

Method as democratizing; through researcher positionality and empirical inclusivity

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to present how my positionality as a researcher aligned with the works of Latour in terms of methodological inspirations and allowed me to develop a critical vantage point and simultaneously adopt a heterogeneously rather than hierarchically informed approach to ordering the world, which I argue serves as a basis for a more inclusive study of management systems.

Design/methodology/approach – I reflect on my own positionality as a researcher and share how my interpretation of Latour's ontology through some of his ideas and concepts, particularly symmetry, power, translation and agency, allowed me to incorporate and organize heterogeneous actors depicted in different empirical materials into space-time contexts and subsequently theorize organizing and management practices as agential, multiple and becoming.

Findings – A base in Latour's ontology has equipped me with openness towards empirical settings, which I argue retains a democratic approach to theorization, i.e. theorization, which remains mindful of inadvertent assumptions about power, hierarchy or the taken for granted. This approach has also given me a form of personal resilience as a researcher.

Originality/value – The originality of this paper lies in presenting and developing the concept of method as democratizing. I argue that Latour's approach to the empirical allows for at least two forms of active democratizing, one relating to the researcher as self and the other in how it incorporates the empirical actors into research, making possible the inclusivity of heterogeneity in analyses of organizations and organizing.

Keywords Democratizing, ANT, Latour, Positionality, Organizing, Heterogeneity, Multiplicity

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1. Introduction

It took me a lot of reading, writing, dialog with academic colleagues and introspection, but also several therapy sessions to understand that I have for most of my life struggled with a form of minority stress [1]. The stress stems from identifying as being minority and having been the only one with particular experiences in a given setting. For example, as a child I knew no one else who was adopted. I grew up with a Swedish adoptive mother and a Pakistani adoptive father in Lahore, Pakistan. I was for a long time the only one in my school with a foreign parent. Now living in Sweden I find myself included in social circles where other non-natives express that they do not feel as if they fit in. Of course, speaking the language and being a curious and social person helps, but these experiences all together have

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meant I've often identified as an outsider and as not really fitting in. As I shall argue, being a researcher, these experiences have come to mean something for my positionality, but turning experiences of outsider-ness into a strength has demanded both personal determination as well as dedicated mentorship. Reading and learning from Latour's work (and from others who relate to his work) has certainly contributed immensely towards my perseverance during setbacks and challenges.

I can write this now because I feel that I can provide a relatively cohesive narrative of how and why this has been the case, but mind you, it is more of a web of interconnected and at times overlapping contextual and situational processes (*life happens*) that have impacted my ideas about myself, the world and my place in it. I have come to learn, in reflection, that ideas of the self tend to change over time and not least in periods of transition. I have explored this further in [Babri \(forthcoming\)](#). With some reflection behind me, today, I rather speak of a self and her relation to the world and how I am compelled to take seriously in my research the pains and problems of Othering practices which indeed create the circumstances which can make life so much more difficult for minorities.

I have much to thank Latour, actor-network theory (ANT) specifically; but also, the wider actor network of those I see as proponents (Barbara Czarniawska, Tommy Jensen, Hervé Corvellec, John Law, Anne-Marie Mol, to mention a few) of ANT as well as wider dialogs in feminist studies and archeology which relate to Latour's thinking. Thinkers in these fields often pay heed to Latour's interest in the interplay between humans and nonhumans, things, materiality (See for instance [Hekman, 2010](#); [Hodder, 2024](#)). I have this actor network to thank for coming to grips with the ethnographic apparatus and the vocabulary to speak and write about how, when why and by whom organizing comes to be and what its consequences are. I realize it might seem provocative that I group Latour together with so many others, but to me he is an important node in a network which together has made it possible for me to translate Latour's ideas into actionable method skills, including methodological reflection, doing fieldwork and analysis.

In what follows I first present a recollection of my struggles as a PhD student to find my voice. I present an account of how my background and upbringing in a cultural and linguistic melting pot, a place where multiplicity was norm conflicted with much of the non-critical, top-down management literature which neatly arranges opposing categories like sites of production and consumption developing and developed countries and often assumes hierarchical (managerial) levels as actual ontological entities.

I then discuss my introduction to Latour and ANT and how this helped me find the agency to trust what I observed through my vantage point and to begin making sense of my time spent in the field through careful analyses of my own observations, reflections over what I with my body and background triggered in my surroundings, learning not only to trust my senses but also to find the means to articulate and communicate that knowledge. In doing so, I revisit some of the main texts that influenced my thinking and my approach to ethnographic field work, analysis and academic writing. In doing so I present how Latour's ontology and specifically his conception of power, agency, symmetry and translation, have allowed me to design studies inclusive of heterogeneity and able to deal with seeming incommensurabilities.

I conclude by summarizing how an alignment of my positionality which I grounded in a strong resonance with Latour's ideas about how the social world is constituted on the one hand and a Latourian ontology applied to field work on the other. I argue for two ways in which method based in ANT has served as a democratizing practice in the academic discourse, making it in my view more inclusive of difference and hopefully also more relevant.

2. From minority stress to a reflexive, embodied positionality

I was not aware of the term minority stress until a few years ago. I saw it on a poster on a university billboard announcing a seminar for psychology students (yes, thanks to Latour

and my supervisory Tommy Jensen, I had learned the value of reading all kinds of information outside my field of inquiry) on the health effects of minority stress on students. Minority stress can be defined as the social stress experienced by minority group members due to a conflict between minority and dominant values (Dentato, 2012; See also Bernal *et al.*, 2003). It is with this knowledge of minority stress together with what I have learned from ANT that I reflect on my academic journey.

I was twenty-three years old when I began the PhD program in management and organization at a Business School in Sweden. I was curious, I was ambitious, and I was excited about this opportunity. However, I knew very little about what an academic institution looks like on the inside and although the university was at the time working hard with their internationalization efforts, I was the only person in the department who had a background in Indo-Asia, specifically Pakistan. I was, however, so used to identifying as an outsider that I didn't reflect much over it at the time. However, it slowly became clear to me that I felt odd. When I reflect over this today, I see many reasons why I felt different. I grew up in Pakistan and I was the only woman with a non-European ethnicity at the department. I also struggled to feel at home because I didn't come from an academic background. I was the first woman in my family to go to university. I represented in my birth family, the first generation of women to have a higher education.

My ideas were different, and my approach to learning was different. I found myself being questioned and perhaps this was often due to genuine curiosity rather than critique, but I often felt that I had to defend myself or my points of view more often than others. Perhaps this wasn't so strange, because it came naturally to me to question some of the assumptions that theories and ideas in management were taking for granted, but it became provocative, and I felt subjected to often being in an adversarial position. To handle the anxiety that this caused, and because I wanted to belong and find friends, I did what I had practiced for much of my life to do. I began withdrawing some parts of myself to a much more private sphere and masked my otherness of opinion as to not cause distress and debate.

I carried with me many experiences which gave me a different vantage point on stability – to mention a few, the history of the part of the world where I grew up and the relatively recent colonization, wars and the creation of a new nation in 1947. Pakistan has a lot to offer in forms of rich cultural heritage particularly of the arts, but it has also been associated with cheap labor and possibilities for outsourcing of production of clothes, medical equipment and sports gear. When I was growing up there were several corporate scandals which made me curious to how and why the world is organized as it is. One such incidence was the 1990s Nike sweatshop scandal which exposed child labor and supply chains with exploitative conditions. This wasn't something hidden but rather prominently visible while growing up in Pakistan, the realities of the factory floor, children having to work to put food on the table for their families, is something I grew up seeing, something I know to be a part of how corporate work is organized. I remember as a child that I was confused, why, when there were so many people talking about equality and equal rights, did some children like me get to attend school, while other children had to work? These are questions that do not easily go away. So, when I came to study management and organizing, these were realities I could not ignore as part of my understanding of how organizing works. I knew very well that much of what matters takes place not in the central headquarters where decisions are being made, but on the peripheral factory floors where products are being made; and it is more often in the latter contexts that we find expressions of inequality; excessive pollution, poor working conditions, child labor.

I cannot recall when this feeling set in, and probably much of it stems from growing up with cultural beliefs in sharing and giving back to society, but I was from an early age aware that my privileges came with a responsibility; to help and see and acknowledge those who did not have the same privilege of attending school and making sense of the world. This sense of responsibility preceded my understanding of why or how such inequality came about and

was sustained. Nonetheless, it spurred an early interest in things both social and material and a quest to understand why the world was this way. Why was there inequality? And how can we start to turn this around?

This lived experience contrasted starkly with the literature I read at the business school I attended in Sweden. Most of the literature I was exposed to during my studies never mentioned the physical and material, the factory workers, factory floor, hazardous industrial waste, industrial pollution. Much focus was given instead to strategizing work which takes place in the headquarters, speaking of supply chains as something distant which needs to be managed. There was a sort of dissonance which began growing within me, and not really having the tools to deal with this dissonance, I found myself beginning to question myself rather than the unidimensional and hierarchically ordered approach to ordering the world.

On beginning my PhD, my main supervisor introduced me to Bruno Latour and this opened up a completely new world for me and eventually led me to find theoretical and methodological peers who had paved the way regarding my understanding of the intricate and interconnected webs of humans and nonhumans that make up the world (e.g. [Latour 2005a](#); [Barad, 2003](#); [Mol, 2002](#); [Law and Mol, 2008](#)). I still remember when (now professor) Tommy Jensen handed me the book, *Artefaktens återkomst, ett möte mellan organisationsteori och tingens sociologi* (1998/2007), an anthology comprising some of Latour's most influential works translated into Swedish by Elisabeth Wennerholm and told me, "Here, start with this".

I remember that several of the chapters in the book really spoke to me in a way I had not experienced academic texts previously do. I was amazed at what to me were big, controversial ideas that Latour presented with such prowess; particularly his approach to power (chapter 1, 2 and 5), urging an openness towards seeing the world as flat and denying *a priori* differences between micro and macro actors ([Callon and Latour, 1981](#)), the power of actors conceptualized only through associations, alliances, networks ([Latour, 1986](#)) and the postulation of analytical symmetry that he so adamantly advised on. The book was in Swedish, and although I had a good comprehension of Swedish, I wanted to re-visit some of the texts also in English translations, as English is the language, I'm most comfortable with. I know that Latour's ideas have been influential for many, but for me particularly, as an individual who has often felt like an outsider, in academic terms struggling to reconcile lived experience with literature, there was something that felt unfamiliar yet pleasant, inclusive, as if the texts described methods that someone like me also could use to make sense of the world.

Latour's ideas allowed me to begin to investigate the world with the belief that what I observe and see is valid and valuable and worth taking notice of. This allowed me to realize that I could investigate the world from my vantage point, using my "what had always felt like different" eyes to observe, my "what felt like a different" body to move around in the field and my "what felt like a different" intellect to guide my curiosity. It was the precedence of the empirical, that which always needs investigations, as Latour reminds us in, e.g. *Reassembling the Social* (2005a), together with a flat ontology that allowed me to visualize a non-hierarchical approach to doing organization and management research. An important lesson that ANT and Latour taught me is that hierarchies, stability, institutions, matters of fact, are all constructed in social interactions and take a lot of work to uphold. It is stability rather than change that needs explanation because ANT researchers do not see stability as the norm, rather things, objects, phenomena that emerge and become as they unfold. Because there is constant renegotiation, every time that new cases are considered they will suggest new lessons about the nature of actors ([Mol, 2010](#)). In other words, ANT is an invitation to investigate or reinvestigate almost anything. A world in becoming is a world that is constantly interesting, because all is never said and done. ANT allows for an analysis that treats "everything in both the natural and the social worlds as continuously generated effects of the webs of relations in which they are located" ([Law, 2009](#)).

It has taken some time to land, in a positionality from which I am able to make sense of my experiences, communicate them and hopefully also contribute to the academic debate. This positionality is a point but also a trajectory, where I as researcher am both situated and in movement, in between the self and the studied. It is an embodied reflexivity (Rosales and Babri, 2023) as well as a state of nomadism (Babri, Forthcoming). This is a positionality which, although inspired by Latour, is markedly distinct from Latour's approach to science (see, e.g. his work on circulating references [2]). This positionality allows me to remain open to changes, but to stop and stay long enough in places and thoughts which demand of me to listen or observe more deeply. Latour has also taught me the value of thinking with metaphors; his are far too many to mention here but suffice it to say his texts are ripe with figurative language.

It is from Latour that I learned that which was needed for my research positionality to blossom. I learned that there is little to gain from setting *a priori* boundaries around those which you wish to study, especially in terms of what (we often presume) stems from human intention. And I learned to see myself as a curious individual wanting to understand the world and do research, on par with any other individual wanting to conduct research to better understand the world and perhaps contribute with novel perspectives. Although my inspiration is drawn from Latour, his argument for symmetry is connected primarily to the equal treatment of humans and nonhumans. He says, "To be symmetric, for us, simply means *not* to impose *a priori* some spurious *asymmetry*, among human intentional action and a material world of causal relations." (2005a, p. 76). I extend that to say, there is no means to impose asymmetry among humans with diverse backgrounds.

The premise of symmetry entails giving equal weight to all actants before an analysis is conducted and not beforehand deciding who is powerful and who is not, who is right and who is not. "As Law (2004, p. 70) puts it: "[. . .] method is productive of realities rather than merely reflecting them". So, the methods used to study phenomena categorize them and produce dualities. These separations do not exist inherently in the phenomena being studied but are crafted when phenomena are studied and depicted. The make-up of the social world can be investigated only if we *a priori* do not take these various actors as different in their capacity to influence their surroundings (Latour, 1998/2007)." What follows from this is that "order", which is stability over time, in social associations are seen as an "*effect generated by heterogeneous means*" (Law, 1992, p. 383, emphasis original) rather than an inherent quality or characteristic attributable to a thing, person, or organization. i.e., stability is done and must be created rather than inherently existing as a property of something.

Furthermore, all actors are in essence the same, what differentiates their size and strength at certain points in time is their ability to successfully bond with other actors, combining their conglomerate energies to pursue a common mission or goal (Latour, 1998/2007). A powerful entity is one that has managed to accumulate resources by silencing other actors and making them representations of one goal, mission and voice (Callon, 1986). For Latour, power lies not in the hands of a particular actor, role, person, or institution, but rather in the practice of association, connection and ability to successfully create and uphold such associations or connections (Latour, 1986). It is thus never the actors, in essence, which are interesting to study, but rather the connections, how they are made, why they remain upheld and why they are contested or replaced by others (Latour, 2005a).

Latour suggests the researcher interested in the social thus to deploy an approach to the field as flatland, not to flatten the actors, but rather to give actors "space to deploy their own contradictory grounds: scaling, zooming, embedding, 'panoramaing', individualizing, and so on." (Latour, 2005a, p. 220). It is with such a flat (in terms of being devoid of substantive social hierarchy) outlook of the world and myself as an actor amidst others, who exists in the practice (rather than essence) of researching, and by connecting my sensemaking with my observations, that I developed my researcher positionality.

3. From dichotomies and hierarchies to agency, movement and multiplicity

Before embarking on a field study, most method training would have you focusing on some way of preordering the world, collecting empirical material for your specific cause and thus limiting your focus. As introduced above, Latour's approach to empirical fieldwork is quite the contrary. Not only does he reject the idea of levels and size which are otherwise rather prominent in organization and management studies, but in his work, he also argues that dichotomies as well as the boundaries that uphold these, again are created by actors rather than existing out there. Leaning into Latour's texts, I thus learned to see the performative and becoming rather than the ostensive or fixed (Latour, 1986, 1998/2007, 2005a), focusing thus on phenomena as emergent, moving and becoming in performance or practice rather than as given or static. Rejections of dichotomy and boundary as given allowed me to start visualizing how it might be possible to do organization studies differently, wanting to include more. I wanted to be able to incorporate both what was happening in the headquarters, strategy rooms and what happened on the factory floor. Here I owe a great deal also to ANT proponents such as John Law (2004) for translating the ideas of ANT into both practical and theoretical methodology and Barbara Czarniawska (See, e.g. Czarniawska, 2007, 2008a, b) for making explicit her hands on tools on how to approach the study of organizing as a phenomenon, rather than the static "organization". It is among other things via the method of shadowing (Czarniawska, 2007) or following both human and nonhuman actors that I was able to study how organizational boundaries are created and re-created, but also defied and resisted (Babri, 2016) by different actors.

It sounds simple, but in traditions which attach ideals of rigorousness with the quantifiable, what you learn by going into depth to study phenomena can be hard to sell. But by accompanying those that you study you can see what they *do* rather than only speaking with them and have them recall their daily activities. Furthermore, I found that while following people around can be interesting, following artefacts rather than people can prove to help you even more in an analysis of what people do (Latour, 1998/2007). It is these approaches precisely which have guided me in my study of organizing, i.e. by following not only humans but also things, materials, documents and ideas that I have developed my approach to studying organizing.

Starting with the assumption that there is constant renegotiation in the field, every time that new cases are considered they will yield new lessons about the nature of actors (Mol, 2010). In other words, ANT is an invitation to investigate or reinvestigate almost anything. A world in becoming is a world that is constantly interesting, because all is never said and done. ANT allows for an analysis that treats "everything in both the natural and the social worlds as continuously generated effects of the webs of relations in which they are located" (Law, 2009).

During and after the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an upsurge in the interest as well as use of online technologies which allow for both simultaneous as well as asynchronous work. This has spurred interest in diverse ways of working but prior to this, the mainstream approach to doing organization studies has often confined pluralism. The understanding of different modes, temporalities, simultaneity of work taking place in different spaces becomes possible only when we can imagine not only the "here and now", but also the "there and then". Latour expresses this multiplicity of happenings as: "So, it is perfectly true to say that any given interaction seems to *overflow* with elements which are already in the situation coming from some other *time*, some other *place*, and generated by some other *agency*. This powerful intuition is as old as the social sciences. As I have said earlier, action is always dislocated, articulated, delegated, translated. Thus, if any observer is faithful to the direction suggested by this overflow, she will be led *away* from any given interaction to some *other places*, *other times*, and *other agencies* that appear to have molded them into shape." (Latour, 2005a, p. 166)

Latour's conceptualization of agency and how this relates to his idea of translation (Latour, 2005a) has also been relevant for my framing of how organizing takes shape. Latour

speaks of actors and actors, in Latour's world always have the capacity to act. However, they do not always do so. To distinguish between acting and non-acting actors in a particular setting, Latour uses the concepts of Intermediary and Mediator.

In interpreting Latour's distinction between mediators and intermediaries, it can be said that mediators exert their agency while intermediaries do not. However, it is important to note that an actor can be a mediator in one situation and an intermediary in another. Intermediaries are stable, so within the time and space of a particular relation they do not change. A mediator, on the other hand, changes things around it through translations. Actors compete for agency and to remain as mediators, the actors must remain or be kept present and active. To stay present and active, an actor must move within the network and associate with new actors and this process of negotiations and renegotiations of agency may involve new translations. Translations occur when one actor associates with others and in doing so changes while changing other actors around it. So as it changes, translates, or is translated it is actually transforming or becoming something different. An object becomes something else through translations and these things can be seen as multiple (parallel rather than fragmented) forms of the same – i.e., multiple realities (Law, 2004; Mol, 2002).

Translation is the term used in ANT to describe the inevitable changes with takes place as things move, as actors come together and begin to influence one another. The "... process of delegation, dislocation, and translation is never clearer than in the role of material objects – provided we understand 'matter' in the extended sense." (2005a, p. 194) Latour explains that, "To designate this thing which in neither one actor among many nor a force behind all the actors transported through some of them but a connection that transports, so to speak, transformations, we use the word *translation*- the tricky word "network" being defined ... as what is *traced* by those translations in scholars' accounts." (2005a, p. 107)

At the beginning of any study, Latour's take is that we do not know how actors are associated. As such he rejects the idea that "existing theory" is a viable explanation for what is to happen. In his words, "We don't know how all those actors are connected, but we can state as the new default position before the study starts that all the actors we are going to deploy might be *associated* in such a way that they *make others do things*. This is done not by transporting a force that would remain the *same* throughout some sort of faithful intermediary, but by generating *transformations* manifested by the many unexpected *events* triggered in other mediators that *follow* them along the line. This is what I dubbed the 'principle of irreduction' and such is the philosophical meaning of ANT: a concatenation of mediators does not trace the same connections and does not require the same type of explanations as a retinue of intermediaries transporting a cause." (2005a, p. 107). Latour also insists that it is important to focus on how nonhuman objects affect humans. He explains this as, "Objects, by the very nature of their connections with humans, quickly shift from being mediators to being intermediaries, counting for one or nothing, no matter how internally complicated they might be. This is why specific tricks have to be invented to *make them talk*, that is, to offer descriptions of themselves, to produce *scripts* of what they are making others – humans or non-humans – do." (Latour, 2005a, p. 79)

Building on these ideas, I have been able to conceptualize codes of ethics (albeit together with others) as active agents at work in Sweden and China, in the headquarters as well as on the factory floor (Babri, 2016), circular economy principles as action in a chief executive officer's (CEO's) quest make his company more sustainable (Corvellec et al. 2020). Moreover, I have looked at sustainability education as things, ideas inscribed into artefacts, documents, slogans and ideas embodied by humans who translate them in their own ways, sometimes following others, sometimes making their individual interpretations (Stål and Babri, 2020). But doing such studies in practice demands a breadth of methodological tools, of which the most important have proven to be curiosity in the field and creativity in ways to present findings.

Latour himself provides several examples of what to look for in the field, situations in which objects' activities, in which "momentary multiplicity" is enhanced and can be made visible (Latour, 2005a, p. 79–82). Examples include focusing on innovations in an artisan's workshop or in the scientist's laboratory, because in these settings "objects live a clearly multiple and complex life through meetings, plans, sketches, regulations, and trials." (2005a, p. 80). Furthermore, "... even the most routine, traditional, and silent implements stop being taken for granted when they are approached by users rendered ignorant and clumsy by *distance* – distance in time as in archaeology, distance in space as in ethnology, distance in skills as in learning." (2005a, p. 80)

A third situation which Latour mentions is, "accidents, breakdowns, and strikes: all of a sudden, completely silent intermediaries become full-blown mediators; even objects, which a minute before appeared fully automatic, autonomous, and devoid of human agents, are now made of crowds of frantically moving humans with heavy equipment." (2005a, p. 81). A fourth setting is when it seems that "objects have receded into the background for good, it is always possible – but more difficult – to bring them back to light by using archives, documents, memoirs, museum collections, etc., to artificially produce, through historians' accounts, the state of a crisis in which machines, devices, and implements were born. Behind each bulb Edison can be made visible, and behind any microchip is the huge, anonymous Intel." (2005a, p. 81). Latour is a methodological pluralist, with an epistemological stance which connects knowledge and knowing as well as sites of knowing and doing. As if these approaches to looking for the multiple ways in which organizing takes shape were not enough, he also suggests that, "Finally, when everything else has failed, the resource of fiction can bring – through the use of counterfactual history, thought experiments, and 'scientifiction' – the solid objects of today into the fluid states where their connections with humans may make sense." (2005a, p. 82)

So essentially, ANT studies can show the process involved in and explain how and why things appear as they do, or how and why things hold together as they do by highlighting how "... actors and organizations mobilize, juxtapose, and hold together the bits and pieces of which they are composed; how they are sometimes able to prevent those bits and pieces from following their own inclinations and making off; and how they manage, as a result, to conceal for a time the process of translation itself and so turn a network from a heterogeneous set of bits and pieces each with its own inclinations, into something that passes as a punctualized actor" (Law, 1992, p. 386). A punctualized actor is a cohesive unit, its parts no longer visible, as they are working silently to uphold the successful new unit. But this is possible only as long as the network is stable, and this is always a matter of time. This approach tries to understand how stability is achieved and retained and to answer such a question we need to look closely at the actors and the associations between them. What kind of associations are these? When and what actors have agency? And these questions cannot be answered beforehand, but only after an empirical investigation (Latour, 1986).

These examples are reminders of how it is a matter of curiosity and attention to the less visible and less prominent, that which is not noticeably "present" which allows for analyses which pierce through the taken for granted and seemingly stable and powerful actors, innovations, or systems. When it comes, however, to the creativity of presentation of findings, I found it challenging to find inspiration directly from Latour. It was here that I had to look to myself on the one hand, to find a form and a voice that I was comfortable with but also a way to deploy the depiction of different spaces and times. I have done this in my PhD thesis (Babri, 2016) using fiction and using contextualization of space-time around events depicted in chapters which I call "rooms". The fictional chapter pertains to room zero (pp. 102–106), a supposed starting point for the studied company's code of ethics. I began studying the company once the code of ethics was in place and had heard stories about how the previous CEO of the company had launched the code. I was unable to speak with the former CEO

directly but had access to some of his video greetings to the company's employees. To be able to depict a supposed starting point for when the code of ethics got introduced to the company, I therefore built a fictional empirical chapter on the basis on (1) the stories which other's told about the CEO and his ideas and introduction of the code of ethics, (2) video greeting from the CEO viewed long after they were first aired and the academic literature on codes of ethics.

The following rooms, room one through thirteen are depictions of specific translations of the code of ethics, depicted as mediation and intermediation among assemblages of heterogeneous actors at specific times and in a specific place, or in a particular practice. For those interested in the details, these can be found in chapter five of my thesis titled, "The Corporate Code of Ethics at Home, Far Away and in Between; Sociomaterial Translations of a Traveling Code" (Babri, 2016).

These modes of presentation allowed me to tell several different stories about how the code of ethics was translated, without having to impose onto the stories any model or vector which tries to group or hierarchically order them. This hasn't always been easy, but it has produced more nuanced accounts of the realities in the field.

4. Management tools as sociomaterial, agential, multiple and becoming

As a result of a being able to frame my studies with inspiration drawn from ANT, I conceptualize organizing as becoming, open to negotiation and change, but also with a strong basis in the sociomaterial, i.e. a strong interplay between humans and things, human and nonhumans. Codes of ethics, which are traditionally presented in the management and organization literature as management tools can thus instead be seen as a sociomaterial object, an actor with agency, embedded through associations in a management system (which is a constellation of humans and nonhumans). Starting from there it becomes inevitable to find multiple versions of ethics depending on how a particular "management tool" it is held together (Babri, 2016). A document with certain ethical values inscribed into it is thus seen as a becoming actor that gets its shape and form in a particular context. Ethics documents are artefacts, but they are also ideas, so they can be both material and immaterial; their most studied and written about manifestations are expressed in written documents. However, these written documents are far from enough to scrutinize if we are to understand codes of ethics and their implications for organizing, not least across national and regional governance borders. Only by shifting from ostensive definitions to performative ones (Latour, 2005a), ones that are not about what a particular management tool is but rather what it does, can we begin to see codes in a truly different light. In studying the doings of a corporate code of ethics, beyond national borders, we need to look at the multiple versions of the code. It could be a physical project, a case of discussion (discussing), a cause of disagreement (disagreeing), it could be inscribed in an infinite amount of material and immaterial objects, it has a variable ontology (Latour, 1993), differing manifestations in different sociomaterial encounters. Such a study brought to light how the same management tool is networked (relatively well held together in meaning and expectations), fluid (sometimes held together) and vaporous (only existing through loose traces of the original idea and meaning, but with several add-ons and variants).

When I was working on making communicable the ways in which actors in an organizational setting come together to make a code of ethics work, the terminology of inscriptions and inscription devices (Latour and Woolgar, 1986) also proved to be particularly helpful. As a written document, the code of ethics can be seen as an object inscribed with text, ideas, a vision and philosophy for how an ethical global corporation could work. Inscriptions and inscription devices are both important in terms of understanding how actors act and how they form networks. Despite their similarity in terminology, inscriptions and inscription devices are slightly different, mostly in their potential. An inscription is a material trace that

has a very distinct meaning in the corporate context. It could denote meeting notes, documents, or a file on a computer, anything that can be used to trace the history of an action: “Organizers talk to each other constantly, but this talk does not emerge out of thin air, and it leaves material traces; all conversations and meetings have texts that caused them, texts that were the basis for the discussion, and texts that are to be produced as a result.” (Czarniawska, 2008a)

Note that an inscription is before analysis, a neutral actor albeit with potential agency, but we cannot identify an inscription before observing it in action and much less know if it has agency in a given context. An inscription, however, can become an active part of an inscription device that aims to produce and exert a certain understanding or way of doing things. Inscription devices are complex apparatuses. Latour and Woolgar define them as “any item or apparatus or particular configuration of such items which can transform a material substance into a figure or a diagram which is directly usable” (1986, p. 51). The main difference between inscriptions and inscription devices is the perceived or actual usability. An inscription device becomes a more powerful actor in a world that is obsessed with measuring and counting, while inscriptions gain power when used as symbols or patents or logos, often creating a new world order.

When observing a finished product, it can be tempting to think that inscription devices come together in a predictable manner. However, following things as if they are always in the making proves quite the contrary. While ANT scholars suggest following artifacts and objects, my field studies taught me that it is often a combination of objects, humans and material traces left by their work, rather than objects themselves that one must follow (Babri, 2016) in order to understand how an inscription device comes about. These traces can come in the form of meetings notes, or customer claims about a broken product, or a controversy over how to interpret a certain “fact” during the writing of a report. It is easy to forget, but in organizing, many conversations leave visible and easily observable material traces, in form of what is to happen next. Such traces, somewhat like the work of a detective, need to be picked up at later stages in a follow-up. In addition, meetings and conversations may be preceded by texts that would be entangled with these conversations and meetings but might not have caused them. Similarly, making a configuration of items into a figure or diagram may be extremely successful, but there is always the possibility that it will fail. Even though it might be seemingly “*directly usable*”, as Latour and Woolgar (1986) put it, we might find in practice that it might not be used. The point is that the entanglement between preceding and succeeding actions makes it difficult to assign causality *a priori*. The empirical reality needs to be accounted for to answer the question, “what happened next”?

Overall, management systems, tools and ideas, in light of ANT become potentials for a vicissitude, coordinating mechanisms that have the potential to draw together empirical realities in different geographical sites, but also loose ideas with little or no material bearings in space and time. Management systems may simultaneously be both coordinating and un-coordinating at different points in time. There may arise situations where a management system indeed is fragmented and other times where it draws together multiple realities. Management ideas such as a code of ethics and the circular economy exist in organizational associations and have the potential to act and be enacted by other actors, coming to work in a heterogeneous materiality. What ANT helps make clear is that these same systems and ideas can in practice and effect become actors for the environment and for equality or against the environment and against equality. If the associations that hold strongest are the ones people want to and believe they can uphold, we as researchers also have a choice to make in terms of which types of actors we wish to be and which associations we wish to contribute towards strengthening.

5. Latour's ideas and method as democratizing

My synthesis of the different ideas I have been able to borrow from Latour's work is that heterogeneity is a viable alternative to hierarchical ordering of research projects and presentations, but it takes more work and more energy. To keep heterogeneity (in field work, theories, methods, approaches and perspectives) visible, alive and thriving, however, we need an openness towards methods of inquiry and an approach to criticality which retains interest in the realities beyond matters of fact, including also matters of concern (Latour, 2004, 2005b).

My use of the metaphor of democratizing should be understood as a matter of making possible the voicing of difference, keeping open spaces for disagreement, yet coming together regarding issues and matters of common interest and concern. This precisely is the argument that Latour makes regarding democracy, i.e. it lies not in a parliament of people but in all the material things, "Ding" which make possible the meeting of difference in constant "representations" of representation (Latour, 2005b).

Without having been an organizational scholar, Latour has been acknowledged for the great impact he has had on management and organization studies (Czarniawska, 2017). He has perhaps been, and has potential to continue to be, particularly influential in the Swedish organization studies context, where case studies and ethnographies have long been appreciated for their unique contributions. For me personally the inspiration from Latour and ANT have allowed me to cultivate an ontological stance which has provided me methods as well as a positionality form which to do (what to me feels) relevant social science; in a sense a democratization as it gave me the tools to take part in a research community which I struggled to fit into. To be able to partake in a corporate-centric business school academic environment, I needed a point of entry which allowed me to frame my ideas differently. By engaging in meaning-making and knowledge creation thanks to finding a method which allowed me to use my senses, my body, my presence, my observations and my questions as an apparatus for empirical data collection and sensemaking, I have been able to build an empirically informed understanding of how multiplicity in organizing takes place, as well as how and why it is held together. I was allowed a different way in, perhaps the only one possible for someone who does not and cannot share the axioms on which much of the contemporary strategy and management literature rests, i.e. a premise of stability in constructs of dichotomic ideas like developing and developed countries, geographic sites representing producers vs. consumers etc. When theories are based on taken for granted truths and contexts one cannot relate to, surprisingly little makes sense. This was the case for me.

A second way in which ANT through its methods serves as democratizing is precisely the idea that actors have the capacity to influence their realities. This is not to say that every actor always has every possibility, but it is to say that most actors have choice. And actors who come together in association create powerful entities. There is in this approach to studying phenomena a necessity to be inclusive in methods of inquiry, there is no way to say *a priori* which actors will prove to be decisive for the outcomes in a particular setting. Thus, the only way to find out is to be non-exclusive and open to what you observe in the field.

Latour has had a significant influence in my academic life, and I believe that Latour's ideas continue to live on. I suggest all PhD students in Organization and Management Studies be exposed to a multiplicity in onto-epistemological outlook. I feel highly indebted to Latour and have found inspiration in all his texts which I have engaged with. Although I must admit that I have been influenced mostly by his later works and my reading has always lagged his writing, i.e., there is still more to read, but I continue to be drawn in by his texts. He writes profoundly on that which matters. He has remained current and till his last days, provided new insights into the way we understand the world and how this is intricately linked with the biophysical consequences of climatic change and related politics (Latour, 2018). In his most

recent and unfortunately last book, he shed light on how the experiences of lockdown during the pandemic can inform an understanding of making commensurable the seemingly different, parts and the whole. He questions borders, boundaries, distinctions using the metaphor of body and flesh “If an isolated part of flesh doesn’t make sense, neither does a ‘whole body’. Uniqueness, edges, boundaries are what living beings most lack – and this goes for parts, of course, but also for wholes. That is indeed what the word ‘holobiont’ tries to capture: heterotrophs, by definition, cannot stabilise what they depend on. Give them an identity, and this latter will necessarily be out of whack with all the beings who authorize, contest, support, build up this temporary membrane. This goes for the entity ‘heart’, or ‘kidney’, as well as for the entities ‘astral body’, ‘energy zone’, ‘aura’ or ‘acupuncture points’. The whole advantage of the lockdown is to free us from edges with clear lines.” (Latour, 2021, p. 94–95).

It is sad to know that Latour will not write any more books, but I choose to take his view on change and (the lack of) boundaries seriously. I choose to believe thus that the boundaries between living and no longer living are permeable rather than discrete. It is an honor to have been introduced to and have engaged with Latour’s ideas. I look forward to continuing to revisit them both in my own scholarship and together with students. I also hope that sharing my experiences and views on positionality can inspire more young scholars to investigate ANT as a possible epistemology open to multiplicity.

Notes

1. While the concept of minority stress was originally used to describe the experience of minorities in gender or sexual orientation, the concept has been broadened to apply to include stressors related to minority identity. See for example Frost and Meyer (2023) and Valentin-Cortés *et al.* (2020).
2. See for example Pandora’s Hope (1999) chapter two.

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