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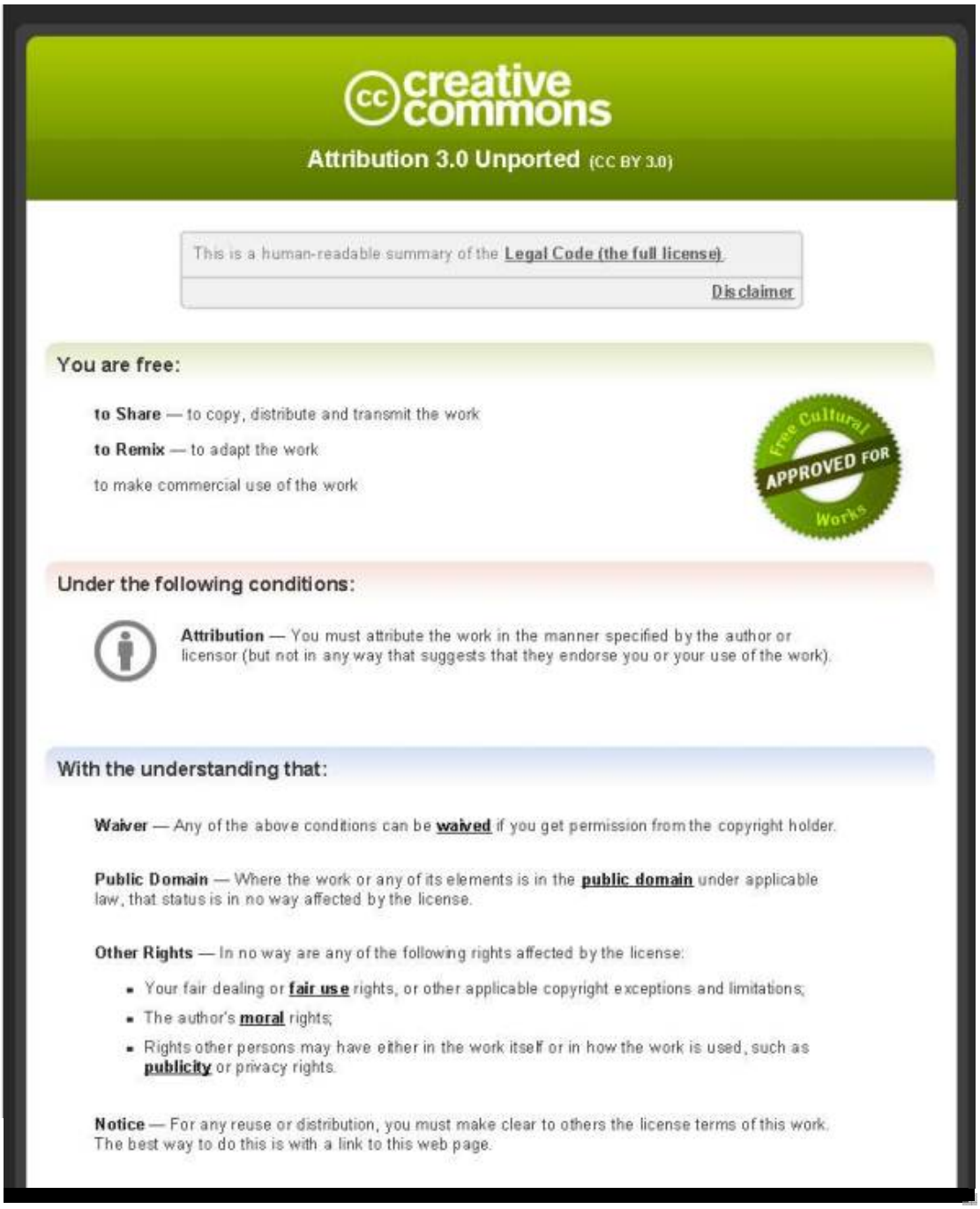

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Scandinavian Journal of Management (2013) 29, 282–291

Available online at www.sciencedirect.com

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Thinking the ontological politics of managerial and critical performativities: An examination of project failure☆

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KEYWORDS
Performance;
Ontological performativity;
Critical Management Studies;
Actor-network theories;
Projects;
Failure

Summary Recent contributions within Critical Management Studies have argued for critical engagements with performativity to acknowledge and advance the plurality of performance calculi within organizations. However, even critically minded authors persist in deploying managerial calculi of performance when criticizing the failure of management on its own terms. Equally, interpretive analyses of performance narratives as discursive power games have thus far offered little substantive challenge to managerial understandings of performativity, as orientated around maxims of efficiency, control and profit. Positioned against these managerialist and conservative tendencies in extant understandings of performativity, we draw together the ANT-derived notions of ontological performativity and politics, alongside empirical research on projects, and specifically project failure, to propose that if ontologies are performative, multiple, and political, then performativities are ontological, multiple and political, and are thus capable of being realized otherwise; but crucially, we can advance this thesis only if we better understand how managerial performativity simultaneously others and depends on that which is outside it: an absent hinterland of different performative realities. This theoretical move challenges how we might not only understand but assemble multiple performed realities — demanding new methodological, analytical and political resources and responses to engage with performativities.
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Introduction

Despite their popularity, managerialist notions of performance offer a limited understanding of the shifting pluralities, and equivocalities, of performance within contemporary organizational life (Prasad & Mills, 2011; Rowlinson & Hassard, 2011; Spicer, Kärreman, & Alvesson, 2009). However, there remains a distinct lack of analysis into how multiple performativities are afforded reality or not within organizations. Hence in this paper we seek to better understand how different performativities interact alongside each other within organizations; in other words, we are concerned with exploring the politics of performativities. And yet, in so doing, we do not follow interpretive suggestions that the politics of performance can be accounted for

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http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.scaman.2013.01.004

simply as different perspectives on the same organizational reality (e.g. Brown & Jones, 1998; Fincham, 2002; Hargie, Stapleton, & Tourish, 2010; Hartz & Steger, 2010; Whittle, Mueller, & Mangan, 2009). Rather, we suggest that multiple performativities enact and multiply organizational realities rather than represent a singular reality. This process is conceptualized here through the ANT-derived concepts of ontological performativity and politics (Alcadipani & Hassard, 2010; Durepos & Mills, 2012; Gad & Jensen, 2010; Law, 2009a, 2009b; Mol, 1999, 2002). To develop, and elucidate, the theoretical contribution of these arguments we focus here upon projects, and specifically project failures. While the association between projects and ontology may appear surprising to some readers, technological projects, and especially failures, have long inspired the development of novel ontological propositions around ANT, from Bruno Latour's semi-fictional account of the ARAMIS train system in Paris (Latour, 1996), to John Law's study of the UK's TSR2 fighter project (Law, 2002); equally, project management researchers themselves appear increasingly interested in interrogating the ontological positions they adopt (Gauthier & Ika, 2012).

Projects offer an especially elucidating arena to better understand performativity, as their mere existence is predicated upon a seemingly singular, all-encompassing mission to 'perform or else' (Mackenzie, 2001). It is the phoenix-like mission of project managers to purposefully wind down the project, while striving to achieve 'success' in its name. Yet even within projects, success or failure, is hardly unequivocally understood, for example we can quickly forget (and forgive) substantial cost overruns and delays on the construction of the Sydney Opera House since it became an iconic and profitable attraction (Winch, 2010, p. 208). Taking inspiration from such pressing and capricious project performativites, in this paper we focus upon research and practice on and around projects, and specifically project failures, in order to gain greater purchase on how calculi of organizational performance are simultaneously *realized* and *politicized*. While we expect this paper to contribute to project studies, we also intend it to be theoretically consequential to a broader audience of management and organization scholars interested in understanding the political interplay of multiple performativites (following Jacobsson & Söderholm, 2011).

As recent discussions in CMS have elaborated (e.g. Clegg, Kornberger, Carter, & Rhodes, 2006; Parker, 2002; Spicer et al., 2009), managers are not the only actors involved in shaping calculi of organizational performance; a range of actors far beyond the formal boundaries of an individual organization, or project, not least management and organizational scholars themselves, are implicated in enacting, modifying, and multiplying, calculi of performance. Our commitment to ANT here also entails we extend this field of actors to include nonhumans (Latour, 1996). By seeking in this paper to better understand how different performance calculi come into being (not simply those of senior managers or clients), how they interact with each other, and become afforded more or less reality, we seek to contribute to wider discussions around the power and politics of performativities, both in and around organizations (Brown & Jones, 1998; Fincham, 2002; Prasad & Mills, 2011; Spicer et al., 2009; Vaara, 2002). Moreover, if we are living in an increasingly 'projectified society' (Lundin & Söderholm, 1998), where personal, community, organizational, and even national esteem is measured against project success (Cicmil, Hodgson, Lindgren, & Packendorff, 2009; Clegg and Courpasson, 2004; Hodsgon & Cicmil, 2008; Lindgren & Packendorff, 2006), even within 'anti-performative' academic projects like CMS (Young, Adarves-Yorno, & Taylor, 2012), then the phenomenon, and effects of, performance failure (and success) in projects appear an increasingly pervasive concern across organizational life.

By way of further specifying the imperative for this task, we will briefly introduce the current state of affairs within project management research as related to performance, and specifically project failure. Unsurprisingly perhaps, project management (PM) research remains mostly wedded to rationalist-normative assumptions about performance: a failed project is defined against an 'iron triangle' of initial time, cost, quality targets (see e.g. Jha & Iya, 2007; Morris & Hough, 1986). In recent years this rationalist-normative consensus in PM research has prompted at least two, related strands of re-theorization: *Making Projects Critical* (Cicmil et al., 2009) and *Rethinking Project Management* (Winter, Smith, Morris, & Cicmil, 2006). Amongst various related contributions, these researchers have promoted alternative approaches to help project practitioners and researchers reflect upon the shifting social, political and ethical contexts and practices framing the design, use and transformation of performance criteria (e.g. Cicmil & Hodgson, 2006; Geraldi, Lee-Kelley, & Kutsch, 2010; Hallgren and Wilson, 2008; Lindgren & Packendorff, 2006; Smith, 2007). These largely discursive approaches, are, in part, intended to help practitioners to recognize the dynamic socio-political contingency of seemingly technical definitions of project performance and thus perhaps even redefine project 'successes' and 'failures' to encompass new political and ethical values, such as sustainability, social justice or wellbeing (Cicmil et al., 2009; Hodsgon & Cicmil, 2008). There are remarkable resonances between such attempts to advance new calculi of performance amongst practitioners, and recent discussions on the potential for critical performativities to augment the impact of CMS (see Prasad & Mills, 2011; Rowlinson & Hassard, 2011; Spicer et al., 2009).

While we view such re-theorizations of performance as immensely welcome contributions to a field of management that continues to resists deviations from managerialist/rationalist/positivist orthodoxies (Cicmil et al., 2009), the critical position adopted towards project failure is, however, rather less straightforward than it first appears — 'failure' appears both: (i) a social construction involved in the reproduction of (pernicious) managerial interests and agendas; and (ii) an unequivocally experienced end-state, a materially manifest reality composed of lost profits, careers and even lives — a phenomenon whose reality has, after all, precipitated critiques of 'classic' PM knowledge (see Cicmil et al., 2009, pp. 83–85; Winter et al., 2006, p. 641). In other words, recent attempts to encourage the reflexive (re)theorization performance criteria in projects (Cicmil & Hodgson, 2006; Geraldi et al., 2010; Hallgren and Wilson, 2008; Lindgren & Packendorff, 2006; Smith, 2007) are framed as a response to the prevalent reality of project failures, which are (somewhat incongruously) mostly defined in managerial terms.

Tensions between those inspired by the failure management (on its own terms), and the need to problematize

managerial definitions of performance, are not unique to project studies. Grey (2009) for example, remarks how ''organizational theory. doesn't even do what it says it should do'' (p. 161), while elsewhere stressing that ''in organizations (and elsewhere) the facts do not speak for themselves. They are always interpreted and when the interpretations stick and get believed by all or most people they become constructions'' (pp. 153–154). Grey (2009) echoes Cicmil et al. (2009), by not sufficiently acknowledging this paradox, wherein the pervasive reality of the failure of management, judged against its own calculi of performance, is allowed to speak for itself, despite elsewhere asking us to probe the contingencies of knowledge statements; thus, there is always a risk that in proposing that management has failed (on its own terms), that any managerial calculus of performance assumes greater not less reality. Or, as Spicer et al. (2009) put it: ''we unwittingly continue to affirm the sovereignty and all-powerful nature of these systems and convince ourselves and perhaps more importantly, others that they cannot be challenged or changed'' (p. 549, for related arguments see Clegg et al., 2006, p. 15; Rowlinson & Hassard, 2011, p. 682).

In tackling this paradox of better understanding the contingency of (project) performativities while not inadvertently advancing a priori, singular, managerialist designations, we question here how narratives of failure are progressively afforded reality, or not, as effected by the actors involved themselves, including project management researchers (and we include ourselves in this definition). Our approach therefore does not take as its starting point, or indeed inspiration, any generalized acceptance of the pervasive reality of project failure (or success). This concern with how to re-think the power and politics of (project) performativities, while resisting any tacit augmentation of managerial performativities, constitutes the specific contribution of this paper. As will be discussed in due course, we propose that concepts of ontological performativity, multiplicity and politics, developed within actor-network theories (Law, 2006, 2009a; Mol, 1999, 2002) are particularly well-suited to this task.

To develop this (re)theorization of performativity, power and politics, we examine extant notions of performativity in project management research, alongside performativities in and around a construction project and protest. This part review, part empirical, paper, unfolds across five sections. In the first section, we consider how rationalist-normative understandings of project failures, and performance, have been challenged by interpretative and critical approaches, thereby offering insight into the plurality of notions of performance; however such analyses appear more limited in accounting for the power, and by extension politics, of performativities. Secondly, and in response, we address the limitations of these interpretive approaches, by working through the ANT-derived concepts of ontological performativity to rethink how the power of performativites is bound up with their *realization*. Thirdly, we empirically engage the concept of ontological performativity to develop an account of a construction project and protest. In so doing we consider how we might think project failure, and do (project) performativities, differently. Such analyses analysis suggests how we should pay greater attention to the interplay of multiple organizational realities, and attendant performativites, to better account for the politics of the latter. Fourthly we consider the potential of this approach, and specifically the notion of ontological politics, to think more politically about calculi and designations of performativity in projects, and beyond. By way of conclusion we summarize the key contributions and limitations of this thesis.

(Re)theorizing project failure and performativity

Critical project studies have evidenced that the unequivocality of failure, judged against an ''iron triangle'' (of cost, time, quality targets), as incubated by rationalist-normative project management theory, appears only far too real for many project practitioners, who increasingly define their personal worth against project performance (Cicmil et al., 2009; Clegg and Courpasson, 2004; Hodsgon & Cicmil, 2008; Lindgren & Packendorff, 2006; Styhre, 2006). And yet, despite the pervasive reproduction of rationalist-normative understandings of failure in practice and research (see e.g. Belassi & Tukel, 1996; Cooke-Davies, 2002; Fortune and Whyte, 2006; Ika, 2009; Venugopal & Suryaprakasa Ra, 2011; Yeo, 2002), it is all too apparent that such approaches also deny any consideration of the political contingency, effects, and mutability, of performance narratives. Interpretive studies of failures in management and organization (see Brown & Jones, 1998; Fincham, 2002; Hargie et al., 2010; Hartz & Steger, 2010; Whittle et al., 2009) suggest that 'failure' should not merely be understood as an objective reality – a failed project – to be diagnosed against nomothetic causes (as in Critical Failure Factors – see Belassi & Tukel, 1996), but rather as a socially constructed narrative involved in the emergent identity work and power relations within and between organizations, social groups and individuals. These studies explain how 'failures' are often translated over short periods of time into 'successes' and vice versa, as actors vie to render narratives of failure/success socially meaningful in such a way that benefits their interests, identities and agendas (Brown & Jones, 1998; Kreiner & Frederiksen, 2007) to make sense of, and legitimize, changes in organizations (Vaara, 2002), including projects (Fincham, 2002).

Interpretive approaches draw attention to the highly political character of seemingly technical measures of performance in projects (and organizations generally), as criteria for failure/success are negotiated, even preconfigured, to benefit, or disadvantage, particular actors, their interests, agendas and identities. These studies also suggest that the significance of project failures for actors involved does not pivot around the end-state of the project, but rather contested failure/success narratives are involved in the reproduction of past, present and future identities and relations of power. Indeed, the temporal relocation of failure (and success) from the present tense (e.g. 'this project has failed', 'why has it failed') to include past and future tenses (e.g. 'this project will fail, unless', 'this project almost failed, until', 'this project should have failed, but') is an important component of moving away from a narrowly rationalist-normative understanding of failure, where an emphasis is placed on diagnosing, in the present, an objective reality of failure experienced in the past.

Interpretive approaches to project failure thus help reveal the political import, and mutability, of seemingly technical discussions of project performance. They are entirely commensurate with the critique of classic PM knowledge in the *Making Projects Critical* (Hodgson & Cicmil, 2006) and *Rethinking Project Management* movements (Winter et al., 2006), as well as the de-naturalizing ethos of CMS, more broadly defined (Fournier and Grey, 2000). Despite such critical strengths, interpretive studies, have not, thus far, brought into view a great deal about the particular techniques through which a definition of project failure becomes institutionalized and accepted as a reality — or, as Fincham (2002) puts it, how is the outcome of this "classic power game" (p. 13) determined.

Recognizing this opportunity for further analysis, Vaara (2002, p. 240) proposes that research is required that examines "the relative power of different accounts [of failure and success] in specific settings" (p. 240), rather than the delineation of generic performance discourses (e.g. 'rationalist', 'cultural', 'role bound', individualist' — Vaara, 2002, p. 225) in post hoc explanations of failure. Yet, perhaps interpretive—discursive approaches are not well-suited to this particular task of understanding the institutionalization and naturalization of narratives of performance. Fincham's (2002) study of IT project performance narratives, for example, presents just the kind of interpretative analysis of on-going performance narrative negotiations, which Vaara (2002) proposes. However, Fincham (2002) offers little explanation of the relative power of performance narratives: the promulgation of change in performance narratives is viewed simply as a need for new managers to validate their appointment (Fincham, 2002, p. 10); or elsewhere: "Dominant groups used the stigma of failure and the allure of success in order to engineer a narrative shift" (Fincham, 2002, p. 12). In other words, the social status of senior managers is used by Fincham (2002) to explain the relative power of particular narratives of performativity, yet it also appears that these narratives of performativity are bound up in the hegemonic reproduction of their status: power breeds the capacity to define and thus achieve successful performance which produces more power.

Latour (2005, pp. 82—86) proposes that such circular logics where *power explains power*, obscure far more about the complexities of agency then they explain: studies of power should instead be concerned which describing power rather than deploying it as an explanation. Thus, we seek here to examine the 'how' rather than 'why' of power; we describe what mechanisms powerful narratives resist (and harness) counter-narratives and what sorts of discursive *and* material resources might be significant. It appears that this lack of engagement with the 'how' of power, relates not simply to an empirical oversight within interpretive approaches, but rather to more profound limitations in such approaches to account for the emergent *realization* of (performance) narratives. Of relevance here is a broader identified tendency for social science analysis to focus upon representational registers (Anderson & Harrison, 2010; Law, 2006; Lorrimer, 2005; Thrift, 2008), not least within management and organizational studies (Beyes & Steyaert, 2011), including studies of construction (Sage, 2012). Extant interpretive approaches to the analysis of performativities, seek to understand plural, and emergent, interpretations of a reality (Fincham, 2002, p. 6; Vaara, 2002, p. 217), through discursive processes of sense-making, driven by actors interests, identities and intentions (cf. Brown & Jones, 1998; Hargie et al., 2010; Hartz and Steger, 2010; Whittle et al., 2009). All of these interpretations describe the existence of perspectives upon an aspect of a singular reality, rather that acknowledge how all descriptions of project failure (including those of the academics cited thus far) may be involved in the on-going, socio-material, *enactment* of multiple, novel, though related, (project) realities (Law, 2002). "Attention to these kinds of expression, it is contended, offers an escape from the established academic habit of striving to uncover meanings and values that apparently await our discovery, interpretation, judgement and ultimate representation" (Lorrimer, 2005, p. 84).

Actor network theories and ontological performativity

A distinctly 'more-than-representational' (Lorrimer, 2005) approach to the study of descriptions of the world, including organizational narratives, is offered by actor-network theories (ANT). ANT offers a novel mode of analysis that engages with the interpretive position (Fincham, 2002; Vaara, 2002) that organizational narratives are politically charged, but these descriptive accounts of organizations 'out there', are said to not purely represent, but perform, different, if related, organizational realities, and associated ethical goods (Law, 1994, 2002, 2006, 2009a, 2009b). This proposal about ontologically performativity is concomitant with ANT's more (in)famous emphasis on socio-material relations:

> It is not possible to separate out (a) the making of particular *realities*, (b) the making of particular *statements* about those realities, and (c) the creation of *instrumental, technical and human configurations and practices*, the inscription devices that produce these realities and statements. Instead, *all are produced together*. Without inscription devices, and the inscriptions and statements that these produce, there are no realities (Law, 2006, p. 31; original emphasis).

While concepts of ontological performativity have become increasingly associated with 'Actor Network Theory and After' approaches (Alcadipani & Hassard, 2010; Callon & Law, 2005; Durepos & Mills, 2012; Gad & Jensen, 2010; Law & Hassard, 1999; Law, 2009a, 2009b; Mol, 1999, 2002) and other related non-representational approaches (Anderson & Harrison, 2010; Beyes & Steyaert, 2011; Lorrimer, 2005; Thrift, 2008), even early ANT laboratory studies (e.g. Latour, 1987, 1988; Latour & Woolgar, 1979; Law, 1994) document how propositions about realities can enact the realities they seek to represent. As Latour (1988) explains in *The Pasteurization of France*, realities, such as 'a world full of bad (and good) microbes', which first appeared in Pasteur's laboratory, have become 'real' (that is part of an independent, prior, definite, singular reality — Law, 2006) because aspects of Pasteur's laboratory (microscopes, test tubes, experiments, etc.) have been long ago extended into other sites (farms, schools, hospitals, factories). This extended network of relations does not simply represent, but performs, this

particular reality of microbes (Latour, 1988): ''reality and the statements that correspond to it are produced together in the disciplinary and laboratory apparatus of inscription'' (Law, 2006, p. 31). As Alcadipani and Hassard (2010) suggest, this point has profound implications for social research: ''The researcher, therefore, is not just observing, s/he is actively constructing what it is being studied'' (p. 428). Law (2006) elaborates further the methodological implications of ontological politics:

> I want to subvert method by helping to remake methods: that are not moralist; that imagine and participate in politics and other forms of the good in novel and creative ways; and that start to do this by escaping the postulate of singularity, and responding creatively to a world that is taken to be composed of an excess of generative forces and relations (p. 9).

The process of realization was first delineated in ANT as *translation* (Callon, 1986). The messy, uncertain practices through which a project practitioner might seek to label, name and measure, project performance, whether before, during, or after, a project, therefore amounts to an on-going process of *translation* (Ivory & Alderman, 2011; Sage, Dainty, & Brookes, 2011). Translation is the process by which an actor (humans or non-humans), or a group of actors, seeks to define, interest and enrol a large number of heterogeneous actors in support of their enactment of a reality, and test this assemblage of relations through on-going *trials of strength*, so that their reality may become a durable intermediary, or *black box*, in another actor-network, creating substantial transformations in those networks (Callon, 1986; Latour, 1987, 1988, 1996). ANT suggests that within all projects, progressive attempts are made to translate calculi of project success and failure: ''Projects are also chains of translations, but this time in a different key, of the ability to maintain a highly complex socio-technical assemblage of heterogeneous constraints'' (Latour, 2010, p. 602). And so it follows that narratives of project failure and success should be recognized as part of an on-going process to perform different project realities, rather than (variously) influence perspectives on an already existing, singular, external reality. Thus, if a project, such as Sydney's Opera House appears to extract success from failure this is not necessarily because its reality has been viewed differently over time, but rather may also be because a particular reality of project performance has been (successfully) translated over and above others (cf. Latour, 1996; Law, 2002). It is thus entirely possible that multiple realities co-exist and interplay with each other, just as the universe of astrophysics overlaps the universe of astrology (Campion, 2012), both containing specific agencies, objects and subjects. We will now continue to clarify this approach, and its contribution to the study of projects, with reference a specific project.

Engaging actor network theory: a construction project and protest

Between 2008 and 2009 the first author undertook research into a large construction project in the UK which involved the redevelopment of an inner city bus station. Interviews and informal discussions with construction staff on the project revealed two, opposing, narratives of project success/failure that had percolated around the project over several years. These dispersed discussions are unfolded here as a vignette, interspersed with interview quotes, to illustrate how an ANT derived approach can be mobilized to understand the realization of differing narratives of failure, without re-imposing a priori (rationalist-normative) understandings of *the* reality of project failure. The small sample of empirical data contained in this paper is offered merely to illustrate and examine theoretical arguments, rather than offer a 'thick' ethnographic study of project failure. While it would be entirely possible to develop these arguments around power, politics and performativity in abstraction, we contend that such a purely theoretical exposition would insufficiently acknowledge the significance of encounters with project workers that inspired, and perhaps best illustrate this discussion, as well as tentatively suggest its fecundity for further empirical work. In accordance with our collaboration agreement, aspects of this account have been changed to maintain the anonymity of the individuals and organizations involved.

The redevelopment project had been hampered during its conception stage by a group of several protesters that had opposed the removal of the old bus station within the planned residential, retail, leisure, and transportation complex of buildings. The protesters explained that they objected to the destruction of the old bus station because its art deco design constituted part of the urban heritage of the city and also contained development potential. One protester had a van lifted into place on the roof of the old bus station, which they then lived in for several months. This act functioned not merely as a symbol of protest, but became a means of physically blocking the council, developer and bus operators (CDO) consortium from enrolling the site in their narrative of project success: the CDO saw the site as pivotal for urban regeneration and economic prosperity. Project failure for the CDO was defined in a ''rationalist-normative'' discourse (Vaara, 2002, pp. 225–229) as the inability to maximize the efficient commercial development of the site (and thus 'success' as the converse). For the protesters, project failure in this narrative (no commercial development) could equal 'success' in a rather different narrative: a vision of urban regeneration which emphasized the protection of the city's heritage.

ANT suggests that both of these narratives are seeking to not simply represent the reality of project performance but actually enact, or translate, different, related, project realities. These divergent translation processes are on-going, fragile and expansive: the protesters are seeking to extend their project reality to other sites throughout the city and beyond (homes, council chambers, shops, newspaper rooms, local television studios, neighbouring streets, conversations on buses) via the insertion of various mediators (e.g. websites, posters, media interviews, vans on roofs and placards) designed to define the identities and interests of particular actors ('the public remember and value the city's heritage', 'how could a good council destroy the city's heritage', 'this occupying van shows our resolve to protect the city for you, from them'). If the protesters are successful in defining and aligning the interests of this wide group, and speaking for them, then the project reality might coalesce around a

particular measure of its performance that is highly contradictory to that of the CDO. For their part, the CDO are seeking to extend the reality of their (rationalist-normative) project performance criteria to a range of slightly different sites (courts, police stations, council chambers) via the enrolment of actors (e.g. lawyers, judges, planning officers, police and local councillors), defined and interested through mediators (planning documents, predictions of economic development, property law, planning law). In effect, each performance narrative functions as an actor-network seeking to translate, or enact, entirely different, though sometimes over-lapping, project realities, and a range of associated actors from councillors, to plans, to various publics.

This project multiplicity resembles Mol's (1999) description of the multiple realities of Anaemia (as symptoms articulated by a patient; laboratory tests of the patient's blood against statistical norms of haemoglobin; examinations of the patient's specific capacity to transport oxygen). And in further similarity with Mol's (1999) analysis, these competing calculi of project success/failure were not merely circulating across, and around, the project through human interactions (e.g. Fincham, 2002; Vaara, 2002), rather a range of materialities, from leaflets, occupying vans to court cases, were also involved in enacting two project realties. However, unlike Mol's (1999) account, these multiple realities were unlikely to be "living-in-tension" (p. 83) for long as their interferences appeared far from productive; rather they outwardly sought to annihilate, or colonize, each other. Indeed, despite some public sympathy to the protesters cause, after a legal case they were forcibly evicted by the police and construction began. At the outset of the construction phase, the old bus station was quickly demolished, thus removing from the scene a key element of the protesters' project reality. However, during the intervening time the original developer had gone into administration due to the worsening economic situation in 2007—2008, and, although a replacement had been found, this developer would only support the partial development of the site, given the economic downturn. And so, while the enactment of the project reality of the protesters appeared to evaporate when the bus station was demolished, it endured to some extent as an absence witnessed in the CDO project reality: a lack of development and excess of space.

For the CDO, the project might appear to be a failure as it now did not maximize the efficient urban regeneration potential of this part of the city, however at this juncture the CDO reworked their definitions of project performance: the CDO group now simply sought to maximize the development of a new bus station and create some new retail and leisure development opportunities. The area which was previously earmarked for development could now offer a green space in the inner city — a partial victory for the protesters perhaps. Project failure was now managerially defined by the CDO purely as the failure of the chosen construction contractor to deliver the bus station to initial time/cost/quality targets. The delays caused by the protester actually appeared to offer some advantages to the construction contractor. The design plans of the new building had seemingly been extensively developed and the construction staff welcomed the extra free space around the site to accommodate materials, staff cabins and plant equipment:

> The initial impression here was it's a nice job, it's a fairly big site compared to some we are getting, some of the city centre sites we have got no room whatsoever, at least here we have not got restrictions on deliveries, we have got a bit of storage space (site manager).

In other words, even the highly hostile interference of the protesters project reality (which endured in the extra space on the site) now appeared strangely productive inside the CDO project reality: "Alternative realities do not simply coexist side by side, but are also found inside one another" (Mol, 1999, p. 85).

The realigned statement about performative criteria, in part determined by the (unplanned) effect of the colonization of the protesters project reality, had interested the contractor (and future tenants) in the project and kept the CDO group together. Ultimately the project was several months late in opening. The local media and the public deemed the project a 'failure': penalty fines (and legal claims) soured the relationship between the general contractor and the CDO; business and leisure units were not complete when the new bus station was opened, creating a PR failure for the CDO.

Given the mutability of such project performativities, we might follow an interpretive—discursive agenda (e.g. Fincham, 2002), and insist on alternative, reflective modes of practice to recognize performativity in more emergent ways (e.g. Cicmil & Hodgson, 2006; Geraldi et al., 2010; Hallgren and Wilson, 2008; Lindgren & Packendorff, 2006; Smith, 2007). However, ANT analysis indicates profound obstacles blocking this path. In construction projects, for example, a whole apparatus of disciplinary, managerialist, rationalist-normative practices seeks to powerfully translate project realities (and assimilate other realities, including other measures of success/failure). In this instance, the CDO had recruited a manifestly present 'hinterland' (Law, 2009b) of black boxed inscription devices (Law, 2006, p. 29) into their translation process to help label, name and measure, and thus construct, the reality of project 'failure' and 'success' in advance; both nonhumans (fees, balance sheets, legal contracts, KPIs, Gantt charts, rewards, fines, and computer systems) and humans (quantity surveyors, planners, project managers, site managers, accountants, lawyers, directors, investors). The project planner offers a glimpse of this translating actor-network:

> I will check our target programmes, and then where we are on site, check each sub-contractor and what they have to do, mark up drawings, colour them in to indicate progress as a percentage of work complete. Then I come back into the site office, mark up progress on our complete programmes and then reschedule it using the software. The software will tell you how future progress will be affected by current progress. The software really just tells us if the work programme is behind or in front of the target programme and then I report that back to management and the site team (Construction Planner).

The problem is, as Latour (1987) explains, that any dissenter to this managerialist translation of the reality of project performativity is now "faced with piles of black

boxes [work programmes, contracts, coloured drawings, planners, software, legal decisions, planning decisions] and obliged to untie the links between more and more elements coming from a more and more remote past'' (p. 93).

Performativities as ontological politics

While it is well-known that criteria of performance can and do emerge during a project, as actors respond to the complexities of project work (Ivory & Alderman, 2011; Sage et al., 2011; Tryggestad, Georg, & Hernes, 2010), as within other organizational settings (Brown & Jones, 1998; Spicer et al., 2009; Vaara, 2002), it is also clear that some performance calculi become more capable than others of defining, and thus helping to enact specific realities (Latour, 1996; Law, 2002). Consider the account above: the performance criteria given to the construction contractor appeared far more robust, or real, than that which protesters had earlier sought to instill. It is possible to explain these differing outcomes through appeals to the force of interwoven, force of hegemonic discourses (e.g. Late Capitialism, the Neoliberal State and rationalist-normative management theory); however, such macro analyses seem to obscure, rather than help elucidate the specific conduits and sites through which such grand narratives must travel (Latour, 2005, p. 187) and interfere with other realities.

ANT suggests that if any calculus of organizational performativity appears 'powerful' this is only because it is well-connected, well-translated, well-realized. The implication here being that organizational performativities implicate actors far beyond the narrow confines of a particular organization if they are to be realized: ''realities (as well as knowledge of realities) depend on practices that include or relate to a hinterland of other relevant practices — that in turn enact *their* own realities'' (Law, 2009b, p. 241; original emphasis). While interpretive—discursive approaches to organizational performativity can recognize the plurivocality of performance narratives, articulated perhaps within polyphonic organizations (Clegg et al., 2006), the relational, more-than-representational (Lorrimer, 2005), and reticulated enactment of multiple performative realities, and indeed multiple organizational realities, cannot be fully acknowledged in either rationalist-normative or interpretive—discursive accounts.

What then of the specific aim of this paper to advance novel understandings of the power and politics of performativities. First, as should be clear by this point, ANT, as sketched out here, cannot help those (e.g. Cooke-Davies, 2002) seeking to reveal the 'real' causes of organizational, or management, failure (or success). Secondly, neither can ANT be deployed as a theoretical lens to explain pluralistic sensemaking around *the* reality of organizational performance: ANT cannot function as a methodological prism to illuminate the 'polyphonic organization' articulated by Clegg et al. (2006). Thirdly, and on more productive note, ANT can aid those seeking to bring into being 'heterotopias' (other places, other worlds) *inside*, rather than outside, extant organizations, as discussed by Spicer et al. (2009). ANT also certainly aids those interested in understanding how the 'pluriverse', a concept offered by William James, is *organized* politically and ontologically (see Latour, 2004). More specifically, ANT can encourage us to become more reflexive about the on-going, heterogeneous and multiple processes of translation, including our own as scholars, through which measures of performativity are *realized*. In the remainder of this paper we will reflect upon the profoundly political implications of ontological performativity.

> If realities are enacted, then reality is not in principle fixed or singular, and truth is no longer the only ground for accepting or rejecting a representation. The implication is that there are various possible reasons, including the political, for enacting one kind of reality rather than another, and that these grounds can in some measure be debated (Law, 2006, p. 162).

Ontological performativity, multiplicity, and politics, is persistently elided, in both appeals to critical failure factors that objectively constitute *the* project (Belassi & Tukel, 1996; Cooke-Davies, 2002; Fortune and Whyte, 2006; Ika, 2009; Venugopal & Suryaprakasa Ra, 2011; Yeo, 2002) *and* notions that performance depends upon your perspective of in the project (Fincham, 2002; Vaara, 2002) or the organization (Brown & Jones, 1998; Vaara, 2002).

Law (2002, 2006, 2009a) explains how accounts about how reality can (variously) be understood, or represented, presuppose that reality is singular, a priori, independent, definite (Law, 2006); in other words ''the possibility that an ontology is being created or performed is concealed by the focus of attention on epistemology'' (Law, 2002, p. 35). Consequently, claims to represent organizational performance, are already constructing a particular reality, and notions of the good/bad, while simultaneously denying this performance (Law, 2006). This displacement of ontological performativity, as it occurs, rather ironically perhaps, in descriptions of organizational performance, is worthy of more attention, both within the *Making Projects Critical*/*Rethinking Project Management* movements, and indeed wider discussions of performativity within management and organizational studies, not least the CMS 'project'.

It is precisely the concept of ontological performativity which explains the unease we feel towards the paradox identified at the start of this paper. That is, if authors (e.g. Cicmil et al., 2009; Grey, 2009) identify the pervasive reality of (project) management failure as leverage for a radical re-conceptualization of management, then they are (inadvertently) enacting managerialist performativities. Moreover, even if we go further and follow Fincham (2002) and Vaara (2002), by recognizing the emergent polyvocality of perspectives on performance (as implied by Clegg et al., 2006), then we risk obscuring the overlapping interferences of related, but entirely different, organizational realities, and concomitant distributions of performativity: ''the centre, the object of the many gazes and glances [*the* project, *the* organization] remains singular, intangible, untouched'' (Mol, 1999, p. 76).

It is beyond the scope of this paper to address what sorts of varied organizational realities might be being created elsewhere (on construction see Sage, 2012), and what specific (non-coherent) interferences are being played, and with what effects (see e.g. Sage, Dainty, & Brookes, 2010), yet it is apparent that it is only be recognizing the possibility that such multiple, overlapping, realities are

being *performed*, that radical performative values (e.g. work-life balance, sustainability, and social justice), might not simply be described, but enacted. Alcadipani and Hassard (2010) explain that acknowledging ontological performativity implies adopting a (political) stance to organizational research that seeks to "strengthen realities that otherwise would be fragile" (p. 428). Thus, for example, if through careful empirical analysis we become passionate about the good in a construction protester's project reality, we might seek to strengthen this reality and weaken others (cf. Law, 2009b; Law & Mol, 2008; Mol, 2008). This has an important corollary: the complaint made about the CMS 'project' that esoteric issues of epistemology and ontology have displaced its radical, progressive, and indeed performative intent (Perrow, 2008), are, we argue, missing the point. If ontology is performative then it is political; if claims about performance are political then they are ontological; if the "facts do not speak for themselves" (Grey, 2009, p. 153), if every proposition about the reality of organizational knowledge seeks to more or less explicitly bring into being the world it is seeking to describe (not least CMS (Clegg et al., 2006; Rowlinson & Hassard, 2011)), then questions of epistemology and ontology are inescapable when discussing any political stance, any notion of the good life, any critical performativity (contra Spicer et al., 2009, p. 538).

However, it is also important to stress here that ANT offers no possibility to freely choose amongst different realities, there is no transcendental position outside realities to judge and evaluate them (Mol, 2002). Rather, as Gad and Jensen (2010) explain, "possibilities seem to exist everywhere. Important normative moments and decisions therefore often appear as originating elsewhere and feel as if out of reach" as "different enactments do not necessarily exclude each other but may be in various ways be entwined" (p. 72). Thus, by partly bringing into being the interwoven ontological multiplicity of a construction project, we have weakened managerial enactments of the "singular, dependent, definite and a priori" (Law, 2006) reality of *the* project, its goodness, it success (or failure), as it itself is shown to rely upon, and be shaped by, a hinterland of othered, more vulnerable (Middleton & Brown, 2005), often absent (Law & Singleton, 2005), project realities, including radically divergent performativities, such as those of protest. We have also enacted here other multiple, overlapping organizational realities: it is apparent that managerialist studies of *the* reality of project performance, associated with rationalist-normative managerialist discourse, are being partly sustained by that which appears outside (and othered by) them, namely the epistemological problem of how we view *the* reality of performance differently, evoked within 'critical' interpretive—discursive studies of organizational performance. We might think of this perhaps as a (re)enactment of the ontological politics supporting Grey's (2007) deliberations about the co-dependence of mainstream and critical research communities.

Summary and conclusion

Much has been made of epistemologies and ontologies of performance across the social sciences, under the influence of such seminal contributions as Schechner's *Performance Theory* (Schechner, 2003), Butler's *Gender Trouble* (Butler, 1990), and more recently Thrift's *Non-Representational Theory: Space, Politics and Affect* (Thrift, 2008); yet in these times of austerity the word 'performance' arguably increasingly resonates with a resolutely managerial drift, welded to maxims of efficiency, control and profit. We want to suggest here a small move towards challenging this conceptual (and political) myopia, while also not downplaying the influence of managerial practice upon performance. Indeed across diverse academic projects, the concept of 'performance' has oscillated between philosophical ruminations (Anderson & Harrison, 2010; Butler, 1990; Lorrimer, 2005; Schechner, 2003; Thrift, 2008) and the strict rationalist-normative maxims of management, sometimes even in the hands of critically minded authors. By weaving together here philosophical strands of performativity alongside engagement with managerial performativity, we can better recognize and advance the ontological politics of management. To repeat an earlier slogan: if ontologies and performative, multiple, and political, then performativities are ontological, multiple and political, and thus can always be realized differently.

We intend this paper to have a utopian, or rather heterotopian, refrain; yet we will end on a cautionary note. As (hopefully) has become clear throughout this paper, while we can admit that measures, or calculi, of performativity, (whether project success/failure, or simply good project/bad projects) are ontologically enacted, performative values themselves ("this project failed", "this organization is successful", "this organization is good") cannot be wholly reduced to the enactment of realities (Law, 2009a). If this were not the case than any good project, or indeed good protest, could readily overcome any bad project, or bad organization. Rather, goodness must be worked upon alongside reality: "The conclusion is inescapable: as we write we have a simultaneous responsibility both to the real and to the good" (Law, 2009a, p. 153). Alas, however, in enacting this nascent project to rehearse the ontological politics of organizational performativities, we, like all other project practitioners, cannot assume, or determine, its realization, success, nor virtue:

> All projects are still born at the outset. Existence has to be added to them continuously, so they can take on body, can impose their growing coherence on those who argue about them or oppose them. No project is born profitable, effective, or brilliant, any more than the Amazon at its source has the massive dimensions it takes on at its mouth (Latour, 1996, p. 79).

Acknowledgements

We are extremely grateful to the numerous construction practitioners that inspired and shaped this paper. The current and former editor of the journal, and two anonymous reviewers, also significantly helped us strengthen the argument presented here. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Making Projects Critical workshop at the University of the West of England in January 2010.

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