

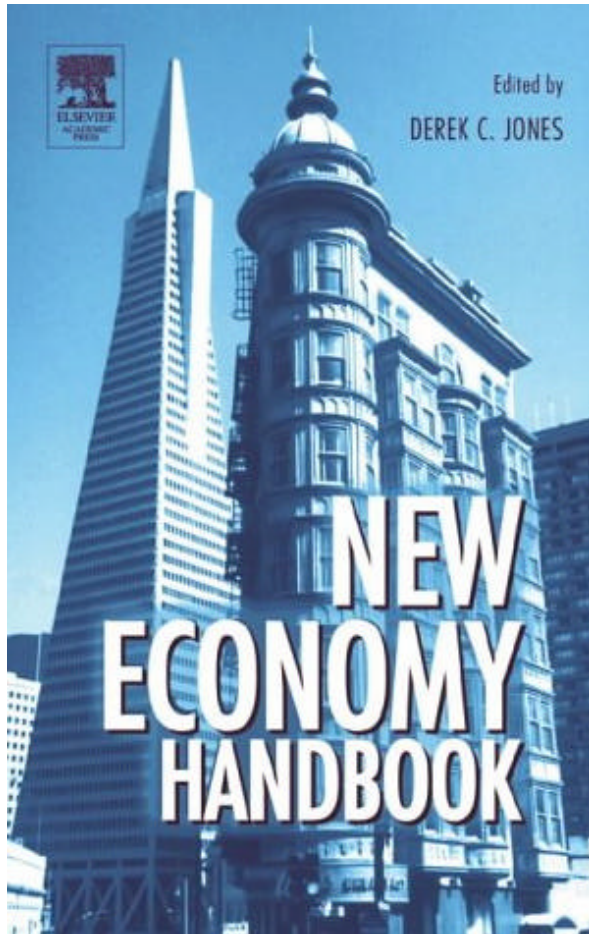
Something is happening but you  
don't know what it is, do you, Mr.  
Jones?

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# Something is happening but you don't know what it is, do you, Mr. Jones?

Bob Dylan - Ballad of a Thin Man.mp3



# Structure of talk

- **Introduction**
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- **Project management as the core of politics in post-bureaucracy**
- **The death of a theoretical object?**
- **Conclusion**

# Bureaucracy today

- Modern bureaucracies are under reconstruction.
  - Bureaucracy no longer being 'modern', those organizations formerly known as bureaucracies are becoming 'post' bureaucratic,
  - As post-bureaucratic sightings amongst the ecology of the dot.com boom indicate, newly founded organizations often strive not to be bureaucratic.
  - What, precisely, constitutes the post-bureaucratic is less clear. Often, the post-bureaucratic is defined in terms of hybrid new organization forms.

# Hybridization

- Bureaucracy, far from being superseded, is becoming embroiled in complex processes of hybridization
- To understand post-bureaucracy today we need to see bureaucratic organizations through a dialectical lens, one that sees them as simultaneously *decomposing* and *recomposing*.
  - Decomposition takes us to the world of supply chains and outsourcing, of which the phenomenon of call centres is probably the most pertinent example.
  - Recomposition takes us into the world of new organizational forms

# A little pre-history

- Weber & bureaucracy
- Weber, Schutz and slippage
- Celebrated studies
- Form typology to taxonomy ... the freezing of liquefied jelly
  - Defence of the essentially conceived ontological structure of the underlying configurationally moulded model against all comers (Donaldson 1996)
  - Led to epistemological cul-de-sacs of ever-diminishing returns.

# Criticisms – bureaucracy is inefficient ...

- Actual bureaucracies rarely achieve the efficiency that might be attributed to them in any pure state – therefore:
  - Bureaucracy must be “banished” (Osborne and Plastrik 1997)
  - Government must be “reinvented” (Osborne and Gaebler 1992).
    - The reason is simple: bureaucracy is inefficient. In the popular view, as du Gay (2000) or Pugh (1966) point out, bureaucracy is synonymous with inefficient business administration, pettifogging legalism, and red tape.
    - For critics, demolition of bureaucratic systems will further efficiency: “Employee empowerment does not mean every decision in the organization must be made democratically or through consensus” (Osborne and Plastrik 1997: 227).
    - Empowerment fosters effectiveness not more egalitarian and democratic settings.

# Criticisms – bureaucracy is dysfunctional ...

- Private sector bureaucracy is:
  - “maladaptive when massive change, environmental dynamism and considerable uncertainty are the norm ...[where there is a] ...growing asymmetry of power between the managerial agents in charge of them [the mega global firms] and most other groups in the society, including consumers, employees, and members of the local communities in which the firms’ operations are located” (Child and McGrath 2001: 1136; 1140).

# Turning 'post' ...

- The emergent notion of post-bureaucratic organisation has very significant similarities to that of an empowered democracy.
  - Its ruling concept has been suggested to be that “everyone takes responsibility for the success of the whole” (Heckscher 1994: 24).
- The most salient implications of post-bureaucracy are conceived as political: they concern
  - Relationships between individual members, and between members and their organization
  - The nature of power and authority
  - The conception of equity instead of equality
  - The existence of flexible and permanent dialogues concerning the rules of action.
    - Echoes of earlier ideal types:
      - Rothschild-Whitt and Whitt (1986) and Rothschild-Whitt's (1979) collectivist organization,
      - Lazega's (2000) collegial organization.

# The shock of the new ... or decomposing bureaucracy

- Derek Jones' 'New Economy'
  - The major external fact in speeding up organization change in recent times has been the Internet and associated information and communication technologies (ICT).
  - Kallinikos (2006) argues that digital technologies allow tasks that were previously embedded in the 'fixed space' of traditional organizations (for example accounting, inventory management, production operations or financial management) to be dissolved and recomposed as 'informatised' modules or services (Kallinikos 2006: 96).

# New economy, new religion?

- Computer screens as the altars of a new secular religion of change.
- As secularized religions go, that of the digital devotees is fairly apocalyptic and a little messianic.
  - There was a past, irrevocably broken with through the advances of digital technologies, and there is a bright sunlit future, a veritable New Jerusalem, just out of reach but visible through the miasma of the imperfect here-and-now.
  - Only more devotion to newer and better digital technologies, an utter commitment requiring more dollars and tithes on the altar plate, can clear the present miasma.
  - The New Jerusalem will be a robust, almost Quaker, Protestantism not a Catholicism, with its attendant hierarchy and bureaucracy.
  - The post-bureaucratic individual, lost in the lonely existence of their soul, digital virtuosi all, will communicate with their Organizational Master, or at least, the Master's disciples, in a wholly unmediated and direct way.
  - No priests; no bureaucrats – just believers and their digital devices, the only artefacts the new religious virtuosi need.

# Beware the yellow brick road ...

- We should, perhaps, pause – are not all utopia's, however beautifully glimpsed, false dawns?
  - What is mapped out is a deconstruction of the scalar and career elements of bureaucracy for all but the elites.
  - New entrants must learn to compete and win if they are to pierce the inner sanctum of the bureaucracy that remains.
  - Not for them the golden chains, unless they can be seen to triumph in and make themselves a value proposition for the elites (Kallinkos, 2006: 109).

# Technological shaping

- Almost every organization today is awash with e-technology and software.
  - Most of the tools that are bought are not revolutionary in their managerial impact; they merely enable managers to do what they would have done anyway but do it better and faster.
  - The new tools are based on technological innovations that drastically change the hardware used to produce a good or service.
  - They are as revolutionary as the typewriter.

# 'The media is the message'

- The computer vastly extends the capabilities of the keyboard, even while retaining many of its apparent features, but its digital capabilities also transform the possible nature of organizational design.
  - Digital technologies can deliver business as usual much faster.
    - Basic e-technologies, such as e-mail, websites, and search engines can be used effectively to obtain office productivity improvements.
    - They make it possible to generate new channels for communicating with customers, suppliers and staff.
    - The digital revolution not only enhances service productivity but can transform what were once broadcast models of distribution – from a few centres to many customers – into narrow-cast communication where there a great many points of distribution and reception – think of Limewire and downloads or favourite blogs.
    - Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, digital technologies make extended supply chain operations feasible and reliable.

# Digitalization ....

- The major advantage of digital technologies for business and organizations are their virtual possibilities for disaggregating existing designs.
  - Increasingly, organizations segment and specialize activities that are critical to their competitive advantage and those that are not.
  - The non-core functions, such as back office accounting, telemarketing, or programming are outsourced to parts of the world where the wage is one third to one tenth the cost in the home market, dramatically reducing operating costs and increasing competitiveness.
  - Outsourcing combined with digitalization has proven to be a potent mix.

# ...Decomposition

- The result of digitalization has not really been the development of post-bureaucratic organizations as was widely imagined in the new organizational forms literature.
- In fact, what has happened has been a *decomposition* of existing organization forms, especially bureaucracies, and the externalization of bureaucratic routines into either supply chain inputs or sub-contracted and out-sourced service providers

# Call Centre's

- Call Centres are often the first point of contact that most customers have with virtual organization.
  - Usually are unremarkable office buildings with many cubicles, within each of which is a computer monitor and telephony head-set.
  - Usually the cubicles are about a meter deep, about 1.2 meters wide, and separated by a partition wall about 1.2 meters high. There might be many hundreds of these cubicles.
  - With the development of VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol), call centres can be located anywhere, in any country and still dial at local rates.
  - Many are located in countries such as India where labour costs are far cheaper than in the more developed economies and where the skill basis is well developed, especially language capabilities in English.
  - Call centres are organized in shifts of team workers, with employees answering or making calls.
  - Team leaders monitor targets and manage performance.

# Call Centre Technology

- The technology behind call centres is twofold:
  - Menu of FAQs and scripted responses
    - Some Call Centres are ‘dedicated’; others not
  - Automated call distribution (ACD) – the technological backbone of Call Centres.
    - The ADC routes calls to the different operators on the next available basis, thus minimizing ‘hold times’, and maximizing the number of calls that any agent can handle, as well as ordering the queue of calls.

# Panoptical devices

- Data on more than 20 statistical records are recorded by the ADC on the performance of each operative:
  - How long each call takes
  - How long the operative pauses between calls
  - How much time is spent on other related work, such as:
    - Preparing data base records documenting the call
    - Time logged on and off
    - Break times and duration, and so on.

# Organizational designs

- Call centres combine elements of three different technology-based organization designs (Frenkel et al 1998).
  - White collar bureaucracies
    - Extensive technical rules built in to the design of the work process: the scripts, the electronic measures of performance, and close supervision.
  - Mass production flow-based labor processes.
    - What flows through them on a 24/7 basis are telephone calls rather than oil or petro-chemicals.
  - Each service encounter is a unique opportunity to either sell or service a customer satisfactorily.
    - While each call will be different, the centres have high degrees of standardization in the available responses and sales pitches, although, because of the unpredictability of customer responses, operatives can display creativity and innovation in the way that they handle specific customers.
    - Where more complex customer relationships exist, call centres can be innovative forms of work organization, suggest Wickham and Collins (2004).

# Recomposing bureaucracy through new organization forms

- Conceptions of new organizational forms are many but united by one thing – they are all conceived in opposition to the classic model of bureaucracy.
- For this reason they are sometimes termed post-bureaucratic organizations, as Fairtlough (2007) suggests. At their core he suggests are two main features:
  - Reduction of hierarchy and of coercive elements in bureaucracy
  - A move towards less rigid and perhaps apparently less rationalistic ways of organizing.

# Alternatives to bureaucracy I

- Heterarchy
  - Heterarchy comprises dispersed leadership, dispersed power, and a balance of power, with mutual accountability.
  - A good example of heterarchy would be the structure of professional service firms, such as law firms.
  - Although these tend to become more hierarchical as they grow in size, the advantages of partnership continue to be recognized. The procedures in many successful law firms are quasi-democratic, with voting by all partners deciding key issues.
  - A great deal of conversation between partners takes place before a vote.
  - However, the nature of these conversations is strongly influenced by the prospect of the subsequent vote (Fairtlough 2007a: 1274).

# Alternatives to bureaucracy II

- Responsible autonomy
  - Depends on encapsulating relatively autonomous roles as responsible to rules, both explicit and tacit, which govern the interaction of autonomous actors or elements or divisions of an organization.

Table 1: Concepts of organization structure

Concept	Characteristics	Author and Year
Adhocracy	This refers to organizations that have simply grown, without much explicit design. They are characterized by a lack of structure and formal rules. Often small, creative agencies are adhocracies, such as a design studio.	Mintzberg 1983a
Technocracy	Organization structure enabled by technological innovations. Organizations that comprise people who work on a common data base from remote locations would be a good example. Research networks such as the Genome project would be a good example.	Burris 1993
Internal Market	Flexible markets and internal contracts within an organization structure characterize these forms of organization, often adopted by public sector organizations in search of greater flexibility and efficiency.	Malone, Yates and Benjamin 1987
Clans	A clan organization is based on shared culture rather than formal rules, much as the members of an extended anthropological clan might be in a traditional society. The culture is overwhelmingly oral rather than recorded in formal rule-like statements. For instance, hi-tech start ups in places such as Silicon Valley.	Ouchi 1980
Heterarchy	A form of organization resembling a network or fishnet. Rather than their being a single chain of authority – a hierarchy – there are plural connections between the individual members. Professional firms, such as Law Partnerships or Accounting Partnerships often correspond to this model.	Hedlund 1986
Virtual organization	An organization linked through virtual networks rather than formal rules, often involving several ostensibly separate organizations, often project-organized. <i>The crucial factor is that the network relations are virtually enabled.</i> Often data is moved with great rapidity around the virtual network and separate skill-sets work on it either in series or in parallel. This often is the preferred mode of design-oriented firms, such as architects studios, working on large projects with many other specialist partners, such as engineers, project management firms, designers, etc.	Davidow and Malone 1992
Network organization	An organization formed by intersecting and crosscutting linkages between several separate organizations, usually connected on a project basis, such as large scale civil engineering alliances between a public sector organization, such as a major utility, and other specialist construction, design and project management related firms. <i>The crucial factor here is that the partners have a more formal and enduring relationship than in the virtual organization, and are not restricted to work on digital data, such as movies, designs, etc.</i>	Biggart and Hamilton 1992 Powell 1990 Rockart and Short 1991
Postmodern organization	This is essentially a bureaucratic organization which has undergone a degree of de-differentiation of its structure; that is, it has become more integrated, less specialist, and more team-based. Japanese automobile companies – learning bureaucracies that are seeking to become less bureaucratic – would be a case in point.	Clegg 1990

# New fast post bureaucratic companies ...

- Making fast decisions is the first—and, arguably, the most important—capability for post-bureaucratic managers, Accenture suggest.
- Managers need to be able to do their own data analysis on the spot, and to make decisions with limited information—recognizing they may be wrong. (What's new?)
  - If they do make a mistake, they have to cut their losses and quickly reverse directions, knowing that ultimately making that mistake will have been less costly than delaying any decision too long.
  - They must continually balance the need for speed against the need to be right, keeping an eye out for decisions that, if made too quickly, could not be reversed before causing real harm to the organization<sub>25</sub>

# Need for speed ...

- The Internet makes many partnerships, networks and collaborations possible.
- The ability to identify and evaluate potential partnerships, build key relationships and successfully negotiate the terms of a deal will be critical capabilities for managers in post-bureaucratic organizations in the digital economy.
  - Alliances move organizations toward strategic objectives, hence managers need to be able quickly to evaluate a potential ally's financial strength and whether or not they can deliver the value they are promising.
  - Managers also need to build rapport quickly with potential partners because a lot of collaborations are really experiments, thus managers need to negotiate less formal, less structured relationships as a way of finding out which alliances really work for both parties.
  - A strong creative bent is essential for negotiating web partnerships in order to involve collaborative conflicts.

# Castells and *The Rise of the Network Society*

- Networks can be understood as a long-term relationship between organizations that share resources to achieve common goals through negotiated actions.
- Accenture suggest that in the post-bureaucratic organization technology will not be a support system but the very basis of the business model.
- Thus, post-bureaucratic organizations will be technologically fetishistic:
  - Hence, the digital devotion of which I have spoken in religious terms, only half-jokingly.
  - Managers will routinely invest time in keeping up with evolving technologies—reading, meeting with experts, and working with the technology first hand. T
  - hey will develop a network of trusted technical experts – disciples – who can offer guidance and will have to "unlearn" old technologies, just as the religious convert must unlearn old faiths, which act as barriers to the new.
  - Multiple partnerships, collaborations and networks means that successful managers in post bureaucratic organizations will have to learn to balance and devote time to the demands of multiple and diverse stakeholders—members of their own team, colleagues from other units in the company, external partners,

# Being digital; staying rooted

- One puzzling aspect of the knowledge economy is if digital disaggregation makes location anywhere possible how come so many firms cluster close to each other? Certain places become magnets for particular fields of activity, like hi-tech in Silicon Valley, movie-making in Hollywood or Mumbai, or creative design in Brisbane's Fortitude Valley.
  - A specific ecology of business has developed in the Valley, where social and business networks overlay each other in a shared sense of identity and community, as well as dense networks of referrals and problem-solving.
  - Much of the work that individual firms do is digitally based but often involves collaborative project-based work with other creative people in the same neighbourhood.
  - It is not so much the technology that creates new possibilities for organization design that is disaggregated and project based but a network of ties premised on social proximity, in both a spatial and cultural sense.

# Form networks to the multitude

- Rhizomes as open systems with no underlying structure or hierarchy. The term is used metaphorically and is drawn from botanical usage, where it means a thick underground horizontal stem that produces roots and has shoots that develop into new plants.
  1. Any point in a rhizome can be connected to any other – the principle of connection and heterogeneity.
  2. The rhizome is defined by its lines of flight rather than by points internal to it – the principle multiplicity.
  3. The rhizome can be broken at any spot, and it will either sprout a new line of growth or continue along an old line – the principle of asignifying rupture.
  4. The rhizome does not have an underlying generative structure; intensive states and thresholds replace the idea of an underlying topology – the principle of cartography.

# From bureaucrats to project managers

- Careers will be increasingly project-based in these post-bureaucratic organizations.
- Conflict and confrontation are inevitable, so managing emotions becomes a crucial skill.
- Managers need to create a learning environment—coaching, hands-on-teaching and mentoring—to stimulate and develop their employees.
- They must manage expectations about evolving roles in projects.
- Employees will be sensitive to shifting roles and the signals they send about a person's worth. Accenture likens the task of the post-bureaucratic manager to that of a coach trying to build a team out of a group of highly paid free agent talents.

# The politics of post-bureaucracy

- Recent management writers have seen project management as a circuit breaker for bureaucracy, and have contrasted the bureaucratic past with the future of a project-based post-modern world (Clegg 1990).
- Elements of empowerment, self-reliance, trust and peer-based teamwork controls (Barker 1999) are supposed to portray project-management as an explicit and concrete appeal to post-modern/post-bureaucratic organizations.

# The hierarchical politics of post-bureaucracy

- Looked at from below, from the perspective of the subaltern recruit, these organizations seem shape-shifters, project-based, with teams composing and decomposing, locations shifting as projects are completed, KPIs changing with projects, and one's individual organizational future uncertain.
- From the perspective of the elites the story is quite different. They know that they are over the threshold where the golden chains are evident. The largest problem that they must deal with is using the project shape-shifting that goes on outside the threshold as the basis for competitions and tournaments that will decide who may cross the threshold.

# Hybridity and elites

- The hybrid political structure of post bureaucracy:
  - Elites differentiated from sub-elite members, knowledge workers, experts, and professionals, with regard to values, demographic characteristics and types of aspirations.
  - Elites unified to ensure a relative consensus on basic values and on the legitimate rules of the internal political arena.
  - Sub-elites compete for notice in ‘projects’

# Project management

- Project management is both a principle of selection and a principle of education.
  - *Selection mechanisms* are used to enhance the circulation as well as rivalries among sub-elite members (namely would-be project managers and actual project managers), while facilitating the control by incumbent oligarchs over local orderings (through appointments of new project leaders, circulation of experts among projects, “go/no go” decisions at certain critical steps of the projects...).
  - *Education mechanisms* are used to create what Mills terms the “fraternity of the chosen” (1957: 143).
    - In other words, project management can be viewed as a technology of power helping to create and sustain diffuse networks of acquaintanceship between “professionals”, that legitimates “educational nurseries” in which project managers learn both the basics of the official body of knowledge, as well as a feel for those underlying values whose meaning they have to decipher.

# Projects and protestants

- Project managers strive for *visibility* for their achievements in managing the projects as *innovative, creative and exciting* but also as *timely, on budget and dependable*.
  - Like Weber's Protestants, they strive to show the state of leadership grace moves through them sufficiently to join the ranks of the elect
  - Corporate leaders have a direct interest in shaping, grooming and educating selected aspirants to be subjects with appropriate comportment, etiquette, and equipage.
    - Mostly, these characteristics pertain to an ability to accept and work creatively with an existing order and existing rules; thus, they go far beyond merely technical and professional expertise

# Being professional

- Project management:
  - Combines “pure” professional features, such as the existence of external rules of expertise, of external associations, of official systems of accreditation, of an official body of knowledge, with organizational norms and values.
  - Serves as a resource for business leaders to compare and judge future would-be leaders, a metric for gauging the level of ambition of pre-selected individuals.
  - Constitutes a springboard for those who shrewdly avoid being pegged as “true professionals”, with the cosmopolitan and organizationally disinterested pose that this can imply.

# The politics of project management

- Project management directly influences elite power structures in contemporary post bureaucratic organizations for three major reasons.
  - It differentiates between those likely to be able to aspire further and those who will not.
  - Organizational elites retain the power to stabilize or destabilize what project teams do, through different kinds of decisions (such as resource allocation, project termination, team leaders demotion/promotion...).
  - Project management both creates more complex elite strata to traverse and enables a route of social mobility within the organization.
  - Post bureaucratic organizations are characterized by a kind of elitist-democratic culture through competition in the social technologies of project management.

# New circulatory and competitive elites

- From the moment the circulation of sub-elites is monitored from the centre of the organization, it is a means of:
  - Producing knowledge through the diversity of individual experience
  - Disseminating a powerful network of shared values regarding career and ambition which also facilitate the activation and embodiment of common reference points that structure the attention and commitment of project members.
    - Such reference points include milestones, key performance indicators, profit-margins, annual performance, respect for deadlines, respect for budgets, deference to which is progressively internalised as incontrovertible business *and* moral values, essential for the healthy survival of the entire organization (Courpasson and Dany 2003).

# Paradox

- Bureaucracy is both being superseded by post-bureaucracy and not being superseded by post-bureaucracy!
- While this may sound nonsensical it all depends on whether one focuses on recomposition or decomposition;
  - If one follows the direction of decomposition it is clear that in the new electronic panopticons of the call centre, often globally located on the margins of modernity, bureaucracy is alive and well in a particularly centralized, standardized and routinized form. Here the bureaucratization of the shopfloor has proceeded into the heart of the white collar, pink blouse, and colourful indigenously attired digital factory.
  - If, on the other hand, one follows the recomposition route into the upper echelons of leaner and more entrepreneurially oriented organizations then one might draw the conclusion that they were, indeed, post-bureaucracies that had managed to turn the iron cage into golden chains.

# “Many Are Called, But Few Are Chosen”

- The zone in-between, the arenas through which individual recruits cycle and circulate, managing their careers as they manage their projects, becomes a panoptical space for the elites to watch and for the project managers to be aware that they are under surveillance, never knowing whether this is the project that will lift them out of the in-between zone and get them over the threshold into the promised land.

# Implications

- What made bureaucracies bureaucratic, in part, was their unitary nature – the incorporation within them of many separate processes under one central control.
- What we are seeing with the emergence of the post-digital economy is a dispersal of the elements that once were incorporated.
- In fact, in some respects we are seeing the end of organizations as theoretical objects.

# The end of the theoretical object of organization

- Since the post Second World War era, the organization has been assumed to be an equivalent theoretical and empirical object, the dialectics of recomposition and decomposition have sundered the presumed unity.
- Organizing capabilities of focal organizations are often vested in the chains, networks, alliances and collaborations that they are party to.
  - These are traversed by a multiplicity of projects and panoptical devices, organized around creativity and innovation on the one hand and strictly defined KPIs on the other.
  - The organization is much less than the sum of its relations and the spaces they traverse.
  - The centrality of relations of employment – the proxy for organization size in the old accounts – has been superseded by the centrality of relations of production, distribution, service provision and supply.
  - Organization – conceived on the old model of bureaucracy – is decomposing.

# Organizations still exist as empirical objects

- The theoretical object of organizations, crystallized in the 1950s and 1960s, froze some elements of becoming. It captured in a series of snapshots a moment in the becoming of the empirical object.
- It was the age of the organization man, of the complete organization.
  - Earlier models of Marshallian industrial districts, which had emphasized what we might now think of as important post-bureaucratic tendencies, which had characterized areas such as Birmingham's jewellery district, were not attended to – even though the Aston researchers were adjacent to them in Birmingham (Pollard 2004).
    - Here, since at least the late eighteenth century, jewellery and medallions, shields, presentation cups, etc, had been produced in a dense web of networking and putting out, in which it was rare for any one craftsman to produce a whole item. Instead, the whole trade was based on parts manufacture. It was decomposed.

# Downing tools

- In many ways, given the tendencies to recomposition, in which the figure of the project leader has replaced that of the bureaucrat, and the centrality of the project has replaced the centrality of an occupational career pursued within an organization, together with the decomposition of routines, standardization and out-sourcing, the theoretical object has been transformed.
- Today it is less the organization and more the processes of organizing, the chains, links and networks, which are the salient theoretical object.
- Analysis of organizations as stand-alone and complete entities increasingly misses that much of what they do is done through virtual linkages.
- Thus, in the post-bureaucratic era we may be witnessing not only the emergence of post-bureaucracies but also the decline of the ontological basis for what has been a fairly fruitful line of enquiry these past 70 years or so.
- To excavate the future we may need not only new tools but also a renewed scepticism, and a different compass, than that which has brought us, analytically, to a position where we need 'to find out what price [we] have to pay to get out of going through all these things twice' (Dylan 1966).

# End-game, or the price of going through these things twice

- Otherwise, post-bureaucracy will simply be a replay of the old ontology's, this time through the mirror darkly, in reverse, as the representations of organization theorists increasingly accord with a moment of intellectual reification, frozen in a language game of their own making, whilst, meanwhile, social reality changes in ways that cannot easily be represented within the contingent language game being played out, in a deathly, Bergman-like endgame (Bergman 1960).

# The Seventh Seal



