and development, work, bureaucracy, friendship, immigration, rationality, technology, secrecy, law – these are but a modest sample of the types of category that take an ethnographic life of their own in some of the essays that follow. And there are yet others that are not covered in this volume, if only because the catalogue of possibilities is as rich and ever-expanding as the anthropological enterprise itself. For the same reason, if one is to make some sense of the wealth of materials that the comparative study of organisations yields, it is important to keep a theoretical perspective in mind. The remainder of this Introduction is concerned with building such a perspective.

Reasons and Persons

Derek Parfit opens his admirable book, *Reasons and Persons*, with a question that is emblematic of the theoretical itches that informed the early incursions of anthropologists into the world of organisations: 'What do we have most reason to do?', asks Parfit (1986, p. 3). The reasons for our actions are sometimes moral, sometimes not. They may be explained by resorting to moral theory or moral arguments, or they may be explained with reasons that are self-justifying, that pride themselves on their rationality. Different theories and different reasons create different images of the kinds of persons we are – indeed, of the model of personhood that we are dealing with (Douglas and Ney, 1998) – including the structures of continuity that we bestow on our social and personal projects. Some persons see themselves as self-interested individuals, autonomous holders of their agency, the remit of their aspirations and calculations limited to the here and now or to a temporal horizon that is circumscribed by rational self-projections. Others, conversely, find it difficult to separate their agency from the community of values beholden by the (one or many) social groups to which they feel they belong, so that the reasons for their actions are dissolved into the larger structure of retentions and protentions that makes up social life. 'Reasons and persons' therefore works as shorthand for a type of analytic that helps us think through systems of political and moral adjudication – that is, how people organise their social life in virtue of the image they have of both themselves and their human capacities.

Knowingly or not, Elton Mayo and his associates deployed an early variant of the 'reasons and persons' analytic when they walked into the Western Electric Hawthorne Plant in Chicago and Cicero, Illinois, in the 1920s. Mayo, then a psychologist at Harvard, arrived at Hawthorne to study the impact of physical and incentive changes on the productivity of workers. The company had been running a series of experiments which sought to elucidate the physiological relationship between the intensity of illumination and workers' output and efficiency (Roethlisberger and Dickson, 1939). The results of the tests were contradictory and confusing, so Mayo and his colleagues were called in to set up a number of different experiments aimed at controlling and measuring the co-variations between human and technological variables. It was eventually noted that productivity appeared to oscillate independently from the changes made to working conditions. Researchers then became intrigued about the extent to which workers might be reacting to changes in the organisation of social relations (say, new supervisory arrangements, or even interactions with sympathetic researchers) rather than to technological variables. This led to an increase awareness of, and interest, in 'human relations' in industry – that is, in the so-called quality of the social relationships that workers had at the workplace – with Mayo eventually advocating the establishment of personnel counselling and therapeutic programmes to help workers unburden themselves from the boredom of industrial work. The human relations school thus signalled a reorientation of research in industry towards *shopfloor sociality*, including the favouring of ethnography as the preferred research methodology (see Gardner and Whyte, Chapter 1, this volume).

The nature and consequences of the Hawthorne experiments have been amply discussed in the literature (for example, Jones, 1992; also Parsons, 1974; Schwartzman, 1993, pp. 5–18) and they set a milestone for social science research in industry. William Foote Whyte, for instance, traces 'the beginnings of behavioral science research in industrial relations' to Mayo's work at Hawthorne (Whyte, 1987, p. 487). Helen Schwartzman, on the other hand, has commented on

the methodological robustness of a research programme based on the virtues of open-ended exploration: 'the most significant contribution of [the Hawthorne Studies] is its demonstration of the value of allowing both research questions and methods to evolve and change during the course of an investigation' (Schwartzman, 1993, p. 15). What interests me here, however, is the ideology and social theory that those involved in the experiments brought to their explanations and models. I have noted above how Mayo's views on the predicament of contemporary technological society led him to endorse a theory of spontaneous association that expressed contempt for all forms of labour and industrial organisation. These, he felt, were but an 'artificial substitute for (the spontaneous growth of) human cooperation' (cited in Bendix and Fisher, this volume, p. 12), His idealisation of social life in terms reminiscent of a pristine and romantic vision of 'traditional' pre-industrial life made its way into his and his pupils' theoretical models. Not only did the human relations school import system equilibrium concepts and a structural-functional paradigm into industrial research (see Whyte's essay on the social structure of restaurants, Chapter 3, this volume), but it did so under the wing of a theory of political relations that was blind to the redistributive choices playing out at the institutional level. Social relationships were explained as contributing to either 'conflict' or 'consensus', which were taken for archetypical models of sociality (Buchsbaum *et al.*, 1946). Workers' responses to managerial incentives were deemed either rational, and hence consensual, or irrational and therefore antagonistic. At one point, the discipline's canon was even defined by what became known as the 'restrictions of output' literature – the study of workers' sometimes resistant and sometimes consenting strategic responses to management's incentives to increase output (Collins *et al.*, 1946). Michael Burawoy has called the structure of this archetypical confrontation the 'paradox of organisation theory'; organisations were imagined to be built around 'two divergent premises, namely, the assumption of underlying harmony and the necessity of social control' (Burawoy, 1979b, p. 7, emphasis removed). His point is an important one. The paradox shows the extent to which what happens inside an organisation is a refraction of larger political developments. Consent and consensus are only meaningful categories if some larger process is kept stable. They are not 'primordial conditions but products of the particular organisation of work' (Burawoy, 1979b, p. 12), one that, in Burawoy's analysis, is defined by the capitalist labour process.

Relations and Distributions

The question of what is kept stable brings us back to the 'reasons and persons' analytic. It is a question that affects the redistributive template we use to make our social theory work. Burawoy's own choice – the capitalist labour process – already entails a redistributive choice in which social relationships are viewed through the lens of a productionist paradigm (cf. Campbell, 1987) and in which people see themselves and their human capacities in a contributory idiom (see Corsín Jiménez, Chapter 27, this volume). Mayo and the early human relations scholars favoured a view of industrial relations organized around an 'individualistic point of view' (Whyte, 1951, p. 185). If workers did not respond positively to appropriate incentives, they were seen as 'irrational', incapable of making adequate choices. Reason and rationality were thus bounded to the individual; individuals related to other individuals by exercising rational choices, and a model of rational *relationality*, not morality, informed such choices. This is a powerful model of redistributive social politics, although it has rarely been described in these terms. Critics were, however, quick to point out its limitations. The

individual, it was insistently noted, made a very poor basic unit of analysis. One needed to expand not only the types of relations to which individuals responded to include, for example, individual case histories, racial and ethnic factors, status hierarchies, clique and friendship groups, or processes of unionisation, but also the kinds of relations that were bundled together as rational actions, to account, for instance, for group quotas, the presence of rate-busters, or income generated in the informal sector outside the workplace (see Mollona, Chapter 10, this volume, for a wonderful contemporary example). This is what eventually led industrial ethnographers to incorporate ever-expanding layers of context to their analyses. Departing from their original focus on the social system of the workplace (see, for example, Gardner, 1946; Richardson and Walker, 1948; Whyte, 1948), researchers moved to the study of the larger community in which the workplace was located (see, for example, Warner and Low, 1946, 1947). From here, it was only a small jump to include the local economy, the nation-state, the world system or the structurally uneven forces of capitalist development (see, for example, Lupton, 1963; Nash, 1993; Wolfe, 1977; Yanagisako, 2002). The move towards 'studying wide' was paralleled by a move towards 'studying up' (Nader, 1972), to include analyses of decision-making processes among elites and power-holders.

Curiously, throughout this time no one queried the central place of the 'relation' in the theoretical imagination of all such expansively individual-cum-social redistributive (that is, rational and moral) choices. The calls to study up and wide had indexed a displacement of the analytical gaze, a growing out and expansion of the number of perspectives to be considered. Few attended to the possible strains arising from this constant zooming in and out of social situations, this perpetual oscillation between different orders of complexity (cf. Law and Mol, 2002). 'Relations' were being put to work across all orders of reality: they were being traced out to elucidate new contexts and situations; to include new political or economic actors; to articulate new theoretical perspectives, about modes and *relations* of production or emerging patterns and structures of social *relationships*; or to resituate theories and theorists in *relation* to their work. Marilyn Strathern (1995) has noted the central role that relations have consistently played in anthropology as both terms of ethnographic description and categories of anthropological analysis, and nowhere has this been so evident as in the urban and industrial case studies of the post-Hawthorne paradigm.

A number of consequences followed. From a formalist point of view, the limitations of the relational model are shared in the oft-cited critiques of structural functionalism. It is difficult to make relations take stock of change and temporality, to make them 'move', to see them developing new forms and shapes. Relationality, in this context, produces theories whose sell-by date comes about very quickly. From a substantivist angle, on the other hand, there are also important constraints on the type and extent of 'moral' work that relations can do for social theory. An example can be found in Harold Wilensky's early appraisal of research in human relations in industry. He observed:

> …that size of immediate work group is negatively correlated with productivity, or job satisfaction, or regular attendance, or industrial peace – other factors being equal. This is due in part to the greater likelihood that *primary relations (relations that are intimate, personal, inclusive, and experienced as spontaneous)* are more likely to develop in small groups that in large groups. (Wilensky, 1957, p. 28, emphasis added.)

For Wilensky, relations carry a moral burden, the scale of which varies with factors such as the size of a group or the *internal* moment of the relation itself – what he calls their 'inclusiveness'.

The notion of scale here is important. It points to how widely the social imaginary is cast: whether sociality is made to work *inside* relations ('inclusively') or whether it is carried forward through *externalisations*, such as Burawoy's 'capitalist labour process'. What is internal or external to a relation, inside or outside an ethnographic description, is, of course, always a matter of dispute. Wilensky himself appreciated this, although he did not articulate it in these terms. Contrasting a group of army and industrial shopfloor 'buddies', he observed how the latter 'might have less of a sense of the manager's right to command and more of a sense that the manager is playing on a different team' (Wilensky, 1957, p. 30). In other words, in the army, relations internalize their externalities; they become deeper *within* to account for the pressures *outside* (cf. Strathern, 2002). In other words, if we follow Wilensky, we are more likely to have buddies in the army than on the shopfloor.

In both its internal and external moments the relational analytic thus dictates the way in which we see morality work, when and where our values and principles are made to kick in, and to what effect – inside or outside, privately or publicly, inclusively or exclusively, in the army or on the shopfloor. This affects what I referred to above as our model of social redistributive choices. Relations always carry with them a particular *scale* of moral and equity possibilities, a field of political justice (Strathern, 1991, 1999; on the notion of scale, see for example, Corsín Jiménez, 2005; Green, 2005, pp. 128–58). In other words, relations always need to relate to something – to be placed within some sort of scale – if they are to map out for us the terrain of moral and political reasons and choices wherein they have to make sense.

Culture

Much of the work that was done in the 1960s and 1970s reflected this dissatisfaction with the analytical and descriptive constraints imposed by the relational model. Building on the work of Max Gluckman, industrial ethnographers based at the University of Manchester adopted the 'extended case study' as a method for analysing social situations (Emmett and Morgan, 1982). These ethnographies first signalled a concern for, and interest in, meaning-making practices – an appreciation of the 'limitations [inherent] in the idea that society is made up of face-to-face contact between people in different roles in a social structure' (Wright, 1994, p. 13). Culture also allowed scholars to make sense of the work of 'non-relations', such as organisational *deviance* (Linstead, 1985; see also Mars, Chapter 20, this volume), occupational *crime* (Mars, 2001) or *risk* behaviour (Douglas and Wildavsky, 1982), where people seem strangely to act *against* the interests of their collectivities (Mars, 1997). These studies gestured towards the importance of cultural and symbolic resources in the making, distribution and dissociation of collective values, away from the study of types of relationships (for example, solidarity, conflict, cooperation, production, alienation) that created social situations. Instead, they started paying attention to the very *currencies* of relationality through which such situations emerged. Researchers stopped looking for the effects of, say, authority, or the clashes and difficulties between black and white people, or men and women in the workplace, and instead began to explore the different ways, idioms and categories through which 'power', 'race' and 'gender' *themselves* emerged as factors that enabled or constrained social life.

The 'cultural' turn in ethnographic description and analysis had a series of consequences that are well known and have been amply documented (see, for example, Wright, 1994). My interest here lies in the way in which 'culture' itself became an adjudicative category, an

analytical currency through which social and moral redistributive choices were allocated and explained (away) – the way, that is, in which culture itself became a *scale* of sorts. For the term levelled the playing field of institutional politics, rescaling the moral template of social re-distributive processes. This was particularly the case amongst organisational scholars, who turned eagerly to the anthropological concept of culture for use as an objectifying tool. A sophisticated example is Thompson's and Wildavsky's cultural theory of information bias (Chapter 16, this volume) in which the availability of information and the processes of decision-making are *themselves* the 'organisation' in the making.

The appropriation of the culture concept by organisational scholars then took a peculiar turn (see, for example, Pettigrew, 1979). It had two moments: an explanatory and a methodological one. Broadly speaking, the initiative may be characterised as follows. Culture, it was argued, is what anthropologists study (although others, such as sociologists (Ouchi and Wilkins, 1985), legitimately claimed a slice of the cake, too). According to this perspective, then, the study of organisational culture seems to be a natural and legitimate extension of the anthropological agenda – something about which anthropologists should have something to say or something that other people could say in an anthropological vein. Of course, culture meant many different things to many different people (Barley *et al.*, 1988), but it was almost always used in an explanatory fashion and very rarely for its indigenous – conceptual because ethnographic – purchase (see, however, Gregory, 1983).

The second moment focused on anthropologists' sense of ownership of the methodological analysis of culture – that is, on the ethnographic method. Ethnography, it was argued, is what anthropologists do when studying culture. It would therefore seem natural to get organisational researchers to do ethnography or, more infrequently, to get anthropologists on the job. Bring the two strands together (the culturalist and the methodological) and what you get are reviews or histories of the anthropology of organisations where one gets the impression that all anthropology can do for organisations is to study their cultures ethnographically.

There are at least two elements in this cultural-cum-ethnographic approach to the anthropological study of organisations that lame the discipline if compared to more classical definitions. One is an absence of references to anthropology's traditional *comparative* method and analytic (but see Thompson and Wildavsky, Chapter 16, and Douglas and Mars, Chapter 21,this volume); the other, related, is a hollowing-out of the discipline's *critical* interrogation of social theory. Combined, they tell the story of anthropology's historical critique of social theory through its descriptive rendering of indigenous and folk models of social life, a sense of intellectual purchase for which anthropology is rarely credited in organisational ethnographies of culture (Gellner and Hirsch, 2001; Schwartzman, 1993).

An appreciation of the comparative and critical dimensions of anthropological analysis would show not only the extent to which 'culture' is itself a culturally situated category – 'double faceted', as Susan Wright has put it (1994, p. 27), at once analytical and ethnographic – but also those things that culture does not explain. In this way, those things that 'culture' does in fact explain to those for whom it is a meaningful category are thrown into a morally weighted relief. This figure–ground reversal (explained versus obviated) of the cultural imagery brings us back to the question of distribution and scale (cf. Wagner, 1975). Explained in figurative language, one could say that the resort to cultural idioms projects a light, whose size or scale will always leave certain items in shadow. The *distribution* of the light and the *scale* of the cultural idiom will, of course, vary: that which becomes illuminated, and where,

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are the moral constituencies that an organisation will render worthy of acknowledgement. I will illustrate this point by way of an example.

   John Van Maanen's ethnography of the various reactions inside a police organisation in the aftermath of a police shooting (Chapter 6) provides an eloquent example of how things become 'illuminated'. Van Maanen tells us that police shootings are 'beyond account'. They are exaggerated events, overflowing with surplus – of meaning, of consequences, of self-reflection, of administrative reactions. Shootings are larger-than-life affairs which trigger an 'infinitely expandable' argumentative logic. Although the organisational response and management of a shooting aims always to produce a clean and justifiable account of the event, police officers know only too well that it 'could always have been otherwise. … The bullet could have missed its mark, the aid car could have arrived sooner, the prowl car's entrance onto the scene could have been delayed by another call, another red light, another prowl car, an accident, or a breakdown' (p. 67). A shooting is 'an event without boundaries' (p. 69): no amount of context, relations, explanations or justifications will be enough to tame or account for it.

   Van Maanen's is an ethnography of confusion and indeterminacy, which uses the imagery of excess and surplus as background to the organisation of routine and accountability in police departments. Excess, surplus and indeterminacy are indigenous images. It is against this oscillatory backdrop of uncertainties that the social world of police work takes shape. Agency, if one understands by this an individual's intentionality, is, therefore, not something that one can attribute easily in the case of police shootings. It is something that is discovered 'after the event' (p. 69), often involving factual reconstructions and administrative negotiations. Such 'failures' in the adjudication of responsibility are not something police officers care much about, except when asked to provide a 'public presentation' of the event. The atmosphere of indeterminacy and the surplus of 'deeper, darker forces' (p. 69) that shape and characterise police work trickle down the organisation, reshaping at every level how officers define themselves, define the corporation and when and how they define the terms through which police work becomes a public affair (reported in newspapers, or talked about in the family or the neighbourhood). In the aftermath of a shooting, individual police officers not only need to reconstruct their own personal identity in a sea of administrative and institutional justifications, tying and tidying up the messiness of the affair, but also need to coin or invent new social objects, persons or places on to which to pass the buck of original responsibility (cf. Frankenberg, 1972). The world of indeterminacy is thus carefully resculpted into images, words and forms that have first been approved for public consumption. This is the moment where shadows are cast and moral constituencies illuminated. This is how scale works, and how 'reasons and persons' re-distribute themselves across the organisation, reassembling, in the process, the integrity of what is indigenously taken for political and moral justice.

Re-institutionalisations

Not every police shooting is treated equally, or has the same effects. Some officers, Van Maanen tells us, react by expressing '[g]uilt, embarrassment, stigma, incapacity, and profound insecurity'. An officer's 'sense of self' thus becomes a sticking-point for wider moral judgements (p. 75), a locus for the negotiation of personal, family, community and public values. These get caught up in moments of re-institutionalisations, where the surplus

of violent indeterminacy looks for its own still point, a new resting place of temporarily re-distributed (personal, moral and political) equity. One of Van Maanen's informants puts it thus:

> If it hadn't been for Parks and White I don't know what I'd of done. I was really messed-up, confused, ready to pull the pin. I couldn't really talk to Mary about it since she'd never really been in favor of my police career and all. Besides she was going through enough shit of her own with me being on the six o'clock news every night. It got so bad that we had to jerk the kids out of school for a while. The department was good though and nobody ever suggested that it wouldn't all blow over eventually. But it was Parks and White who got me through it. They came around everyday and listened to me moan and bitch. … I really love those guys. (pp. 74–75)

Van Maanen's informant shuffled and re-distributed his own notion and sense of self (via Parks and White, his wife, the police department, his kids and their school) until he obtained or produced for himself an integrated and justifiable sense of moral coherence. We are witnesses to the mobilisation and reassembling of reasons and persons in order to produce a stable fund of social and personal well-being.

The Re-distributions of Institutional Publics

In his recent biographical approach to the question of egalitarianism in political philosophy, G.A. Cohen identifies three views on what he calls 'the *site* of distributive justice – about, that is, the sorts of items to which principles of distributive justice apply' (Cohen, 2000, p. 3, emphasis in the original). These views consist in three different pick-and-mix formulas, made up of either rules of public order *or* morally informed personal choice, or a mixture in between. This three-case scenario is a well-known point of departure for intellectual disquisitions in political philosophy. I have cited Cohen's formulation, however, because I am interested in his choice of vocabulary, which he himself emphasises in the quote above – what he terms the *sites* of distributive justice. My interest in the topology (from *topos*, 'site' in Greek) of distributive justice goes back to my description of society's re-institutionalisations – what I have called throughout its moments of re-distribution. This concern for the *places* or moments of re-distribution echoes Bruno Latour's recent call for an 'object-oriented' or 'matters-of-concern' politics, a *Dingpolitik* (Latour, 2005) that looks out for the 'assemblies' – or 'assemblages' (see Ong and Collier, 2005) – through which the social reinvents the political: that is, the moment at which society emerges as an object of 'public' concern to itself. A vivid example of this assembling of the political through the re-institutional is captured in one of the cases recounted by Janet Gilboy in her study of immigration inspections (Chapter 13, this volume). Gilboy (pp. 221–22) tells us of a young woman who, in a question-and-answer (Q & A) interrogatory, admitted to coming to the USA to work in a family's stable for room and board. She failed to produce the necessary entrance paperwork, and her case was deemed inadmissible. The woman voluntarily returned home. At a later stage, however, the Port and State Department office began to receive calls from the suspected employer, who turned out to be a judge elsewhere in the USA. Under increasing pressure, high-level administrators eventually issued a visa and admitted the girl into the country.

So far, no surprises: bureaucracies mobilise their own funds of patronage, outside or inside the organisation, which then flow up and down, creating ripples and pools of power and effects

– bureaucracies, after all, have long been noted for the obduracy of their power structures (Heyman, 1995 and Chapter 14, this volume; Weber, 1946). Things start to look differently, however, when we attend to, and open up, the catalogue of ethnographic descriptors. An official's account of the story provides the cue:

> When she came in, she gave a Q & A that incriminated her. She said she was going to take care of the horse and get room and board for doing that. Where do you draw the line? She was to take care of the horse and she'd be able to ride. But he [the suspected employer] had enough financial resources to show that he had other people to take care of the stable and that she did not need to work. He does travel and may have just met her and invited her. (p. 222)

Suddenly, the incident is no longer bureaucratic or administrative. It becomes political. Not because of the way in which it expresses particular power dynamics and clashes, but because of the way in which certain *external* 'publics' become *internal* to the social moment of the incident itself: the ways in which the incident 'goes public' at different points of inflection – for instance, how ideas about (structural inequalities of) class and wealth, power and sex, or even intimations about the aristocratic flare of the judicial system, make their sudden ('public') appearance inside the organisation as consequential idioms *and* instruments of administration. Here we have again, then, the illuminations (the idioms gone public) and the shadows (the words spoken in gossip and secrecy). For these ideas become part and parcel of the institution itself. This is why Gilboy places so much emphasis on what she calls 'foreseeable "organisational futures"' (p. 211) – that is, officials' use of organisational background and embedded knowledge to anticipate the possible futures of particular actions and to manoeuvre accordingly. In the above case, officials later admitted to Gilboy that they should not only have anticipated the judge's use of his connections of class, status and political patronage to bring about casework intervention, but also have therefore taken pre-emptive action by, for example, deferring, without detention, the young woman's inspection to a later date. It is at this point that the incident signals its re-distributive moment, when officials readjust and reallocate their distributed capacities (Corsín Jiménez, 2003; Gell, 1998) by internalising and externalising, in a double movement, the organisation's societal orientation. This is best captured in the question with which the official summed up his literally distributed (and thus bedazzled) agency: '*Where* do you draw the line?', p. 222.

Re-institutionalisations of the Contemporary

So where are the lines of contemporary institutional re-distributions being drawn? There are many answers to this question, and the essays that make up Part VIII of this volume offer some selective glimpses. Here, however, I want to focus on a particular emerging assemblage, that of the *ethical*, which poses crucial analytical challenges to our understanding of social forms because of its centrality to any model of distributive social theory. The rise of the ethical is particularly problematic for the social sciences because of the language and imagery of redistribution that already populates our analytical vocabularies (for example, proportionality, balance, equality, justice). The matter takes on greater poignancy if given the form of a question: how can we theorise the ethical, if the ethical itself becomes the mode of articulation of (Euro-American) society (cf. Strathern, 2000)?

   Anthropology, and the anthropology of organisations in particular, provides a simple, yet I believe compelling answer: ethnography. Ethnography gives us the comparative and critical edge that we need to revitalise from within our social theory. In his ethnographic study of aid policy and practice, for example, David Mosse (Chapter 24, this volume; see also Mosse, 2004) alerts us to the trans-institutional purchase of allegedly self-evident policy categories, such as 'participation', 'evidence-based policy' or 'governance', which in his ethnography fold on to one another to produce a particular regime of ethically accountable development. These categories create a model of policy that subverts and bends the actual forms that concrete development practices take. They make policy take a life of its own, away from the fractured and contradictory terrain of professional practice, self-validating a world of systemic representations that has little to do with how things are on the ground. The point is not simply that such abstract, policy-driven rhetoric establishes a world of virtual management that has nothing to do and is radically detached from the everyday life of those whom it intends to engage (cf. Miller, 2003). That, no doubt, happens, too. But perhaps more intriguing and unsettling is the way in which the institutional assemblages that at any one point in time buy into the current rhetoric of 'participation' or 'responsibility' both signal *and* create re-distributions of the sociopolitical order itself, making certain actors and people (for example, villagers, farmers, NGOs, patrons) now visible, now – five years later, when the rhetoric and the power-holders have changed – invisible. Participation works in this guise both as a re-distributive instrument (that is, a tool of aid and development) and a redistributive moment (a model of ethical and social theory). It becomes policy-makers' own indigenous ethic of development: prescriptive of the actions to take and descriptive of the events taking place.
   It is when used as a descriptive category that 'participation' eclipses its own moments of social re-distribution and thus becomes most pernicious. A similar point is made by Marilyn Strathern in her essay on the institutionalisation of 'transparency' as a modern idiom of trust-building in today's universities (Chapter 25, this volume). Strathern argues that there is nothing innocent about trying to 'make the invisible visible', as the current vogue with practices of accountability and transparency puts it. She observes that visibility often conceals something else and draws a parallel with Hagen public ceremonials, where displays of wealth and goods conceal the efforts and negotiations that take place over time and modulate Hageners' power and gender relationships. It is at this juncture, therefore, that we can see the pernicious effects of the new institutionalisation of ethics. For when prescriptive categories are deployed in a descriptive fashion, something is deliberately concealed. Strathern makes the point eloquently: 'The rhetoric of transparency appears to conceal that very process of concealment, yet in so far as "everyone knows" this, it would be hard to say it "really" does so. Realities are knowingly eclipsed' (p. 491). In other words, institutional ethics makes (certain dimensions and funds of) knowledge disappear – hardly an ethical stance at all.
   The re-duplicative work (simultaneously descriptive and prescriptive) of 'transparency', 'participatory' and all such other idioms of institutional re-distributions is thrown vividly into relief when brought under a comparative light. The play of ethnographic contrasts and shadows then takes a crucial *critical* dimension. Strathern's 'tyranny of transparency', for example, can be profitably compared to Abner Cohen's 'politics of ritual secrecy' (Chapter 5, this volume). The comparison allows us to see that transparency and secrecy are not self-evident counterpoints to the opposition trust–mistrust. Much to the contrary, trust and transparency appear as the *institutional* products of a particular distributive moment, one that

dislodges the ethical from the social and posits it as an institutional objective. Building on this mode of comparative analysis, a critical, cross-sectional reading of the essays in this collection allows us to see the force and value of ethnography as a model of critical social theory. We can see, for instance, the analytical purchase of ethnographic terms when used to describe the re-distributive effects of institutional practices: when, say, the 'public knowledge' that museum curators hold of science (see Macdonald, Chapter 22) is contrasted with the public's trust of institutional transparency (Strathern, Chapter 25). When the 'public', that is, is shuffled out of the benefaction of the state and re-institutionalised against the market; now an image of social relevance of museums for society, now an index of corporate trustworthiness; or when 'productivity' is re-distributed to fund the individual creative genius of a cook (Fine, Chapter 9), the collective values and resistance of female Malay workers (Ong, Chapter 8), or even a manager's administration of bureaucratic efficiency (Jackall, Chapter 12, but cf. also Dalton, Chapter 11).

Such contrasts are useful because they illustrate the mode of assemblage of particular institutional re-distributive movements. Publics, to stay with the above example, take and occupy different institutional shapes and spaces: they 'open up' in response to different pressures, make different concessions to different parties in the name of different interests, and generate their own internal differences, – their own endogenous 'publics', so to speak. Equally crucial, their moment of 'public' appearance is an *institutional* moment. 'Transparency', 'participation' or 'public knowledge' emerge as institutional idioms – that is, idioms with an institutional remit, whose redistributive effects bear institutional consequences, although they do of course also travel through and across persons and places, within and outside an institution. Hence the significance of scale: the 'inclusiveness' or 'externality', to use Wilensky's earlier formulation, of such socially re-distributive movements; and hence, too, the importance of attending to the re-institutionalisations of organisational life, of developing an anthropology of organisations that is an anthropology of re-distributive politics/publics –in other words, an anthropology that carries forth an intellectual agenda for an *institutional anthropology*.

About this Volume

Ethnography documents this ever-displaceable movement of the fund of social and political interests, and also provides the terms for its analysis. This volume is therefore organized around the service that ethnography can lend to this comparative and critical task. The history of the anthropology of organisations is, of course, little different from the history of the discipline at large, so the selection of essays collected here runs through the very same history of theoretical preoccupations, interests and challenges that have characterised the anthropological project over the past 80 years. Debates within the anthropology of organisations rehearse classic debates in anthropology about the validity or limitations of the structural-functional paradigm (Bendix and Fisher, Chapter 2; Whyte, Chapter 3; Roy, Chapter 4); the importance of context and of opening analysis to the influence of wider historical and political forces (Cohen, Chapter 5); the effects of global and transnational changes in the relations of capitalist production on organisations (Nash, Chapter 7; Ong, Chapter 8; Mollona, Chapter 10; Kunda and Van Maanen, Chapter 26); a reflexive attitude towards, and preoccupation with, the fieldworker's structural and subjective position in the construction of the ethnographic method (Gardner and Whyte, Chapter 1; Van Maanen, Chapter 17); a critique of ethnocentric social theory

and its categories and an insistence on the privileged insights afforded by ethnography, to encompass revisions of our understanding of, among other things, what it means to be a moral person (Jackall, Chapter 12; Kondo, Chapter 18); how and where to look for the sources of human agency, creativity and intervention (Ong, Chapter 8; Fine, Chapter 9; Suchman *et al.*, Chapter 23; Corsín Jiménez, Chapter 27); the changing meanings of work (Kunda and Van Maanen, Chapter 26); the qualities of institutional times (Czarniawska, Chapter 28); the pervasiveness and subtleties of bureaucratic power (Gilboy, Chapter 13; Heyman, Chapter 14); the perversity of our own social descriptions (Mosse, Chapter 24; Strathern, Chapter 25); the questioning of social theory as an ethnographic project itself (Czarniawska, Chapter 28; Riles, Chapter 29); and, of course, a critical interrogation and scrutiny of, as well as an often unashamed discomfort with, the agencies and operations of power.

The volume is divided into eight Parts which follow a rough chronological order, with Part I containing essays that belong to, or address the writings of, the early human relations school and Part VIII including recent examples of attempts to rethink social theory using insights from organisational ethnographies. The title of each Part broadly corresponds with the theoretical fashion prevalent at its time. Note that I have deliberately kept the word 'relations' in the titles of Parts I to IV in order to highlight the dominance of the relational analytic as a vocabulary for describing our social theory.

Human Relations

Part I offers a sample of essays from the human relations school. It includes Gardner and Whyte's methodological manifesto on how to do ethnography in industrial contexts (Chapter 1) as well as Reinhard Bendix's and Lloyd Fisher's early critique of Elton Mayo's humanist sociology, in which the authors point out the latter's lack of attention to the work of authority as an ideological force. The closing essay is a classic example of organisational structural functionalism by William Foote Whyte.

Social and Political Relations

Part II moves beyond the circumscription of industry as a self-enclosed entity to show the importance of including wider social and political forces. Abner Cohen's ethnography (Chapter 5) is an example of what became known as the Manchester school of anthropology, with an emphasis on deep situational (political and historical) analyses. On the other hand, Donald Roy's essay (Chapter 4) – the first to signal the need to thicken our understanding of the *social* moment itself – is a classic of industrial anthropology. Roy expanded our understanding of the social not by looking out to politics or history, but by enriching and making the social itself more 'inclusive'. He wrote in opposition to the human relations school and the rationalizing spirit of scientific management to bring attention to the complexity and intricacies of the exchanges through which workers constituted themselves as persons, including their reasons for doing the things they did (*à la* Parfit). Finally, John Van Maanen's essay is included as an early and eloquent example of the limitations of the relational paradigm. In this essay, discussed extensively earlier in this Introduction, Van Maanen anticipates the culturalist turn in anthropology that was to create such turmoil in the discipline in the 1980s. His description of the culture of violent indeterminacy in police departments is exuberant, echoing the sense

of surplus and overflow that characterises the corporation. Van Maanen's essay is also a wonderful ethnography of 'organisational culture', a term that would later be appropriated by organisational scholars and be given a life of its own and a topic to which Part V is dedicated.

Productive and Power Relations

Part III takes a specific stance on the political redescription of organisational contexts. The rise of Marxist scholarship in the 1970s relocated the call of the Manchester school to widen ethnographic situations within a particular productionist paradigm by shifting attention to the interfolding between international and national regimes of capital accumulation, organisational structures and shopfloor sociality. June Nash's (Chapter 7) analysis of the career paths and movements of managers in multinational corporations is one of the first of its kind, and one that is still useful for understanding the micro-structural effects of macro-structural operations. Aihwa Ong's analysis of spirit possession among Malay female workers in a multinational corporation and Gary Fine's study of the production of aesthetic culinary values in the restaurant industry (chapters 8 and 9) show the value of ethnography for illuminating general questions regarding the connections between human agency, cultural values and experiences and the hegemonic structures and stricture of capitalist productivity. Massimiliano Mollona's recent essay on the experience of formal and informal labour in an ex-industrial district in Sheffield, UK, closes Part III with an evocative ethnography of local redefinitions of 'capital' and 'labour', where relations of production escape the factory setting and are made to acquire new 'bloodlife' inside the family or the neighbourhood, animated by gender and generational conflicts. It presents a contemporary resurrection of the best Manchester school tradition, but is attentive also to the institutional forces – state welfare, regional economic policies – through which institutional idioms scale out to shape everyday lives.

Bureaucratic and Administrative Relations

Part IV narrows the focus back again from the sociohistorical to the institutional, emphasising the ideology, machinery and operations of bureaucracy. Bureaucracy is industrial society's favourite form of administrative organisation and is, without doubt, the organisational form which has received most attention from scholars. For this reason, I have included, as Chapter 14, a recent essay by Josiah McConnell Heyman in which he introduces and analyses the bureaucratic form and its ideological and power-wielding mantle. The remainder of the essays are ethnographic in character. Robert Jackall's study of morality and expediency among corporate managers in Chapter 12 provides a useful historical counterpoint to Melville Dalton's classic study of managers (Chapter 11). In both cases the study of management becomes a study of the funding of political patronage within the organisation and thus of the structural paths that managers are encouraged to take in the decision-making process. From this perspective management appears as a social fund organised around, and coerced by, the bureaucratic administration of political credit and also has the capacity to nominally align itself with moments of 'change' and to construct and set in motion social assets such as 'responsibility' in order to be seen to adhere to the chain of command and commitment. The studies show that managers are trapped in a type of 'thought-work' (Heyman, 1995) that

imposes severe restrictions on their ability to manage creatively – a restriction that Jackall calls the 'bureaucratic ethic'. Janet Gilboy's ethnography of political casework in immigration inspections (Chapter 13), though focused on the work of immigration officials rather than managers, presents a similar scenario, where officials end up trafficking in expectations and anticipations (Gilboy calls them 'foreseeable organisational futures') in order to cope with sudden political interventions. All three ethnographies present vivid examples of what Heyman calls the anthropology of power-wielding bureaucracies in which those who work in institutions re-distribute their funds of social interests (outside or inside the organisation) to redefine what is morally and politically viable.

Organisational and Anthropological Cultures

Parts V and VI deal with the topic of culture. Part V, on organisational culture, includes essays by Linda Smircich (Chapter 15), who surveys the use of the culture concept in organisational studies and provides a critical commentary, and Michael Thompson and Aaron Wildavsky (Chapter 16), who, focusing on the use of information, recognize the importance of 'ways of life' as an institutionalising force in holding together organisational cultures. Theirs is an early tribute to Mary Douglas's work and its relevance for organisational studies, a point which I take up again below.

Part VI, on the other hand, presents an outline of the ways in which the concept of culture has figured in anthropology, as well as examples of the types of cultural concept that anthropologists have developed in their ethnographic writings. John Van Maanen's methodological essay (Chapter 17) provides an early reflection on the fictional qualities of ethnographic reportage. Though not a full-blown interpretative piece, his essay stands out as one of the earliest contributions to the 'writing culture' debate, one that takes the question of ethnography's methodological construction head-on as its major topic of inquiry. This is followed by two essays on the cultural construction of selfhood and place. Dorinne Kondo's ethnography of the transformation of the self at a corporate-sponsored ethics training seminar in Japan is a fascinating and richly textured study of the intricacies of cultural categories. Kondo's analysis of the self includes, for example, explorations of its ramifications into the realms of the family, a careful disentangling of its moments of coherence and integrity with Nature, and an elucidation of its homological echoes with the corporation. The cultural concept of the person that Kondo presents to us is infinitely richer than the objectified culture to which organisational scholars often refer. Much the same can be said about Helen Schwartzman's ethnography of meetings in an American mental health centre (Chapter 19). Meetings, in Schwartzman's essay, become re-distributive moments, culturally situated *institutional* places that endow certain people with certain kinds of capacities (including distinctive social identities) and sanction the type of rationality through which the institution will embed its decision-making process – reasons, persons and places which, again, become re-distributive forces.

Institutional re-distribution is also the topic of Mars' essay on occupational classification and the cultural organisation of 'deviance' and of Mary Douglas's and Gerald Mars' essay on the cultural typologies of organised terrorism (Chapters 20 and 21). Both essays present a contemporary application of Douglas's famous Cultural Theory grip and group model, and of her and Gerald Mars' work on the institutional flow and exchange of information. Douglas's

work on institutions (Douglas, 1986) has not received all the attention from anthropologists that it merits. This is a pity. Although it is not quite analogous to what I am proposing here under the term 're-institutionalisations', Douglas's insistence on the need to embrace an *institutional* theory of organisational behaviour is an important one. Unlike Douglas and Mars, I do not conceptualize the institution as a system-constrained fund of information, but as an assemblage of 'public' (that is, political) interests, where the opening-up of the space for the emergence of publics (*à la* Latour) becomes itself the institutional moment. However, my affinity with Douglas's and Mars' project lies in that, like them, I see the re-distribution of the institutional fund of social interests as fundamental to the creation of (local) spaces of justice. It is the *institutional* moment that is crucially political. Finally, Douglas's and Mars' essay also offers a refreshing reminder of the virtues and strengths of cross-cultural comparison for anthropological theory.

Institutional Re-distributions

The last two Parts deal with the topic of institutional re-distributions. Part VII, on anthropological institutionalisations, contains Sharon Macdonald's ethnography of the making of public knowledge at the Science Museum in London, an example of the institutionalisation of the 'public' as an arena (a market?) for trafficking in diverse interests. Perhaps a trait of late twentieth-century European politics, the ethnographic study of the rhetoric of institutional engagement with 'the public' makes a marvellous example of the institutional re-distribution of political justice.

   Part VIII closes the volume by providing some glimpses into the social processes that are fashioning contemporary societies. Chapter 23 by Lucy Suchman, Jeanette Blomberg, Julian Orr and Randall Trigg summarises their pioneering and now famous anthropological interventions at Xerox Palo Alto Research Center (PARC). As the title of their essay indicates, their work at Palo Alto opened the way for an understanding of technology as situated practice, a theoretical move informed by detailed ethnography that anticipated, by many years, the contributions of what later became known as actor network theory (see, for example, Law and Hassard, 1999). I have already commented on the ethnographic value of David Mosse's and Marilyn Strathern's work on the contemporary institutionalisations of ethical regimes: both the essays included here provide exemplary illustrations of the perverse effects of social descriptive vocabularies that are made to work in ethically self-conscious ways. Next, Gideon Kunda's and John Van Maanen's essay on the transformation of emotional labour in post-industrial societies (Chapter 26) also gives an illuminating account of how the deliberate engineering of corporate culture to create loyal and committed subjectivities, and its eventual readjustment to accommodate the transition to an ethos of entrepreneurialism and a regime of flexible accumulation, produces re-distributions in the flow of trust and autonomy within and between managers (see also Kunda, 1992, on which their account is based). My own essay (Chapter 27) presents a brief ethnographic analysis of the way in which the language and imagery of labour has come to inform our theories of personhood, including our ideas about agency, creativity and the temporal and contributive orientation of our human capacities. This notion of labour, I suggest, is an important force that informs new institutionalisations of distributive justice – for instance, the equity structures (hardly equitable at all) that young workers have to cope with when first gaining employment.

The last two essays, by Barbara Czarniawska (Chapter 28) and Annelise Riles (Chapter 29), approach the delicate question of the failure of ethnographic knowledge, and they both develop a mode of theorising the slipperiness of knowledge that bears on the spatio-temporal qualities of our theoretical constructs (see also Miyazaki, 2003). In her study of the technocratic knowledge of Japanese bankers, Riles observes that bankers' awareness of the limitations of their knowledge (of the market) mirrors, and thus presents an epistemological problem to, anthropology's own analytical vocabulary. Bankers see the fragility and limits of their knowledge way before the anthropologist does, at which point ethnography fails on account of being incapable of opening up an epistemological distance between indigenous and anthropological explanation. Towards the end of her argument Riles observes that it was an ethnographic cue obtained from a situation where people refused to describe their sociality in *relational* terms that provided her the analytical artefact ('intimacy', a metaphor that stood for the exact opposite of 'relations') to create the distance between technocratic and anthropological knowledge. It is the *intimacy* between technocratic and anthropological knowledge that suddenly appears to provide the very political leverage needed for critical enquiry.

Like Riles, Czarniawska carries out a sophisticated reappraisal of the spatio-temporal qualities of our theoretical descriptive vocabularies. Her essay does double work for it also relocates the possibilities of the anthropological method within the larger literature of organisational studies. She introduces two terms (kairotic time and dispersed calculation) and two theoretical and methodological constructs (action nets and mobile ethnologies) to try to capture the never-ending flow of re-distributive practices and their episodic assembling in moments of re-institutionalisations. These tools are designed to help us think of contingency in *institutional* terms: to appreciate and value the weight and effects of institutional practices that momentarily conglomerate their own dispersed, often conflicting, reasons-and-persons orientations in what Czarniawska calls autonomous kairotic moments (that is, 'proper', that feel right or 'just' to the people involved) of temporal organisation.

Riles' admonition about the endpoints to which the very movement of anthropological knowledge tends and Czarniawska's call for re-envisioning how we think about the process of organisation both remind us that all ethnographic knowledge is self-embedded and therefore inherently escapist. This may require developing the way Czarniawska invites us to think, a new sociological vocabulary, with which to bridle ethnography's inclinations in an already runaway world. That may be so. But it is important to remember also that part of the charm of ethnography's escapism lies in the very way in which it re-distributes its own categories of description ('intimacy', 'proper time', 'participation') to make matters of political justice, a second and an analytical moment later, invisible. It is this very quality of self-embedment in the contemporary that makes ethnography so seductive to theory, thus lending it its true analytical leverage. We might therefore hold better chances for understanding the making and distribution of political justice if we readjust our gaze and look out for ethnography's own moments of institutional re-description instead.

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