The Meeting Revisited: Emergent Events, (Dis)order, and Cultivating Organization

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THE MEETING REVISITED:

EMERGENT EVENTS, (DIS)ORDER, AND CULTIVATING ORGANIZATION

by

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This dissertation entitled:
The Meeting Revisited:
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The final copy of this dissertation has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

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Inspired by the recent publication of *The Cambridge Handbook of Meeting Science* and particularly Schwartzman’s (2015) concluding chapter, I write this dissertation to closely examine the order-disorder dynamic of meetings. Order represents momentary accomplishments or achievements in meeting events, which could always be otherwise. Disorder, on the other hand, represents the “local sense” of a meeting which both energizes and resists order. In order to study this order-disorder dynamic, I situate my work in the relational ontological turn, particularly DeLanda’s (2006) theory of assemblages. This ontological grounding provides the foundation for a perspective of meetings as emergent events, where order and disorder are emergent effects. This perspective further brings together two research traditions: the ethnography of communication (Hymes, 1972; Schwartzman, 1989) and the Montreal School in the communicative constitution of organization tradition (Cooren, 2010; Taylor & Van Every, 2000). With these perspectives together, I ask the question: How do meetings as emergent events cultivate the transient effects of organization and culture?

My research design utilized ethnography and practices of the ethnography of communication to inform data collection and analysis. I conducted a four-year ethnography with a small nonprofit organization called Suicide Prevention Campaign, particularly focusing on their meetings, which tended to be held through hybrid or virtual means. For data analysis, I constructed a descriptive framework that involves: temporality, act dynamics, contingently obligatory relations, and emergent effects.

In the analysis chapters, I use narratives to represent the eventfulness of meetings. I detail three ways that meetings as emergent events cultivate the transient effects of organization and culture: deciding, legitimizing, and presence-ing. Deciding demonstrates the power of repetition, documents, and rhythm in organizing meetings. I claim that legitimizing acts to drag disorder toward order, but not all disorder can be “transformed” because there are always excesses, surpluses, and supplements to order. Finally, I argue that hybrid meetings presence disorder in distractions, disruptions, and interruptions, which play an integral role in meetings by simultaneously energizing and resisting order. I conclude the work with a discussion of cultivation for design in applied research and several future directions in meeting science.

Keywords: meetings, ethnography of communication, communicative constitution of organization, order and disorder
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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION: REVISITING THE MEETING

Meetings are one of the most commonly occurring communication events in contemporary organizations. At times they are praised for bringing a sense of order to the chaos of organizational lives, and at others they are decried for bringing disorder to what had otherwise appeared to be an organized world. Scholars who attend to this commonplace event often laud Helen Schwartzman’s (1989) tome, The Meeting, as the first work to focus research interest on meetings themselves, rather than other phenomena that happen to occur during meetings. In this work she argues that “meetings create pockets of order in an often disordered world, but they are also responsible for reversing, inverting, upsetting, and disassembling organizational worlds” (p. 313-314), thus planting the seed for other scholars to take up this important line of research.

Twenty-six years later, several scholars followed her edict to study meetings as phenomena worthy of such investigative focus. This body of work came together in the recent The Cambridge Handbook of Meeting Science, edited by Joseph Allen, Nale Lehmann-Willenbrock, and Steven Rogelberg (2015b). The extensive volume pays tribute to Helen Schwartzman as the genesis of scholarly concern with meetings, with most chapter authors citing her in some way as generating a concern for the particular area on which they write. Topics included in the volume range from the variety of theoretical lenses that have been used to study meetings (Scott, Allen, Rogelberg, & Kello, 2015) to premeeting activities and context (Aksoy-Burkert & König, 2015; Duffý & O’Rourke, 2015; Gerpott & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2015; Hansen & Allen, 2015; Köhler & Götz, 2015; Odermatt, König, & Kleinmann, 2015; Van Eerde & Buengeler, 2015; Yoerger, Francis, & Allen, 2015) to the meeting itself (Asmuß, 2015; Beck, Paskewitz, & Keyton, 2015; Brodeur, 2015; Haug, 2015; Hoogeboom & Wilderom, 2015;
Klonk, Paulsen, & Kauffeld, 2015; Kocsis, de Vreede, & Briggs, 2015; Lei & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2015; Littlepage, 2015; Meinecke & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2015; Raclaw & Ford, 2015; Reiter-Palmon & Sands, 2015; Sauer, Meinecke, & Kauffeld, 2015; Thomas & Allen, 2015; and even to investigation of special types of meetings (Allison, Shuffler, & Wallace, 2015; Cichomska, Roe, & Leach, 2015; Lacerenza, Gregory, Marshall, & Salas, 2015; Scott, Dunn, Williams, & Allen, 2015). At the end of this volume sit two chapters to synthesize the work included throughout, one written by Kello (2015) to summarize the implications for practice of meetings, and another written by Schwartzman (2015) herself to summarize and comment on the state of the field.

In her concluding chapter, Schwartzman (2015) applauds the wealth of research that has been inspired by her early work and interest in meetings. However, her commentary on the volume also has an uneasiness or dissatisfaction with the direction of this research. Her chapter especially stands in stark contrast to the immediately preceding chapter where Kello (2015) suggests a number of ways to control meetings and make them better, many of which draw on the body of research summarized in the volume. Schwartzman (2015) opens her chapter by referencing Melville Dalton’s (1959) *Men Who Manage* with the following quote,

> The formal meeting is a gallery of fronts where aimless, deviant, and central currents of action merge for a moment, perfunctorily for some, emotionally for others. All depart with new knowledge to pursue variously altered, but rarely the agreed courses. (Dalton, 1959, p. 227, quoted in Schwartzman, 2015, p. 735).

By referencing Dalton (1959) here, Schwartzman (2015) positions herself as interested in both the order and the disorder of meetings. Opening her chapter, she writes:
There’s something about meetings that makes researchers and participants want to change them, control them, order them and make them predictable. But there’s something about meetings that makes them resistant to efforts to change, improve, order, and make them predictable. (p. 735)

These opening lines present the contrast between her view of meetings and Kello’s (2015) view that focuses on the order of meetings. She is as interested, if not more so, in the disorder of meetings as unavoidable rather than potentially controllable. This is one of the areas where she praises the authors of this volume, for as she writes they push back on the “overwhelming tendency” to want to order and control meetings. To argue against this overwhelming tendency she writes,

one of the things that we also see over and over again is that, as researchers and practitioners search for order, meetings in particular settings seem to push back in ways that are often difficult to understand but that frequently produce a sense of disorder and frustration for anyone who has to attend them. (p. 737)

She picks up on several areas where the chapters included in the volume push back against some of the “folk theories” about meetings, including the need to understand and explain the appearance of a meeting in the first place, that a meeting event must be sustained by talk, and “the idea that individuals (especially certain individuals such as those in leadership/management positions) are always (or should always be) in charge of what happens in organizational settings” (p. 739). Although she praises authors in this volume for pushing back on folk theories in these ways, the total thrust of the volume does not push back against these folk theories. In sum, Schwartzman advocates for a focus on the moments where researchers treat meetings as events. To bolster this focus, she makes a call for more research that focuses on “meetings as events with
agency”, although she recognizes that only one chapter (Duffy & O’Rourke, 2015) came closest to conceptualizing meetings in this way, and the chapter authors did not use the word in their writing (p. 740). Although she is pushing for more research on meetings as events, and writing that much of this volume pushes in these directions, the main thrust of the volume still treats meetings as interesting tools rather than constitutive or emergent events.

One of the central arguments of Schwartzman’s (2015) chapter is that there is an order and disorder dynamic for meeting events. Order, Schwartzman recognizes, “is an obvious and immediate need… because for a ‘meeting’ to occur and be recognized as such in all speaking communities, it is necessary to shift from one form of speaking – often a more casual or less formal way of speaking – to the form of speaking that is recognized by the community as appropriate ‘meeting talk’” (p. 737; cf. Atkinson, Cuff, & Lee, 1978). As opposed to Robert’s Rules of Order and perspectives that treat meetings as tools, Schwartzman instead views order as an accomplishment, or an interactional achievement (cf. Asmuß, 2015; Raclaw and Ford, 2015). However, “it is always possible that the interactional ‘order’ that is ‘achieved’ in these settings will be upset” (p. 739). As I noted above, Schwartzman also recognizes that an “important American folk theory supports the urge to order meetings and try to change them,” which depends on the tight coupling of individual intention, organizational processes, and organizational action (p. 739). She argues that a move away from this kind of individual-centeredness is productive to further understanding the meeting event.

Schwartzman also discusses the disorder part of this meeting event dynamic. Schwartzman (1981) first published about processes of disorder as “dancing” in meetings. Reflecting on this piece in her 2015 chapter, she writes that dancing “involved a complicated system of saying one thing in terms of something else, in order to define ‘reality’ in one way that
might then be contested by someone else” (p. 741). As a phenomenon of performance, “dancing” in meetings sounds similar to the ways other scholars wrestle with disorder. Vásquez, Schoeneborn, and Sergi (2016) propose the concept of (dis)ordering, which describes “communication-based organizational processes through which meaning is simultaneously opened (i.e. disordering) and closed (i.e. ordering)” (p. 630). (Dis)ordering then posits or attempts to define “reality” in one way, which closes meaning, but simultaneously opens meaning to be contested or (re)defined.

Schwartzman (2015) continues to discuss disorder beyond “dancing.” She explicates a guideline that future meetings research should follow, which she calls the principle of “local sense”:

That is, the first and most important assumption a researcher concerned with understanding meetings should make is that the meetings that occur in a particular setting make “local sense” in this context(s). In other words, they are “doing something” in/for the setting. They may not make sense to everyone and there may be great resistance to them, but the researcher’s (and also the practitioner’s) first assumption should always be that in some important way they make “local sense.” (p. 742)

Schwartzman’s principle of “local sense” could be interpreted in a variety of ways, but here I address two possibilities. One possibility of what she means by “local sense” could be the typical ethnographic edict to find the sense of the locals, or the people of a community. Meetings, thus, make sense to the locals, even if they do not make sense to the researcher or the practitioner. However, in this dissertation I show that Schwartzman’s “local sense” has a richer meaning than the local symbolic coherence of a community. If meetings do not “make sense to
everyone,” and if the practitioner is implicated in this edict to assume that meetings make “local sense,” then this “local sense” does not reference the human locals’ understandings, but rather the sense that is local to the meeting. A second take on the word sense also references the senses, or feeling something through sight, sound, touch, taste, or scent, instead of making sense as in understanding. Thus, “local sense” could refer to the senses of a meeting, which make up a meeting, and are only done so in particular locations, contexts, or settings. Therefore, different “senses” of meetings, and thus differences in the meeting form, may have less to do with the humans who construct the event, and more to do with how the event itself proceeds.

In the remainder of this introduction, I argue that in order to see both the order and the disorder of meetings we need to articulate meetings as emergent events. This move involves one that Schwartzman (1989) has been advocating for since her original volume, where she writes,

> When we move beyond the individual bias of most organizational theories, it is possible to see how a social form such as the meeting may create and control the structures of everyday life along with the influence and authority of specific individuals in organizations. (Schwartzman, 1989, p. 222, emphasis added)

Throughout her work, Schwartzman (1989) attempted to center meetings in her focus, and thereby de-center the intentions of individuals and groups. Although much of the work in *The Cambridge Handbook of Meeting Science* centers meetings as the focus of research, most of the chapters do not de-center individual intention. Without this de-centering, the disorder of meetings appears as something that could be eradicated, rather than understood. Schwartzman (2015) even positions most of the research included within the volume as focusing on the order of meetings, rather than the disorder. To illuminate this aspect of meetings alongside the already
illuminated order of meetings, I argue for using a view of meetings as emergent events. This view addresses several of Schwartzman’s (2015) calls for future research in her chapter.

Taking the order and disorder dynamic that she describes, Schwartzman (2015) called for several future research directions by the end of her chapter, most of which motivate my dissertation project toward understanding meetings as emergent events. First, Schwartzman calls for researchers “to consider and theorize the relationship that exists between meetings and documents (such as agendas, reports, etc.) and how this relationship unfolds ‘before, during, and after’ a meeting event” (p. 743). This specific call draws attention to two specific areas that affect the direction of my dissertation. One area is to pay attention to relations between meetings and other kinds of phenomena or actions, like documents. In this dissertation, I seek to address relations more specifically through the relational ontological turn, which I discuss further below and how this connects to the kinds of work that Schwartzman produced on meetings in her career. Another area is to pay attention to documents and the unfolding of relations throughout the event. This area affected my research design to include document collection alongside participant-observation of meetings, which I discuss further in Chapter 3.

This first future direction links with the second. Schwartzman “strongly” encourages future research that considers “retrospective talk” about meetings, because “this form of talk (such as telling stories about meetings that have occurred) has a powerful influence on how a group defines, and sometimes redefines, its understanding of what happens, before, during, and after meetings” (p. 739). This “retrospective talk” or retrospective accounts of meetings often take the form of meeting minutes, in addition to the kinds of talk that Schwartzman describes in this quote. The relation between meetings and meeting minutes, thus, provides an interesting point to interrogate for meetings, which I do in the course of this dissertation project (see
Chapter 6. In particular, Schwartzman argues that future research should address how meetings and documents, like meeting minutes, or meetings and retrospective talk “shape each other” (p. 743).

Finally, and most importantly for my project, Schwartzman calls for work that pays attention to “the interaction between face-to-face meetings and virtual/electronic meetings” (p. 744). Specifically, she calls attention to the hybrid meeting, which mixes face-to-face and virtual participation. She poses that scholars need to “develop a better understanding of what this hybrid form looks like, feels like, and even ‘thinks’ like” (p. 744). This call drew my attention to the virtual and hybrid meetings of my ethnographic site, Suicide Prevention Campaign (SPC), which served as the primary form of meeting throughout my research with them. With these future research directions in mind, as well as the the dynamic of order and disorder that she proposes as a focal point for meetings research, I developed this dissertation project to address as many of these areas as possible with the ethnography I conducted.

Throughout the rest of this chapter I outline the theoretical background behind treating meetings as emergent events. First, I start with an overview of three ways that scholars have defined meetings, and discuss how treating meetings as an emergent event aligns with and detracts from these traditional definitions. Second, I outline the ontological foundation of treating meetings as emergent events and overview the ontological turn in which I ground this perspective. Third, I describe two theoretical perspectives that are brought together by this perspective of meetings, the ethnography of communication and the Montreal School of organizational communication, and how these perspectives each contribute to taking meetings as emergent events. Fourth, I set out my research question that guides this dissertation. Finally, I
conclude the chapter with a description of the practical significance and scholarly significance of this project, and then preview the remaining chapters of this dissertation.

**Defining Meetings**

Meetings have been defined myriad ways in the literature since Schwartzman’s (1989) initial definition. Three definitions are repeatedly cited throughout the literature, so these are the three on which I focus in this section.

The first is Schwartzman’s (1989) definition from her tome on meetings. She defines a meeting as:

A communicative event involving three or more people who agree to assemble for a purpose ostensibly related to the functioning of an organization or a group, for example, to exchange ideas or opinions, to solve a problem, to make a decision or negotiate an agreement, to develop policy and procedures, to formulate recommendations, and so forth. A meeting is characterized by multiparty talk that is episodic in nature, and participants either develop or use specific conventions... for regulating this talk. Participants assume that this talk in some way relates to the ostensible purpose of the meeting and the meeting form frames the behavior that occurs within it as concerning the “business” of the group or organization.

(p. 7)

Boden (1994) is also often cited for her definition of meetings, especially in the literature from organizational communication. She describes a meeting as:

A planned gathering, whether internal or external to an organization, in which the participants have some perceived (if not guaranteed) role, have some forewarning (either longstanding or quite improvisational) of the event, which has itself some
purpose or “reason,” a time, place, and, in some general sense, an organizational function. (p. 84)

Finally, another definition that is often cited in the literature on meeting practices is Rogelberg, Leach, Warr, and Burnfield’s (2006) definition, which is summarized by the following in Allen, Lehmann-Willenbrock, & Rogelberg, (2015a):

[Meetings are] purposeful work-related interactions occurring between at least two individuals that have more structure than a simple chat, but less than a lecture. Meetings are typically scheduled in advance, last 30 to 60 minutes on average, and can be conducted face to face, in distributed settings (e.g., conference calls), or as a combination of the two modes. (p. 4)

Together these definitions share some common features that I take to be defining meetings in general, and particularly as emergent events. First, Schwartzman (1989) and Boden (1994) both mention the meeting as an “event”. Schwartzman (1989) is likely referencing that the meeting is a communication event, which is one of the key concepts of the ethnography of communication (Hymes, 1974). Boden (1994) does not share this intellectual heritage, but nonetheless calls the meeting an event.

The second common feature between these definitions is that meetings bring individuals (participants, people) together. Likely all of these definitions are referencing human individuals, but as I will discuss below and in Chapter 2 people are not the only “individuals” necessary to or involved in a meeting.

The third common feature defines meetings as specifically organizational or work-related events. Although there is a vast literature on public meetings, I will be focusing on those that are organizational or work related throughout this dissertation.
Finally, Boden (1994) and Rogelberg, et al.’s (2006) definitions focus on meetings having both time and place. The temporality of meetings is essential to understanding the meeting as an event, and it is also important to notice that meetings happen in places. However, as Rogelberg, et al. note, these places could be distributed and brought together through technology, which itself is also an interesting process that I explore in this dissertation.

These four common features serve as my general definition of meetings, however they should not be taken as a comprehensive picture of the meeting event. As Allen, et al. (2015a) write, these definitions “fail to capture the depth and breadth of meetings in general. In other words, the definitions help us identify what is and is not a meeting, but they do not capture its underlying intangible essence” (p. 4-5). This “underlying intangible essence”, I argue, is central to the complexity of the meeting as an emergent event, and is a key aspect of what the literature that treats meetings as tools misses in their research. In other words, “there’s something about meetings” that the extant research is missing, and I claim that in order to see this we need to view meetings as emergent events.

Emergent Events: Ontological Foundation

One of the distinguishing features of the perspective I am articulating here is its ontological grounding. The typical ontologies that meeting scholars base their work upon have several shortcomings that “limit the capacity of scholars to develop theoretical explanations for how what happens in work meetings would or should affect individual and organizational outcomes” (Scott, Allen, et al., 2015, p. 21). One of the integral shortcomings is the limited “ability of scholars to develop and hone the theoretical explanations necessary to fully understand complex meeting phenomena” (Olien, Rogelberg, Lehmann-Willenbrock, & Allen, 2015, p. 16). Furthermore, Scott, Allen, et al., (2015) argue that there is a need for studies that
include “reflection on the ontological status of work meetings,” moving beyond treating meetings as containers of other processes to examine other ways that “meeting communication can be conceptualized” (p. 21-22). Their call further specifies that there is a need for studies that focus on “theoretical questions about what meetings are and how they fit into larger organizational processes and outcomes” (p. 20). In this section I address this critical need by providing the ontological reflections of treating meetings as emergent events, and discuss how these “fit into larger organizational processes”.

To begin a reflection on the ontology of treating meetings as emergent events, I begin with Schwartzman’s (1989) work that first articulates meetings as events worthy of scholarly attention. One of the key aspects of her argument is that individual experience of organizing primarily occurs from meeting to meeting. As she writes, “on the ground individuals move from practice to practice, event to event, occasion to occasion” (Schwartzman, 1989, p. 37, emphasis in original). Furthermore, she writes that in some ways it “seems unnecessary to move from practice to structure, or culture, or vice versa” (p. 37), precisely because individuals experience the movement from event to event, and rarely (if ever) experience the organization or the culture “itself”. She treats the meeting as constitutive of organization and culture both in her 1989 book, and later in her concluding chapter to The Cambridge Handbook of Meeting Science.

However, her work and others that treat meetings as constitutive of organization and/or culture still falls short of an ontological ground upon which a concern for both order and disorder can be built. In order to treat meetings as emergent events, in a way similar to her call for studies that conceptualize “meetings as events with agency” (Schwartzman, 2015, p. 740), there needs to be a shift in the ontological ground. This shift would involve turning away from providing a view of what is constituted in meetings, to a view of how meetings constitute, or an ontology that
foregrounds reality as moving from “event to event, practice to practice, occasion to occasion”. In order to study meetings in this way, and to treat them as emergent events, we need to attend to a turn toward an ontology based in “relations of exteriority” (DeLanda, 2006), rather than “relations of interiority” that treat meetings as a part that is constitutive of an organizational or cultural whole (DeLanda, 2006).

Let’s delve deeper into the distinction between these two ontological statements and the differences between them. As Schwartzman (1989) writes that it seems unnecessary to move to structure or culture from practice, DeLanda (2006) argues that those who do move from practice to structure and culture might be doing so based on an organismic metaphor that treats society as analogous to the human body. He writes that this is based on a “general theory about the relations between parts and wholes, wholes that constitute a seamless totality or that display an organic unity” (p. 9). He calls these relations “relations of interiority,” which focus on how “the component parts are constituted by the very relations they have to other parts in the whole” (p. 9). Giddens’s (1979) structuration theory is posed as a prime example: structures are made up of routines and rules, which must be constituted in practice, where agency takes over. Agency reproduces structure, and sometimes can change it, although DeLanda (2006) seems skeptical of how this would happen with relations of interiority. As he writes, “Allowing the possibility of complex interactions between component parts is crucial to define mechanisms of emergence, but this possibility disappears if the parts are fused together into a seamless web” (p. 10). He treats emergence here as the appearance of “irreducible properties” of the whole that cannot be attributed to the totality of individual parts, but rather “emerge from the interactions between parts” (p. 10). Theories that treat component parts as mutually constitutive with a whole create the seamless web he references (the whole), and therefore they do not allow theoretical room to
understand change or the emergence of these “irreducible properties”. In this system subsisting of relations of interiority, relations are “logically necessary” because “a seamless whole is inconceivable except as a synthesis of these very parts” (DeLanda, 2006, p. 11).

In contrast to this, DeLanda (2006) poses that relations of exteriority more readily allow for emergence and change to be seen. These relations are “contingently obligatory” in that several parts may seem as if they must be put together because they have evolved that way through their histories. DeLanda likens this to an ecosystem metaphor. Plants and animals would all exist outside of the ecosystem, but together they have exercised their capacities and developed relations that only over time have become necessary for each other’s survival. These relations of exteriority are not “logically necessary” to make up an ecosystem, because ecosystems can be made of myriad components and are not defined by parts which are solely defined by their relation to the whole. As DeLanda further writes, it is important to note that it is not the properties of components that “explain the relations which constitute a whole”, but rather “the actual exercise of their capacities” (p. 11). Therefore, it is in action that relations form, that “wholes” emerge, and that effects can be seen. Without action, there are no relations, and yet the parts do not lose their identities because no whole has emerged.

Although DeLanda’s (2006) statements do not define the ontological turn, as several other scholars have attempted their own statement of what the current ontological turn is (Coole & Frost, 2010; Cooper, 2005; Emirbayer, 1997), I do think that his distinction made here between two ontological viewpoints makes a useful distinction in the case of meetings. As I discuss in the literature review in Chapter 2, many scholars readily treat meetings as tools that are used as part of organizational wholes. Without “an” organization, an entity that is itself treated as having a variety of component parts like work teams and hierarchies, meetings would
lose their meaning. And furthermore, an organization without meetings seems to be unthinkable. Meetings, therefore, are logically necessary parts of an organizational whole in their perspective. However, a wealth of the literature would largely disagree.

As I wrote above, other scholars have treated meetings as constitutive events. In this view, the meeting provides a space and context for component parts of a team or organization to constitute themselves as such. This is by and large the theory that was “cutting edge” at the time of Schwartzman’s (1989) writing. However, just as Giddens’s ideas of structuration are based on relations of interiority, so are these views. The focus remains on the human parts that constitute a meeting whole, although often these scholars recognize that other parts are logically necessary as well (a meeting space, for example). The human parts of this meeting whole, however, are also considered logically necessary for a meeting to occur, and for an organization to be made. If you remove a human from a meeting, the meeting may still happen, but the “whole” organization will be changed, and this human part loses its (organizational) meaning. However, I do not think this is the direction or the end for which Schwartzman’s (1989, 2015) work argues. Her writing is almost obsessively focused on the meeting itself, on action, and she is especially interested by and puzzled with disorder. If humans were the main component parts, if meeting relations were “logically necessary,” then why does disorder still emerge from meetings?

In order to address disorder, change, and emergence, researchers must shift their view of relations. I argue that in order to do this we need a third possible view of meetings that treats them as emergent events. Meetings are constitutive of organizations, but not because they are one of the component parts or an event that brings them together. Meetings, and the contingently obligatory relations that have coevolved through the history of their actions, produce organization as an effect. Without action, organization does not happen. Organization itself is
not a state arrived at, but rather a constant process of action (cf. Cooper, 1986; Vásquez, et al., 2016). Meetings are usually held in the name of order. However, as Cooper (1986) would argue, order only comes out of the zero state of disorder, therefore order is “less than” the expansive view possible, and disorder is “more than” what order includes. Order places a frame around some actions or relations, and necessarily cannot be fully representative of a full event. Contingently obligatory relations, in DeLanda’s (2006) view, do not create a seamless web, but rather, sometimes, a buzzing confusion or a felt disorder. The felt experience of “disorder” may often contribute to the urge to control or order these events, but often our efforts to control meetings result in further frustrations or surprising results. Meetings have the capacity to surprise us not because we cannot know the intentions of other people and therefore do not fully know the properties of our fellow components, but because it is through action that relations and “effects” emerge that do not fit into the reduction of order.

When we shift our focus to action as the origination of being, we shift toward an ontology of becoming and relationality (Cooper, 2005; Emirbayer, 1997). Components become relations in action, and thus action is necessary for organization or other effects to “become”. Questions become “how” instead of “what” or “why”. In treating meetings as emergent events, I argue that researchers should not be solely focused on the patterns that seem to constitute the typical or the “logically necessary”. Instead, when the focus turns to action, it allows us to see both how patterns come to be (become) and how uniqueness also emerges alongside this. We find how both order and disorder, or organization and disorganization, come to be. We come closer to understanding the “underlying intangible essence” of meetings that defies definition. It is with this view of meetings as emergent events, this perspective grounded in the ontological turn, that I argue we can view the disorder-order dynamic produced in meetings. This view helps
us to come to understand not how meetings “fit into larger organizational processes”, but rather how “larger organizational processes” emerge out of meetings.

**A Meeting of Perspectives**

Meetings themselves bring into relation two areas of the communication discipline: language and social interaction and organizational communication. Scholars who specialize in one area or the other are represented in *The Cambridge Handbook of Meeting Science*, however they are rarely cited side by side. Language and social interaction scholars, like Raclaw and Ford (2015), often focus on the minute details of interaction like pieces of a puzzle that work together to produce a meeting. On the other hand, organizational communication scholars, like Beck and Keyton (2009) or Scott, Allen, et al. (2015), often focus on how meetings fit in larger contexts, like organization, or how they work with/in organizations. Neither perspective wholly supports the view that I articulate here. However, when acting together, a productive relation emerges for viewing meetings as emergent events.

In order to best put these into relation, I want to put in action two perspectives that do not easily go together. In other words, this is not a “logically necessary” relation between language and social interaction and organizational communication, but rather a “contingently obligatory” relation prompted by meetings research and Schwartzman’s (1989, 2015) work in particular. Specifically, this brings together the ethnography of communication as a perspective of language and social interaction and the Montreal School as situated in organizational communication. In the next sections, I briefly describe these perspectives and what importance they bring to treating meetings as emergent events.

**The Ethnography of Communication: Communication Events**
Schwartzman (1989, 2015) bases her work on a language and social interaction perspective called the ethnography of communication. This perspective comes from linguistic anthropology and was developed by Dell Hymes and his colleagues who sought to discover local means and meanings of speech (see Hymes 1972, 1974). Originally termed ethnography of speaking, the name was revised to include nonverbal as well as verbal communication.

Schwartzman (1989) particularly picked up on the concept of a speech event (also referenced here as a communication event to reflect the same revision mentioned above). According to Hymes (1972), communication events are “activities, or aspects of activities, that are directly governed by rules or norms for the use of speech” (p. 56). Communication events serve as one of the primary sites where communities integrate language and social life. For Schwartzman, meetings are a specialized kind of communication event that can be found across cultures. Furthermore, the communication event includes “properties not reducible to those of the speaking competence of persons” (p. 53). The SPEAKING framework to study communication events demonstrates the interdependence of several properties of the event – which include aspects of the material situation in addition to who uses which means to communicate, toward what end, using what actions and emotional tone, and following or violating which norms of conduct for the practice.

This interest in the “irreducible properties” of the event, or the whole, aligns with DeLanda’s (2006) argument that if we are interested in the irreducible properties of wholes, then we need to shift to an emergent ontology based in “relations of exteriority.” However, Hymes’s (1972) definition focused on the patterns of events, or how rules and norms guide the activities of the event. Although this allows for discovering breeches of rules and finding how they are handled in unique or similar ways, the focus remains on the pattern itself. As I articulate the
view of meetings as emergent events, this definition of communication events is a solid starting place, but does not allow for an articulation of the uniqueness and transformation of events as well. In this dissertation, I take DeLanda’s (2006) ontological argument and shift the interest in communication events. This opens up several new questions for investigation: How do events come to be? And furthermore, how do the patterns researchers often see in them come to be? In other words, how do meetings become culture or organization?

The Montreal School: Cultivating Organization

The other perspective brought into this “contingently obligatory relation” by treating meetings as emergent events is the view of communication as constitutive of organizations (CCO). Although there are several treatments of this view (see Brummans, Cooren, Robichaud, & Taylor, 2013), and certain articulations of it were present in the literature at the time of Schwartzman’s (1989) writing (see Putnam, 1983; Weick, 1979), I argue that treating meetings as emergent events brings one particular articulation of this perspective to the fore: the Montreal School. In particular, Cooren’s (2010) concept of cultivation focuses on precisely one of the questions brought up by the shift in communication events: how do the patterns researchers often see in meetings come to be?

Cooren’s (2015b) work to describe cultivation begins with a relational definition of communication, which is articulated under the broader ontological turn that I describe above. He defines communication as “the establishment of a link, connection, or relationship through something” (p. 10). As the process that establishes links between and through something, communication is constitutive in that it is through this process that “beings” or wholes emerge, or become, in the world. Thus, by studying particular communication events, researchers can identify processes of becoming.
Furthermore, Cooren (2010) uses cultivation to draw our eye specifically to how values, norms, beliefs, or ideals are “typically, traditionally, or usually invoked or conveyed by the respective participants,” human or nonhuman (p. 114). Cultivation represents his articulation of culture, which draws on the etymological root of the word and brings the view of culture as a process to the fore (Cooren, 2015b; Cooren, Brummans, Benoit-Barné, & Matte, 2013; cf. Williams, 1983). As he writes, “when you contact with organization, you soon discover that there are specific values, norms, artifacts, or practices that tend to characterize it” (Cooren, 2015b, p. 83). These values, norms, artifacts, or practices have been cultivated through repetitive practices in communication events, like meetings. In other words, cultivation focuses on how the patterns ethnographers of communication find come to be, and simultaneously expand consideration of the cultivators to include more-than-human actors, like technologies, documents, and meetings. Through studying the processes of cultivation in meetings, one can see both how patterns come to be, but also the uniqueness of processes and action. Not everything be-comes cultivated, and “built into this view is the assumption that it could have been otherwise” (Schwartzman, 1989, p. 238).

When taking meetings as emergent events, this research brings into relation these two rich theoretical perspectives: the ethnography of communication and the Montreal School. In order to take meetings as emergent events, I need to be able to see what patterns emerge (using the ethnography of communication), how those patterns came to be (using the Montreal School’s concept of cultivation), and also how it could (and sometimes does) be-come “otherwise.” In an ontology of becoming, the otherwise is ever present. As Mol (2014) writes, “there is no longer a singular ‘it’ to look at from different sides” (para. 4). Contingently obligatory relations are just that: contingent. Meetings are emergent events that bring contingency and precarity into
organizing because they are always already acting to bring components in relation. Although whatever organization emerges through meetings might be referenced as if it were the same “entity”, the different components involved in meetings and brought into relations with each other produces the “otherwise”. However, although organization “is more than one, it may still be less than many” (Mol, 2014, para. 4, emphasis in original).

**Research Question**

In this dissertation I seek to extend Schwartzman’s (2015) order-disorder dynamic in meetings research by developing a perspective that grants purchase on how order and disorder come to be in meetings. Through Schwartzman’s work, the ontological turn toward assemblages (especially DeLanda, 2006), the ethnography of communication, and the Montreal School, I seek to find out how the appearances of organization and culture emerge from meetings. Organization and culture, for this study, are descriptive short-hand references to transient moments of emergent order. Like organizational communication scholars before me, I am more interested in organization as a process or action (Cooper, 1986; Taylor & Van Every, 2000), not a stable product. Similarly, I am interested in culturing or cultivation, the process(es) or action(s) through which cultural patterns emerge, rather than a stable product. With these perspectives, I seek to answer the following question in this dissertation: How do meetings as emergent events cultivate the transient effects of organization and culture?

**Practical Value of Study**

“Today there are more than 25 million meetings per day in the United States alone” (Allen, et al., 2015a). A staggering and perhaps incomprehensible number of meetings occur throughout the world per day, many of which occur for businesses, nonprofits, and other kinds of organizations. On an individual level, the average employee today spends six hours of their
work week sitting in meetings (Allen, et al., 2015a; Rogelberg, et al., 2006). For the sake of illustration, in 50 weeks the average employee spends 300 hours a year sitting in meetings. For senior managers, this number climbs higher. Senior managers can spend 23 hours or more per week on average in meetings (Rogelberg, Scott, & Kello, 2007). Assuming this extends over 50 weeks as well, senior managers could easily spend 1,150 hours per year in meetings. Neither of these figures accounts for the time managers spend preparing for or processing the results of meetings, which could easily double this figure (2,300 hours per year). How much time is that? A person who averages seven hours of sleep per night sleeps 2,555 hours per year, including weekends. If we take the common saying as truth, time equals money, and employers spend 300–2,300 hours per employee in meetings.

Why do we feel the need to meet? What do meetings do for us? These questions often go unanswered by human resources departments, although they cut to the core of a human resources problem. As Rogelberg, Shanock, and Scott (2012) wrote, “based on the authors’ informal surveying of dozens of HR leaders in Fortune 500 firms, shockingly, organizations do little or nothing to assess the return on this meeting investment or to take substantive steps to assure the investment is a good one” (p. 237). Although their informal survey only accounts for the largest companies in the business sector, nonprofits and other organizations likely also leave their meeting practices unexamined. Meetings researchers often suggest company-wide surveys and efficiency criteria (Rogelberg, et al., 2012), but these measures can be costly, and quantitative measures will likely demonstrate problems but not offer solutions (Agar, 2013). Organizations, however, are not aggregates of numbers. As I claim, organizations are processes through which assemblages of people, circumstances, market competition, shareholders,
responsibilities, technologies, documents, mission and vision statements, values, ideas, and culture(s) come together. All of these come together through meetings.

Throughout this dissertation, and particularly in Chapter 7, I detail the processes through which I aimed to examine meetings, and assess their “return on investment,” for lack of a better term. In Chapter 2, I examine the literature on meetings as tools, which often proposes that the tool needs to be fixed. Studies included in this section provide a variety of suggestions for fixing meetings, as do multiple meeting manuals written by practitioners (Axelrod & Axelrod, 2014; Lencioni, 2004; Monts, 2011; Turmel, 2014). Instead of offering general suggestions here, I mirror meetings as emergent events by suggesting a process through which I am to cultivate meetings (see Chapter 7). Although this applied mode requires a hefty time investment for those involved in the study, this mode provides guidance for researchers to adapt meetings to changing circumstances through cultivation. Furthermore, the particular perspective that I adopt here draws attention to the ways in which both order and disorder emerge through meetings. As I propose this applied mode, I discuss how I will attempt to embrace disorder and “harness” the practical solutions usually offered to improve meetings. It is my goal that through the suggestions I offer for cultivation, I can help SPC emerge new, albeit perhaps unintended, changes of organization and culture.

**Theoretical Significance of Study**

In this dissertation, I make several significant contributions to scholarship. First, my study extends the literature on meetings by articulating a perspective through which to view meetings as emergent events. This significant move centers the meeting, and the variety of actions in the event that emerge the effects of human participants, technologies, affects, etc., while decentering humans and their individual intents. Specifically, this perspective addresses
Schwartzman’s (2015) call for research that examines the relations between meetings and documents, as well as meetings and retrospective views of them that could be represented in meeting minutes or talk about meetings. Broadly, this perspective attempts to uncouple or at least loosen the ties that are involved in “the strong belief that there is a tight connection between individual intention, organizational processes, and organizational action” (Schwartzman, 2015, p. 739). Whereas treating meetings as tools further entrenches this strong American folk theory, and treating meetings as constitutive events gently loosens these connections, viewing meetings as emergent events decouples these tight connections in order to discover something new about meetings and how they “do” organization. Furthermore, my articulation of meetings as emergent events provides a perspective through which to view the disorder-order dynamic of meetings (Schwartzman, 2015).

Second, I address the relative lack of research on hybrid and virtual meetings, compared to their face-to-face counterparts (Allison, et al., 2015; Cichomska, et al., 2015; Schwartzman, 2015). Hybrid and virtual meetings, like those that I observed for this dissertation, draw attention to the ways in which technologies participate in meetings, and how these technologies enter into the “contingently obligatory relations” drawn together through meeting. This dissertation aims to take up Schwartzman’s call to “develop a better understanding of what this hybrid form looks like, feels like, and even ‘thinks’ like” (p. 744). The emergent events perspective for which I advocate here is central to developing this better understanding of hybrid meetings.

Furthermore, my study contributes to the rich theoretical history of the ethnography of communication by further reconceptualizing the communication event concept. The communication event was one of Hymes’s (1972) foundational concepts for the ethnography of
communication, and this concept notably influenced Schwartzman’s (1989) work. This concept focused analysts on actual communicative events and acts to discover the ways that they are patterned by speech communities, rather than assuming the patterns that guide communicative behavior. In my dissertation, I take this concept through the ontological turn to examine how events emerge patterns, and not just what patterns show up, are represented, or are constructed by human participants. This involves decentering the human in events, but also looking for not just patterned communication, or order, and instead including the uniqueness, or disorder, that emerges from specific events.

My study also directly contributes to the Montreal School’s project of developing a coherent theory of how communication constitutes organization by providing further exploration of cultivation in this frame. Cultivation as a concept asks a researcher to determine how certain values, patterns, and beliefs appear to be patterned, important, or shared in a communication event. There have been very few studies that explore this concept in the Montreal School (Cooren, 2010, 2015b; Cooren et al., 2013), and only one of these is empirical work based on long-term engagement with a particular kind of communication event. In this dissertation, I add another long-term engagement with a particular kind of communication event, meetings, to explore how cultivation works with/in these communication events.

Finally, by engaging with the ontological turn of which the Montreal School is part, and the ethnography of communication is potentially turning toward, I provide a model of how to conduct cultural communication research with the commitments of the ontological turn. This involves close attention to action, and how the meeting “moves.” Furthermore, this involves decentering the human participants and their (potential) intentions to focus on how human participants themselves emerge (or do not) from meeting. By sticking with action, I am
examining “relations of exteriority” that better allow a researcher to view change, transformation, and emergence (cf. DeLanda, 2006). This provides an alternative to the other views of meetings as tools or constitutive events, which include “relations of interiority” that focus more on the relationships between parts to constitute a whole, and are better suited for finding stability and part-whole relationships.

**Outline of Study**

The rest of the chapters in this dissertation proceed accordingly: In Chapter 2, I overview the literature about meetings, and articulate three distinct perspectives through which meetings could be viewed: meetings as tools, meetings as constitutive, and meetings as emergent events. In taking a close look at the third perspective, I further detail the ontological foundations of this perspective, which builds on the work that I include in Chapter 1. Then, delving further into the implications of this perspective, I discuss the qualities of meetings as emergent events, including complexity, emergence, and relations between meetings. Finally, I overview several components that could be brought together in meeting assemblages, including: time and temporality, space, artifacts, (digital) technologies, values and cultures, and affect and emotion. These components expand the consideration of what is part of the meeting, thus expanding the analyst’s view.

After setting up the theoretical perspective through which I view meetings, I describe the design of my research in Chapter 3. I begin this chapter with a description of my site, Suicide Prevention Campaign (SPC) and meetings. Then I describe the processes of data collection that I used throughout my four-year ethnography in this site, including participant-observation, ethnographic interviews, and document collection. In this section, I also describe and discuss reflexivity and address the various, shifting roles I enacted throughout my project. Following this, I describe the procedures I used for analysis and representation. Then I demonstrate these
procedures with a sample analysis and representation that previews the kind of work that I accomplish in the analysis chapters, and particularly how I moved from analysis to narrative representations. I briefly summarize the results of my analysis, and then conclude this chapter with a discussion of writing and the choices and styles I include in the analysis chapters.

The next three chapters demonstrate my data analysis and describe three ways that meetings as emergent events cultivate the transient effects of organization and culture. First, Chapter 4 addresses the action of deciding, particularly focusing on the role of repetition, documents, and rhythm throughout these processes. Second, Chapter 5 focuses on the action of legitimizing, or producing the effect of legitimacy for organizing, especially as this involves policies and discussions of online platforms. Finally, Chapter 6 focuses primarily on technology’s role in presence-ing organization and culture, thus focusing on what hybrid meetings look like, feel like, and “think” like.

I wrap up my dissertation with two concluding chapters. The first concluding chapter focuses on the applied and practical implications of this dissertation. In this Chapter 7, I discuss the ways in which my research included a variety of applied moves that I discuss throughout the analytic chapters, and some moves that were not included in the writing. I discuss how these draw upon practical theory as transformative practice (Barge & Craig, 2009). Moving forward with the findings from my dissertation, I detail cultivation for design in order to describe the process through which I came to some of these applied moves and through which I will determine and implement future moves. As I discuss, this process involves processes of improvisation, rather than innovation of products. I conclude this chapter by agenda-setting for my future work with SPC based on my findings in this dissertation.
Finally, in Chapter 8, I conclude my dissertation by discussing the implications of my research for the field. First, I summarize my dissertation and findings. Then, I detail how I have extended and reconceptualized previous research and concepts. I address how my dissertation extends and expands Schwartzman’s (2015) work, as well as the Montreal School and the ethnography of communication. Third, I compare my study with other empirical studies of meetings, including Milburn’s (2009) work and Schwartzman’s (1989) ethnography, to discover similarities across them, and particularly how my empirical study furthers our understanding of meetings. Finally, I conclude with several future directions for meetings research.
Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I review the breadth of literature that has been produced on meetings. For this chapter, I start with a review of the literature that treats meetings as tools. I open this section with a description of what kinds of studies fit in this perspective, and then detail some of the key findings about meetings that scholars using this kind of perspective have found. I wrap up this first section with a discussion of the ontological grounding of the perspective. Then I set up the literature that has treated meetings as events, and begin this section with the contrasting ontology upon which these studies are founded. I also summarize the specific shifts I am making from this ontology. Finally, I overview the relevant literature from the perspective of meetings as events to outline key elements that inform my proposal for treating meetings as emergent events.

Meetings as Tools

Much of the literature that looks at meetings uses the metaphor that meetings are tools that people use to accomplish or coordinate work activities (Scott, Allen, et al., 2015; cf. Van Vree, 1999). Schwartzman (1989) similarly defined part of the extant literature at the time of her study as focusing on meetings as tools. These tools are used to accomplish tasks, and systems of rules such as Robert’s Rules of Order were originally developed in order for “groups and associations to focus attention on the tasks or topics of the meetings” rather than relationships, workplace dramas, or the meetings themselves (Schwartzman, 1989, p. 81). Scholars who take this perspective often use meetings as tools to study other phenomena or topics. Meetings have been used to study topics such as problem solving, information sharing, coordination of work tasks, and decision making (Scott, Allen, et al., 2015). The studies that I focus on in this section, however, focus on the meetings themselves, and the processes that happen within them, in order
to see how meetings work. Often these studies are undertaken with the hopes to affect other kinds of phenomena like employee productivity or retention, but they remain focused on meetings. Studies that view meetings as tools tend to take up one or more of the following themes that I will explore: meetings occur in contexts, meetings as containers of talk and other processes, influences of leaders or managers on meetings, evaluations of meetings, and suggestions for how to make meetings better or at least avoid their pitfalls. I wrap up this section with a consideration of the ontological foundation on which this work builds.

**Meetings in Contexts**

A common theme of the literature that treats meetings as tools is that researchers are concerned about meetings as they exist or happen in particular contexts. In this vein, researchers have been concerned with “why meetings exist and persist in specific organizational and cultural contexts, how meetings are used, and what the outcome of meetings is believed to be in particular settings” (Schwartzman, 1989, p. 8). Van Vree (1999), for example, focused on the historical/political context(s) in which the modern meeting form arose by tracing their history from wars and war councils to the civilizing force of meetings. Many meeting researchers who focus on culture are focusing on meetings differences between nation-states, which I discuss further below. Furthermore, some meeting researchers call for research that examines “meetings in their larger organizational context,” and they argue that these studies can “provide an opportunity to understand at a much deeper level the context of a specific meeting and the underlying reasons for why a meeting happened the way it did” (Köhler & Götz, 2015, p. 140; see Beck, Littlefield, & Weber, 2012; Goh, Goodman, & Weingart, 2013 for examples of this work). In other words, this area of the literature treats meetings as happening or existing within contexts, and these contexts are typically taken to be large (on the order of nation-states) rather
than small and momentary accomplishments which meetings themselves bring together. Within organizational and cultural contexts, meetings happen, and when they happen, they also contain various processes and practices that reflect the wider organizational/cultural context. The processes and practices of meetings in particular contexts are briefly overviewed in the next few sections.

**Processes in meetings.** “A substantial amount of meeting research is focused on what happens within the meeting; in other words, on meeting processes” (Allen, et al., 2015a, p. 7). This body of the literature has focused primarily on the variety of processes that happen *within* meetings, such as communication and social processes in meetings (Beck, et al., 2015; Gerpott & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2015; Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2006, 2008; Littlepage, 2015; Reiter-Palmon & Sands, 2015), pre-meeting interaction (Allen, Landowski, & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2014; Mirivel & Tracy, 2005; Yoerger, et al., 2015), problem solving in meetings (Brodeur, 2015; Reiter-Palmon & Sands, 2015), information sharing in meetings (Kauffeld & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2012; Reiter-Palmon & Sands, 2015) strategic interaction and argumentation in meetings (Asmuß, 2015; Beck & Keyton, 2009; Beck, et al., 2015; Seibold & Meyers, 2007), conflict management in meetings (Raclaw & Ford, 2015; Holmes & Marra, 2010), and decision-making in meetings (Clifton, 2009; Raclaw & Ford, 2015; Haug, 2015; Huisman, 2001; Milburn, 2009). Many of these studies come from a “communication perspective,” which “positions messages as the foundation for analysis and problematizes their influence on meeting functions” (Beck, et al., 2015, p. 319). These messages and processes summed together make up the meeting. When meetings are treated as tools in this way, if one part does not work, then it can be swapped for a better part. Communicative acts, like drill bits, can be exchanged for ones better suited for the job to make the meeting more effective (cf. Littlepage, 2015).
Other studies have focused on how the selection of certain kinds of communicative acts, or sequences of them, are due to cultural differences between nation-state groups (Clifton & Van de Mieroop, 2010; Friday, 1989; Köhler & Götz, 2015; Lehmann-Willenbrock, Allen, & Meinecke, 2013; Meyer, 1993; Miller, 1994). Although noting the differences in these meeting practices are important, Köhler and Götz (2015) argue that these studies “do not explore the underlying systematic differences in the expectations and norms that people hold about meetings” (p. 120). In other words, these studies by and large leave out a consideration of culture, or the cultural premises on which these differences make sense for each meeting group. These studies are also focused on aggregate data, rather than individual meeting parties, and thus might miss important differences of meeting practice frequency, even within the same organization.

**Leading Meetings**

When meetings and their processes are assessed for effectiveness, scholars have found that “the greatest single influence on [effectiveness] is the leader of the meetings” (Kello, 2015, p. 715). Kello (2015) also argues that the meeting leader is largely in control of the structure and design of meetings, which affect how effective a meeting can be. Thus, some scholars have focused on the meeting leader, or chair, and the different responsibilities or practices that come along with that role. The meeting chair may often be a team leader or manager, but does not necessarily need to overlap as such, and thus some scholars treat this identity as a situational accomplishment (Clifton, 2006; Pomerantz & Denvir, 2007; Potter & Hepburn, 2010; Svennevig, 2008, 2011). Meeting chairs are often a general “switchboard” for talk and turn-taking (Boden, 1994), and therefore initiate the shift between pre-meeting processes and the start of the meeting (Asmuß & Svennevig, 2009). Chairs are also largely responsible for managing
conflict in meetings (Holmes and Marra, 2010), and focusing discussion during the meeting by refocusing participants back on the agenda topic (Holmes & Stubbe, 2003) or using “gist” formations to fix the meaning of prior discussion before moving onto the next topic (Clifton, 2006). However, leaders are not solely in control of the form and structure of meetings. Participants are also crucial to structuring and conducting a meeting, and some scholars have found that leaders often attempt to establish more hierarchical or egalitarian practices to either establish their control or share it (Cockett, 2003; Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008; Pomerantz & Denvir, 2007; Van Praet, 2009). Certain practices may lend themselves to fostering a shared sense of control or structuring than others, so although the meeting leader might be an important, or at least unique, role in the meeting, they may not play as crucial a role in determining meeting effectiveness as Kello (2015) states.

The imposition of order and structure. This focus on leadership in meetings also draws attention to the ways that scholars taking a tools perspective of meetings propose that order and structure can be, and are, imposed on meetings (cf. Scott, Allen, et al., 2015). In some scholars’ treatment, meetings are seen as one of “the human communication technologies that structure organizational life” (Scott, Allen, et al., 2015, p. 29). Some scholars have even suggested that meetings are more successful when “the appropriate structures and interventions are offered to those involved” (Allison, et al., 2015, p. 680). Furthermore, some scholars have focused on how the structure of an organization or society imposes certain kinds of interaction on meetings. These studies tend to see this structure as a split or continuum between hierarchical and egalitarian organizations. As Hansen and Allen (2015) write, “larger firms are more complex, formal, and bureaucratic” (p. 208-209), and thus are treated as more hierarchically structured than smaller firms might be. Meetings are required in these larger firms to coordinate
interdependent work across the larger population that makes up the organization, and especially to reinforce the hierarchical structure itself (Schwartzman, 1989). Egalitarian structures are also reinforced in the course of meeting talk and influence the structure of speaking and turn-taking in powerful ways (Schwartzman, 1989).

**Evaluations of Meetings**

A key aspect of viewing meetings as tools is also being able to evaluate them to see whether or not they are the efficient, effective, and right tool for the job. A body of studies, many reflected in *The Cambridge Handbook of Meeting Science*, demonstrate the multiple positive and negative perceptions and evaluations that people make of meetings. As I will describe in more detail below, many people argue that there should be fewer meetings in the workplace based on their negative evaluations, whereas others argue that meetings should be held more often in order to gain more benefits from their positive aspects. However, despite the negative evaluations of meetings as tools, meetings are still “an integral part of employees’ everyday workplace experiences” (Allen, et al., 2015a, p. 3). Therefore, a third area of the literature that pertains to meeting evaluations is the wealth of scholarly and practical advice for fixing or designing better meetings, which I also overview.

**Negative perceptions and evaluations.** “From an efficiency perspective, meetings are time consuming and expensive” (Scott, Allen, et al., 2015, p. 23; cf. Rogelberg, et al., 2012). Scholars and practitioners alike have many complaints about meetings just like this. Many studies decry the financial cost of (potentially) unproductive meetings (Rogelberg, et al., 2007; Rogelberg, et al., 2012; Scott, Allen, et al., 2015). Meetings have also been assumed to be “ineffective, unproductive, inept, chaotic, incompetent, wasteful, ridiculous, boring, tedious, silly” and many other descriptors (Schwartzman, 1989, p. 53). Meetings draw frustration and
even hatred from attendees (Beck, et al., 2015; cf. Rogelberg, et al., 2007; Tracy & Dimock, 2004), and people who attend meetings have a variety of opinions about what the greatest problems are (Allen, et al., 2015a; Odermatt, et al., 2015). For example, meetings have been shown to take a “negative toll on employees” (Scott, Allen, et al., 2015, p. 26; cf. Rogelberg, et al., 2006), which can involve increased workload and fatigue on employees (Luong & Rogelberg, 2005; Scott, Allen, et al., 2015). Other aspects of meetings that are often cited as specific problems include: multitasking (Cichomska, et al., 2015; Wasson, 2004), meetings themselves becoming the overarching aim of meetings (Hansen & Allen, 2015), poor meeting planning and leadership before a meeting occurs (Odermatt, et al., 2015), suboptimal use of expertise and information in meetings (Littlepage, 2015), employees’ negative attitudes toward meetings (Hansen & Allen, 2015), inefficient use of time (Kello, 2015; Rogelberg, et al., 2006; Scott, Allen, et al., 2015), and conflicts in meetings (Reiter-Palmon & Sands, 2015; Schwartzman, 1989; Scott, Allen, et al., 2015).

**Positive perceptions and evaluations.** Several meetings have focused on meeting effectiveness as one of the most prominent positive evaluations meetings can have. Several factors have been found to affect meeting effectiveness, including small talk (Allen, et al., 2014; Mirivel & Tracy, 2005; Odermatt, et al., 2015), selecting the right meeting participants (Leach, Rogelberg, Warr, & Burnfield, 2009; Littlepage, 2015), the purpose of the meeting (Kello, 2015), using agendas properly (Leach, et al., 2009), and the combination of environmental factors (Leach, et al., 2009). Specific designs of meetings, like standup meetings, have been studied in order to find the optimal combination for an effective meeting (Bluedorn, Turban, & Love, 1999; Odermatt, et al., 2015). Effective meetings have also been shown to have a relationship with other positive effects, which leads many to make positive evaluations of
meetings. Meetings have been shown to improve task performance (Cichomska, et al., 2015), improve team performance (Allen, et al., 2015a; Allen & Rogelberg, 2013; Kauffeld & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2012; Sauer & Kauffeld, 2013; Sauer, et al., 2015), increase employee engagement and satisfaction (Allen, et al., 2015a; Allen & Rogelberg, 2013; Hansen & Allen, 2015; Kauffeld & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2012; Olien, et al., 2015; Rogelberg et al., 2006), affect organizations’ ability to change in productive ways (Hansen & Allen, 2015; Kauffeld & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2012; Klonek, et al., 2015), increase or improve creativity and innovation (Hansen & Allen, 2015; Reiter-Palmon & Sands, 2015), and contribute to positive culture and climate in the workplace (Kello, 2015). One important factor in the success of meetings may be an organization’s or team’s meeting orientation, or the establishment of “both explicit and implicit policies, procedures, and practices that increase the focus on setting up, holding, and rewarding meetings in the firm” (Hansen & Allen, 2015, p. 205). Hansen and Allen (2015) assert that a strong meeting orientation will directly affect other aspects of an organization’s focus and support success in those areas because of the positive aspects of meetings. They also found that a meeting orientation had the strongest effect when leaders and managers of meetings were perceived as legitimate.

**Fixing the tool: Meeting shoulds and should nots.** Throughout the literature, meetings are recognized as good or at least necessary aspects of organizational life, so getting rid of meetings when they also bring along the negative aspects mentioned above is not a suggestion one will often find. Instead, a wealth of the literature, both scholarly and practical, is focused on how to “fix” meetings and choosing particular places to focus efforts toward designing or leading better meetings. Many authors make a general call to improve meetings, partially because as Schwartzman (2015) noted, “the urge to order meetings and try to change them” is part of an
American folk theory about meetings that is especially predicated on “the strong belief that there is a tight connection between individual intention, organizational processes, and organizational action” (p. 739).

One of the first specific recommendations made to meeting leaders is often to make sure that the purpose of the meeting is clear and that it actually justifies meeting in the first place (Kello, 2015). The next recommendation is that meetings should have the right people involved, and the right number of people to ensure meeting effectiveness (Kello, 2015; Leach, et al., 2009; Littlepage, 2015). Several scholars propose that meeting agendas are “absolutely critical” to the success of a meeting (Kello, 2015, p. 723; cf. Cohen, Rogelberg, Allen, & Luong, 2011; Leach, et al., 2009; Odermatt, et al., 2015; Volkema & Niederman, 1996; Yoerger, et al., 2015). Following this, another point of design is ensuring the proper timing of the meeting, which involves scheduling it for the right amount of time to fit the purpose and ensuring starting and ending on time (Cohen, et al., 2011; Kello, 2015; Odermatt, et al., 2015; Yoerger, et al., 2015). Finally, the proper meeting facilities should be ensured for the meeting, as environmental factors can play a key role in the effectiveness of a meeting (Cohen, et al., 2011; Kello, 2015; Leach, et al., 2009; Odermatt, et al., 2015; Yoerger, et al., 2015). Other fixes are aimed at using good meeting practices (Cohen, et al., 2011; Lehman-Willenbrock, Allen, & Kauffeld, 2013; Yoerger, et al., 2015). Some scholars make specific recommendations for certain types of meetings, like multicultural meetings (Köhler, Cramton, & Hinds, 2012) and hybrid or fully virtual meetings (Allison, et al., 2015; Cichomska, et al., 2015; Hertel, Geister, & Konradt, 2005).

Overall, the suggestions made to “fix” meetings are not unlike the suggestions that have been offered in meeting manuals since the 1980s. As Schwartzman (1989) notes,
the solution to these problems is either tighter structuring of meeting procedures (e.g., more premeeting preparation, developing a structured agenda, following a strict series of steps, adhering to time frames, setting meeting priorities and goals) or more attention to group dynamics (e.g., recognizing the importance of involving all members, developing effective leadership skills, using a meeting ‘facilitator’ and ‘recorder,’ developing trust and shared responsibility, becoming familiar with techniques for resolving conflict, and the importance of self-examination). (p. 53)

Meetings as Containers

Although Schwartzman has argued for over twenty-seven years that meetings are more than mere tools that humans use, one can still find research that treats them as such. As Olien, et al. (2015) write “for decades small group and team researchers used meetings as a ‘container’ for studying other phenomena of interest” (p. 13). Research on meetings as containers for talk, actions, and processes tends to leave out consideration of “the organizational or institutional context in which workplace meetings are typically conducted or their role in shaping or reifying those contexts” (Scott, Allen, et al., 2015, p. 21). Thus, meetings can be treated as “merely containing or reflecting important processes and outcomes” (Scott, Allen, et al., 2015, p. 21). Together the literature that treats meeting as tools ultimately upholds an “important American folk theory” that “supports the urge to order meetings and try to change them” (Schwartzman, 2015, p. 739). This belief is that “there is a tight connection between individual intention, organizational processes, and organizational action” (Schwartzman, 2015, p. 739). This folk theory and cultural belief strongly place individuals as the origins of organizational processes and actions.
However, we often find the converse to be true. Reflecting on the body of meetings research since her book, as well as the state of opinions on meetings, Schwartzman (2015) comments, “one of the things we also see over and over again is that, as researchers and practitioners search for order, meetings in particular settings seem to push back in ways that are often difficult to understand but that frequently produce a sense of disorder and frustration for anyone who has to attend them” (p. 737). In other words, what we find when we attend and research meetings is that they are often not what we expect. The sum is greater than the individual parts and the intentions of individuals. What emerges out of meetings is not necessarily what was intended, which is perhaps most starkly noticeable when participants come in to create or enforce order, and instead find disorder. Indeed, “there’s something about meetings” (Schwartzman, 1989, 2015) that escapes the kind of part-whole relations to which many of the scholars cited throughout this section ascribe. My work in this dissertation seeks to rectify meetings as the arbiters of (dis)organization, and take a view that uncouples or at least more loosely couples “individual intention, organizational processes, and organizational action” (Schwartzman, 2015, p. 739). In doing so I explore and understand how meetings occur such that what emerges from them defies simple relations of individuals and individual parts that build up to a whole event. I demonstrate how the event of meetings themselves emerge and cultivate the effects of order, disorder, organization, and culture.

The Event(fulness) of Meetings

Other scholars have focused on meetings as communication events, or “temporally bounded activities governed by rules and norms for communication” (Sprain & Boromisza-Habashi, 2012, p. 182). Schwartzman (1989) first made this argument out of her research based in the ethnography of communication and its focus on communication events (see Hymes, 1974).
She had initially argued that this shift in focus made meetings the topic of research, but since then others have made meetings a topic of research and still treated them as tools. Schwartzman (1989) initially writes several reasons for treating meetings as events and not other kinds of phenomena. Events are a significant concept in the ethnography of communication because it is “the point at which speakers and means come together in use” often with a recognized beginning and ending (Bauman & Sherzer, 1975, p. 109). Events in the more general sense compose a broader concept than communication events, with the former used to designate any “culturally defined bounded segment of the flow of activity and experience” latter being categorized primarily by their “rules for speaking” (p. 109).

Schwartzman (1989) treats meetings as events in part because of the temporal frame that bounds them, but also because the frame accords some significance to the actions that happen within this boundary. Furthermore, after an event ends, it can be “read” as a cultural text (Schwartzman, 1989, p. 36). Schwartzman also draws on the connotation of the concept to demonstrate that events recur over time, which might not be the same case if one used the term occasion or gathering. She also writes that several questions become relevant when we treat meetings as events, including:

How, in fact, do individuals construct meetings as speech and communication events? What local knowledge do participants use to produce and recognize a meeting as a significant event? What are the types of meetings that individuals in particular settings recognize, and how do they interpret the significance of their meetings? How do meetings interact with other events (including other meetings) to reproduce themselves? (Schwartzman, 1989, p. 310)
These questions mark a strong contrast to the questions and answers outlined for the meetings as tools perspective above. Whereas those questions tend to focus specifically on how to make meetings more effective, and understanding different aspects of meetings, these questions that Schwartzman (1989) posed focus more on the meetings themselves, and a more holistic rather than piecemeal understanding of meetings.

I argue that treating meetings as emergent events involves a similar focus on the meeting itself. I use the word events to specifically signal that I treat meetings as a “bounded segment of the flow of activity and experience” (Bauman & Sherzer, 1975, p. 109), with boundaries that are often temporally defined, and these “bounded segments” recur over time. I am qualifying the concept of event with the term emergent to signal that this perspective marks a shift in focus grounded in the relational ontological turn, which I introduced in Chapter 1. Here I briefly summarize again and the differences between treating meetings as constitutive events and emergent events. After this ontological summary, I overview some of the key qualities of meetings that this perspective brings into focus, and then I describe a series of components from the literature on meetings as events which factor into this perspective.

**Rethinking Meetings, Rethinking Ontologies**

The ontology that scholars who treat meetings as tools typically rely on is one with several shortcomings that “limit the capacity of scholars to develop theoretical explanations for how what happens in work meetings would or should affect individual and organizational outcomes” (Scott, Allen, et al., 2015, p. 21). Many of these studies tend to take the existence of the organization for granted (Schwartzman, 1989), and few studies have gone beyond treating meetings as “containers” (Olien, et al., 2015, p. 16) that are “dominated by rational, goal-directed, and instrumental behavior” (Schwartzman, 1989, p. 243). Consequently, scholars in
The Cambridge Handbook of Meeting Science have called for different conceptualizations of meetings. Scott, Allen, et al. (2015) for example, calls for studies that include “reflection on the ontological status of work meetings,” moving beyond treating meetings as containers of other processes to examine other ways that “meeting communication can be conceptualized” (p. 21-22). Furthermore, many studies of meetings have only focused on the “practical relevance and related frustrations of work meetings” rather than “theoretical questions about what meetings are and how they fit into larger organizational processes and outcomes” (Scott, Allen, et al., 2015, p. 20). The shortcomings of such a focus have limited the “ability of scholars to develop and hone the theoretical explanations necessary to fully understand complex meeting phenomena” (Olien, et al., 2015, p. 16). Toward addressing this specific issue, I have overviewed the differences in ontological foundations above between treating meetings as constitutive events and treating meetings as emergent events. Briefly here I summarize the distinctions and where the literature falls along this distinction before moving into the qualities and components of meetings as emergent events.

Meetings as constitutive. One of the ontological grounds of treating meetings as events has been to base this work on an ontology that treats meetings as constitutive of organization (Beck, et al., 2015; Cooren, 2007; Hansen & Allen, 2015; McPhee & Zaug, 2000; Scott, Allen, et al., 2015; Schwartzman, 1989; Tracy & Dimock, 2004). Schwartzman (1989) goes so far as to say that meetings “play this constitutive role in all organizations” even though other studies of meetings often miss their importance in this function because they “take the existence of organizations for granted and treat them as concrete, objective, and essentially unproblematic entities” (p. 269). These scholars have treated meetings more as practical accomplishments.
**Of order and structure.** Scholars that treat meetings as constitutive in this way are more likely to focus on how meetings constitute the “macrolevel” phenomena of structure and culture rather than how these “macrolevel” phenomena impose structure and order on the meeting and participants. Schwartzman (2015) writes that one of the important folk theories *The Cambridge Handbook of Meeting Science* challenges is “the idea that individuals (especially certain individuals such as those in leadership/management positions) are always (or should always be) in charge of what happens in organizational settings” (p. 739). This challenge comes in direct opposition to the arguments of scholars who treat meetings as tools that are by and large controlled by managers and leaders, including Kello (2015) who is included in the same volume.

Many scholars who treat meetings as events recognize that meeting interactions are where leaders and nonleaders are constituted as distinct or overlapping roles (Asmuß, 2015; Beck, et al., 2015). Furthermore, although several rule systems have been designed to guide and structure meetings (such as Robert’s Rules of Order), some scholars have demonstrated that “the existence of such codes does not guarantee that they will be followed in any specific meeting or moment therein” (Raclaw & Ford, 2015, p. 270). Any structure or leadership established in meetings is treated as a practical accomplishment rather than something that pre-existed the meeting and thus can impose itself on participants and the interaction itself (Asmuß, 2015; Raclaw & Ford, 2015; cf. Asmuß & Svennevig, 2009; Boden, 1994; Cockett, 2003; Deperman, Schmitt, & Mondada, 2010; Ford, 2008; Mondada, 2007; Svennevig, 2012; Vöge, 2010).

Schwartzman (1989) goes so far as to point out that “it is in meetings that we come to know ourselves and our social systems” (p. 314).

**Of context(s).** Also flipping the view of scholars who treat meetings as tools, scholars who treat meetings as events do not examine them only as they “exist in a sociocultural context
because they frequently play an important role in constituting such systems” in the first place (Schwartzman, 1989, p. 274). According to Schwartzman (1989), meetings are a powerful point to study because they bring together “local cultural worlds” and “the larger political and economic systems” in which these worlds participate, and become the site where these are enacted (p. 5). Meetings often constitute the contexts that they inhabit. Ruud’s (2000) study of a regional symphony argues that members (re)create their organization, hierarchy, and social relationships through competing communication codes in meetings. The meeting event provides a context for participants to interpret “the significance and meaning of the event” (Schwartzman, 1989, p. 76-77). Furthermore, the meeting context allows one the unique space “where one thing can always be talked about in terms of something else” (p. 42).

_Sense-making._ Schwartzman (1989) and others have posited that meetings are sites of sense-making, often citing Weick (1995). “Although sensemaking theory is relevant to many forms of interaction in organizational life, meetings are arguably the most common work activity directed implicitly or explicitly toward this goal” (Scott, Allen, et al., 2015, p. 33). Meetings, thus, are an important site that constitutes “the interpretive schemes that work groups use to construct the shifting environments that enable and constrain their work and the coordinated responses to those shifts” (Scott, Allen, et al., 2015, p. 39; cf. Schwartzman, 1989; Weick, 1995). Meetings serve this function both as they are enacted, and also later as “texts for cultural interpretation” (Schwartzman, 1989, p. 138). As the meeting becomes objectified it could become a text both literally, as evidenced by minutes and reports, and figuratively, more along the lines of a text as this has been treated by Taylor and Van Every (2000) and Cooren (2004).

**Meetings as Emergent Events.** Treating meetings as events also involves a second and emergent ontological grounding. This is the view that I am taking here in this dissertation, and
although it has not been explicitly stated as such yet, scholars since Schwartzman (1989) have been making statements that support this new ontological grounding for the meeting. In particular and as I argued in Chapter 1, Schwartzman (1989) seems to be arguing for this view herself, but she did not have the advantage of the recent “ontological turn” on which to articulate this view. In this section, I draw together the threads of this view that she scattered throughout her book, along with related threads from other meeting scholars.

Schwartzman (1989) initially notes that studies around the 80s had started to coalesce around “the concept of practice as the ‘new key symbol’ of theoretical orientation” (p. 14). She notices and relates this to the similar “turn in organization theory from a study of organizations as concrete things toward a concern with organizing processes” (p. 14). This turn in organization theory is toward treating organizations as constituted by communication (Putnam, 1983), which in turn spawned a trajectory in interest moving from organizational culture (Pacanowsky & O’Donnel-Trujillo, 1982), to organizational discourse (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000), and then to the CCO perspective of the Montreal School (Taylor, Cooren, Giroux, & Robichaud, 1996; Taylor & Van Every, 2000; Cooren, 2010). This final perspective is related to what has been sometimes called the “practice turn” (Schatzki, 2006), otherwise referenced as an ontological turn toward relationality or becoming (Coole & Frost, 2010; Cooper, 2005; Emirbayer, 1997), in the social sciences, which relates to Schwartzman’s noticing of practice as the “new key symbol.” This perspective and ontological turn have come decades after Schwartzman’s original statement, but they are not the only threads that lead me to articulate a perspective of meetings with this foundation.

Another thread traced throughout her work, especially related to communication events, is that she writes “individuals do not and cannot act outside of forms such as communicative
events like meetings… It is in these forms, and only in these forms, that individuals are able to transact, negotiate, strategize, and attempt to realize their specific aims, but cultural systems and social structures are ‘bred into’ these forms” (Schwartzman, 1989, p. 36-37). This positions the event, or a temporally bounded flow of action, as the place where individuals, action, culture, and structure are realized and made real. Furthermore, through her focus on meetings as events and practice, she is interested in addressing the lack of focus on “how practice generates and constrains practice” because, especially for ethnographers, “on the ground individuals move from practice to practice, event to event, occasion to occasion” (p. 37, emphasis in original). She also recognizes the need to “move beyond the individual bias of most organizational theories” to instead see how “a social form such as a meeting may create and control the structures of everyday life along with the influence and authority of specific individuals in organizations” (p. 222).

This is precisely the point that many in the ontological turn seek to examine in emergence: “how practice generates and constrains practice.” These scholars, particularly those situated in the Montreal School, resist the bifurcation of practice into structure and action. Instead they stick to action, as this is what participants experience “on the ground,” and these scholars demonstrate how action itself produces the effects of individuals, organizations, structures, and cultures. What comes to matter for practice only matters insofar as it acts with/alongside/against other matters, concerns, and “individuals” (Cooren, 2015a). In this way, speakers may “re-present” individuals, interests, or “figures,” like the organization, that are not themselves but are still acting with/alongside/against them in the meeting (Cooren, 2010, 2015a; Schwartzman, 1989; cf. Duffy & O’Rourke, 2015). Viewing meetings as emergent events then gives me an opportunity to study meetings’ “importance as events in and of themselves that
shape work, the organization, and the individual” insofar as work, organization, and individuals emerge as effects of the meeting (Olien, et al., 2015, p. 13). Furthermore, it provides a way to view what Schwartzman means when she says “individuals may use, but also may be used by, the meeting form” (Schwartzman, 2015, p. 742) or participants “were both the subjects and objects of the event” (Schwartzman, 1989, p. 260). If we take meetings to be constitutive events, driven by a view of social construction, then the human participants, rather than the meetings, are in the driver’s seat of what comes out of them. Instead, I seek to put meetings in the driver’s seat in order to articulate a view that accounts for meetings as emergent events.

**Meeting as agent.** One of the aspects of treating meetings as emergent events is that it also requires positioning the meeting in a way that is usually only reserved for human participants, as an agent or arbiter of action. Schwartzman (1989) notes that what she was studying was “not a context that individuals controlled” but rather that it “was a context that was produced by and controlled, to the extent that it was, by meetings” (p. 235). Furthermore, her general approach “assumes that individuals do not and cannot act outside of social forms such as meetings” (p. 312), because, as I claim, these individuals do not exist as such outside of meetings or other streams of action. Furthermore, by the end of *The Cambridge Handbook of Meeting Science*, Schwartzman (2015) argues that Duffy and O’Rourke (2015)’s chapter comes closest to moving away from an “individual-centered viewpoint” (p. 740). Instead she says that their work comes “the closest of all the chapters to conceptualizing meetings as events with agency (although this word is not used in this chapter)” (p. 740). By casting this language onto this chapter, she seems to be arguing that scholars should be working toward a view that treats meetings as agents. This argument poses meetings as “making a difference” for organization and culture (Cooren, 2010), or furthermore, poses them to “enable and constrain what meeting
groups can accomplish” (Scott, Allen, et al., 2015, p. 30). In my own work, I examined how ventriloquizing meetings positioned them as an agential figure that both enabled and constrained action (Peters, 2014a). This work is the closest to the kind of work that Schwartzman (2015) calls for, but falls short of treating the event itself as agential because it only focuses on explicit metacommunication about meetings.

Schwartzman (1989) proposes that meetings are particularly powerful in that they can create both order and disorder, and they can also stabilize and destabilize the status quo “in ways that are often unrecognized and even unintended by actors in the system” (p. 11). This is because the meeting often “disqualifies itself as performing this [constitutive] function because [the meeting frame] indicates that the meeting is merely a facilitating event” (p. 78). Furthermore, meetings have already been shown to create effects for individuals and organization (Schwartzman, 1989), such as member attitudes about meetings (Scott, Allen, et al., 2015) and job satisfaction and attitudes (Rogelberg, et al., 2006; Scott, Allen, et al., 2015). These effects show how although individuals may “be used by” meetings (Schwartzman, 1989, 2015). What effects emerge out of meetings are “not always predictable” (Schwartzman, 1989, p. 300) and often defies “some taken-for-granted aspects of Western assumptions” about meeting results and outcomes (Schwartzman, 1989, p. 298), especially when examining results and outcomes cross-culturally.

Qualities of Meetings as Emergent Events

When I treat meetings as emergent events, there are some key qualities of meetings that I am hailing with this terminology. First, meetings are dynamic and complex events. Second, meetings are emergent, in that they themselves emerge out of a set of circumstances or other
meetings. Finally, the way meetings relate to each other is another interesting characteristic that further demonstrates the meeting as an emergent event.

**Dynamic/complex.** Although meetings may initially appear to be simple, meetings are complex phenomena and have often been stated that they have a dynamic character to them. “There’s something about meetings that makes researchers and participants want to change them, control them, order them, and make them predictable. But there is also something about meetings that makes them resist these efforts at change, improvement, order, and predictability” (Schwartzman, 2015, p. 735). Meetings may be “unpredictable” because they are complex. As Brodeur (2015) writes, “complexity is difficult to define, but in its most basic form, it consists of interconnected, interrelated, or interwoven parts” (p. 505; cf. Taylor, 2001). As complex phenomena, meetings are also treated as dynamic in character. Work that has looked at the dynamic character of meetings has focused on “within-meeting dynamics that can promote or diminish meeting satisfaction, team productivity, and overall organizational effectiveness” (Meinecke & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2015; cf. Kauffeld & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2012), which is reminiscent of the meetings as tools perspective. However, some of this work does examine how actions taken in meetings lead to further actions, rather than taking the intentions and expectations of a group and assuming that these produce the results (Sauer, et al., 2015).

**Emergent.** Meetings are often stated to arise out of circumstances, or to emerge circumstances themselves. Many scholars readily admit that meetings are not pre-determined events, and instead evolve over time to demonstrate they are constantly an emergent accomplishment (Depperman, et al., 2010; Meinecke & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2015; Schwartzman, 2015). Participants themselves often anticipate that decisions, actions, or recommendations will emerge out of meetings (Schwartzman, 1989). However, oftentimes “the
processes that a meeting puts into place may produce results that are unanticipated by, and even nonsensical to, participants” (p. 11). This is a point that Schwartzman (1989, 2015) often argues about meetings. Changes that result from meetings are often a mixture of intended and unintended consequences, but, more importantly, they are “frequently the result of specific meetings” (Schwartzman, 1989, p. 44). This further emphasizes the point that specific events and specific actions should be the focus of meeting researchers, especially if they are interested in change, emergence, and becoming. This quality of meetings as emergent events distinguishes the perspective from other individual-centered viewpoints because it involves the “idea that there are many aspects of meeting functioning that (1) cannot be attributed to individuals, (2) are not actually subject to individual control, and (3) may not have been intended by anyone participating in the event” (Schwartzman, 2015, p. 739-740). Individual human intent, and the consequences of these intents, are therefore not the focus of my perspective here because they do not help me to view the ways both order and disorder emerge from meetings.

Relations between meetings. One of Schwartzman’s (1989) initial noticings about meetings was that “if they lead nowhere else, meetings… frequently lead to other meetings” (p. 304). This noticing perhaps led her to include meeting cycles and patterns as one of the categories in her heuristic framework. Furthermore, she writes that meetings “also interact with each other to attract participation and to distract individuals from engaging other types of gatherings and activities” (p. 140). In other words, one of the key distinctions to examining meetings as emergent events is to see how relationships between them also emerge from the course of meetings. Meetings may then be said to “birth” themselves from the ashes of previous ones. She also writes that the processes of meetings interacting with and relating to each other are “frequently taken for granted,” like meetings themselves, “as they are assumed to be ‘the way
of life’ in organizational systems” (p. 140). Some researchers have become interested in the relationships between meetings, and have developed one way to study meetings systematically. Duffy and O’Rourke (2015) write about the importance of studying relations between meetings, because this perspective can address “an often neglected aspect of meetings” which is “the way in which meetings relate to each other as collective rather than isolated episodes of interaction” (p. 223). Rather than treating each separate meeting event as a silo of action through which organization emerges, I am similarly interested in the ways meetings “relate to each other” as emergent events.

Making of/Making up the Event

Finally, there are several components that factor into the meeting event and their involvement has been said to emerge a set of effects. Many of these are necessary figures that are present in order for the meeting event to even occur, although particular meetings might include unique components, such as the actions of the supernatural in spiritual meetings (Molina-Markham, 2012, 2014). The more generally necessary components include considerations of time, space, artifacts, (digital) technologies, values and cultures, and affect.

Time & temporality. Many scholars, primarily those who treat meetings as tools, have decried how much time meetings take up in our lives (Allen, et al., 2015a; Kello, 2015; Luong & Rogelberg, 2005; Rogelberg, et al., 2006; Rogelberg, et al., 2007). One study states that over eleven million meetings occur each day in the United States (MCI, 1998; cf. Rogelberg, et al., 2007). As “time-intensive workplace events” (Allen, et al., 2015a, p. 3), meetings take up an average of six hours per week of employees’ time (Allen, et al., 2015a; Kello, 2015; cf. Rogelberg, et al., 2006) and an average of “23 hours a week” for those in managerial positions (Allen, et al., 2015a, p. 3; cf. Rogelberg, et al., 2007). Since meetings require individuals to
“allot time” to them (Schwartzman, 1989), often meetings can be expensive endeavors, especially if they are treated as interruptions of “real work.” Although these numbers are usually calculated for the United States alone, Van Eerde and Buengeler (2015) found in their comparison of studies across country clusters that there were no significant differences “with respect to the average number of meetings held per week” (p. 193).

Regarding time and meetings, scholars have studied the effects of what happens before a meeting begins (Brannen & Salk, 2000; Allen, et al., 2014; Odermatt, et al., 2015; Volkema & Niederman, 1996) and the flow or timing of what happens in meetings (Depperman, et al., 2010; Djursaa, 1994; Köhler & Gölz, 2015; Leach, et al., 2009; Meyer, 1993; Schwartzman, 1989; Van Eerde & Buengeler, 2015; Vuorela, 2005). The first aspect of this area of the literature attends to pre-meeting talk, preparation activities for the meeting, and how these interact with what happens in meetings themselves. The second aspect of this area of the literature has focused particularly on cultural differences in length of meetings and adherence to the scheduled start and end times (Brannen & Salk, 2000; Depperman, et al., 2010; Köhler & Gölz, 2015; Meyer, 1993; Van Eerde & Buengeler, 2015). What these studies share with a concern for time and temporality when treating meetings as emergent events is that, first, they treat meetings as bounded events (Boden, 1994). Meetings have particular beginnings and ends marked in a flow of action. Second, they are similarly interested in the relationships between what happens prior to a meeting and how that interacts with meeting actions.

Some scholars, however, have written about a distinct temporality of meetings, which aligns well with treating meetings as emergent events. For example, Schwartzman (2015) reflects on her early fieldwork experience writing “the way that the event unfolded seemed quite disorderly and sometimes even anarchic. Yet at the same time it was all strangely compelling...
and engaging” (p. 742). This disorderly unfolding of time might be most noticeable when meetings defy their expected temporalities. For example, Köhler and Gölz (2015) write that “Americans… experience a sense of frustration when nothing is determined sequentially” (p. 131), which means Americans expect a linear temporality, but might oftentimes find themselves thrust into “disorder” when this is defied. Expectations of temporality can often pose themselves as stark contrasts between cultures as well (Köhler & Gölz, 2015; Djursaa, 1994). However, the emergent events of meetings may also create the temporality of work itself. As Scott, et al. (2015) write, meetings “punctuate the experience of work by imposing temporal boundaries on work. A certain amount of work needs to be accomplished within a meeting time frame” (p. 26). This last point brings the research on how much time employees and managers spend in meetings, thinking about meetings, and planning meetings into a unique light. The event itself seems to guarantee some amount of work and organization becomes accomplished, whereas this is not a feature shared of time spent outside of meetings.

**Space.** “Researchers have frequently used the physical setting and spatial arrangement of participants to comment on what meetings communicate about social relations and cultural systems” (Schwartzman, 1989, p. 282). What was true then is still true now, although often these studies are more focused on how the setting and environment affect meeting effectiveness (see the Fixing the Tool section above). Several scholars have tried to catalog the places and spaces where meetings take place (Asmuß, 2015; Köhler & Gölz, 2015; Miller, 1994; Mondada, 2007; Odermatt, et al., 2015). Where participants are located in the space(s) can also affect free flows of communication (Cichomska, et al., 2015). Seating arrangements, however, can also be used to include or exclude members and visually and physically display the hierarchy of the space (Schwartzman, 1989). Furthermore, the globalization of work has prompted research on
global virtual teams (GVTs), whose members are typically geographically dispersed around the globe (Cichomska, et al., 2015). The geographic location of people and artifacts affects how meetings occur: most GVTs use virtual or hybrid meetings, which requires computers and other kinds of technologies to enter into the space of meeting.

**Artifacts.** Often artifacts are treated as part of the physical setting and environment of meetings. As I wrote above when considering meetings as tools, many scholars have pointed out that the mere presence of certain documents or artifacts can make for a more effective meeting. This typically includes an argument for having a clear meeting agenda that is distributed ahead of time. Although this practical information can be useful toward that goal, it misses a broader consideration of how artifacts participate in meetings. As has been argued often, “Meetings consist of people talking to each other” but they also consist of “other resources… such as gaze, gesture, and body posture” and “artifactual and spatial aspects” (Asmuß, 2015, p. 277). Several artifacts are involved in meetings, including “work-related artifacts, such as whiteboards, computer projections, paper documents, and pens, and non-work-related artifacts like coffee cups, water glasses, and plates” (Asmuß, 2015, p. 283). Computer presentations themselves participate in a “complex interplay between the computer steering the computer presentation, the presentation itself, and the meeting participants” (Asmuß, 2015, p. 284; cf. Asmuß & Oshima, 2012). Research on meeting artifacts has gone a long way to include these as considerations in how meeting action unfolds, but they fall short of treating these documents and artifacts as participating in the meeting itself, rather than just being “used” by human participants. However, Asmuß (2015) and I agree that “it is important to acknowledge the impact that the artifactual resources available at meetings can have on the actual outcome of these meetings” (p. 293). Schwartzman (2015) even calls for research that “looks directly at meetings and
documents as ‘mediators’ that shape each other, as well as the processes that occur or are reported within them” (p. 743; cf. Latour, 2005). This calls for treating meetings as emergent events, where documents participate in the action of meetings, like texts in conversations (Cooren, 2004; Taylor & Van Every, 2000).

(Digital) technologies. A particular kind of materiality has recently caught the attention of scholars, which is digital technologies and how they participate in work and meetings. These scholars have noted that “although advances in communication technology were once expected to diminish the need for synchronous workplace meetings, meeting activity in organizations continues to increase” (Scott, Allen, et al., 2015, p. 23; cf. Rogelberg, et al., 2007). Alongside this shift, telework has become increasingly popular around the world, with about one-fifth of Americans currently working from home, which is only expected to increase further in the future (Cichomska, et al., 2015). Some of this work again tends to treat technologies as part of the meetings as tools perspective. This work examines problems and difficulties of virtual and hybrid meetings (Allison, et al., 2015; Anderson, McEwan, Bal, & Carletta, 2007; Bal & Foster, 2000; Cichomska, et al., 2015; Johnson, Heimannn, & O’Neill, 2001), particularly when cultural diversity also plays a role (Brandt, England, & Ward, 2011; Cichomska, et al., 2015), and especially the differences in participation rates depending on the location and technologies used (Anderson, et al., 2007; Cichomska, 2013; Cichomska, et al., 2015; Vartiainen & Andriessen, 2008). Although these problems may also occur in non-virtual or non-hybrid meetings, some are more specific to the virtual or hybrid meeting, such as the ability of all participants to use the technologies (Cichomska, et al., 2015; Olson & Olson, 2009), ensuring everyone is on board with the new meeting type (Cichomska, et al., 2015; Montoya, Masset, Hung, & Crisp, 2009), and the potential for distracted multitasking (Cichomska, 2013; Cichomska, et al., 2015; Wasson,
Overall, however, these studies contribute to finding how technologies participate in meetings, although they often do not explicitly recognize this function of their research.

Hybrid meetings, which include “a combination of virtual and face-to-face attendance” (Cichomska, et al., 2015, p. 663), have been on the rise both in practice and in research. These meetings bring more flexibility for teleworkers and mixed teams, but they also bring unique challenges because, unlike face-to-face and virtual meetings, participants are more likely to have different ways or modes of experiencing the meeting (Cichomska, et al., 2015; cf. Cichomska, 2013). This area of research is still relatively new, although “hybrid meetings in particular are becoming ever more popular” (Cichomska, et al., 2015, p. 676). Cichomska, et al. (2015) have called for further research on the differences between group compositions, considering that there may be differences between two collocated teams meeting and a mixture of virtual-only and hybrid meeting participants. Schwartzman (2015) makes an important distinction in her call for research on hybrid meetings, citing the need for research on hybrid meetings “to develop a better understanding of what this hybrid form looks like, feels like, and even ‘thinks’ like” (p. 744). I argue that to meet this need, this research would need to consider how technology participates in meeting action alongside human participants, particularly in the ways it may defy or challenge their intentions, in order to better understand meetings as emergent events. Toward this end, I have researched the way that software and technology design affect the way participants can act and relate to each other through hybrid meetings, including the differences between those who only attend via technology and those who also attend face-to-face (Peters, 2015a). A similar view is necessary for treating meetings as emergent events.

Values and cultures. A lot of the research that has focused on cultures in and of meetings has focused on the different norms and expectations of people who belong to certain
nation-states (Bargiella-Chiappini & Harris, 1997a, 1997b; Köhler & Gölz, 2015; Köhler, et al., 2012; Pan, Scollon, & Scollon, 2002; Poncini, 2002; Yamada, 1990, 1992, 1997). This research focuses primarily on the effects of processes that happen in meetings, rather than interrogating the processes themselves, as well as whether and how organizations can use cultural diversity to their benefit. Some researchers have also focused on how meetings participate in organizational culture. Much of this research tends to treat meetings as constitutive events. Organizational cultures have been said to have effects on meetings, and vice versa (Aksoy-Burkert & König, 2015; Hansen & Allen, 2015; Scott, et al., 2015), and organizational cultures might matter for how successful virtual and hybrid meetings can be (Allison, et al., 2015; Cichomska, et al., 2015; Connaughton & Shuffler, 2007; Daim, Ha, Reutiman, Hughes, Pathak, Bynum, & Bhatla, 2012; Keyton, 2011). Particular kinds of meetings can demonstrate “an organizational [culture] that promotes voice or engagement” which “can lead to an organizational emphasis on practices that promote meetings” (Hansen & Allen, 2015, p. 205).

Other scholars have promoted using a cultural perspective to study meetings, such as the ethnography of communication (Schwartzman, 1989; Sprain & Boromisza-Habashi, 2012). This perspective “orients scholars to local means and meanings for communicative action” in communities (Sprain & Boromisza-Habashi, 2012, p. 180) rather than trying to find differences across nation-state or organizational scales. Scholars taking a cultural perspective find out more about the “complex, collaborative productions” of meetings (Schwartzman, 1989, p. 77), which includes “norms of interpretation that are used to account for what happens in particular events” (Schwartzman, 1989, p. 302-303), social dramas (Schwartzman, 1989), shared values or identities (Mirivel & Tracy, 2005), as well as specific strategies or ways to encourage participation, such as “rewards, sanctions, fines, and ridicule” (Schwartzman, 1989, p. 301). In
other words, scholars taking a cultural perspective are often interested in the “cultural patterns and constraints that are not generally recognized unless groups with different patterns and expectations come into contact with each other” (Schwartzman, 1989, p. 128). Sometimes these cultural patterns, or codes, might co-exist in the same group and cause tensions in meetings (see, for example Baxter, 1993; Ruud, 1995, 2000).

Finally, meetings are also often cited as places where cultural values and beliefs are validated, created, and transformed (Keyton & Stallworth, 2002; Scott, Allen, et al., 2015). Scott, Allen, et al. (2015) cast this important function of meetings as treating meetings as rituals. This kind of function suggests that “statements and behavioral choices enacted in meetings … are also constitutive of group- and organization-level cultural phenomena” (p. 31). Although I agree that meetings are often where values and beliefs are validated, created, and transformed, I disagree that these values “belong” to an organization that has meetings. Instead, treating meetings as emergent events involves investigating the ways in which these values and beliefs are cultivated through meetings (Cooren, 2010). Rather than searching for just the ways that meeting events are patterned across time, and thus finding the regularity of meetings, cultivation powerfully focuses attention on both the unique and the patterned aspects of meetings. In this way, small and unique actions that occur once, but then are referenced later, are just as important as the broader and more explicitly cultivated beliefs and values.

Affect and emotion. Perhaps the most “intangible” of meeting essences, scholars have attempted to discover how emotions, moods, or affects emerge from meetings. The literature here takes a sharp “split” in whether researchers focus on individual emotion expression (Kangasharju & Nikko, 2009; Köhler & Gölz, 2015; Miller, 1994; Raclaw & Ford, 2015; Schwartzman, 1989; Van Eerde & Buengeler, 2015) and emotion labor (Shanock, Allen, Dunn,
Baran, Scott, & Rogelberg, 2013; Thomas & Allen, 2015) or if team affect brought into the focus (Hareli & Rafaeli, 2008; Kelly & Spoor, 2006; Walter & Bruch, 2008). Lei and Lehmann-Willenbrock (2015) surveyed the meetings literature that addresses team affect, which describes the “natural tendency toward the emergence of a shared form of collective-level affect” (p. 469). Although they go on to describe this as the convergence of individual affect states, I think that this phrasing is less useful especially when considering meetings as emergent events. As team affect emerges in meetings, these scholars state that it might indicate “the ‘groupiness’ of a group” (p. 461), it might overcome individual affective states or dispositions that the aforementioned other split of the literature examines, and it might affect what comes out of a group or a meeting (Hareli & Rafaeli, 2008; Kelly & Spoor, 2006; Walter & Bruch, 2008).

Furthermore, Lei and Lehmann-Willenbrock (2015) identify a wider literature on “affective culture” or contexts, which has been signaled as a force that drives group affect (cf. Barsade & Gibson, 1998, 2007, 2012; Kelly & Barsade, 2001). This literature links with the organizational culture literature mentioned above, covering the “emotional content of organizational culture” (Lei & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2015, p. 463; cf. Barsade & O’Neill, 2014). Later the authors assert that “affective contexts – such as culture, affect display norms, or leader influences – not only influence… but also shape their expectations about what types of affect are most likely to emerge or should have emerged in a team meeting” (Lei & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2015, p. 463). Perhaps boredom is a frequent participant in meetings as emergent events to the extent that it becomes expected and anticipated, hence why an enjoyable meeting stands as a surprise to many US Americans. Schwartzman (2015) writes, reflecting on this piece, that viewing meetings “as ‘affect-laden environments’ … also suggests the need to adopt a more
contextual and less individualistic approach to the study of what actually happens in meeting events” (p. 740).

Another prompt to include consideration of affect in the emergent events of meetings comes from the affect theory literature itself, which is part and a driving force of the ontological turn. Much like what Lei and Lehmann-Willenbrock (2015) describe as the “ebb and flow of affect” in team meetings (p. 457), affect theory scholars similarly point out that affect is born in *in-between-ness* and resides as accumulative *beside-ness*… At once intimate and impersonal, affect *accumulates* across both relatedness and interruptions in relatedness, becoming a palimpsest of force-encounters traversing the ebbs and swells of intensities that pass between ‘bodies’” (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010, p. 2, emphasis in original)

Lei and Lehmann-Willenbrock (2015) seem to be writing toward this body of theory by stating the need to understand team affect as it relates to dynamics, rather than statics. Group affect for them then moves in spaces and meetings, among people and things, and requires “empirical research” that treats affect as dynamic rather than static. I argue that the best way to include group affect in a study and consideration of meetings is to treat meetings as emergent events, or, perhaps, affective hot beds of activities waiting to emerge a sense of “groupiness” or un-“groupiness” depending on the ebb and flow of affective activities.

### Emergent Meeting Conclusions

In order to further describe the perspective for which I am advocating in this dissertation, which treats meetings as emergent events, I outlined and described the differences between three perspectives in this chapter. First, I described the perspective that treats meetings as tools for organizations. This area of the literature largely examines how leaders set up meetings, the
benefits of meetings, the drawbacks of meetings, and how to fix meetings when they have gone awry or are otherwise deemed ineffective. Although this area of the literature is rich, and can be practically useful, treating meetings as tools is based in an ontology that treats meetings as containers for action and as embedded within larger contexts. Ultimately, this literature fails to meet Schwartzman’s (1989) call for contextual research of meetings and leaving the individualistic lens behind.

Second, a vast section of the literature on meetings treats them as constitutive events. This area of the literature focuses on how meetings constitute structure, order, culture, and organization. However, this area of the literature tends to ground itself in “relations of interiority” and may still place too much emphasis on human intentions and their results. Although this area of the literature is currently the primary way to treat meetings as events, I want to diverge from this to explore what effects emerge from meetings themselves. I draw heavily on this literature, with some important shifts that I have discussed throughout the section, in order to develop a third perspective, which treats meetings as emergent events.

The shift between the second and third perspectives involves a shift from an individualist lens, with a focus on people, to a contextual lens, with a focus on meetings themselves (Schwartzman, 2015). Based on the distinctions from the other two perspectives of meetings outlined in the literature, treating meetings as emergent events involves viewing them as dynamic, complex, and emergent themselves. Furthermore, meetings are related to other meetings and these relationships likely emerge their own effects. This perspective comes closer to treating meetings as “events with agency”, as Schwartzman (2015) calls for in future research. By viewing meetings as emergent events, this brings several components of the meeting into relation with each other, including: meeting temporality, space, artifacts, technologies, values
and cultures, and affects. Together, I argue that this perspective of meetings as emergent events is essential to view not only the order that the other two perspectives reveal, but also the disorder of meetings, and therefore how meetings emerge organization and culture.
Chapter III

RESEARCH DESIGN

This dissertation is based on a four-year ethnography of meetings with the small, nonprofit organization Suicide Prevention Campaign (SPC). In this chapter, first, I describe this site and the meetings involved in this study. Then, I detail the methods of data collection that I used, including participant-observation, interviews, and document collection. Following this, I describe the analytic procedures that I used on this body of data to determine how meetings as emergent events cultivate the transient effects of organization and culture. Finally, I include a brief demonstration of my analysis to preview the kinds of work included in Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

Research Site and Context

Suicide Prevention Campaign, or SPC, is a small nonprofit organization in Central Pennsylvania with a small volunteer base that is largely made up of twenty-somethings from the area and the occasional older participant. SPC was founded by then-nineteen-year-old Mary who received a vision from God after a series of teenagers died by suicide in a Central Pennsylvania community in 2010. Mary heard about these deaths while working at a Christian youth group where students who were affected by these deaths, also known as suicide survivors, attended. As she often tells it, her vision was of a mental health fair, similar in style to a career fair, but where students can walk through and see the different resources offered by the community to maintain or improve their mental health. She also received from God the name of the organization, which is far more poetic than the pseudonym (Suicide Prevention Campaign) that I use throughout this document. She worked on her own, inspired by this vision for a few years before she decided to make the vision real through an organization. By May 2012, Mary brought together her friends, co-workers, and other acquaintances in a foundational meeting to ask them to volunteer their
time to make her vision from God a reality in the form of a nonprofit organization. I joined SPC during this first meeting.

In July 2012, Mary had asked some of the more dedicated of this early set of volunteers, including me, to join her board of directors and create a legal nonprofit organization. At this meeting, the board reviewed two necessary legal documents to gain nonprofit status, the articles of incorporation (which were then signed) and SPC’s bylaws (which were given suggested revisions that were made later). At this point, SPC had been asked to visit a few community youth groups to educate teens about mental health and suicide prevention. Mary organized and led these events. I started my research with SPC in October 2012 to fulfill a requirement for my qualitative research methods class, and chose to examine their meetings. By November 2012, there were four committees that were each assigned some subset of organizational tasks, including community resources, education, fundraising, and marketing. Each committee and the board of directors held a (relatively) brief end-of-year meeting where discussions revolved around what work could be done before receiving official 501(c)(3) status from the IRS, and what work would have to wait until after this designation was given to them. The board of directors approved the final drafts of the required legal documents at this end-of-year meeting as well.

In 2013, SPC largely went into a holding pattern. They recruited new volunteers, and some volunteers left the organization. Almost all of the volunteers who left the organization did so by simply not responding to the online discussion boards that served as the primary mode of communication during this time. Pennsylvania had finally reviewed and returned the documents needed to apply to the IRS for the 501(c)(3) status, and SPC’s pro bono lawyer had sent the documents to the IRS just in time for the government’s sequestration to affect the speed with
which applications were seen. Finally, in April 2014, SPC had received its long-awaited 501(c)(3) status, and they were able to solicit donations that were tax-deductible. This also meant that SPC could apply for grants to fund their educational events and pay for staff and teacher trainings that became part of the revised vision for preventing suicide in their Central Pennsylvania community. A timeline view of these major events and others that I mention are included in Appendix 1.

At present, SPC has a volunteer base of about twenty individuals who are associated with at least one committee or the board of directors. There are now five committees below the board of directors, which include design, education, fundraising, marketing, and a “subsidiary” Christian-faith-focused group called Keep Living Ministries (KLM) that was acquired in September 2014. Most of the members of the board of directors are the same as the original board, including Mary, Dan, Lisa, Lise, Amanda, and me. Four members of the board of directors left since 2012, and three current members were brought on to replace them at various points, including Theresa, Craig, and Sam. The involvement of board members and other volunteers included in the narratives is detailed in Appendix 2. In 2015 SPC got their first grant funded to put on educational events at local high schools to prevent suicide, which marked an increase in their “actual work” of suicide prevention. KLM also organizes other activities and events, usually smaller-scale versions of the school program, for church youth groups.

Meetings

To this point, I have used a conventional ethnographic style for setting the scene of SPC. However, based on the theoretical commitments I outlined in Chapters 1 and 2, and especially given my focus on meetings themselves, only including this conventional scene-setting seemed insufficient. The description of SPC written above is largely human-centric, although it also
recognizes the “players” outside of the human control of SPC’s volunteers. However, my research maintained a focus on meetings “themselves.” In order to make the familiar setting of a meeting strange, rather than simply describing the unique features of a meeting organized by these human volunteers, I break into a different kind of voice here. Here I make a similar move to that which Schwartzman (1989) begins her tome, when she asks her readers to “consider a room” and therefore the ambience of a meeting rather than the specific intents of humans within it. In this section where I set the meeting scene, I describe the meeting from a different point of view in an attempt to decouple “individual intention, organizational processes, and organizational action” (Schwartzman, 2015, p. 739). This kind of description is informed by the theoretical background I established in Chapters 1 and 2. Therefore, in the rest of this section, I describe the ways in which meetings call together a variety of human and non-human participants to enact them.

Although each meeting is unique and has its own details of order and disorder, in general they have a scheduled start time. This start time is negotiated through human-computer assemblages brought together by a web service called Doodle, and then based on the aggregate data Doodle indicates to a human user which option got the most positive responses. Ostensibly, this time is then selected and typed in an email or Google Groups blast to a set of human participants that are nominally associated with the committee or board of directors that was most recently constituted in meetings. If a human-computer assemblage fails to attend three meetings in a row, that human-computer assemblage is essentially “kicked out” of the committee for failing to be constituted into it.

After this negotiation, the meeting begins once its human-computer assemblages have come together through a web service called Google Hangouts. Roughly half of the time, there
are “hybrid” participants who are brought together in a physical location in addition to joining with others in the meeting action through Google Hangouts. The meeting then entreats some small talk and an introduction that describes what kind of a meeting is about to happen: one that will largely be “announcements” or one that will involve more work and talk from the variety of human participants involved in the process. The meeting’s agenda loosely guides what topics must be involved, which often include a review of progress made so far on goals that were set in a previous meeting, talk about any events or other meetings that are coming up, discussions or brainstorming sessions on problems that arose in another meeting, and off-topic tangents highlighting a variety of life details, which are called forth by the aforementioned contributions to “work”.

Throughout the meeting conversation, something called SPC is referenced as if it is some entity that exists outside of these meetings, although there seems to be multiple and competing versions of SPC that masquerade as one, and these versions come out of different meetings. Although meetings bring out joyful affects, these momentary impulses tend to be overshadowed by the emergence of boredom or drudgery, which in turn pushes the event forward to the quickest end possible. Often, meetings take up the entire time that was found in the scheduling process: between 30 minutes and four hours, and also more often than not business continues after this time, which then necessitates further meetings that bring together different varieties of assemblages, all of which are ostensibly SPC.

**Procedures for Data Collection**

In conducting an ethnography of meetings, I used participant-observation and attended 22 out of 38 scheduled meetings organized for the various committees and the board of directors of SPC (see Appendix 3 for a list of these meetings). Some of these meetings were fully virtual,
and the board of directors often met in a hybrid format that involves both virtual-only participants and participants who share the same physical space while meeting with virtual-only members online. I primarily met through virtual-only means, although I have attended the physical meeting space four times during my tenure with SPC. At the meetings I have attended, I audio-recorded the entirety of the meeting and/or took fieldnotes on the flow of the meeting event. Appendix 3 details the kinds of data collected for the 38 meetings, and which primary observation data I have for the 22 I attended.

Methods of the ethnography of communication guided my efforts to collect data in these meetings. The ethnography of communication usually requires a substantial amount of fieldwork (roughly one year as a general guideline), particularly using participant-observation, in order to gather recordings, transcripts, and fieldnotes of communication events, often those identified by a community. Interviews and/or document collection are often used alongside this more primary method, traditionally to “triangulate” meanings. This method fits my exploration of this question because I am primarily focused on meetings as emergent communication events, and thus focus on the participant-observation of these meetings. Furthermore, this matches the “requirements” of the two perspectives brought together by my focus on meetings as emergent events. The ethnography of communication relies on long-term fieldwork using participant-observation, and, in addition, Cooren (2010) suggests that some aspects of CCO, like cultivation, would be best studied by long-term ethnographic engagements with a community. Furthermore, the ethnography of communication is the method that Schwartzman (1989) adapted to suit her study of meetings, so using this perspective and its related data collection methods provide an aspect of continuity between her project and my re-articulation of her arguments within the ontological turn.
I conducted three formal interviews with members through online means, although I also often inserted informal, ethnographic interviews throughout meetings and conversations with members. Ethnographic interviews occurred “in the midst of some other social action, often when the sights and sounds that triggered the question are still fresh in the minds of the researcher and the participants” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 176). Questions in these ethnographic interviews focused primarily on meetings and meeting experiences. I used these interviews like what has elsewhere been called “member-checking,” but they also served to check my experience against others’ to determine the range of actions and effects that emerged through meetings.

Documents collected included meeting agendas, minutes, and associated supporting documents like yearly calendars and financial records (documents for 38 total meetings). I also collected the legal documents such as the articles of incorporation, bylaws, and six policies set by SPC. I also had access to a range of documents used to organize the different events that SPC has organized (totaling 37 over four years), and the public-facing documents like brochures and resource kits that have been developed. Finally, my data set included over 240 topic threads on Google groups since SPC switched to this medium in 2014, and three topic threads that were used during the switch to Microsoft SharePoint in 2016. These topic threads originated from seven distinct groups, including a group for the board of directors, a catchall group for all volunteers, and one group for each of the five committees. I was granted access to all of these documents from my involvement on the board of directors.

In summary, data collected over the course of this ethnography include: audio-recordings of meetings and verbatim transcripts (19 meetings recorded, totaling 28.5 hours, average of 90 minutes per meeting recording); field notes and/or documents of meetings, including those
recorded and not recorded (for 38 meetings); field notes of more informal kinds of meetings and conversations (including coffee and instant messaging, 22 instances); interviews with members (three formal interviews with transcripts, plus ethnographic interviews included in meetings and informal conversation field notes); documents (including 38 meeting minutes and/or agendas and other associated documents, six policies, 37 events’ worth of coordination documents, a strategic plan, and a board of directors handbook); and online posts (over 243 topic threads), some of which include shared narratives of significant moments.

A Note on Reflexivity

Often reflexivity is treated by scholars as a place to list relevant identities that together produce a standpoint from which the researcher views the project. However, in the ontological turn, I think there needs to be a restatement of this. For example, Harris (2016), borrowing from MacBeth (2001), writes about two kinds of reflexivity. The first, authorial reflexivity, describes the kind of reflexivity where “writers expound upon their own position” (Harris, 2016, p. 118). This first kind of reflexivity can be tricky, in that it tends to position the author as having certain essentialist and fixed identities, whereas often the theoretical perspectives of the work assume otherwise. The second kind of reflexivity, textual reflexivity, describes when “authors invite readers to muse about the construction of the writing and representation” (Harris, 2016, p. 118).

In order to balance out the drawbacks of each, Harris advocates for using both through the course of a piece of writing. In the analysis chapters I include reflexive asides to build textual reflexivity into the text, and here I expand upon my position(s) to state my authorial reflexivity.

In many ways my research has already shaped this text, and especially shaped the chapters following this one. My research certainly has shaped me, and through multiple relations, my research has certainly shaped SPC. The capacities I use in research produce my
role as researcher in contingently obligatory relation with others. At times, it certainly blinds me from positions others seemed to easily occupy. When running a strategic planning meeting, I asked everyone to “dream big” for the future and from there brainstorm some goals for SPC. When someone turned the question on me, I could not come up with an answer. I wanted it, at the very least, to still be-come. However, I had been listening so intently to the conversations around me trying to take notes and remember who was saying what that I was not present in the same way as others. And yet, this researcher was still part of the contingently obligatory relations that made that meeting.

There were other times, however, when my sheer participation blinded me to research. I would come home from an afternoon with Mary, where together we switched somewhat seamlessly from best friends, to co-workers, to “boss”-“subordinate”, to consultant-client, to researcher-informant, and I would wonder if I should be writing notes on what happened. What seemed to start as “hanging out” with my “best friend” quickly devolved into “research” with an “informant.” What of that should I have included in fieldnotes? Sometimes, I chose to include more than I think was strictly “research.” For example, once, in the middle of a conversation about one of the committee chairs quitting, she told me a (very) tangentially-related story about her brother-in-law’s car spontaneously combusting (he was fine, the car was not), and after we laughed, she transitioned back to the “original” topic. Perhaps I chose to include this tangent because tangents also crept into meetings, or maybe I included it just because it was a funny story that I wanted to remember.

In one final example of the tangled web of my positions, I may have talked myself into becoming the president of the board for SPC. During the course of writing this dissertation, Mary asked me to run the annual board meeting, even though my data collection had concluded.
After doing so, it occurred to me that I could be the chair or president of the board sometime down the line, if my time freed up after finishing this dissertation, especially if running meetings was the primary responsibility of a board chair or president. I suggested this to Mary, researched more about the role of the president, and suggested that Mary inquire about the legality of holding the offices of president and staff person with some of our collaborators. After a few weeks, and discovering that best practices suggested that executive staff generally should not hold the office of president or even a position on the board, Mary suggested that I consider taking the position of president of the board. The reasons she asked me to consider this position were largely influenced by the research I conducted for this dissertation. First, I was the one who found these guidelines and suggested that she do some specific advice-seeking around this topic, which I was only curious about due to some combination of membership and research. Second, as she cast it in an email to the board seeking self-nominations, the primary responsibility of a president would be to run meetings, about which I research and consult (as evidenced by this dissertation). Third, Mary and I have been frequently in contact about everything regarding SPC, as best friends, as consultant-client, and as researcher-informant. In January she called me at 11:00pm to ask my advice on a KLM matter, with which I had no direct connection, because she said I gave sound advice. In the meeting on April 8, 2017 the board did vote for me to take over the position of president for SPC.

This dissertation was produced somewhere in these particular relations of participation and observation. Without the multiple relations that comprise this reflexive section, and upon which I further reflect in the text itself, this project would not have emerged in this incarnation. More specifically, this dissertation text emerged through relations to many other texts, or “data,” gathered, scribbled, written down, drawn, and recorded. These data themselves were produced
somewhere in the relations brought out by the simultaneous activities of observation, participation, and work. After all, once this dissertation is complete, I will still work “for” SPC. Perhaps it will also be a relief to only refer to my best friend with her given name, rather than her chosen pseudonym. Maybe I will miss her dual names and some of these relations I will lose when the research ends.

**Procedures for Data Analysis**

Throughout my analysis I focused on scheduled meetings as a unit of analysis. I chose this unit of analysis because scheduled meetings in SPC were the most frequent kind of meeting data I collected, and my data included more than one configuration of scheduled meeting. Although, as I state above, I also included unscheduled meetings in my field note data, these were almost entirely between Mary and me. Although these unscheduled meetings were also interesting in that they displayed the emergence of meetings in other types of conversation, in the moments of having them it was difficult to classify them as meetings instead of ethnographic interviews, informant checks, or a conversation with my best friend. Furthermore, I only negotiated access to record scheduled meetings, and thus I have treated scheduled meetings as my primary focus throughout this project.

Data analysis in the ethnography of communication typically makes use of a heuristic framework. Hymes (1972) developed the SPEAKING framework to study communication events. This framework includes consideration of the following components of an event: Setting and scene, Participants, Ends, Act sequence, Key, Instrumentalities, Norms for speaking and interpretation, and Genre. Analysis using this framework examines the patterns between instances of the same communication event. Later, Schwartzman (1989) adapted this heuristic framework to analyze certain meeting-specific components, including: Participants, Channels
and Codes, Frame, Meeting Talk (which includes Topics and Results, Norms of Speaking and Interaction, Oratorical Genres and Styles, and Interest and Participation), Norms of Interpretation, Goals and Outcomes, and Meeting Cycles and Patterns. Similar to Hymes’s (1972) framework, her framework is also meant to look at the patterns among meetings in the same organization.

Both of these frameworks are designed and used with comparison to other kinds of communication events or meetings in mind. However, both of these heuristic frameworks center around patterns. In my re-articulation of meetings as emergent events, I am not only concerned with how patterns emerge in meetings, but also with the uniqueness that emerges from meetings and potentially creates change. In order to capture both the order and the disorder of meetings, I utilized these heuristic frameworks toward different ends. First and foremost, I am concerned with action and the happening of meetings that bring contingently obligatory relations together. It is in action that the patterns with which Hymes’s and Schwartzman’s frameworks are concerned become cultivated, and it is in action that organization is done. In order to see both the order and the disorder in my data, I further adapted both of their frameworks to include some of the concepts I introduced in the literature review that are qualities of meetings as emergent events. The categories that I created out of these two frameworks and the concepts in the literature review were also chosen based on what arose in my time in the field. For example, one of the categories, temporality, seemed particularly important for meetings in SPC because every meeting begins and ends with a statement of the exact time so that this can be recorded in the minutes. Based on my fieldwork, these two heuristic frameworks, and the concepts I outlined in the literature review, I combined sets of components and concepts into four broad categories that
I examined: temporality, act dynamics, contingently obligatory relations, and emergent effects. I describe each of these categories and what components they combine below.

**Temporality**

The category of temporality brings together an interest in the meeting frame and meeting cycles and patterns, which are both part of Schwartzman’s (1989) framework, as well as relations between meetings, which I introduced and described above. Scheduled meetings usually come with a particular start and stop time, because individuals must “allot time” to it (Schwartzman, 1989). The meeting frame, according to Schwartzman (1989), describes “the process or processes whereby the beginning, the ending, as well as the continuation of the meeting as an event are signaled or marked” (p. 67). In other words, the frame is the process by which the meeting becomes a temporally bound event (Boden, 1994). However, as I have found, these temporal boundaries may only be loosely followed. At times a meeting scheduled for one hour may last only twenty minutes, or a three-hour meeting may end up going long into a fourth hour. The temporal boundaries of meetings themselves may then be emergent rather than intended by the scheduler. Furthermore, it is important to study the relations between meetings or meeting cycles and patterns because they punctuate other kinds of “work” and can play off of each other. Coding for this category primarily delineated the boundaries around instances of my unit of analysis, and also examined relations between meetings across months or years (see Appendix 3 for a timeline of meetings).

**Act Dynamics**

Hymes’s (1972) framework includes the component of act sequence, which is primarily focused on the patterned sequence of actions that typically occurs to make up the event. However, I am concerned with uniqueness as well and thus have relabeled this category as “act
dynamics” to signal my twin concern with the unique and the patterned. Although the term “act” carries a connotation of pattern for ethnographers of communication from Hymes’s framework, the ontological turn is also interested in acts, but in a different light. As Cooper (2005) writes, “the space and time of daily life [looks] like a restless scene of acts in permanent suspension… They express relationships between things” (p. 1690-1691, emphasis in original). I am interested in the “restless scene” of patterned and unique acts and, as I write in the next category, the relationships expressed through them. This category recognizes that each meeting ebbs and flows in unique ways, even if patterns emerge over time through the histories of these ebbs and flows. This category also draws concern to some of the components Schwartzman (1989) labels as meeting talk. Although her sub-components here are largely concerned with the patterned ways in which meeting talk developed, I instead coded for the different trajectories of action in meetings, rather than looking for just patterned occurrences across meetings that make up a component like norms of speaking and interaction. Furthermore, this analytic category is not solely concerned with human action or talk, because I am also interested in how the nonhuman participated in meetings. This meant that aspects of meetings like computer glitches, switching slides or documents on a screen, and bodies moving were all part of my concern for this category. Coding for this category involved examining the bounded instances of scheduled meetings and then identifying the acts or actions (often segments named by human members or informed by speech act theory, Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) that flowed through particular meetings.

**Contingently Obligatory Relations**

As the ontological turn in which I am working is concerned with becoming and relationality (Cooper, 2005; Emirbayer, 1997), I did not focus on separate categories of “scene”,
“participants”, and “instrumentalities” like Hymes and Schwartzman. In order for an emergent event to take place, these categories and others that I mentioned before must be put in relation with each other through action. Action, therefore, is listed earlier in this categorization scheme because it sets up the contingently obligatory relations and calls them forth to begin with. This category incorporates several components that Hymes’s (1972) and Schwartzman’s (1989) frameworks employ, including (human) participants, topic(s), setting and scene, and instrumentalities. Other qualities of meetings as emergent events that I discuss in the literature review are similarly involved in this category, and these include space, artifacts, affect, and technologies.

As I examine the actions of meeting, I coded for what relations were brought into being. For example, in order for me to make a suggestion during a meeting, I, a human participant, had to be in relation with instrumentalities, especially technologies, and spaces. This joins an office space where I sat with a computer using a certain kind of video-conferencing software that joined together another or a few other computers, which all sat in their own spaces, to create a hybrid space of meeting through which my voice and picture reached the other (human) participants. These relations are contingently obligatory in that they come together for the action to occur, but these precise relations are not necessarily the only constellation through which this action occurred. Coding for this category involved consideration of what relations were brought into being by the actions coded in the previous category.

**Emergent Effects**

Many components that are included in Hymes’s (1972) and Schwartzman’s (1989) frameworks are concerned with the effects of meetings, or what comes out of the communication event. These categories include results, ends, goals, outcomes, and norms of speaking and
interpretation. As I set up above, I am also concerned with the emergent effects of organization and culture, both of which may be “seen” through some of Hymes’s and Schwartzman’s categories, particularly in patterns. However, the emergent uniqueness of meeting action should also not be ignored for it could be as organizational or as cultural as the patterns typically identified as the organization or the culture. These effects help me to answer my research question (How do meetings as emergent communication events cultivate the transient effects of organization and culture?) because they demonstrate the effects produced by meetings, but the focus of the question remains on the how, or the actions through which these effects emerge. Therefore, coding for this category involved a third look at the actions coded in the above act dynamic category, and identifying what effects emerged through the interactions of these acts.

Steps Toward Representation

Armed with these categories, I began data analysis by selecting and examining every third meeting. Between these meetings elapsed a period of time of about a year at the early part of the project, and a few months in the later part of the project. As I examined these meetings, I started by coding for what emergent cultural or organizational effects seemed to have changed since the previous meeting. This involved looking for and coding the following components in that category: results, ends, goals, outcomes, and norms of speaking and interpretation. By doing this work I looked for the already spoken changes and took note of these so that I could return to find their cultivation.

After I found and noted the changes in this punctuated look, I noticed that many of the actions involved technology. As I returned to the full body of data to search for the moments where these effects took shape, I searched for instances where technology made its presence felt, either through talk about it, computer glitches, or actions that required technology. As I coded
these moments, I also coded for the contingent relations brought together through these actions with technology. Through this step, I traced the cultivation of the changes in effects I noticed in the first category. Then I compared these tracings to draw conclusions about how meetings as emergent events cultivate the transient effects of organization and culture.

Finally, I crafted non-fiction narratives to demonstrate the complexity of the cultivation of these effects through meetings. As a form of representation, the strength of non-fiction narratives lies in their ability to present “an event in all its details,” rather than transcript analysis which excels at separating “complex webs of meaning into bits and pieces” (Muñoz, 2014, p. 16). Non-fiction narratives were the best representation choice for this project because this dissertation centers around the eventfulness of meetings and the emergence of effects. Just as narratives emerge the effects of resolution(s), meetings also emerge effects of organization(s) and culture(s). In addition, narratives have the ability to represent emergence with the reader in relation to the text, which made them an excellent representational match for the ontological turn in which I situate this work. Using the codes produced through the above procedures, I crafted narratives to re-present the actions of meetings as emergent events which cultivate organization and culture. Through the crafting of these narratives, I refined codes, categories, and actions into Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

**Demonstration of Coding Procedures**

In this section, I provide a preview of the kind of analysis and representation I include in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. In order to come to this point, I analyzed the first few meetings of my data set using the steps I outlined above. I found that the last meeting of 2012, which was held by the community resources committee, was significantly shorter than the others and it was the last meeting held that was called an “annual review” meeting. This was also the last regularly
scheduled meeting before SPC held only three meetings of any committee or board in nine months, which violated the explicit and written rules for each committee that stated that each committee would hold monthly meetings. Furthermore, this was the last meeting that occurred in this particular space. These emergent effects prompted my return to this short meeting at the end of 2012. Although this was not the only moment that cultivates this emergent norm violation and subsequent re-norming, I produce this one moment to demonstrate how I moved from analysis to the kind of narrative writing I utilize in the later chapters.

A Four-Minute Meeting Analysis

The transcript excerpt below begins moments before the “official” starting point of the meeting, and captures roughly one-third of a four-minute long meeting held by the committee. Mary and Katie met in a small coffee shop attached to a Christian bookstore, and Amanda attended on speakerphone throughout the meeting. Surrounding and moving through this meeting were a variety of customers and employees, and stacks of books on shelves placed around the small and only couch in the shop where Mary and Katie sat. After the excerpt, I walk through my analytic steps based on the framework I outlined above in order to demonstrate the kind of coding that this framework produces. Then I describe the steps I take between coding data and crafting a narrative. Finally, I include a narrative representation of this same meeting, which exemplifies the kind of writing that I include in the later chapters of this dissertation.

Excerpt: December 2012 Community Resources Meeting (Mary, Katie, and Amanda)

1 M: So we're gonna run through this I don't even have it written down because I've done it four times five times now. So community resources, what we're doing, um oh I guess we officially call this to order. It's 12:59, call this to order. ((laugh)) What we've been doing with community resources we've just been connecting with people in the community, obviously. Um I've been connecting with United Way um started a new relationship there. Like I said at our last meeting they invited me to be a part of the uh Mental Health Adolescent Subcommitee thing, which I haven't actually heard back from that yet cuz I did contact them for some more specifics and they haven't gotten
back to me. I'm assuming it's because it's the holidays so I'm waiting for the holidays to be over and then try again, so really once I get that committee then that's going to open a lot of doors for us we're going to get our name out there things are going to be much smoother. So with that being said one thing that I do want to focus on for next year is I really want us finding out what uh events are happening in the community. Like the Out of the Darkness walk and other workshops maybe like United Way or whoever else is doing so that we can be part of those events that's not just SPC events, it's other local things happening that we can be a part of so that's something that I really want that to be a priority of ours that we need to start looking into and start planning for 2013. Um yeah I think that's it. The only other thing is that we've been looking at schools and stuff so that's cool we did that we have them prioritized by size. We've done that um but also like I said our attorney apparently has connections with Midburg, so there's a possibility that he might be able to get us into Midburg which is cool, but you know with his track record who knows so

K: ((snort))

A: ((laughing)) yeah

The excerpt begins with a mark of meeting temporality. Although Mary starts with some commentary on the ensuing meeting (lines 1-2), she then “officially calls this to order” (lines 2-3). The “official” start time is cited as 12:59 (line 3), although the meeting was scheduled for 1:00. Later in the transcript, the meeting ends at 1:03, making this a four-minute meeting despite being scheduled for 30 minutes. However, the meeting started prior to this official calling to order, when Mary begins in line 1 with “so we’re gonna run through this”. The citation of a specific start and end time in order to “officially” begin marks a pattern or ritual required to mark a meeting. Furthermore, regarding temporality, this meeting is marked as one of a pattern of meetings that has been conducted “four times, five times now” (line 2).

When examining the act dynamics of this excerpt, a few “segments” appear. First, Mary comments on the meeting (lines 1-2), characterizing it as something that will be “run through”. The meeting will also be repetitive, at least for Mary, who says that she’s done it “four times, 5 times now” (line 2). This characterization is followed up by the “official call to order” (lines 2-3) at 12:59, and then a laugh that marks a transition between acts. Next Mary reviews the
committee’s actions (lines 3-10; 17-19). This is punctuated by setting the committee’s agenda and hopes for the future (lines 10-17; 19-21). Finally, Mary wraps up with a joke (line 21), and Katie and Amanda laugh (lines 22-23).

These acts are similar to what I would have found using only Hymes’s (1972) and Schwartzman’s (1989) frameworks, especially if I were examining the act sequence of this one meeting. However, when examining act sequence, typically one would look across meetings to find out how a typical pattern appears. If I were to involve more meetings in this, I would likely lose the flow from a hope for the future to a joke, because this is not necessarily the typical case. The joke is, however, still interesting in this particular meeting because of the relational work it accomplishes, which I explain further below. Furthermore, this sample analysis is based on a transcript excerpt that includes what the human participants speak during this meeting. Although there is a description beforehand to set up the excerpt, this still misses the way that bodies are moving around the meeting through the coffee shop space. These acts themselves are unique to this particular meeting in my data set, and the relation posed between meeting and coffee shop through these acts influences the acts that I point out above. For these reasons, the act dynamics category suits my purposes here better than just a combination of Hymes’s and Schwartzman’s frameworks.

The acts that I name above “express relationships between things” (Cooper, 2005, p. 1691, emphasis in original), thus the next step in coding is to examine the relations brought together through these actions. As I move through these codes, I include the emergent effects of these actions and relations I have found. The first act, commenting on the meeting, expresses a relation between Mary, the committee, and the ensuing meeting. Furthermore, this marks a relation to other meetings that Mary and the committee members have been a part of, including
meetings of the other committees that were held about a month prior to this (Mary attended meetings of the three other committees, Katie attended the fundraising committee, and Amanda attended the education committee meeting) and the board of directors held two weeks prior (all three attended this meeting). The relation between this meeting and the previous meetings emerges the effect of a meeting pattern, however this is the final instance of the pattern, as I noted in the introduction to this sample analysis.

Second, the meeting is officially called to order by Mary. This expresses a relationship between time and meetings, and seems to make the meeting more official than if this relationship were not expressed. Furthermore, this also marks a relation to the meeting minutes, where this exact time as stated would be recorded. As I mentioned above in coding for temporality, marking this particular relationship happens at the beginning of nearly every meeting. Thus, an emergent effect of this repeated cultivation is a ritual meeting beginning.

Third, the review acts express a number of relations. These mark a relation between previous acts and the committee, such as an invitation to join a subcommittee, looking at schools, and prioritizing schools by size. Each of these previous acts, and their re-constitution here, bring together relations between the committee, the United Way, the community, and its schools. This review, and the relations expressed, emerge the appearance of work that has been done in the name of the committee. Furthermore, this emergence of work relates the committee to SPC and the community, as this is done in service of a further related mission and vision statement. However, this review marking the relation of ends and acts does not mark a “resolution” of prior actions, and this is evidenced in the fourth action that punctuates these reviews.

Fourth, the reviews are punctuated by setting the committee’s agenda. These acts relate past acts to (hopeful) future acts, emerging a continuity between past and future as related in the
present meeting moment. The first agenda-setting act relates SPC to the community through the (hopeful) finding of local events. Through this act SPC embeds itself within a community, signaling a relation rather than a pre-existing condition. The second hopeful punctuation brings together a complex relation between SPC, an attorney, and Midburg school district. The unspoken, but powerfully present, necessity and urgency in this relation is the silence around mental health at the school district where at least two students who died by suicide had attended. In another meeting a powerful storytelling cast Midburg in a naïve and resistant relation with mental health, which was then transferred to a potentially resistant relation with SPC.

Fifth, and finally, the joke and laughter relate the previous hope with a “track record” of reported blunders and the attorney. Through the joke itself a coherent relation between Mary, Amanda, and Katie emerges and puts this committee assemblage in a begrudging relation with the attorney. This relation with the attorney is necessitated by the attempt to gain 501(c)(3) status with the IRS. Once this “official” relation was made between nonprofit and government, over a year later, the SPC-attorney relation was no longer enacted.

**Moving Between Analysis and Narrative**

Taking this transcript excerpt analysis above, and including some of the actions and relations prompted in the scene-setting of this particular excerpt, I started by using the actions and their prompted relations to create a storyboard for the ensuing narrative. As I stated above, I chose nonfiction narrative as a method of representation in order to present meetings as emergent events “in all their details” (Muñoz, 2014, p. 16). The kind of analysis I could produce from analyzing transcripts, like I did in the previous section, would instead separate out the complexity of the event into “bits and pieces,” which works against my treatment of meetings as emergent events (Muñoz, 2014, p. 16). In the ensuing narrative, the dialogue is based on the
transcript record of talk, but cleaned up to include fewer stutters and fillers. This particular choice was made in the service of developing a smoother flow to the narrative itself. With more data included, I would storyboard across meetings and demonstrate the relations between meetings in narrative form as well to further show how meetings as emergent events cultivate the transient effects of organization and culture. What follows is the narrative representation produced from these storyboarded codes.

**A Four-Minute Meeting Narrative**

Three days prior to Christmas, Mary and her best friend Katie arrived at the local Christian bookstore and found each other in the back of the store where there was a small coffee shop, which held scattered tables and chairs and a variety of vertical free-standing shelves displaying popular Christian book titles that customers can peruse while sipping on their coffee. Both friends arrived at the one and only couch that had been used for other now-distant committee meetings. Mary was still dressed in her work outfit as she had just arrived from being a bank teller. Katie had recently arrived home from Colorado. They made some small talk before Mary decided to call Amanda on speakerphone. Through this call the entire community resources committee would come together and could finally begin meeting.

“So we’re gonna run through this,” Mary began, “I don’t even have it written down because I’ve done it four times, five times now.” This particular preview signaled that nothing would be new, because this meeting was held to fulfill a pattern of meetings occurring at the end of the year for each committee to review their work.

Quickly, Mary backtracked already in order to fulfill the requisite ritual beginning. “Oh, I guess we officially call this to order. It’s 12:59.” This time would be officially recorded in the meeting minutes: start 12:59.
Mary laughed at herself slightly and then started to run through her review, which was almost identical to the one she had run through exactly two weeks prior at the annual board of directors meeting where all three committee members also had been in attendance. “So what we’ve been doing with community resources… we’ve just been connecting with people in the community, obviously. I’ve been connecting with United Way and started a new relationship there. Like I said at our last meeting they invited me to be a part of the Mental Health Adolescent Subcommittee… thing. Which I haven’t actually heard back from that yet, cuz I did contact them for more specifics, and they haven’t gotten back to me.” Mary had committed to contact them two weeks ago at the board meeting, so this was somewhat new information compared to the initial report.

“I’m assuming it’s because it’s the holidays,” she continued. “So I’m waiting for the holidays to be over and then try again. So really, once I get that committee then that’s going to open a lot of doors for us. We’re going to get our name out there, things are going to be much smoother.” This hopeful pronouncement reflected a long-held hope that someday soon SPC would gain some momentum and start to build partnerships and actually hold events to educate teens and prevent suicide. So far, only a few sparse and small events had been held in SPC’s name.

Amanda and Katie remained silent, allowing Mary to continue through her spiel. Talking on speakerphone in the middle of a public space where other customers roamed around the store put a kind of pressure on the meeting to continue as fast as possible to its inevitable end. The pair on the couch holding Amanda on speakerphone even drew the occasional pointed stare from a customer or employee.
“So with that being said, one thing that I do want to focus on for next year is I really want us finding out what events are happening in the community, like the Out of the Darkness walk and other workshops so that we can be part of those events, that’s not just SPC events, it’s other local things happening that we can be a part of.” One of the most successful events for getting people together under SPC’s name had been the Out of the Darkness walk, a charity walk organized by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention in different areas of the country. This was an already established kind of walk that brought a large section of the population together, so SPC could potentially gain more exposure by participating in this walk and other community events that other efforts attempted so far had not been successful at garnering.

“So that’s something that I really want to be a priority of ours, that we need to start looking into and start planning for 2013.” 2013, after all, was only nine days away! However, again, this was not new information, as it had been reported and decided two weeks ago.

“Yeah, I think that’s it,” Mary concluded the topic, thereby setting the agenda for the committee in 2013 that had already been set and agreed upon in the annual board meeting. “The only other thing is that we’ve been looking at schools and stuff, so that’s cool. We did that and have them prioritized by size. We’ve done that.” One of the “major” tasks undertaken by the community resources committee in 2012 was to gather a list of middle schools and high schools in the community to determine how many schools there were to reach and attempt to prioritize getting into these schools by the size of their student body. To reach the highest number of students with the least number of events, the largest area high schools and middle schools had become the main targets. From there, the hope was that word of mouth would spread to the lower-populated schools. The schools with better relations to mental health topics were also
prioritized over others with worse relations, partially because forging the new relation seemed to be an easier task with them.

“Oh, but also,” Mary interjected in her own review, “Like I said, our attorney apparently has connections with Midburg, so there’s a possibility that he might be able to get us into Midburg, which is cool.” Midburg High School had the greater share of recent suicides compared to their student population, which made them the highest priority on SPC’s list. However, they also had the biggest reputation for being averse to mental health, which made them the largest challenge for SPC. They were therefore downgraded on the list until SPC emerged with further credibility. These connections through the attorney might produce this credible fruit! “But you know, with his track record, who knows…” Mary trailed off.

Katie and then Amanda laughed, making the first sounds other than Mary’s voice since the meeting “officially” began at 12:59pm. Par for the course, Mary had taken up 95% of a meeting so far with information that could easily have been sent in an email and was largely repetitive of another meeting. After concluding the meeting two minutes later and hanging up on Amanda, she comments, “We really did not need to come here.” The drive home from the meeting ended up lasting longer than the meeting itself, but the annual review meeting pattern was complete. And it would never be repeated again.

Outcomes

Before concluding this chapter, I discuss the outcomes of my analysis briefly before moving into the Analysis Chapters to further explore the implications of these. I proceeded through data analysis using the procedures that I described above, especially upon finding that technology continually seemed to participate in the actions I found through my initial coding. Another reason I chose to focus on technology was to meet Schwartzman’s (2015) call to focus
further on hybrid meetings, which describes almost all of the meetings that I collected. After coding these data, I categorized them according to similarities or relations that I perceived in the process of reviewing them. These codes and categories are included as Appendix 4.

Taken together, this analysis indicated three answers to my research question: How do meetings as emergent events cultivate the transient effects of organization and culture? A first category of codes indicated that deciding in meetings cultivated the effects of organization and culture. I explore this first theme further in Chapter 4. Second, legitimizing cohered to demonstrate a second way that meetings cultivated the effects of organization and culture, which I explore further in Chapter 5. Finally, presence-ing, or the act of technology making something/one present in meetings demonstrated a third category. Presence-ing with technology provides a third answer to how meetings as emergent events cultivate the effects of organization and culture. I explore this theme in Chapter 6, the final analysis chapter.

On Writing

The joining of fieldwork and culture in an ethnography entails far more than writing up the results… Among social scientists there is a rather persistent conviction that the problems of ethnography are merely those of access, intimacy, sharp ears and eyes, good habits of recording, and so forth. It is not a straightforward matter, however, because a culture or a cultural practice is as much created by the writing (i.e., it is intangible and can only be put into words) as it determines the writing itself. To suggest otherwise reduces ethnography to method. (Van Maanen, 2011, p. 6)

To conclude this chapter, I want to further elaborate on my choice of writing style. Narrative, as a genre of ethnographic writing, allows for a range of styles and combinations. I
have taken inspiration from a variety of authors who have focused on their representational practices, and especially on how writing crafts a culture or practice. I do not claim that the narratives constructed for analysis in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 are the meetings they describe. They are, instead, my attempt to inscribe meetings as emergent events. Narrative, as I wrote above, allows me to represent “an event in all its details” (Muñoz, 2014, p. 16). I chose narratives because, as Muñoz (2014) writes, “narratives are one of the most powerful communication acts humans are – uniquely, according to some scholars – able to perform. They persuade, they serve as vessels of both individual and collective memory, they teach, they construct understanding from mystery” (p. 17). Writing these narratives helped me to “construct understanding from mystery” about meetings as emergent events, and I offer them to you, the reader, so that you may do the same. In this way, I recognize that this text itself is emergent, making it an intriguing fit for the ontological turn in which I situate it.

Van Maanen (2011) wrote his book Tales of the Field to survey a range of narrative writing styles and conventions present at the time of his writing about writing. I was inspired by the writing styles and conventions of many authors who have written before me. Narrative, in fact, first drew me to the ethnography of communication. Philipsen’s (1975) accounts of “speaking like a man” in Teamsterville stuck with me from the moment I read it as a senior undergraduate student crafting my first piece of original scholarship. Narrating in the third person, perhaps under the conventions of the time, he wrote about situations in which one’s masculinity or authority were challenged if they chose speech instead of violence. The image of young boys becoming agitated, perhaps because they felt unsafe when their chaperone expressed he would not necessarily respond to threats with violence, sticks with me to this day. Muñoz’s (2014) more recent work also inspired me, because not only does the work argue for the
necessity of narrative styles and conventions, but also because she outed her own “guilty
pleasure” in writing them, which I share. Schwartzman’s (1989) work as well inspired me to
“consider a room” and “consider a meeting” with her opening scenes.

In organizational communication, narrative writing was often included in interpretive
work focused on organizational cultures. Trujillo’s (1992) scenes at a baseball park consider the
mundane practices of workers, like the cleanup crew, that are often unseen by fans. Similarly,
meetings are often unseen by organizational clients or customers, and yet they so intimately
produce the experience(s) offered. In the Montreal School, recent works have played with
writing genres and conventions as well. Brummans (2007) wrote an article that included
nonanthropological poetry to demonstrate the agency of a document. This writing style allowed
him to play with viewing a scene from vantage points other than the human, inspiring some of
my own choices made here, especially Chapter 6. Taylor and Van Every’s (2014) recent book
utilizes a different kind of transcript display and analysis that pulls the reader directly into the
analysis alongside them. Their in-text commentaries on unfolding action read as playful. For
example, comments like “[Echoes of Greimas (and Barley), we realized!]” (p. 68) or “[“Good
taste?” Whose “good taste”?]” (p. 91) guide the reader to approach and question the actions
unfolding in text before them.

Furthermore, anthropology’s own Writing Culture movement in the 1980s (cf. Clifford &
Marcus, 1986; Van Maanen, 2011), and the subsequent resurgences of attention to writing
ethnographies energized my desire to write narratively and attend to a variety of styles and
conventions. Recently other ethnographers have turned to writing about writing, urging others to
pay attention to their craft. Narayan’s (2012) prompts for writers to discover the rich details of
their sites that enliven them helped me to sketch the scenes of meetings, and the characters
brought together in them. Recent works demonstrate the power of writing for ethnography, and they have inspired me to similarly attend to my own writing conventions. In particular, Tsing’s (2005) work inspired me to stick closely to the details of communities through her inclusion of a list of mushroom species. Furthermore, her brief account of sexual assault in the course of her fieldwork still haunts me, despite taking up the space of half a paragraph in the middle of one chapter of her book. Rosaldo’s (2014) and Stevenson’s (2014) works both wrote about life and death, in ways that further haunt the readers and perhaps the writers themselves. Rosaldo’s description of his wife’s untimely death in the course of fieldwork inscribes a grief some know too well and others may not have yet encountered (and hopefully never will). Stevenson’s descriptions of fearful suicide prevention call center workers that worry at night about whether their callers will live or die sticks with me as a fear I too have shared in doing my work with SPC. The focus on writing and the ethnographies that take up various written styles are important not only because they bend traditional academic writing styles, but also because the writing of them resonates with the reader, demonstrating the transcendental power of ethnography. Ethnographies cannot be generalizable, so instead their value can be measured by transcending an individual case to tap into a broader experience. Tracy (2010) refers to this criteria for qualitative research as transferability.

Drawing from these excellently written explorations in ethnography and representation, I chose writing style(s) that align with my goals for this research. I represent meetings through narrative style, but do not attempt to form meetings into narrative arcs. Attending to the ways in which writing is a representational practice, I wanted to represent the ways in which meetings do not necessarily build to a crescendo and end with a resolution in the same way as fictional narratives. However, what follows in the analysis chapters is not purely narrative. I also aim to
make theoretical arguments from my writing, and so I chose a deliberately multivocal style for writing to appease a social scientific audience, even as I push the boundaries of this writing. Muñoz (2014) made a similar move in her work by incorporating questions for academic reflection in addition to a traditional literature review alongside her collection of narratives. Van Maanen (2011) also notes that “voice varies within and between ethnographic narratives,” so ethnography is already a multivocal enterprise.

In this dissertation, each analytic chapter begins with theoretical and conceptual foundations for the ensuing analysis, and I interrupt narratives with analytic writing that demonstrates how the narratives display and build toward a broader argument about these meetings. This decision is ethnographic: tangents, jokes, personal matters, and other “business” often punctuated meetings. Although I include many of these tangents, jokes, personal matters, and other “business” in the ensuing narratives, I also mimic this punctuation by punctuating narratives with analytic style. This decision is also epistemological, because I write the narratives as impressionist tales (Van Maanen, 2011). According to Van Maanen (2011), an impressionist tale

is a representational means of cracking open the culture and the fieldworker’s way of knowing so that both can be jointly examined. Impressionist writing tries to keep both subject and object in constant view. The epistemological aim is then to braid the knower with the known. (p. 102)

Impressionist tales therefore already invite the reader to reflect on the creation of the text, which works toward textual reflexivity (Harris, 2016). These narratives, therefore, incorporate “all the odds and ends that are associated with the remembered events” so that the reader can view the multiple ways that I, the researcher, was involved in meetings and organizing (Van
Maanen, 2011, p. 103). This writing style “braids” together the knower, me, and the known, meetings and my analysis of them. In this way, I hope to “draw an audience into an unfamiliar story world” and allow that audience “to see, hear, and feel” as I did to achieve a quality of transferability in my work (Van Maanen, 2011, p. 103). Through this multivocal text, I hope that the writing resonates with you, reader, and that this demonstrates the transcendental or transferable power of this ethnography.
Chapter IV

DECIDING: BECAUSE MEETINGS ARE NOT ABOUT DECISIONS

In this chapter I describe the processes of deciding as a first answer to my research question, how do meetings as emergent events cultivate the transient effects of organization and culture. As I argued in Chapter 2, practitioners and scholars often assume that meetings are about decision-making processes, and decision-making has often been studied as a specific process in meetings (Clifton, 2009; Haug, 2015; Huisman, 2001; Milburn, 2009; Raclaw & Ford, 2015; Scott, Allen, et al., 2015). Conversation analysts have studied the turn-by-turn interaction that accomplishes decision-making (Clifton, 2009; Huisman, 2001; Raclaw & Ford, 2015). Milburn (2009) found a logical act sequence meetings followed for deciding. Participants themselves often anticipate that decisions, actions, or recommendations will emerge from meetings (Schwartzman, 1989). Decisions are often viewed as a hallmark of rationality in meetings (Schwartzman, 1981).

However, Schwartzman (1981), along with March and Olsen (1976), argue that “the decision-making process [is] a confluence of participants, problems and solutions that does not always make sense” (p. 85). March and Olsen (1976) call this confluence and opportunities for choices and decisions within that confluence a garbage can:

Suppose we view a choice opportunity as a garbage can into which various problems and solutions are dumped by participants. The mix of garbage in a single can depends partly on the labels attached to the alternative cans, but it also depends on which garbage is being produced at the moment, on the mix of cans available, and on the speed with which garbage is collected and removed from the scene. (March & Olsen, 1976, p. 26; as cited in Schwartzman, 1981, p. 85)
This garbage can model of choice opportunities, or decisions, is similar to the view of meetings as emergent events that I take throughout this dissertation. Any one deciding process draws together an (imperfect) assemblage of reasons, circumstances, people, problems, and potential solutions. Effects emerge out of this assemblage for deciding, often not linked to anything “intentional,” and some of these effects could be called decisions. However, meetings are not necessarily about decisions, even if scholars take up this garbage can model. As Schwartzman (1989) argues, “instead of accepting task-focused assumptions that suggest that decisions, crises, conflicts, and the like are what meetings are about, the opposite is proposed here, that is, that meetings are what decisions, problems, and crises are about” (p. 9, emphasis in original). In other words, “meetings reproduce themselves by the volume of decisions, problems, crises, and the like that an organization produces” (p. 10). Meetings, thus, may use decisions and deciding as one of many processes that ensure their continual reappearance. For example, meeting minutes and other documents that persist after the meeting, often record emergent decisions that then lead to further deciding, perhaps about implementation, more specific details, and the like, which prompts a new meeting.

In my analysis, deciding arose as an important way that meetings interacted with technology. Throughout four years of meetings, we have used many deciding processes to determine work processes, like directions for the website designers, how to collaborate online in ways that replaced meetings and what online collaboration meant for volunteers, and details about branding for SPC and its acquired subsidiary. Decisions, in fact, were not necessarily an effect of deciding, as some processes would repeat on the same topic, even after something resembling a “decision” arose.
Throughout this chapter, the reader will see decisions being (re)produced, despite the changes in deciding that shifted over time. Each time deciding appeared, this brought together new assemblages of contingently obligatory relations. Although deciding often emerged similar effects to previous renditions, unique effects also resulted. Deciding, therefore, demonstrates that individual intent, organizational processes, and organizational action are not tightly coupled (Schwartzman, 2015). Deciding organizes differently than this folk theory. This different organizing is what I trace in the narratives throughout this chapter. I have identified, and will illustrate, three types of organizing through deciding: repetition, documents, and rhythm.

First, the repetition of deciding became an important organizing theme through the data I analyzed. Participants often brought up the same problems over and over, even if the same emergent decision resulted each time. Repetition cultivates organization in particular ways. The first section of narratives focuses on the theme of repetition, the repetitive deciding centers around a mobile website. Each time a prompted participant prompts deciding she or he provides both similar and different justifications or reasons for deciding. This demonstrates that repetitive deciding may bring together unique assemblages, or garbage cans each time, despite cultivating the same idea or problem.

Second, documents are continuously brought in and out of deciding throughout these meetings as well. Meetings typically may be associated with agendas and meeting minutes, but deciding brings other documents to the organizing fore. The second section of narratives demonstrates how documents such as a board member contract, a volunteer application form, and an annual review form, all act in deciding about the problem of (dis)appearing volunteers. This section demonstrates that the relationship(s) between documents and meetings are similar to the relationship between text and conversation (Taylor & Van Every, 2000). Texts inscribe
conversations, providing them a lasting quality, whereas conversations (re)produce texts, providing them with continued activity and importance for organizing.

Finally, rhythm was a truly emergent theme in my analysis. While writing the narrative for the meeting produced in the third section, I discovered there seemed to be a rhythm to deciding, much like waves crashing in and out of a shoreline. This rhythm provides an organizing force, moving between a larger deciding and smaller matters that must also be decided. Rhythm ultimately displays that rationality is not necessarily the guiding force for meetings or deciding, nor should it be. Deciding works in pushes and pulls, pushing in with concerns and discussion, and pulling back toward emergent resolution. I expand on the significance of rhythm after the narrative and in the conclusion.

Each of the meetings represented here are meetings of the board of directors. I chose these meetings because committee meetings often repeated or ratified the emergent “decisions” made in board meetings. Deciding in board meetings also (re)organized trajectories, norms, and roles. Despite many shifts in membership over the four years of my ethnographic research, a strong core of the board remained the same over time. Mary, Amanda, Dan, Lisa, Lise, and I have all served on the board since it was formed in 2012. Some participants wove in and out of these meetings as they wove in and out of the board. These included Sean, who served from 2012 to 2014 as treasurer; Doug, who served from 2012 to 2015, and was the oldest board member by thirty years throughout my study; Theresa, who joined the board in 2013; Dave, who joined the board in 2014 as part of the Keep Living Ministries (KLM) acquisition and served until 2016; Craig, who joined the board as treasurer in 2014; and finally Sam, who replaced Dave in 2016 on the board and as lead of KLM. Appendix 2 has the full list of participants included
throughout these narratives, and provides some detail on their formal, assigned roles and timelines of participation.

Prior to presenting the narratives, I want to provide some guidance on the structure of the text. In the first two sections, second-level headings mark the date of each meeting narrative. The third section includes a narrative of only one meeting, and second-level headings there break up the text into smaller deciding that punctuate deciding about an acquisition. Italicized text provides analytical commentary before and after each narrative excerpt, and it marks the beginning of new sections. These sections build toward the claims that I make in each section about deciding and meetings. I use text in square brackets as reflexive asides to maintain reflexivity in the narratives and ongoing recognitions of my shifting and multiple roles in the participation and observation of these meetings. These asides incorporate the two kinds of reflexivity that I discussed in Chapter 3: authorial reflexivity, where I continue to “expound upon [my] own position” (Harris, 2016, p. 118); and textual reflexivity, where I invite “readers to muse about the construction of the writing and representation” (Harris, 2016, p. 118) based on the variety of relations between SPC, this text, and myself.

**Annually Deciding to Make a Mobile Website**

*This section draws on data from the four annual board meetings included in my data set, all of which occurred in December. This timing displays an important aspect of temporality, December was the end of both the calendar and fiscal year for SPC, and thus relates these December board meetings in an annual cycle. Each annual board meeting included a lengthy reporting and goal-setting section on the agenda. The process by which SPC set these reports and goals changed throughout the years, but deciding about a particular goal, namely, establishing a mobile website, repeated in each meeting. By reading each instance of talk about*
the website design and functionality back to back, the contrasts between each instance and the assemblages brought together in each deciding should become apparent.

**December 2012**

_The ensuing narrative pieces demonstrate early organizing in SPC. This is the second meeting in my data set, the second meeting of the board of directors, and the first “annual board meeting.” The timing of this meeting is significant because it is scheduled near the end of the fiscal year (December 31st), and the annual meeting is legally required in order to maintain 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status with the Internal Revenue Service. SPC did not gain this status until April 2014, but the paperwork was about to be filed at this point in time._

_Through the narrative, I include a full example of a committee report and the subsequent goal-setting that Mary provides. She largely reads this report off of a document that she sent out prior to the meeting. The board meeting here stands to ratify these decisions, and, occasionally, refine them. During this recitation of reports and goals, Lise first mentions plans for a mobile website._

In the middle of what appeared to me as a lecture-length ramble of information during the first annual meeting of the board of directors, Mary reviewed the work each committee had accomplished in the first year of SPC. “So this is just so that we can go over stuff that we are working on in each committee and again I know a lot of you hopefully have read this already but let me just read it again.

“Marketing team!” Mary continued. “We’ve been working on a facelift for SPC, we’re redesigning the website and from what I’ve seen so far, it looks AWESOME. So I’m really really excited about that happening. Um, it’s going to be brighter. Right now, you know, it’s black background with like red and blue hints, which is fine, it’s just kind of dark. You know,
[suicide]’s a dark subject, we just want to be a little more hopeful. So we’re switching to more of the white background with blue and red as hints everything. We’re kind of leaning more towards that lighter blue as being our main color with red being a…” Mary trailed off, trying to find the right word.

“Accent,” Lise, Mary’s sister, provided.

“Accent, there we go, thank you, marketing director. Lise, do you want to say anything about the website?”

“No, just that uh, we are also designing an email template so that we can get our email campaign started and our quarterly newsletter to go out. So that’s just our goal for right now and we’re good with that,” Lise added.

“We’ve also been working through social media presence things, like making sure we post at least once a week. I’ve been failing with that a little bit because my life is hard. So if anyone wants to volunteer like, ‘oh my gosh, I found a really cool article’ or something, then by all means let me know. I can promote any of you guys to admin on Facebook. Um, I also notice that pictures seem to get more notice, obviously, even if it’s something like really cheesy inspirational. Like people like that stuff, so we’ll do a lot of photos.”

“Also, I mean,” Lise cut in. “I’m also doing a mobile version of the website.”

“A mobile version, ooh!” Mary praised.

“People can access it via the iPhone,” Lise elaborated softly.

“So we’re working on all of that, we’re working on email marketing, we’re going to have a newsletter once a quarter. And the content of those emails is going to be more, it’s going to be focused on the quarter. For example, the first quarter of the year is actually um, well, the first quarter of the year is you know, a new year, new beginnings. And all of these kind of work off
of that. The second quarter of the year is the um, most stressful for suicide, cuz you know it’s spring. People that are suffering from seasonal affective disorder are starting to get happy again, and also people who are legitimately depressed are starting to feel alone, because no one else is depressed with them. So spring is, you know, new life and woo! And coming back to life, but if you’re depressed that’s actually like the worst thing ever because everything else seems like it’s coming back to life but you. And so the spring is the worst time for suicide, so we’re probably going to be focusing on that in the second quarter. Third quarter is you know, new school year is starting, focusing on, you know, looking at your peers, but also have See You at the Pole, which is a Christian thing that happens. We’re also going to have Christian things in there, that’s another topic. But the point being of course third quarter we’re focusing on the new school year. Fourth quarter is the holidays and the holidays can be very very hard for a lot of people. So that’s kind of the way we’re going to be working those email campaigns.” Mary took a deep breath and paused here. “Does anyone have any questions so far? I know I’m rambling like a lot,” she laughed.

“No,” Lise said. “Are they still there?”

“Everyone still there?” Mary asked the phone. Lise, Mary, Doug, and Sean were meeting in the meeting room of the Christian bookstore where all of our initial meetings had happened for SPC. The internet cut out about 10 minutes into the meeting, so Mary called those attending virtually on a conference call. This included Amanda, Lisa (and Dan), and me. Without the visual cues of faces on a screen, the technology could have dropped us from the call without someone knowing.

“Yes,” I yelled back. I was looking through Pinterest while Mary rambled continuously and I listened to her on speakerphone. So far she was repeating and then tangentially riffing off
of the documents she’d sent us ahead of time, which I had read. I wondered what the other folks were doing without the watchful eyes of video-conferencing. I imagined Amanda planning out her homework for the week as she finished her undergrad degree, and maybe Dan and Lisa making faces at each other to silently maintain the teasing in their relationship.

“Yes,” Amanda answered. The folks “in the room” laughed a little bit, probably because our yes answers sounded monotone at best. The boredom in our voices must have resonated with them.

“What’s that Dan?” Mary asked. We could hear something had come from Dan’s voice, but not what he said in the midst of the laughter.

“Still present and awake,” he repeated.

“Ok, awake. Good. If anyone needs to interrupt me, please just interrupt. I, I don’t care,” Mary mentioned before moving on to ramble further about the other committees.

*Throughout this deciding narrative, Mary almost unilaterally voiced deciding, and this happened in much the same way as reporting information. Even when Lise, the marketing director, offered the mobile website as a decision, Mary ratified it with her interest, and then transitioned to another marketing committee topic. I revisit this same emergent decision often throughout the remaining meetings included in this section. Here, deciding brings together Mary and Lise to produce the emergent effect of a decision to create a mobile website. The increasing prominence of iPhones and other smart phones in 2012 also enters this deciding assemblage. The act dynamics of reporting and ratifying work to bring together these contingently obligatory relations and produce this emergent decision.*

December 2013
The following year the second annual board meeting happened yet again in December. This board meeting included introducing and voting on a new board member, Theresa, who will be included in future meetings. In this meeting narrative, I include a brief example of deciding on continuing board membership, which prompts deciding about the website again.

“Hi, I would like to be on the board,” Lise announced as the last person in the board of directors’ circle to put in her nomination for another year.

“Yay!” Lisa announced, and everyone laughed at the unfitting formality of the action of re-voting ourselves onto the board.

“That’s everyone, ok,” Mary continued with the formality. “Anyone object to Lise? Please don’t object, because we need her.” A few other folks laughed at her pleading.

“Ooh, that would make your life more difficult,” Dan pointed out. He was carrying on a running joke of being Mary’s arch enemy that had started in a small diner gathering after evening church group meetings [although none of us remember the specific inciting incident eight years later]. Dan, Mary, and I started the tradition that carried on for a couple years whenever I was home from college, and occasionally my sister and Lisa would join us. That small diner saw the start of Dan and Mary joking about being each other’s arch enemies, and the start of Dan and Lisa’s relationship. It also witnessed one of the first donations to SPC, a check handed from Dan to Mary. Mary, in disbelief, told him that it was way too much and she couldn’t accept it. Smiling, he told her it wasn’t and insisted that she accept it. I’m not sure any of us realized at the time what that moment would mean. Within months the diner would catch fire (again) and then be closed for repairs and a switch in ownership, or else that small diner could have witnessed many more first moments for SPC.

“You would slowly see our company just like bottom out,” Mary retorted to Dan.
“And we’ll threaten you with more wedding planning!” Lisa added, smiling at her now-fiancé.

“Can anyone take on her responsibility?” Someone asked.

“Yeah, can anyone design a website?” Mary challenged.

“Dan can. Actually, you would do a much better job than I did,” Lise acquiesced.

“The website is fabulous,” Mary praised.

“I love the website,” Lisa concurred.

“I didn’t know what I was doing really,” Lise humbly said in response to the praise.

“Yeah it looks awesome,” Doug added.

“Yay, everyone’s in again, that’s so exciting,” Mary said to conclude again that the board remained intact.

“If you,” Lise started. “If you could, Dan, go through and see something that you know how to fix that’s not working, like I don’t know anything. Just be like ‘hey.’ Like the one our volunteer sent something, I was like ‘thank you.’”

“Yeah, let me know if you need help,” Dan said.

“It works,” Lisa said.

“No problem,” Dan confirmed.

“Lise, you’re our marketing chair so if you need to like, pester Dan,” Mary started.

“Whatever you need,” Dan said.

“And be like ‘here’s half of the email Mary sent me’ and like send it to him,” Mary continued.

“Yeah,” Dan continued. “Cuz I’m actually winding down my, uh, involvement with my web design business. I just hired an idiot client, so.”
“Oh,” Lise said.

“We’ll be your only idiot client!” Mary declared. Several people laughed at this.

“Yeah, I mean, alright,” Lise said. “If it’s totally good for you, it’s good for me.”

“So feel free,” Dave concluded.

Doug cut in, “I love it when people come to fix my computer at my house and they start talking computer-ese about my computer. And I’m like, ‘I’m sure you’re right,’ I just, I don’t even know what those words mean.” Some of the folks gathered around Mary’s kitchen table laughed at this.

“Yeah, it does need a new carburetor! Sure!” Lisa joked, referencing car parts instead of computer parts.

“Tera-what?” Dan joked as well. More of us laughed then as well.

*When considering the deciding involved in this meeting, first notice that deciding about continuing board membership largely relied on the absence of objections to signify the emergent consensus. This norm emerged to save time on the voting process, and later the formality of voting would be cut completely. In January 2016, Mary asked if anyone did not want to continue, and then everyone was considered to be “elected” for another year. Board members who do not wish to continue usually terminate their own contracts at other times of the year, and new members are voted on an as-needed basis.*

*Immediately following this board membership deciding, Lise humbly volunteers that Dan could do a better job at the website design, and Dan accepts the position in an interesting push-and-pull between “arch-enemies” and also his fiancée. As the only talk about the website outside of goal-setting for content, notice that the mobile website has been dropped from organizing SPC.*
dynamics of volunteering and pushing-and-pulling, the mobile website decision does not emerge in this meeting.

December 2014

A year later SPC held the third annual board meeting. The meeting started with discussion of the annual review Mary conducted of SPC, the board, and all of the volunteers. I write more about this process in the next major section about volunteers. This third board meeting included the same reporting and goal-setting structure as the first annual board meeting, but with some changes in process. The mobile website subject came up originally as an aside before Mary brought it to the fore and ratified it.

Over an hour and a half into the meeting, Mary finally arrived at goal-setting, and discussing the marketing committee specifically. Mary talked through a range of thoughts that she’d had for them to accomplish in the coming year.

“We need to work on a mobile site,” Dan said to Lise or just muttered in general, it was hard to tell from my vantage point on a laptop in the corner of the room.

Ignoring or not hearing Dan’s comment, Mary continued talking through the topic that she was already on discussing the press kit and setting a goal to make a promo video.

“I have another marketing thing,” Lise mentioned, over ten minutes later in the discussion. “We want to create a mobile website.”

“Mobile, yeah! Mobile website,” Mary acknowledged.

“Mhm,” Dan confirmed. “Yeah my friend brought that up, and I was like ‘I don’t think we have, yeah.’”

“That’s actually huge,” Mary said. “I’m glad you brought that up cuz one of the, more confidential information,” Mary started rambling. [To respect the confidential information, I’m
summarizing her point, and anonymizing the organization she references as much as possible. I reference this same organization later in this chapter and similarly summarize and anonymize that discussion.] She continues, referencing a startup nonprofit that she once mentioned she felt regret for not inviting to be part of SPC when she had the chance. At this point, we knew that the organization had slowly imploded, strongly affected by the same grief and loss that brought it to life. Mary said one of the volunteers deleted the entire website, which surprised everyone else in the meeting. The same volunteer told Mary that they kept the mobile website up. “[The volunteer] still wanted people to get help,” Mary continued. “And teenagers today don’t use desktops, they use their phones. So they’re going to be accessing the mobile website, so their mobile website is still accessible. And so I was like ‘woah, that’s a really good point. We should probably have a mobile website.’ So yeah, we want to get a mobile website set up.”

One of the glaring differences of this deciding is that it does not reference the discussion in December 2012 when Lise first brought up the idea of creating a mobile website. Now that Dan works on the website as well, he brings this up to Lise as an aside in the meeting. Lise then brings up this point, co-authoring his statement. Co-authoring is a strategy by which two meeting members cooperatively propose something, often one person repeating and expanding on another (Clifton, 2009). Finally, Mary also co-authors the statement, as she did in 2012, to demonstrate support alongside Dan and Lise.

The justification for this mobile website goal also changes between the first mention in 2012 and this meeting. In the first mention, Lise uses the growing prominence of smart phones as a justification, perhaps to get ahead of the mobile curve. Here, Mary uses a “behind the times” justification. “Teenagers,” SPC’s target population, “use their phones” instead of desktops “today.” Without a mobile website, SPC is falling behind reaching its target audience,
and importantly falling behind an organization that no longer exists. These act dynamics bring together a unique assemblage of participants (Dan, Lise, and Mary), a contextualizing narrative about a competing organization, and technology uses. Out of this, the decision to make a mobile website yet again emerges.

December 2015

In the fourth annual board meeting, I had suggested to Mary that she turn over more responsibility for reporting and goal-setting to the committee chairs. This provided a way to cultivate the responsibility and the “ownership” of board members and committee chairs differently than Mary providing reports and goals for ratification. I hoped this suggestion would repeatedly cultivate a solution to one of the problems and concerns Mary brings up in the next section on volunteers. This narrative snippet focuses on Lise’s report of the design committee, which split from the marketing committee and maintained responsibility for the website and its mobile future. This is the third and final deciding about the mobile website as a goal for SPC.

About an hour into this annual board meeting, Lise gave the report for the design team, which separated from the marketing team in the last year. She reported on the progress toward making a mobile website, and the small group that she’d put together to do so.

“We’ve moved all the progress from, well, to the WordPress site,” Dan added, since he’d been volunteered/volun-told to work on this. “I got all of the blog posts, and I’m about halfway through finalizing all the pages. We’ll have that ready. I’m gonna turn it over to Roger in about two weeks?”

“Ok,” Lise confirmed. “So he’s gonna do the mobile part?”

“Yeah, and then,” Dave mumbled something back directly to Lise.

“Ok, cool!” Lise confirmed.
“So then it’ll be mobile optimized,” Mary continued. “And I know that is good for teenagers, because today’s youth are more likely to look at something on the phone than they are on actual desktops, so we need to make sure our website looks good on a phone. And it also gives us higher priority on Google Searches. Is that right, Theresa? On mobile?”

“Yep,” Theresa, the head of the newly-separated marketing committee confirmed.

Another year gone by, another year the mobile website made the goals list.

Finally, deciding about the mobile website starts with a report of movement toward the goal. During the intervening year between the third and fourth annual board meeting, Lise and Dan had worked on migrating the website between hosting platforms. WordPress had better support for mobile optimization from their research, and so the entire website was migrating to the platform. Roger, the volunteer mentioned here, specialized in mobile optimization, and his volunteer presence prompted faster movement toward the goal. Movement toward this overall mobile website goal brought together these participants, technologies, and actions in a new assemblage.

Mary repeated the previous justification for the mobile website: catching up to “today’s youth” who are more likely to “look at something on the phone.” SPC’s website has always been accessible from smartphones, but was never optimized for the device. She adds further justification as well, that Google’s algorithm prioritizes websites that are optimized for mobile. Theresa, who speaks as the expert on digital marketing, concurs with the justification. These act dynamics involve Google, its algorithm, and Theresa in contingently obligatory relations for this assemblage as well.

As a brief epilogue to the mobile website, Roger stopped volunteering halfway through the mobile optimization process, delaying its release, and the migration to WordPress. A friend
of Mary and Dan, whose business has continually contributed financially to SPC, picked up the mobile website optimization. This assemblage finally completed whole process in October 2016, and Theresa reported on mobile traffic progress in the fifth annual board meeting in January 2017.

Each of these decidings involve unique assemblages, although most result in the same emergent decision, make a mobile website. Some of the contingently obligatory relations are continuously involved: Mary, Lise, and the reason that teens, the target audience, increasingly use smartphones to access the web. Others come in and out of view. In 2013, Dan became involved in the assemblage. In 2014, a coworker’s asking prompted a new reason for deciding. Finally, in 2015, the decidings prompted an assemblage’s emergence to complete the goal.

Documents and the Problem of (Dis) Appearing Volunteers

Another repetitive deciding appeared throughout my data, and this concerned the problem of (dis) appearing volunteers. These were volunteers who initially appeared and offered their ability to work with SPC, and then didn’t respond to the online platform, thus disappearing and not contributing to discussions. This deciding also repeated, often without reference to previous deciding about it, like the repetition over the mobile website in the first section. Throughout these narratives, I add some analysis of how characterizations of this problem change over time, demonstrating different garbage cans or assemblages brought together by different incidents. With the exception of the first meeting, documents became an important part of the assemblages brought together through deciding on this problem. As one of the points that Schwartzman (2015) emphasized for future research, I use this section to explore the relationship between documents and meetings in deciding.

December 2012
The first annual board meeting also first introduced the problem of (dis)appearing volunteers. This repeating problem and deciding about it changes characterization over time. This first time brings up an interesting tension around volunteers in the nonprofit, which I discuss at the end of this narrative. As a reminder, the internet fell through in this meeting, so the meeting includes a conference call on speakerphone.

“Ok,” Mary concluded, “we’re going to move into discussion. Is there anything that anyone wants to talk about for anything involving SPC?”

“Um,” Lise started, but didn’t finish.

After a short pause, Mary continued. “No, everything’s good here. Anyone on the phone, that you’d like to bring up?”

“I do!” Amanda shouted. “Um the website. I emailed this volunteer and I never heard back from her, so I don’t know if there’s another way for me to contact her.”

“Who are you talking about?” Mary asked.

“The web volunteer.” Amanda answered.

“I do have her phone number, I will send it to you.”

“Ok.”

“Um, yeah,” Mary continued. “I’m finding there is, that’s one thing that I am very sad about volunteers. I’m getting some very very awesome volunteers and then by the time you need them to do something, their like situation changes. And so, a great example, we did have someone on our marketing committee up until last night, and her name is Rebecca. And she does public relations and she’s very good with like news articles. And she’s done email newsletters and stuff like that before, so we’re really excited to have her, you know, helping out with our emails, our quarterly email newsletters. And she just let me know that her life
situation’s changed and she won’t be able to volunteer anymore. So that’s that. But I mean, especially if you are a chair of a committee, be expecting of that. Um, I don’t ever want SPC to be a burden on anybody. I want people to volunteer because they have the heart to, and they have the time to, so just be aware of that. That your members of your committee, they can really quit at any time. I mean we’re not gonna hold that against them. I’m also not in the business of burning bridges, I mean if Rebecca’s life situation changes and she wants to volunteer again, I want her to feel welcome to do that, and I will gladly let her. So we don’t want to get mad at people if they’re not responding. If you cannot get in contact with the website volunteer, Amanda, you try calling her and you can’t get a hold of her, then we’ll just let her go from the committee. Because we also don’t want dead weight hanging around. We don’t want to be assigning people projects and have them not participate.”

“Ok,” Amanda acknowledged.

“Yeah so just do what you can to contact her and if you don’t hear anything then after maybe like a week or so of responding, maybe after two weeks, then we’ll just let her go from the committee.”

“Ok.”

“And that goes for any committee,” Mary concluded.

Amanda prompted deciding about what to do for volunteers who do not respond. Mary voiced a tension in this deciding assemblage, which is not wanting to “burden” people, especially if their “situation changes,” but also not wanting “dead weight hanging around.” This “dead weight” was represented online by a list of names who had access to SPC’s Wiggio groups, and the information therein, but did not respond. These are people who purportedly volunteered because they once had “the heart to” and “the time to,” but no longer have “the
time to” do the things that need to be done when the need finally appears. Although Mary says not to get “mad” at someone who does not respond or does not complete work for the organization, calling them “dead weight” sends a message about this problem that could be interpreted as contradictory to not getting “mad.” Not getting “mad” might be more about saving the committee chairs and herself time and attention on frustration rather than the treatment of volunteers whose “situations change.” Mary’s point here about “dead weight” also speaks to the contingently obligatory relations brought together by both meetings and the online collaboration. If the process does not involve volunteers until they are “needed,” then they are already constituted out of the organization. The emergent norm here states that a name on the side bar of a page does not constitute membership, participation does. By the point SPC “needs” a particular volunteer, they already may not belong in the assemblage.

September 2013

Between the last board meeting, in December 2012, and this board meeting in September 2013, I discussed SPC’s meetings with Mary to try to find out why they had not happened and how to improve them. I explained the difference between treating meetings as events where people reported information, which is how I characterized reporting in the December 2012 meeting, and treating meetings as an event where people could create or collaborate with each other (see Peters, 2014a). This was my take on trying to explain the difference between the communication as information and communication as constitutive views (Deetz, 1994), about which I was reading deeply at this point in my graduate career. I made this point to try to move meetings to involve more voices and people throughout the process and to try to work toward a collective “ownership” of the organization. As more of these meetings demonstrate, volunteers
and board members often deferred to Mary’s thought or opinion on matters as the founder of SPC.

This meeting’s narrative includes two separate deciding moments, both of which relate to the problem of (dis)appearing volunteers. The first regards inactivity on Wiggio from SPC’s leadership. Participants expected Wiggio to replace meetings, but often weeks or months would elapse without posts or conversations through this medium. The second deciding moment regards a conversation Mary and I had about how organizing through technology may be preventing some older volunteers with significant experience from participating, thus contributing to the (dis)appearing volunteer problem.

Mary called the September board meeting in order to “have contact” with the rest of the board of directors, and provide updates on what had happened so far during the year. She began the meeting with a pretty lengthy report of what had been happening in SPC throughout 2013, similar to the December 2012 meeting, but she took a different approach to discussions and gathering opinions.

More Volunteers. At the beginning of the discussion portion of the agenda, Mary started with the first topic on her list of discussion topics that she included with the agenda. She started with volunteers and the online collaboration platform, Wiggio.

“Like I said, we’re trying to add more committed, skilled volunteers. Um, we want to increase communication on Wiggio. I noticed that even if it’s just saying ‘yes, I’ve seen this. Yes, I agree. Yes, I’ll be there.’” Mary started.

“Check in,” Lisa added.

“Just checking in every now and then, first of all helps Katie with her research because she’s looking at it or whatever, she’s trying to analyze Wiggio and there’s nothing there.” Mary
continued. [I laughed at this, uncomfortable that my research was the first reason she listed.]

“So there’s that. And also especially if you are in a position like a chair or you’re an officer or something like that, you need to be checking in because you have volunteers underneath you and they’re getting confused with like, ‘well so and so is the chair and they haven’t posted anything in four months,’ like,” Mary paused to laugh, the irony that her leadership could be some of the “dead weight” hanging in the air.

“Do they know what’s happening?” Lisa built on the joke.

“Like, ‘are they like still here with us?’ So just especially if you are in a position of leadership, please make sure that you are checking in once a month. You know I’m not sitting here grading your responses, I’m just… I need you guys to be checking in so I know you’re alive and that you’re communicated, communicating, and you’re aware.” I was unsure if she knew how well this connected to the CCO literature I’d started reading in the last year. I’d tried to point this out to her before, that we needed to be talking to each other in more of a back-and-forth rather than a reporting style. Otherwise only Mary’s communication constituted the organization, a point that she brings up next.

“So um, then what one thing that I have noticed and I don’t know if anyone else has noticed this either,” Mary started. “But I feel like especially some of the people on the board hesitate to really take ownership of your role for SPC. Like whenever someone has a question about SPC, everything’s getting directed back to me. Which I’m totally fine with, cuz I obviously know what’s going on with SPC, but I just want to reiterate to you guys that you are on the board of directors. You have just as much power in SPC as I do. And so if you want to go and like talk to people about what we’re doing and be super proactive, you have every right to do that in your positions.”
“I guess it’s just a safety thing,” Lisa offered. “Like checking in with you, be like ‘hey, I’m doing this.’”

“Right,” Mary said.

“Is that ok?” Lisa asked.

“Right and I, and I wonder if there’s anything that you would do that I really wouldn’t be ok with.”

“Strictly for SPC?” Lisa clarified, bringing laughter from some others.

Mary continued. “But I mean the reason that I have you guys as my board is that I trust you guys that you’re not going to go streaking for SPC and I trust that your decisions will like… I honestly wonder with everyone here, you guys have good judgment. You guys I do trust, and I wonder what you could honestly do that would upset me with SPC. You guys know that we’re to be professional, you guys signed that board member contract saying that you are going to be professional for SPC, and that you have SPC’s best interests in mind, so. And if you ever do anything that I don’t like, I’ll tell you.” After someone chuckled, Mary pushed the joke. “I’ll fire you.”

“Exactly,” Lisa added.

“I’ll cut your paycheck!” Most of us laughed. This would become a frequent joking threat. No one made any money working for SPC.

This deciding demonstrates another way of casting (dis)appearing volunteer problems and solutions. Mary expressed frustration at the lack of activity on Wiggio, the online text-based collaborating platform used at the time. The emergent norm stated is that those in positions of leadership should have heightened presences on the platform, including all the members of the
board, to whom she is addressing the concern. This deciding assemblage implicates the board through frustrated criticism.

In the same discussion, Mary voices a concern about board members not “taking ownership of their role for SPC.” Instead, board members directed all decisions, discussions, and questions to Mary, whether from those considered to be organizing with SPC or those who are not. As Lisa characterizes, this is a “safety thing,” and then Mary says that she’s not sure what the board members could do that would “upset” her. The act dynamics here are the original statement of concern or a reproach, an account for the action, and then statements of mixed support and criticism, which softens the reproach. The board member contracts are brought up as an agreement to “be professional for SPC,” providing evidence for the support and criticism.

These act dynamics bring out a contingently obligatory relationship between meetings and documents. Participants often brought up documents in meetings, and Schwartzman (2015) poses this as an interesting topic of study. In this process, the board member contract as a document is organizing as part of this assemblage. The board member contract here is referenced as an authorizing text (Taylor & Van Every, 2014), in that it authorizes humans to work on its behalf in particular ways. Taylor and Van Every (2014) posit authorizing and authority as the set of relationships through which power emerges in organization. According to Taylor and Van Every, authority is a “property of relationships” rather than something that is given or linked to power (p. 20). Authority therefore requires the authorization of one actor to act on behalf of another, such as the organization. Signatures link the document to those who signed it, and authorizes them to “be professional for SPC” and act on “its” behalf. The board member contract begins by saying, “As a member of the board of directors of Suicide Prevention
Campaign, I have a legal and ethical responsibility to ensure that the organization does the best work possible in pursuit of its goals.” This statement, among others, are part of what participants could consider “being professional for SPC.”

Mary, as president and chair of the board, further authorizes this contract, and thus also authorizes board members to act and “be professional for SPC.” Lisa characterizes not wanting to act without Mary’s knowledge or permission as a “safety thing.” As the founder of SPC, participants equated Mary and SPC’s actions in that, from the participants’ perspective, an action taken on behalf of SPC could be considered to be taken on behalf of Mary. Mary’s permission or acknowledgement is required to act on behalf of SPC, or at least these friends are potentially concerned about not “upsetting” her by acting on behalf of SPC without it. Mary introduces the board member contract as a blanket sort of permission: if board members act with the authority of the contract, they act with her permission.

Volunteers and Technology. After joking about cutting nonexistent paychecks died down, Mary brought it in once more. “Alright, and now, here’s, this is pretty much the last thing that I have to talk about. But I really do want some good conversation about this cuz this is something that came up with me and Katie. Most of what we do for SPC, all of our volunteer base, is based on the internet. It’s based on Wiggio, it’s based on Google Docs, and so there is a whole wealth of information of older people who have been doing social work, who have been working with teens for 30, 40 years, and they’re not computer savvy. And so I don’t want to be turning away very experienced volunteers. I don’t want to be turning away people that have that experience really, that experience, that knowledge base, because they’re not computer savvy, and so I’m not sure. Go ahead,” Mary turned over the floor to Lisa who looked like she wanted to speak.
[I’d offered this point of concern in one of many conversations with Mary about SPC as a possible reason why the “dead weight” volunteer problem persisted. I suggested more frequent meetings as a solution so that we weren’t so reliant on the internet, but Mary was reticent to meet more often. Most of the volunteers, Doug notably excluded, were part of the millennial generation. Doug was not able to make this meeting, so he was not present for this conversation. In writing this discussion, I feel like I want to apologize for the generalizations included throughout.]


“Training?” Mary prodded for more.

“Um, if you get someone, and maybe you can require this in the process, like list out what they use social-media-wise, and say ‘are you comfortable with this this this this this?’ And then it comes up that people aren’t, then either have like we have for our emails you had like pictures step-by-step, this is how you set it up.”

“Mhm,” Mary followed.

“Or if you want it to be easier, just have like ok, an afternoon, have like four new volunteers, ‘let’s sit down and run through this with me. Let you run through this so that you know how to get to the documents, or at least know how to get to your email.’” Wiggio provided email updates on posts, either on a per-post or a daily basis. Most of the board members and volunteers had already signed up for these, and they provided an easy way to keep track of discussions. Volunteers could even click a link at the bottom of an email to reply to a specific thread without signing into the website.

“That’s a good idea,” Mary said.
“Especially with that generation, they’re more personable, so like, even if they can get to a website, you can give them the URL, it’s not the same as sitting down and showing them. Which will be more, I don’t know, connecting for them. But just a thought.”

“That’s a good thought. Cuz that way… I, my biggest concern is that, being that was having to do the online stuff less and have to rely on more I’m sending out snail mail or sending out, which I would. I would be fine doing that, like…”

“But it’s more expensive,” Lisa commented. Conversation diverted toward food as something Mary and Lisa would rather afford than sending snail mail.

“Should I put it on the volunteer form?” Lise asked, returning to the topic at hand, and asking what to do with the initial application form that volunteers filled out to express their interest. “Thinking about a, ‘how comfortable are you with these things,’” she offered.

“Yeah, that would be a good. Yeah, for our volunteers form, I should probably go over that again anyway cuz it’s been like two years,” Mary said. The Lisa/es agreed. “Since I’ve even gone over it. So we could add a section on there that’s like how computer savvy are you?”

“That almost, that almost might be a good idea also for someone like Lise who needs help, like ‘oh my gosh, you use coding, cool, help us out please!’ So in the future, if we expand and if Lise’s like crying in the corner,” Lisa added, referencing how much of Lise’s time graphic design and website work demanded, on top of her actual graphic design job that paid her.

“I already do that,” Lise joked. Several people laughed.

“You guys have no idea how often I email Lise, I will email email blah blah blah blah blah,” Mary added. She praised Lise for how much work she does, and how many tasks she completes. Then Mary noted that the past month was an exception because Lise went to London and got engaged to her partner, Dylan. After some short confusion over which Lise/a Mary was
referencing, and clarification that it was LisE, Mary’s sister, not LisA, who was not (yet)
engaged, everyone was laughing.

“Allright, alright,” Mary interrupted. “Coming back, come back. So one way to at least
help with this potential problem would be to tweak our volunteer survey, get some consensus.
Are you familiar, like what social media do you use, what else should we do? What social media
do you use?”

“Coding. Have you ever had any experience with coding?” Lisa remembered.

“Something, you know what I mean,” Lise continued.

“I don’t!” Lisa said, referencing her lack of technology expertise. Her boyfriend Dan was
the expert of their relationship, but he wasn’t at this meeting.

“I think we should revise the technical skills,” Lise said.

“Yeah,” Lisa commented.

“There could be like a social media section, like what social media do you use?”

“Or how comfortable are you with using Facebook, with using Twitter, with using
whatever,” Mary added to the Lise/a collaboration.

“I think as long as they use email they’ll be ok,” I interrupted. “Because you can set up,
you could sit them down and show them how to use Wiggio and then also set it up so that they
get everything in email, and then they’ll at least have it even though they might not like, know
how to respond.”

“Right right,” Mary agreed. “So they never have to actually go on the website per se.”

“There’s a button at the bottom that emails anyway,” Lisa added.

“Yeah,” I said.

“Reply within Wiggio,” Lisa remembered the wording.
“So technically they could get by,” Lise said.

“Right,” Mary agreed. “Cuz yeah, that actually is great, cuz if I’m looking at volunteers, and I’m seeing that someone is not super familiar with something on the computer, then yeah, I can sit them down and show them how to use it. And if all else fails, I could always have a list of volunteers that are not computer savvy that I do have to send snail mail to these people. So that’s great.”

This second deciding about volunteers and technology brought out a lengthy discussion of the volunteer form. This excerpt demonstrates a relationship between texts and conversation (Taylor & Van Every, 2000). Texts, which can be literal or figurative, have lasting qualities which provide permanence. Conversations, on the other hand, describe the ephemeral qualities of communication, like meeting talk when it is unrecorded. The volunteer form here, or meeting minutes generally, provide the textual aspect of meeting, whereas meeting talk provides the conversational aspect. Conversations, like this deciding, use texts, whereas texts emerge in conversation.

In this case, this deciding changes the volunteer form, which signifies a person’s interest in volunteering for SPC and the relevant skills they bring to organizing. Lise, the designer of this document, speaks on its behalf to figure out how the deciding implicates the form. Once the form becomes involved, the proposed skills list grows to include several highly technical skills, rather than the minimum skills required or that could be included in training volunteers. This text will inscribe the emergent decisions in this deciding, thus providing them a lasting quality. The meeting prompted this contingently obligatory relation brought together between text and technical volunteer skills, demonstrating the meeting’s ability to alter and inscribe documents.
The conversation (re)inscribes the text, and at the same time the text shapes conversation regarding it.

December 2014

For the 2014 annual board meeting, Mary conducted a survey to review the board and other aspects of SPC with the board members and other volunteers. She met individually with all the volunteers to conduct “annual reviews” of their progress and performance as well. One of the topics that came up during these reviews was that people were routinely confused about what work was being done in each of the committees, even the ones to which they belonged.

Ahead of this meeting, I’d discussed with Mary that it was important to get more people’s voices in the group conversations. This suggestion aimed to further cultivate collective ownership of SPC, a value discussed in the previous narrative regarding the board member contract. I also made this suggestion to attend to the lack of dissenting opinions in deciding that could result in groupthink (Gastil, 2009), and to try to cultivate some of the dissent and pushes that occurred in the September 2014 meeting (more on this in the third section below about the KLM acquisition).

“Alright, so this year we did reviews of our board of directors,” Mary said, continuing to read through the feedback given through surveys and her individual meetings with each director. “So it sounds like you don’t know what’s happening in your committees? So let’s talk about that. Someone say something,” Mary said.

“I don’t know what’s going on with the boards, because the boards haven’t had meetings of their own,” Lisa complained.

“You mean the committees?” Mary asked.
“For example, the education committee, yeah, I don’t know the last time we met,” she continued.

“I don’t know either, to be totally honest,” Mary said.

“I don’t think there’s really much to report if you don’t meet, and second of all if there’s not anything to do, you can’t report anything.”

“True. And if there’s nothing to do, you don’t need to have a meeting. So that’s kind of…”

“Well if there’s nothing to do,” Lise cut in, “with the education committee, then why do you have it?”

“Yes,” Mary said. “That’s a good point, yes.” Mary picked the education committee to focus on, and went through the list of purposes that the committee existed for, including keeping content up to date online or for printed materials. She talked about the resource packet as the last large goal that they accomplished, which was completed in the fall and then has been waiting to be printed. “But since our resource packets, I don’t think anything’s actually been done in the education committee. I feel like that was our last project we’ve done.”

“Yeah,” Dan mumbled something incoherent.

“So we should make sure,” Mary continued. “You know, our committees do have stuff, they do have goals to work on in 2015, that they’re actively working toward those goals, and if they’re not, then we’ll have to evaluate if we should even have this committee. Cuz why have this committee if nothing’s happening.” [Her words cut me, and I knew I was likely the only one affected by them. I had run the community resources committee where nothing happened because the idea behind the committee was to “google things.” After discussing possibly shutting down the committee in April 2013 and delaying the decision until all three members
could meet, Mary unilaterally decided a few months later to delete the Wiggio group for the committee, thus deleting the committee and its work. I found out by logging in one day to finally make the meeting to decide about the fate of the committee.] “And with that we will need to make sure that the committees are regularly reporting their progress to the board.”

Lise suggested that committees report quarterly what they’ve been doing, because if there aren’t any meetings then there aren’t meeting minutes to update the progress of the committee. Mary agreed that there should be quarterly reports posted on Wiggio, even if it’s just a checklist. Next year this would lead to the desire to have quarterly committee meetings. And at the end of 2016, Mary suggested holding quarterly board meetings. Craig asked who was even on his committee, since he’d just been voted on as treasurer and chair of the fundraising committee a month ago. Lise suggested he contact people that he didn’t know and that hadn’t posted in a while.

“I honestly, I go through our volunteers quite often,” Mary cut in. “And get rid of people who are inactive. And whenever I bring volunteers on board, I tell them that. I’ll say, you know, if you’re not active, I’ll delete you without notice. Quite frankly. Because I'm not going to sit here and harass you to post on Wiggio.” Mary then turned back to reading the results of her reviews.

“So I’m getting that our committees need to meet more often?” she interpreted a particular point on the survey about meetings. “Yes?”

“Does that have to be in person or online?” Lise softly asked to qualify.

“I would say either one. Cuz I know, last time we had, I forget what meeting it was to be totally honest. It may have been a fundraising, it may have been a grant type thing. But we were talking about how sometimes when you meet in person instead of just online it’s easier to
brainstorm, it’s easier to bounce ideas off of each other, and you kind of feel like you did
something when you go to a meeting. It feels more solid, like we’re actually making progress.
And so sometimes you may have to schedule a meeting, even if there’s no agenda, just to get
everyone back on the same page. And that’s totally fine, so if you’re head of a committee and
you need to have a meeting just so everyone can kinda feel like a committee again, then that’s
that’s fine.” This moment, these words, went by so quickly that I’m not sure I got to feel proud
at the time. I originally made this point to Mary a year and a half ago, that our meetings were
too “reporting”, and not collaborative or generative enough. These words seemed to indicate that
she understood to some extent that meetings do something for us, and aren’t just passive
obstacles. There’s a “solid” feeling, it makes things “feel like a committee again” instead of
disconnected people, actions, decisions, documents, technologies, and other things that make up
committees. A few minutes later, she would praise me specifically for not being afraid to speak
my mind and tell her when she’s “being super wrong.”

Mary continued through her reports based on these reviews. As she wandered through
discussions and decisions, her document prompted her to transition to the next point, which
might sound familiar.

“Alright, next point,” Mary transitioned back to half-reading, half-elaborating on her
document. “Inactivity on Wiggio, there were several complaints about inactivity? This may be
due to the fact that many volunteers and board members email me directly or when
brainstorming projects, the activity does not always so on Wiggio. So a lot of people did note
that. People just kind of email me things all the time, so you may not know how active each
person is, cuz it’s not happening on Google or Wiggio or whatever it is. So we do need
increased activity from all members, from board members, to be in our discussions. Remember
if you’re not participating, then you’re not letting your voice be heard, and I would not have you be part of the board if I did not value your opinion. Again, decreased activity, if committee chairs, if you notice anyone isn’t participating, they’re not being active, please call them out on it. Be like ‘hey, what are your opinions? Speak up. Be part of this. Or we’re gonna ask you to leave.’ Pretty much.”

This deciding about (dis)appearing volunteers, who initially appear and seem promising, but then disappear and do not respond when needed, starts with a problem of (dis)appearing work. If committees do work, this work is not made clear to the board and committee members. This point came up through the translation of a text, or the survey responses for the annual review, into conversation when Mary asked for discussion. This survey document, which was an online form, serves as the prompt for discussion about this problem and becomes involved in this deciding assemblage. As a solution, Mary offers making sure that there are “active goals,” concluding “why have this committee if nothing’s happening.” Much like individual volunteers who are inactive, inactive committees are also subject to dismissal, sometimes without warning like the community resources committee.

As for individual volunteers, Mary takes a different characterization of the volunteer problem in this meeting. Now inactive volunteers are subject to be “deleted without notice.” Two possibilities to address this problem are included. First, she suggests that committee chairs can call meetings to “kinda feel like a committee again,” recognizing that meetings “feel more solid” than the online organizing. As I hint in the narrative, the simultaneous communication in a meeting perhaps constitutes the organization in a more solid way than asynchronous communication through online posts, especially when that online organizing is riddled with inactivity.
Later in the meeting she offers her second suggestion, that committee chairs should reach out to inactive volunteers and tell them to speak up. This second suggestion comes as an excuse act for the appearance of a volunteer problem. The inactivity on Wiggio could result from people emailing Mary directly. Thus, the constituting conversations of SPC are only accessible to those included in emails, unless these emails translate into further conversations through other media like meetings or Wiggio posts. Conversations on Wiggio provide volunteers the opportunity to demonstrate their (lack of) commitment to organizing SPC. Their activity on Wiggio or in meetings constitutes membership in the assemblage, and this renewed emergent norm re-authorizes Mary and committee chairs to “delete” members from SPC.

**July 2016**

The July 2016 meeting was the second of the semi-annual board meetings, which started in summer 2015. Mary scheduled the meeting at a time that most people could meet, which did not include me, but she asked me for comments and direction on leading the meeting beforehand. I gave her the following direction: when bringing up a topic, let everyone else speak first, then give the opinions that I wrote in, then give her own opinions. Through this new restatement of an old idea, I hoped to cultivate the collective voices in the meeting, involving as many people as possible in organizing the board and SPC.

This time the deciding around (dis)appearing volunteers began with a document. Mary introduced a new annual review form that each volunteer would fill out and then committee chairs could meet with their committee members, and she would meet with the board after they had filled out their own forms. After I set up more context about the form in the narrative, Theresa begins this instance of deciding with a concern about not agreeing with some of her committee members who are more inactive or disappearing than others.
At the mid-year board meeting, Mary introduced the topic of annual volunteer reviews about halfway through the agenda. She introduced a revised volunteer evaluation form, a four page document that asked for (1) a range of demographic information and contact information; (2) a review of skills, which included suicide prevention trainings; (3) a review of which committees they served and their “tasks completed/conversations participated”; (4) a set of questions asking what they enjoyed about volunteering, and where they or SPC could improve; and (5) a set of scales to rate 1-10 “how you feel about the following at the moment”, including items such as “your sense of motivation,” “your ability to work as part of a team,” “participation in projects/discussions,” “balancing SPC with other areas of life,” “your mental and emotional well being,” and “your trust in SPC,” among others.

Discussion brought out some logistical concerns with the form. Mary read my emailed comments that it was a long form and the demographic information collected did not seem necessary since we already had it. Others were concerned about the logistics of the one-on-one meetings with volunteers, how long they should be, and which committee chair should run meetings with volunteers on multiple committees. After dealing with these issues, Mary asked for further input.

“Other thoughts?” she asked.

“No, but I do have a question,” Theresa said. “Cuz I, I remember like having my evaluation, but I’ve never done it to somebody else. What if we don’t agree with what they put? Like so they’re putting a 10 out of 10 and you’re like…”

“Actually…” Lisa started, in a scolding tone.

“You know,” Theresa continued, “I never hear from you, you don’t participate, you didn’t show up to the meeting that you had said you were going to be there.”
“‘You’re full of crap,’” Lisa continued listing.

“Clarifying questions,” Mary answered. Dan laughed. “Clarifying questions and I-statements, so if someone puts a 10 and you don’t agree, you’re like, ‘oh, I see you put a 10 down.’”

“‘I feel that you are full of crap,’” Dan joked, using an I-statement. Everyone laughed.

“‘I would like you to change that,’” Lisa continued.

“‘I would like you to change,’” Mary repeated.

“Being full of crap. Thank you,” Lisa added to Mary’s statement.

“No, but you can say something like, ‘oh, you put down a 10 for participation, you know, can you explain that?’ Or ‘what made you put a 10 down?’ Or.”

Lisa said something incoherent through the audio recording. Dan laughed at his wife, saying “expose this obvious nonsense.”

Theresa, ignoring them, continued. “So if I were to say ‘in our eyes, a 10 would be this, this, and this. Do you feel that you met those expectations given that I’ve, you know, given this clarification’?”

“I’m really glad I’m not a committee chair,” Joseph said softly to Dan, who was also not a committee chair. Joseph wasn’t even on the board. Dan said something incoherent in return while the “main” discussion continued.

“Yeah, that would be a good way to do that. And it is, you have to be really tactful in the way that you ask this. But uh,” Mary answered Theresa.

“Yeah,” she said.

“Why did you put that?” Lisa offered.
“Because they would know before, because they submit it before,” Theresa thought out loud. “Then I would have time to.”

“Yes,” Mary continued. “You would have time to kind of read over it and if there’s, if there’s a review and you’re like ‘oh my gosh, this person thinks they’re Jesus’ and they’re not, then you can...” Laughter interrupted Mary. Who would have the audacity to think they’re Jesus?

“C’mon, you’re Judas,” Lisa said, continuing with the biblical theme, naming Jesus’s betrayer.

“Judas?” Craig repeated in an exasperated tone. “I feel,” he said, his own laughter interrupting. Everyone was laughing at this point.

“Applicable,” Lisa defended. “Or a happy medium.”

“Then you can always email it to me,” Mary returned.

“Peter, ok? A happy medium,” Lisa revised herself. Saint Peter, one of the twelve Apostles of Jesus and first pope of the Roman Catholic Church, had three times denied knowing or following Jesus before Jesus’s death in the gospels. Even Peter seemed like an aspiration, not an insult.

“And be like,” Mary continued. “‘I really disagree on this point when, what are your thoughts?’ And I can kind of help you form that.”

“Ok,” Theresa said.

“But a good way would probably be like ‘you put a 10 out of 10 on participation, you know, can you tell me more about your reason for saying that?’ And then they explain and you say like, ‘well, from my perspective, I would rate you more of a 6 and the reason is because this,
this, and this, but I also understand if you had valid reasons for not coming to the meetings. Let’s talk about it.”"

“Yeah.”

“And so it’s kind of like, it,” Mary said.

“Give and take,” Lisa supplied.

“It’s a give and take, but we’re not saying, ‘oh, you didn’t hit a six, you’re out.’ You know, it’s not a,” Mary started.

“Well, we could,” Lisa countered

“We could,” Mary confirmed.

“We could say we could,” Lisa said.

“So when do we say,” Theresa tried to continue. “When do we say like, like say we, again, they put themselves at an 8 or 9 and we, we’d put them at a 6 or 7. Do we write that anywhere in our meeting to give to you?”

“I mean, you can if you want to,” Mary said.

“Ok, just like, I know, say that,” Theresa started.

“Put it in bright red, put like a 5, like clearly circle it while meeting them,” Lisa joked.

“This question is wrong,” Mary said.

“Actually,” Dan provided the judging tone.

“You put a 9, and it’s not correct,” Lisa continued.

“Well there’s a place on forms that you can put a comment, so you could like maybe, if I saved it then after the meeting I could like comment on it,” Theresa continued thinking.

“Yeah,” Lisa and Mary agreed.

“Sidebars,” Lisa called it.
“And actually, that would probably be more beneficial because then if three years go by and we’re having the same comments over and over again?” Mary continued. Not that this has ever happened. Most “concerning” volunteers stopped responding and effectively leave before three years go by. [And some people already have had the same comments three years in a row, like me. Mary pushed for the board to get Mental Health First Aid certified, in the youth course particularly, and I have not received the training in the four years since her push began. We revisited this in each of my annual review meetings, but we always excused it with a comment like, “you’re too busy with grad school” or “you don’t work with our youth anyway, you’re more internally-focused.” The same comments, the same excuses, over and over again.]

“Yeah, like,” Theresa started.

“Then we can be like, ‘alright, you’ve been with us for three years, and you’re not,’” Mary supplied.

“‘You said you would do this, but you know, you haven’t been able to. Can we make a more realistic goal for you?’”

“And then in the future,” Lisa continued, “We could be able to look back and be like, ‘ah, 4, 5s,’ like, ok,” she said, projecting a future understanding self.

“Yeah. And that’s always the challenge, and I know it’s a challenge for me,” Mary said, perhaps alluding to her own problems with Keep Living Ministries (KLM)’s leadership right now. At the beginning of the meeting, the board discussed the implications of Dave, the founder of KLM, stepping down from his post. I’d talked on several different occasions with Mary about her professional relationship with Dave, and her frustration with him before finding and adapting a managing style that worked. Whether referencing this as an example of the challenge she faced, it came to my mind.
“Wait a minute,” Lisa said, “I have a question. Well, maybe just keep going.”

“Well, the challenge for me is always just trying to find the balance between, you know, you have expectations and I expect things of my volunteers and I want them to meet those expectations.” Again, I’m reading Dave’s situation into her words. She based her frustrations on her similar status of “founder” that set up expectations that he was not meeting, especially by stepping down from the leadership of his founded ministry. “But I also don’t want to rule with an iron fist.”

“Yeah,” Lisa said.

“Like you want to be a reasonable human being, and so, kinda try to find that balance is always a difficult piece.”

“Is there a way to include, like in each person’s like file, can we include one that’s like, do we naturally do this anyway? Like where you include a review of the volunteer, but the volunteer’s as well, so that it’s both opinions in one file?”

“Yeah,” Dan agreed with his wife. “Yeah, so that’s what I was going to say, like at work, with our reviews, we have our self-evaluation, and our manager’s evaluation. And so you know, I’ve kind of been meaning to discuss the discrepancy between them. ‘Oh, I think I’m a 3, but my manager thinks I’m a 2...’”

“Yeah,” Theresa said.

“That’s what we do at the bank,” Craig said.

“Yeah that’s what we do too,” Theresa agreed.

“And that way, you kind of get the two different perspectives,” Dan finished.

“Or is that asking a lot, because then those people would be doubled?” Theresa added.
“Well, so I was kind of thinking of doing that with this,” Mary said, “because you’re going to get their review before you have the meeting, so you can kind of read over and be like, ok, well, here’s where I disagree.”

“Yeah,” Theresa acknowledged.

“And then when you come to the meeting, then you can talk about it and if you’re writing down your notes as committee chair, then the document’s going to have it.”

“Right, well, that’s true. So we can just write the discrepancy on there, instead of having two and moving back and forth.”

“Yeah. Does that make sense?”

“Yep, yeah,” Dan and Theresa acknowledged.

Mary and Theresa hashed out some logistics, with input from Lisa. Use a pink pen, you can highlight and edit the pdfs, and the word documents have comment sections.

“So you have multiple different ways that you can do it,” Mary said. “You have a question?” She turned to Dave.

“Yeah,” Dave started. “What do we do with volunteers that are like, they kind of come on, but they don’t actually like, I know we have at least like one or two uh Keep Living that were like, you know, that don’t even respond to anything, so they don’t do anything.”

“You don’t know if they’re alive or not,” Lisa thought along.

“They’re not even a volunteer,” he finished.

“You get rid of them,” Mary said, matter-of-factly.

“Like, ‘come on,’” Dave stated his frustration. “Do they just automatically like drop off or do we tell them like, ‘hey, you’ve been.’”

“What’s the period?” Lisa asked. “Tell us the path.”
“Yeah, after like what, you give them like several tries,” Theresa added.

“I give them three tries,” Mary said, arresting attention. “I do the three strikes you’re out thing. So I try contacting them, you know, with the group.”

“Mhm,” Dave followed.

“Like we do the group email or something and they don’t respond,” Mary continued.

“Reach out with us,” Theresa supplied.

“Reach out to the one on one with the email, like ‘hey, you know, did you get the last email? Was there some sort of email glitch,’ or whatever, you know, give them the benefit of the doubt.” Something jaded came through Mary’s words here. How many volunteers had we seen and (immediately) lost due to “inactivity?” “If they don’t respond, then call or text so it’s like ‘I know you’re getting my stuff. It’s not an email glitch.’ If they still don’t respond then I’ll usually send out an email saying like ‘hey, you know, we’ve noticed that you’ve been really busy,’ and you know, wording it really nice.”

“Yeah,” Dave followed.

“Yeah it’s like, ‘thank you for everything you’ve done,’” Theresa continued.

“Yeah, because we do, we do appreciate,” Mary picked it up again. “So I, um, I will usually send out an email that’s like, ‘hey we noticed you’ve been really busy, you’ve got a lot of stuff going on, we totally understand that life can get in the way, but like, for now, we’re going to remove you from our groups, but like if life ever calms down and you wanna come back, just let us know.’ And so it’s like a real chill, like, you’re a terrible person and leave.”

“In the nicest way possible,” Dave said for emphasis, laughing.

*The problem of (dis)appearing volunteers is repetitive, in much the same way that the mobile website was also marked by repetition. In the fourth incarnation of the (dis)appearing*
volunteers problem, other board members, especially committee chairs, claim the problem as their own problem, whereas previously Mary claimed and voiced this as a problem. Throughout the discussion, she is still the voice of “solution.” The act dynamics bring together several contingently obligatory relations, especially regarding documents. Theresa kicks off this discussion with a concern that her rating of someone’s items on a form might not agree with their rating of items on the same form. This volunteer form document prompts the ensuing meeting discussion, demonstrating the translation of text into conversation through the link of volunteer concerns.

Next in the act dynamic, Mary provides the solution: “clarifying questions and I-statements.” Lisa and Dan promptly twist the I-statements, with the emergent effect of undermining the formality of the solution: “I feel that you are full of crap.” After this, Theresa and Mary continue working through more specifics, recognizing that Theresa will have the form ahead of time to decide how to deal with the situation in the meeting with a volunteer. This document, the annual review form for volunteers, now enters into meetings in two ways: it prompts this deciding and translates into conversation, and it generates new meetings with volunteers to discuss the form and their performance. The lasting quality of this text allows it to traverse across meetings, and even create new ones.

As the act dynamics flow onward, Mary mentions the audacity of a volunteer perhaps thinking that they are Jesus, an unreachable standard that signifies a large and flawed ego for the volunteer. Lisa jokes about the person actually being Judas or Peter, which again emerges an effect to undermine the formality of the discussion. Mary and Theresa start to coauthor some specific language that could be used in these situations with volunteers, and then Theresa returns to the document again. “Do we write that anywhere,” she asks. Without writing it
anywhere, how can the discrepancy literally be documented? Although the one-on-one meeting may involve working through the discrepancy together, ultimately meeting talk is ephemeral and fleeting conversation. By recording discrepancies in the document, the concern carries forward through the lasting qualities of texts, so that sometime in the future judgements can be made about whether this is a disappearing or an appearing volunteer.

Next, Dave brings up a related concern with volunteers who “don’t respond” after they start volunteering, in other words they are disappearing. “They’re not even a volunteer,” he characterizes them. Lisa jokes that “you don’t know if they’re alive or not.” An emergent norm similar to previous decidings emerges here as well. To be involved in the assemblage of SPC, one must volunteer, or previously be active online, on behalf of SPC. Without a relation to this organizational figure in the acts of volunteering or being active, a volunteer is not involved in an assemblage. Through either non-participation or having nothing to do, an organization assemblage constitutes without the volunteer, and therefore they are not a member.

To this concern, Mary spells out a rule that has emerged through the practice of dismissing volunteers over the three and a half years since Mary brought up the original concern. No longer does she just “dismiss” someone without warning, as an emergent effect from previous deciding, but now she has a “three strikes” rule. For the first strike, she suggests contacting the volunteer to see if they are getting emails or having an “email glitch.” For the second strike, a switch in channel ensures that their nonresponse is not “a glitch.” Finally, for the third strike, they are out. They demonstrated that they do not have “the time to” participate, even after two warnings to “be part of this.” Meetings and future decidings reference this three strikes rule as a solution to inactivity. In other words, the three strikes rule emerges as a text,
with a lasting quality that persists across meetings. This text authorizes committee chairs to act and criticize volunteers who may be disappearing.

Throughout this section, I demonstrated a variety of relationship(s) between documents and meetings through the activity of deciding. First, documents prompt discussions or concerns in meetings. In this and other meetings documents often prompt conversation. Second, documents also shape discussion through their translation into conversation. The volunteer interest form shaped discussion about it. Third, documents create meetings, as in the case of the volunteer review form creating meetings between committee chairs and volunteers. Fourth, and finally, meeting conversation imbricates (Taylor & Van Every, 2000), or transforms, into texts as well, which could be written documents or, in the case of the “three strikes” rule, could emerge as figurative texts that take on similar lasting and authoritative properties to meetings.

One final point about this narrative regards the emerging rhythm to deciding. As I represented above in both the narrative and the analysis of this, participants punctuated formal discussion with joking or the subverting of formality. As I wrote this narrative, and others throughout these analytic chapters, I started to discover there were rhythms or undercurrents to the flow of deciding. The next section focuses more specifically on this rhythm in another deciding.

**Rhythm in Acquisition**

This section focuses on just one meeting, in September 2014, to demonstrate a unique deciding: whether or not to acquire a new organization that was seeking a 501(c)(3) themselves. This meeting was called to discuss the possibility of acquiring a small non-501(c)(3) organization, Keep Living Ministries (KLM). KLM was founded by Dave, with support from his partner, Ally. I included Dave in narratives above because he joined the board after signing the
agreement that emerges from this meeting. As Mary will characterize in the meeting, she advised the founder and his partner that the process of applying for a 501(c)(3) is “hell,” and instead the idea occurred to her to acquire them under our 501(c)(3). Prior to the meeting, Mary posted a draft of an acquisition agreement, and then put the burden of deciding onto other members of the board. The ensuing narrative focuses entirely around this deciding. As we come into the meeting, Mary provides further context about the idea and proposal, and then members discuss, question, and air their concerns at length before an emergent decision could be reached.

As I mentioned in the previous section, I focus on the rhythm of this meeting in the analysis here, but the meeting also includes both repetition and documents, so I speak to those themes as well. I use quoted second level headings to punctuate the beat of the meeting. There are several large moments, like waves coming in on the shoreline, where participants bring up concerns and discuss them for several minutes. Then, as the waves go out, smaller concerns are dealt with in one or two turns, or Mary calls for objections or further feedback in deciding. Each time, a wave with a larger concern crashes back in, delaying the ultimate emergent decision. This rhythm, like an ocean current, is ever-present, able to be felt if one turns their attention to it, and still moves on the brink of perception even if not attended to.

In representing this deciding, I include more of what was said, rather than summaries of what was said. Through this shift in my narrating style, I aim to depict the rhythm of the meeting, and its ebbs and flows. Throughout, notice how when the meeting flows toward emergent decisions, some members pull back toward more considerations to be made in this particular assemblage. I include brief asides throughout to draw your attention to the rhythm of deciding waves crashing in with new concerns and moving out toward emergent consensus.
“HEY,” I said loudly when I finally signed into Google Hangouts. On my way biking home to get ready before the meeting started, I had gotten several calls and a text from Mary asking where I was. I realized as I was checking my phone after I locked up my bike that I had gotten the time difference wrong, and was in fact not an hour and a half early for the meeting, but almost half an hour late. I ran upstairs to my computer and logged on as soon as I could.

“Hi,” Mary said.

“Sorry I’m late,” I apologized.

“We started without you, so we’re just gonna continue,” she said.

“That’s fine,” I acknowledged, settling in for the meeting ahead. We were discussing the possibility of acquiring Keep Living Ministries (KLM) this meeting, which was a spur-of-the-moment idea Mary had.

“Applying for a 501(c)(3) is Hell”

“Ok, so, he,” Mary started again. She must’ve been referring to Dave, the founder of KLM that she mentioned on Wiggio. “He did KLM and he decided that he wanted to also become a 501(c)(3). And him and Ally met with me and I did my best to tell them in as positive a way as I possibly could that applying for a 501(c)(3) is hell.” Everyone laughed, understanding that it had taken us almost two years to finally get our certification, waiting through the normal IRS lag time and then the backlog that piled up over the government shut down.

“I, while talking about that, they got discouraged,” Mary continued. “They did, cuz it’s a very long, it’s a very hard process, and I could tell that despite you know, me doing the best I could, I could see they were being discouraged. Now, I still believe that they would continue to go for the 501(c)(3), like I don’t think that deterred them. I think it was still a goal for them.
Well while I was talking, I said, you know, ‘maybe we can combine our efforts. Maybe instead of you going through all the hassle of doing your 501(c)(3) stuff, you could just become the ministry branch of SPC. You could focus on our church clients, you can be a 501(c)(3) underneath us, but we would own you, essentially, like the board of directors would own KLM the same way that we own and control the fundraising committee, and we own and control the education committee.’ And so he said, you know, he would definitely be interested in learning more about that, I posted the Wiggio thing, and here we are!”

_In this brief contextualization of the meeting discussion, notice how the 501(c)(3) document from the IRS prompts and shapes discussion. Without this document, and SPC’s contingently obligatory relation to it, this deciding would not have occurred. Its translation into the everyday conversation(s) of SPC and KLM position an organization with the document in a privileged position, drawing KLM into this potential arrangement. As with the volunteer review form in the previous section, this document creates the need for meetings._

“You Guys are on the Board to Tell Me am I Making a Really Bad Decision”

“So, before we even move again,” Mary continued, “before we even look at this agreement, because again, this agreement is worthless if we decide we don’t even want to move forward with this branch. I also want to remind you guys that even though this was like my idea, that you guys are on the board to tell me am I making a really bad decision. And so I want you guys to be honest, if you really feel that this KLM is something that is contrary to what we want, or it says for whatever reason to be a bad idea, let’s talk about it. That’s why we’re here. Go.”

“I have a,” Amanda started.

“So any big concerns?” Mary asked, and then hearing Amanda turned it over to her.

“Ok.”
“I know, I’m sorry, my microphone is delayed, so,” Amanda apologized.

“Go ahead, you sound fine to me.”

“Ok, um, one is Ally hasn’t had… this is her first like long period of recovery, so is she gonna be like a main person? Or is it gonna be Dave taking care of all of this?” Amanda was referencing a long past involvement with Ally, a repeated “customer” who had made several suicide attempts throughout her life. In fact, Mary had told me several stories about Ally’s attempts through our interviews. At one time, she considered Ally to be a looming reminder of why she’d started doing this work in the first place. This was in our first formal research interview, in 2012, when she told me the story of how she had to call the cops on Ally and they’d found her overdosed on an over-the-counter drug waiting to die. Ally continued getting the help she needed, but at this point, she’d relapsed in the intervening two years since Mary told me this story. Ally came back into SPC’s view this time because she was dating Dave and involved in KLM.

“My initial thought was that Dave would be the one taking care of this because I don’t think Ally has been in a period long enough of recovery,” Mary started. “If anything, she would be considered a volunteer under KLM because she is very involved in KLM, so she certainly would not be a, I guess, power player in what’s going on here.”

“Ok, because I know like when I started with you, like your concern was about my like where I was at,” Amanda said. She was referencing her own suicide attempt and recovery period before she started volunteering to help Mary with speaking at her events. She used her own story to share with the teens and show that not only can she relate to them if they’re hurting, but she also used these speaking moments to embody recovery and potential future(s) for those who find help.
“Mhm,” Mary let her continue.

“And making sure that I wouldn’t like relapse and in her case, I feel like, I feel like that’s a really big concern. Especially since she just started having, actually having, really good progress in recovery? So I don’t know, like that’s concerning to me.”

“Ok.”

“And I, I guess if Dave is the one like, being in charge, and taking care of everything, then I guess that’s a little different. I don’t know.”

“Yeah, and then I’m thinking things,” Lisa tried adding. “Yeah, contractual things, like ok, well, you know, ‘as long as it stays in your possession.’”

“Mhm,” Mary acknowledged

“Then we’re ok in this union for now.” Lisa said

“Yeah.”

“And plus, if we did decide to do the five year thing, where you know, we’ll check in after three or five years, or something, and make sure like, ok, is this still working? Is this still doing the best good? Are we still like, down to our core values? Like we can say, ‘ok, let’s see what their progress has been together,’ like you know, if she went through a hard time, you know, two years ago, did he also go through that hard time and then if things take kind of a little lull, or you know, so I think the like few years check in could be really helpful too.” Lisa concluded.

There was more discussion around Ally and her place in recovery and how that affected KLM. [This discussion largely repeated the concerns I summarize above, but included more identifying information that I wanted to keep out since Ally became more of a legend than a person involved in organizing. I feel apprehensive about including her story here, since she, as a
person, was never physically involved in a meeting that I attended. However, her story was reported to me in interviews as a motivation for and a sign of SPC’s “success,” thus becoming an organizing legend. In suicide prevention education, we rarely hear of our “successes,” the people who realized they needed and found help, so instead of data or numbers, we cling to individual stories, like Ally’s.]

Our first wave crashes in, what about Ally’s recovery period? Is she, one of the two people involved in KLM, healthy enough? Mary confirms that she will not be a power player in organizing, and she does not become one. As discussion on this topic continues, the wave moves back out toward the larger decision: to acquire KLM or not to acquire KLM.

“KLM is Dave’s Baby”

Ally and Dave’s relationship became a topic of conversation next, in case “something happens” and they break up or fight. Mary jumped in here and said, “Which is good to know that KLM existed before Ally came into the picture. Yes. And so even if Ally left the picture, even if they had a breakup or something, Dave is still committed to KLM. This is something that existed years before he had met her.”

“Hmm, ok,” Amanda acknowledged.

“And so KLM is Dave’s baby.”

“Ok,” a couple others acknowledged.

“But you know, Ally does, does have you know, not a say, she doesn’t really have a say because she’s not a power player in any of this, but you know she is in a relationship with him, and I know Lisa and Dan, whenever I invited you guys to be on the board, I had asked you if there were any issues in your relationship, at one point, would that affect your ability to work at SPC? And both of you said you would be able to work around that. And then you got married,
so that wasn’t a problem.” Lisa, Dan, and a couple others laughed. “But if those are, and those
are still a conversation I’ll definitely have with Ally and let them know that we do wanna move
forward in this, but here are some reservations we have. What are we going to do if you guys do
break up, or if Ally has a relapse, and how is that going to affect KLM? And how can you
guarantee that our mission and our vision is still going to be number one priority, regardless of
your personal life.”

Conversation flowed through more logistics. Is this a faith-based branch, or specifically
a Christian-based branch? Doug interrupted the meeting by calling Mary, and she noted that we
were about halfway through discussion. Would we share a volunteer base?

_A second wave hits the shore: what if there are problems in their relationship?_

_Resolutions move the wave back out. Dave organized before Ally became involved, Mary will
discuss the possibilities with them, and deciding rolls back to logistical matters._

_“That Frustrating Business Aspect to It”_

“I do want to make a point,” Lise cut in. “That you, you told me that, let me think about
this. Um, one thing you said was that you wanna check in mind people taking our… being our
competition.”

“Yes,” Mary said.

“That’s a good point that kind of changed my mind for it. So I think we should talk about
that too,” Lise said.

“Yes, so another thing, um it’s weird talking about competition in the aspect of nonprofit,
cuz, quite honestly, if someone’s life is gonna be saved, I don’t care if we’re the ones that saved
it or if like someone else. Like I just care about that life being saved. But at the same time, we
are also competing for schools to invite us into, you know, their schools or their churches, as
opposed to a different group. We’re also fighting for grant money, and so there is a level of
competition in that. I don’t care how someone gets saved from, you know, their bad thoughts, as
long as you know, they’re getting help.” Mary ranted. She continued to discuss a different start
up organization that she regretted not bringing on as a part of SPC. The volunteers there were
motivated by immediate grief for their lost family member, and they found a way to be
sponsored by someone else’s 501(c)(3) and didn’t have to frustratingly wait three years to start
doing things. [I’m not including details here because Mary refered to some “confidential
information” about this organization in a different meeting as I mentioned above, so I chose to
anonymize the organization entirely.]

“And so, so there’s that frustrating business aspect to it,” Mary continued. “And part of
me wishes that when all of, when I first met them, and when I first started doing this large event
in their area, that I would’ve just invited them to be part of SPC because it was a really, really
great dedicated volunteers. There are people who are personally motivated, and I wish they
would’ve been part of us rather than starting their own thing competing against us.” Personal
motivation was the main reason Theresa joined the board.

“So I mean,” Mary continued. “With Dave, I’m seeing, it’s someone who’s really
comfortable speaking and someone who’s really passionate about, you know, this topic, and
quite frankly, I want them to be part of SPC. And I don’t want them to start their own nonprofit
that we’re going to continue having to compete against, and so that’s another angle in which I’m
kind of wanting them to be part of us, to eliminate competition in a little bit, and also get more
dedicated, passionate volunteers under our belt. So thoughts on that?”

A third wave: concerns about competition. SPC does not want KLM to become another
competitor. Stories demonstrate previous experiences that lead to this discouragement. If KLM
joins SPC, they wouldn’t compete with SPC for attention. Or would they? Hold your breath for
the next wave.

“What Name Goes out There?”

“Is Mr. Hobbs still here?” Lisa asked about her former high school teacher, Doug.

“Yeah, he’s on the phone,” Mary said. Lisa and a few others laughed. “Any thoughts on
that aspect?” Mary tried to return to the conversation, pushing toward resolution again. “Do you
think I’m doing the right thing, do you think I’m being greedy?”

“It makes sense,” Amanda said.

“Yeah it’s,” Lise started.

“Well, it makes sense, it makes a lot of sense.” Amanda started. “I’m afraid that they’re
gonna end up like overshadowing us at some point because we have been doing a lot of things in
churches so at that point, what name goes out there? KLM or SPC? Like I know they’re a
‘project of us’, but still KLM is still that name that’s there instead of SPC.”

“Mhm,” Mary let her continue.

“So like, that’s concerning to me?” She finished.

“Can we market as SPC’s KLM?” Lisa asked.

“A division of SPC,” Dan offered.

“Yeah can we market that differently?” Amanda asked.

“Or word it,” Lisa started.

“As long as they’re already paired together,” Amanda concluded.

“And that was something I already kind of pre-planned,” Mary said, taking over the floor.

“Like anytime you would see KLM, whether it’s on Facebook, whether it’s on Twitter, whether
it’s in a flyer for an event, whether a display booth, on their website, everything, anything you
see KLM it would always say ‘a project of SPC.’ That would be required, and it would be right here in this agreement. And so there would always be links back to SPC and anytime anyone would want to learn about KLM we would send them to SPC.org in which they can then click on a link to go find KLM we would be like a parent organization, at least that’s the way I’ve been envisioning it.”

A couple folks made some acknowledging sounds, “Yeah, ok.”

“And quite, I mean, I’m gonna be super frank here, but I mean if they’re going to be under us as SPC, then we can simply stop them from overshadowing us,” Mary continued, and a few people laughed. “As the power, so.”

“We are the force,” Dave said, using a joke about Star Wars, and Mary and Lisa repeated the joke.

After some summing up of this point as one of the “biggest concerns,” discussion ebbed for a few seconds.

“Now Katie,” Mary said, suddenly remembering. “Katie, you were going to say something like forever ago?”

“Yes,” I said.

“And then I never let you continue,” Mary said.

“Right um.”

“Do you remember?”

“Yeah, uh, so I was also concerned about like, whose name would be attached to these events? Because even if it is ‘KLM a project of SPC’ I don’t know that people will see the SPC as they will the KLM? Um, and I mean, competing for attention is another thing that we’re doing with these other nonprofits. And even if we take these people under our wing, then we’re
also still competing with them for attention in the public realm. Um, so, I mean, I wonder if it would be better to do like, I don’t know, like if they’re going to be more like a committee, we don’t say that the ‘fundraising committee, a project of SPC’ is doing this flamingo flocking.”

Flamingo flocking was a great first year fundraiser for us, and Mary stole the idea from the youth group we attended. How it worked was someone, almost always Mary, would take a trunk load of Dollar Store pink plastic flamingos and set them up in a little group in someone’s yard. She had a sign with our logo to put up that said “You’ve been flocked!” Then she would tape a letter to the person’s door explaining what SPC is, and who had referred them to be flocked. It left a date and time that she would return for the flamingos, usually a day or two later, and instructed them to leave any donation they wanted to, and if they donated they could provide the name and address of the next person to be flocked.

“Oh, right,” a couple people acknowledged.

“It’s SPC doing this flamingo flocking. So I wonder if we could do like, um, I don’t know, like SPC’S KLM? So that our name is first, and then it’s KLM, like for events in particular, their materials can still be a project of, but for events I want our name to be first,” I concluded.

“Yeah,” Some folks acknowledged.

“Ok, I agree with you,” Mary said.

“I think we could figure out the branding in a way that makes it prominent that SPC is the parent organization,” Dan added. “Like find out not in fine print, like ‘oh, really? This is,’ you know, it’s like, like Sunkist or something, like, ‘This is Coca-cola? I had no idea!’ You know, something very prominent.”

“That’s a great point,” Mary acknowledged.
There was some more discussion that ebbed and flowed, repeating and clarifying some points made before or included in the drafted agreement. Would they be able to put a person or two on the board? Yes, the thought is to invite Dave. Then conversation flowed back to the topic of branding again.

“So SPC’s KLM I think would be a great way to,” Mary brought it back in. “To market that I think that’s a great idea, cuz our logo would be front, it would be first, people would read SPC before KLM, it would be very obvious that this is a project of ours without the tiny little project of SPC.”

“Yeah,” Amanda followed.

“Thumbs up,” Lisa said.

“So does everyone agree with that?” Mary asked.

“Yes,” Amanda chimed in. A couple other folks nodded as Mary looked around the group.

*Like the ocean surf, some waves are larger than others: what if they overshadow us?*

*Internal competition possibilities brought about a lengthy discussion of branding. The more obvious the ownership is, the less likely KLM will overshadow SPC. Smaller matters come up as the wave moves back out, and agreement marks the resolution of this concern. The rhythm pulses back to the broader deciding: does SPC want to acquire KLM?*

*“Is This Something that We Want to Move Forward In?”*

“Ok, so, having said all of this, is this something that we want to move forward in, do we want to bring KLM on as a part of SPC? Let me start by saying does anyone like, just from your gut instinct, want to say no right away? Does anyone want to say no for any reason.”

“No,” Amanda said softly.
“No?” Mary asked, surprised. Dan chuckled.

“I have one more concern,” Amanda continued.

“I’m not raising my hand, just so you know,” Doug said from the phone at the same time.

“Alright, Amanda first,” Mary started, “What did you say?”

“I have one more concern and my concern is that,” Amanda picked up. “With us being the forefront of them, that it well, that they’re, their faith-based Christianity part is gonna overshadow us, and then schools are not gonna invite us in cuz they think that we are, that we have a sole faith-based message. So like I don’t know how to make sure that is absolutely separate, to know that the faith-based part is them and then we are not that way, we’re not, cuz I mean, I know our main goal is to go into schools.”

“Mhm,” Mary confirmed.

“Cuz that’s a big deal, I don’t want this to prevent us from going into schools. I think that’s a big deal,” Amanda concluded.

“I think that’s why,” Lise started, briefly overlapping her. “It’s important to have um, not just SPC ministry, it’s SPC’s KLM, so it distinguishes itself. It’s separate from our school program.”

Several people noted their passing agreement on this point.

“And I think if we market that well, we can make that happen.” Lisa jumped in. “Like I said, we’re making sure like, here it is, another ministry, and then front page being SPC is this thing.”

“Yeah,” Dan agreed.

“Here’s the SPC,” Mary continued off of Lisa’s idea. “If you want a Christian,”

“Check out our other,” Lisa continued.
“Check out our other branch, KLM, at a completely separate website.”

“Over there,” Lisa added.

“Ok,” Amanda acknowledged.

“It would still have,” Lise started.

“It will still say SPC, it would still say SPC’s KLM,” Mary continued.

“Right, right,” Lisa said.

“Yeah,” Amanda acknowledged.

“But um, I do agree that the marketing is going to make all the difference in that because you know, we see images first. Like, you know, the visual of us seeing our SPC logo versus the KLM’s logo and we’ll, it’s gonna be a marketing thing. So I think, I think having the marketing thing is gonna make a huge difference there, and again, if this ends up being something that we feel is not working out, or it’s not going to our specifications, we can always… We can always back off and say, you know, we tried.”

“Or degrees,” Lisa jumped in at the end. “We can tweak the degrees of separation.”

“I mean we can always tweak this agreement as we need,” Mary said.

“Yeah, ok,” Amanda and I acquiesced.

“So Mr. Hobbs, you said something, I think I missed it,” Mary referred to her old high school teacher.

“Oh, I just said before the way you said you know, raise your hand if you object in any way. I’m just letting you know that I’m not raising my hand,” Doug joked. Since he was on the phone and not the computer, we couldn’t see him, so the narration was helpful. All of us laughed.
“Alright,” Mary brought us back in. “So we have noted of the kind of the biggest concerns, and we will keep revisiting these concerns. And these will also be in conversations I’ll have with Dave, um, I’m actually going to meet with him tomorrow, and I’ll talk about some of these concerns with him.”

“Mhm,” I noted my following along, ignoring that it would get lost in between virtual and in-person talk.

*A fifth wave: will SPC be able to escape KLM’s Christianity? Although founded by a Christian with a Christian purpose, SPC remains religiously neutral in order to help the most people, especially to reach public schools. Marketing and branding solutions seem to move toward resolution again. A resurgence of the previous wave moves back out with the promise to have conversations with KLM’s leadership tomorrow.*

“This Could Back out at Any Moment”

“Um, and I mean,” Mary continued. “Even until an agreement is actually signed, Dave himself might back out. I mean he might decide that, ‘woah, I don’t want to lose my baby to another nonprofit.’ So until we actually get something in writing and signed, this could back out at any moment.”

“Yeah, right,” Lisa and Dan noted.

“I mean, now they seem very excited for this, and I think they’re really excited to be operating as a nonprofit underneath us, um. So I don’t anticipate that happening, but until we get ink on paper, there is always a possibility that this is gonna fall through,” Mary concluded.

“That’s true,” Doug spoke up.

“Um, so,” Mary continued, pausing.

“Um, I have one more question,” Doug noted.
“Yes,” Mary acknowledged.

“If they seem like they’ll get it and there are some people in their organization,” hearing Doug over the phone and through the computer got a little fuzzy here, so I assumed he was talking about the branding pieces. “You know we’re doing equal billing or blend or they have a uh different way they want to look at it would there be a would we be willing to sit down and negotiate that and navigate through.”

“Mhm,” Mary acknowledged.

“Some some little bit of, to come to some kind of agreement because I think it would be fantastic to have them with us because, um, so just the idea of having, you know, we put Christian literature on our table. I mean we’ve done that but if they wanted to negotiate a little more would we be willing to negotiate because I would think it would be worthwhile to listen.”

“Yes,” Mary cut him off. “What I plan on doing is we as a board are going to go over this agreement right now and make sure it’s what we want. Tomorrow I’m gonna meet with Dave, I’m gonna present it to him, and I’m gonna explain everything we’ve talked about today. I’m gonna explain the concerns we’ve had I’m gonna go over the agreement. If he says ‘I’m not ok with this,’ or ‘can we talk about this,’ or whatever I’m gonna make notes of anything that he’s uncomfortable with or wants to discuss more, and I’m gonna post it on Wiggio. And we’re gonna discuss it on Wiggio and we just need to make sure that we’re doing it in a timely manner?”

“Mhm,” I acknowledged.

“So, cuz I don’t want this conversation to keep being drawn out for weeks and weeks and weeks,” Mary continued.

“Right, right,” Doug answered.
“So any um, I guess disagreements anything he wants to continue talking about or revise we will continue having that conversation. But there’s only so much that we’re really willing to give them cuz quite honestly I think this agreement is pretty fair as it is,” Mary concluded.

I raised my hand and waved to interject some things that I knew about negotiation. We discussed what our “walk away point” would be, agreeing that they would have to agree to have our name associated with theirs. Sean noted that the walk away point we were talking about was also a legal requirement.

“You and your laws,” Dave said dejectedly, catching some laughter.

“Yeah, yeah, I don’t make ‘em, I just have to abide by them,” Sean added, catching some more laughter.

“So do we want to move on with this agreement?” Mary asked.

“Huzzah!” Lisa shouted overlapping with her.

“Yep,” Dave said at the same time.

“Huzzah! Huzzah!” Lisa continued.

“And go through it?” Mary finished, overlapping with the remainder of Lisa’s “huzzahs”.

“I think so,” Amanda said. I just nodded. Mary interpreted everyone else’s silence as agreement.

The final wave crashes in more softly: will they even accept the agreement? What about negotiating? Mary describes the rest of the process, nervousness subsides. Ensuing discussion of negotiation tactics ends with joking about laws and then agreement that signals the emergent effect of this deciding activity: SPC will move forward with the acquisition.
Deciding about this acquisition brings together the first two themes that I introduced in deciding about the website and deciding about volunteers: repetition and documents. After some initial concerns are voiced, concerns and solutions become repeated, over and over, in an act dynamic like the beat of a drum. First, the concerns: Whose name comes first? Whose name gets associated with which things? In voicing concerns over naming and rebranding the acquired KLM as part of SPC, members express concerns like KLM “overshadowing us,” or growing faster than SPC. Without an explicit tie between the names, it is less clear that SPC is the parent organization. KLM’s reputation as a Christian ministry might come to “overshadow” SPC’s secular focus, preventing partnerships with schools. Each time the solutions come in: branding, “marketing,” or “wording it” properly. “Marketing” becomes the final solution to this beat of concerns, which, in this case, refers to graphic design and branding across social media and website platforms.

This repeated act dynamic brings together contingently obligatory relations with the wider public, potential school partners, and Christianity in this complex assemblage of acquisition. The concerns mark the relation between SPC and KLM as a link that can possibly be defined through “marketing.” “Marketing” will close the ambiguity of meaning to order these relations in a particular way (Vásquez, et al., 2016). However, as Vásquez, et al. (2016) note, meaning is also open to interpretation, and thus disorder. The very link and marketing that are proposed as a solution could open new, perhaps unintended, interpretations about SPC, KLM, and Christianity. Each repetition of the act dynamic brings out different complexes and possibilities for (dis)ordering.

In addition, this deciding revolved around a document, which is what the board discusses immediately after the narrative ends. There is another half hour or so of the meeting just talking
about wording, which points are negotiable, and which points are non-negotiable. The initial draft document comes into play especially as members throw around different combinations of SPC and KLM. The document that results from this meeting is brought to the next meeting between Mary and Dave, the founder of KLM, and, after taking some time to pray on it, Dave accepts the acquisition contract without negotiation. This demonstrates the mutually constitutive relation between documents and meetings, or texts and conversations. Texts translate into ephemeral conversations, thus shaping them, and conversations imbricate into lasting texts that persist across meetings.

As for the rhythm of the meeting, throughout the narrative I noted several large moments, like ocean waves coming in on the shoreline, where participants bring up concerns and discuss them for several minutes. Then, as the waves go out, smaller concerns are dealt with in one or two turns, or Mary calls for objections or further feedback in deciding. Each time, the wave crashes back in with a new concern. First, Ally’s status in recovery is considered. The wave moves back out, and then Ally and Dave’s relationship crashes in. As this wave moves out, nonprofit competition moves in. This concern flows out, and the largest wave of naming crashes in. Just as it seems that one starts moving out to sea, it is restated as a concern of KLM overshadowing SPC and upsets the potentially emergent consensus. Finally, as this wave subsides, the realization that they could back out of this agreement at any moment flows in. This rhythm, like the current, is ever present, able to be felt if one turns their attention to it, and still moves on the brink of perception even if not attended to. Although this appearance of the current takes the form of large concerns moving out to calls for deciding or smaller matters, a similar rhythm can be seen in the formality and joking of the July 2016 narrative above. In the
conclusion below, I explain the role of repetition, documents, and rhythm in deciding, and conclude the chapter.

Chapter Conclusion

The analysis in this chapter focused on the process of deciding in meetings as one answer to how meetings as emergent events cultivate the transient effects of organization and culture. Deciding is an activity that flows through a variety of act dynamics, which bring together multiple contingently obligatory relations in assemblage(s), with decisions as emergent effects. The emergent effects or concluding acts easily identify deciding: voting, consensus, unilateral decisions, or even deciding to delay. Deciding is not defined as the emergent effect of a decision, nor does this label assume intent as in decision-making, which leads one to ask who or what does the making. The processes of deciding that I analyzed in the case of SPC produced three themes that demonstrate further important findings to answer this question.

Repetition

First, I discussed the repetition of deciding. Repetitive deciding may bring together unique assemblages, or garbage cans, each time, despite cultivating the same idea or problem. Schwartzman (1981) posed that decisions are not made under rational circumstances, but rather result from unique mixes of reasons, justifications, volunteers, circumstances, etc. She, following March and Olsen (1976), terms these “garbage cans,” and I reference these diverse mixes here as assemblages brought together in deciding.

The repetition of deciding signals an important organizing function that meetings, and therefore deciding, serve. Borrowing Cooren’s (2010) concept of cultivation, repetitive deciding demonstrates how certain ideas or problems are “typically, traditionally, or usually invoked or conveyed by the respective participants” (p. 114). These ideas or problems, however, are not
always conveyed in the same way, and emerge from different assemblages each time. In the first section, goal-setting for the mobile website emerged out of different garbage can assemblages of reasons, justifications, volunteers, and abilities. By the final narrative in the section, work toward this goal had brought together an assemblage of volunteers, skills, platform migrations, and justifications to eventually emerge the mobile version of SPC’s website. In the second section, the problem of (dis)appearing volunteers and deciding solutions produced several different versions of a similar rule: if a volunteer is too inactive, SPC will remove them from online organizing access. Each time, these decidings cultivate the value of activity and commitment. Despite cultivating the same or similar effects, each deciding brings together unique assemblages of people, concerns, and motivations.

Documents

Second, documents in deciding take on unique importance. Schwartzman (2015) called for future research to interrogate the relationships between documents and meetings. In the second section, I demonstrate that the relationship(s) between documents and meetings are similar to the relationship(s) between text and conversation (Taylor & Van Every, 2000). Texts inscribe conversations, providing them a lasting quality, whereas conversations (re)produce texts, providing them with continued activity and importance for organizing.

Throughout the second section of narratives, several documents translate into conversation, each time authoring criticism of inactive volunteers, including inactive board members. These documents have lasting qualities of text. The board member contract continually re-presents Mary’s permission for board members to act in the name of SPC, thus authorizing action (Taylor & Van Every, 2014). The volunteer form is invoked as a method of signaling the importance of technology and online organizing prior to volunteer commitment,
hopefully to find more active volunteers or figure out which potential volunteers require training. Finally, the annual volunteer review form prompts discussion about volunteer activity. By the end of the discussion, Mary articulates a text, the three strikes rule, which takes on the same import as the board member contract in authorizing particular actions to be taken to address the problem of (dis)appearing volunteers. The third section also shows the relationship between documents and meetings, and how certain documents, like the acquisition contract, prompt meetings, focus discussion, and finally (re)create further meetings. Documents, then, relate to meetings in several ways through deciding, which provides one contribution to Schwartzman’s (2015) call for studying the relations between documents and meetings.

**Rhythm**

Finally, and as I mentioned above, unexpectedly, rhythm emerged as my third finding about deciding. Rhythm ultimately displays that rationality is not necessarily the guiding force for meetings or deciding, nor should it be. Deciding works in pushes and pulls, pushing in with concerns and discussion, and pulling back toward emergent resolution. The push and pull rhythm of the September 2014 meeting in the third section demonstrates a rhythm akin to crashing waves. As concerns crash in and as participants deal with them, deciding moves back out with concerns or calls for feedback and/or decisions. Then the next large concern comes crashing in to occupy meeting time. As I noted above, a similar kind of rhythm is found in the push and pull of formality and joking in the July 2016 meeting of the second section. This rhythm provides an important current to meetings, and an important and unexplored part of the emergent event of meetings.

**Deciding Implications**
My findings here, especially rhythm, concur with Schwartzman (1989) that meetings are not about decisions. Meetings provide an event where deciding may occur, and decisions might not result. Meetings do not guarantee decisions, and they especially do not guarantee unique decisions each time that are based in rationality and individual intention that build on each other to signal organizational process and action (cf. Schwartzman, 2015). Deciding repeats, perhaps each time cultivating the same or similar effects, but each deciding activity brings together different assemblages. Decidings bring together documents and meetings like text and conversation, but the relations between them also do not guarantee rationality nor progress. Meeting rhythms push and pull deciding. Here, I restate Schwartzman’s (1989) argument that instead of meetings being about decisions, decisions are about meetings. Due to rhythms, repetitions, and relationships with documents, meetings are not about deciding. Deciding is about meetings. Repetitive deciding must happen in multiple meetings to cultivate values, norms, and ideas. Documents and meetings come together in deciding, and sometimes further meetings result. Deciding happens in rhythm with the meeting, not vice versa.

The findings in this chapter about deciding have important implications for the future of meetings research and the applied potential of it, including my own research. First, repetitions, rhythms, and relations between documents and meetings may not occur in these same fashions across meetings or in different organizing assemblages. Each of these are important features of deciding and organizing. Repetitions, rhythms, and relations likely differ across meetings, so it is important for future research to pay attention to the shape(s) these take across meetings. In Chapters 5 and 6, I return to the concept of rhythm to further demonstrate its impact on meetings. These concepts are also important for practitioners who may find themselves frustrated with
deciding and meetings. Listen for the rhythms, look for the repetitions, and connect the relationships between documents and meetings. Who or what is out of step and where?

In addition, rhythm specifically has important applied implications. Suggestions for application or changing meetings might fail if they do not take the rhythm of meetings into account, or they could upset the rhythm of meetings and cultivate a new kind of organizing. So far, authors concerned with changing or improving meetings in some ways are interested in efficiency or productivity as goals (see Chapter 2; cf. Kello, 2015). As Schwartzman (2015) gently pushes back against this impulse “to order meetings,” she writes that an important task of the researcher is to find the local sense of the meeting. I claim that this rhythm is an important piece of the local sense of SPC’s meetings. It provided shape, flow, and texture to meetings, and other scholars have not yet considered this important undercurrent of meetings. Although SPC’s meetings are not perfect (by the standards given by human members involved in organizing, and also by the standards of the various video-conferencing networks used to meet), any suggestion for cultivating differently must take into account this rhythm of the meeting. Meeting practitioners, consultants, and researchers should listen for the rhythmic beats of meetings to adapt to them, or cultivate with them.
Chapter V

LEGITIMIZING: (DIS)ORDERING “A PROFESSIONAL BACKBONE”

Legitimizing SPC provides a second answer to my research question, how do meetings as emergent events cultivate the transient effects of organization and culture. Members of SPC throughout the four years of my study showed concern for creating a legitimate nonprofit organization. One of the many relations that legitimizes SPC is the 501(c)(3) certification by the IRS. However, even after receiving this status, and thus organizing alongside it, members of SPC were still concerned with multiple ways to establish “a professional backbone,” as Mary put it, for legitimacy. This “professional backbone” characterizes relations through “internal” communications, rather than the 501(c)(3), which legitimizes SPC for a broader community.

One reason SPC organized with “a professional backbone” to mitigate the personal relations that linked most members to each other, cohering into “the” organization. For example, the current board of directors (as of December 2016) includes five people who were linked through friendship before the idea of SPC brought them together professionally (Lisa, Mary, and Sam attended the same high school; Dan, Katie, Lisa, and Mary attended the same youth group; Katie and Mary met through working at Wegmans, a grocery store chain in the New England/Mid-Atlantic region), three people who became friends with the others through organizing with SPC (Amanda, Craig, and Theresa), two sisters (Lise and Mary), and a married couple (Dan and Lisa). Although the personal relations linking members together still organize SPC, the work of organizing SPC calls forth professional relations as well.

In my analysis, I labeled these emergent effects that established a “professional backbone.” I then traced the act dynamics through which these came to be, which make up legitimizing. The emergent effects included the online platforms, which members transition
between to find a “professional” platform, and policies, which Mary specifically mentions as providing “professional” links to people with whom she has personal relationships. In the rest of this introduction, I provide some more background for legitimizing, preview the two “acts” of narratives for the chapter, and provide another brief description of the logistics of the text.

Meetings themselves legitimize SPC, and even legitimize deciding. This chapter relies on the themes that I established in Chapter 4 on deciding: repetition, documents, and rhythm. In that chapter, I noted that deciding is about meetings, and not the other way around. I found that deciding relies on repetition, each time bringing together a new “garbage can” or assemblage, even if they cultivate the same effects. I also demonstrated how documents translate into meetings, and vice versa, like the relation between text and conversation for the Montreal School (Taylor & Van Every, 2000). Finally, rhythm organizes deciding and meetings differently in pushes and pulls, escaping expectations for rationality. The work done in that chapter now becomes the ground upon which to view legitimizing as figure.

As Schwartzman (1989) wrote, “it is in meetings that we come to know ourselves and our social systems” (p. 314). Thus, meetings provide a way for the SPC assemblage to “come to know” itself as legitimate. The act dynamics through which legitimacy or a “professional backbone” emerges as effect flow through the activity of legitimizing. Furthermore, as I argued in Chapter 2, the event is the place where individuals, action, culture, and structure are real-ized, or made real (cf. Schwartzman, 1989). Even though we could see legitimizing, on one hand, as how “individuals may use” meetings to achieve their goals, through this chapter I demonstrate how instead these “individuals… may be used by” meetings to legitimize. Meetings were the primary event or form through which SPC legitimized policies and online platforms, which in
turn constitute a “professional backbone” for SPC. The processes through which these emerged provide the two sections of this chapter

Legitimizing is a tale of two acts. First, legitimizing manifests through policy creation in “Polic(y)ing the Brand, Polic(y)ing Ourselves”. This act focuses on a single organizational tale, creating a social media policy, and the actions that links organizing to social media through individual volunteers’ posts. This act walks the reader through the author(iz)ing of a text (cf. Taylor & Van Every, 2000, 2014), which can then authorize individuals to police social media posts. Building on the relationship between text and conversation, this analysis expands into matters of authority. According to Taylor and Van Every (2014), authority is “a property of relationships” that requires an authorization of one actor to act on behalf of another (p. 20), such as the organization, and this authorization must first be authored in communication. In this first act, SPC authors a text to translate into future conversations and authorize leadership to act. As SPC discusses this policy, thereby policying, they are also discussing the possibilities for this text to authorize policing behaviors, such as monitoring social media. Through these relations of authority, the social media policy legitimizes particular actions. This act aims to walk through the relations between documents and meetings, showing further how meetings intimately shape documents and are shaped by them, as Schwartzman (2015) set out as a direction for future research.

Furthermore, through the process of forming a new policy, (dis)ordering presents itself in the process of legitimizing a policy to authorize, or legitimize, action. (Dis)ordering describes the “communication-based organization processes through which meaning is simultaneously opened (i.e., disordering) and closed (i.e., ordering)” (Vásquez, et al., 2016, p. 630). Vásquez, et al. (2016) position the communication event, which in this case is the meeting in this case, as the
locus of (dis)ordering. Throughout this narrative, participants demonstrate how the “continuous reconfiguration of contexts and meanings makes communication events and texts precarious and vulnerable in the light of future contingencies and potential renegotiations of meaning” (p. 651). The case of creating a social media policy demonstrates another empirical case of (dis)ordering a text, displaying the indeterminacy of meaning in communication that is built into organizing, and, in this case, legitimizing a policy.

Second, legitimizing manifests through “Four Platforms in Four Years”. This second act turns “inward” to examine the legitimization of work done in SPC’s name, thereby producing the effect of SPC as a professional organization for which volunteers work. This act focuses on the shifts in online organizing platforms over the four years of my study. Across the lifespan of SPC, members have used four different platform suites: Facebook, Wiggio/Voom, Google, and Microsoft SharePoint. Through the narrative scenes in this act, deciding to migrate platforms serves as an action that works toward legitimizing online organizing platforms, and simultaneously positioning these platforms as legitimizing SPC. In this act, legitimizing drags disorder toward (different) order.

Throughout this second act, (dis)ordering appears through other means. As Cooper (1986) argued, the “zero degree” of organization is “absolute disorder,” which “energizes or motivates the call to order or organization” (p. 321). Vásquez et al. (2016) take disorder to be the indeterminacy of communication which opens meaning, whereas order is the closing of meaning, but Cooper (1986) is arguing beyond this dynamic. As he wrote, “if zero degree is an excess, a surplus, a supplement, if it is always ‘more than,’ then order and organization must necessarily be a reduction, a deduction, ‘less than’” (p. 321). This disorder zero degree accounts for the opening, undecidability, and indeterminacy of meaning in communication, but also seems
to work beyond language, which was the focus of Vásquez et al.‘s empirical analysis of (dis)ordering. Organization, which Cooper argues is a process not a state, and order are not only built in and through language. As Cooren (2015a) similarly argues, relations are established through communication, but communication is not necessarily linguistic. The final scene of this act demonstrates an extra-linguistic disorder for which order and language do not account.

Finally, I want to provide some guidance again on the structure of the text. Italicized text provides analytical commentary throughout the narrative acts. In the first act, I use boxes to mark off and reproduce the text of the social media policy, from which Mary read. I also use italicized text throughout this narrative to guide analytic attention throughout and then summarize this analysis at the end of the section. In the second act, I use this same mechanism before and after each scene. Throughout the narratives, I use text in square brackets as reflexive asides to maintain an openness to the narratives and an ongoing recognition of my shifting and multiple roles in the participation and observation of these meetings. These asides continue my weaving of authorial and textual reflexivity into the text (Harris, 2016).

**Polic(y)ing the Brand, Polic(y)ing Ourselves**

*After the annual board meeting in December 2014, the board decided to meet twice a year to prevent having meetings go for three hours at a time (this didn’t ultimately prevent anything of the sort). At the first semi-annual board meeting, in June 2015, Mary included a review of SPC’s policies on the agenda, and the addition of a new policy about social media. This particular policy caught my attention as I narrowed my analytic focus to meetings and technology. The ensuing discussion about the policy brought out arguments about the opening and closing of meaning, marking the indeterminacy of communication, and doing (dis)ordering (Vásquez, et al., 2016).*
In our first semi-annual board meeting, our task was to go over the previous and new policies for SPC. This was also our first fully-virtual meeting, where everyone met via computers instead of some meeting at Mary’s house, although Dan and Lisa shared a computer from their home. Mary (yet again) decided to actually read documents to us, despite our reviewing them just six months prior at the 2014 annual board meeting. 14 minutes into the fourth time Mary read these policies to the board since the board’s first meeting in 2012, I asked, voice full of the burden of this drudgery, “Do you like, have to read through these to us?”

“Good question,” Lise said in a monotone voice.

The ensuing discussion about this point battled between whether people “actually” read these beforehand, or if having “busy lives” means that Mary has to sit us down to focus on these policy documents. Finally, we decided that we would read new policies, but only summarize the relevant pieces of old policies. After skimming and summarizing some of the older policies, we finally came to a newly proposed policy: The Social Media Policy.

“Here’s a new one!” Mary announced. “I asked Theresa to type this one up for us and this one I really want to talk to you guys with, obviously this is a rough draft since I haven’t had a chance to discuss this yet. But the whole point of this social media policy is basically if one of our volunteers decides to like, I don’t know, like jump on Facebook and say that SPC is a bunch of crap or starts like um posting like bad things about us or like as individuals? Or if really just doing anything on Facebook that we, or on Twitter or like social media, that we do not want to be associated with that we have the right to kind of speak with that volunteer and be like, ‘You need to monitor what you have on Facebook, you need to monitor what you’re putting on Twitter, on Tumblr, et cetera. Um, and if you know a volunteer is not putting favorable things
on their social media that we could then stop their volunteer status. So that’s kind of where that’s coming from. So I’ll read over…”

“Can I ask a question first,” I interrupted.

“Yeah, go ahead,” Mary responded.

“Was there like a specific incident that prompted this kind of policy?”

“Yes, there was.”

“Ok cuz I remember us in Wegmans,” I started, and then began mumbling the rest, perhaps realizing that this was really only relevant for Mary and me. “Making fun of their social media policy and I laughed when I saw this.” I remembered the day we came in, about a year after we’d started working at the local Wegmans grocery store, and our manager handed us a crisp, white document titled “Social Media Policy.” The text detailed what we were and weren’t “allowed” to do with our social media regarding mentioning or posting about Wegmans, and this included such seemingly ridiculous directives as, “no pictures of Wegmans shall be posted on your page if they have not been handed down from the Wegmans publicity department and officially approved” and “any and all mentions of Wegmans must be officially approved by the Store Manager or the policy department before they may be posted to a social media page”. The legalese is likely not in the original text but rather the way my mind inscribes the mixture of text and mockery into a remembered image eight years later.

“Yeah I hate social media policies,” Mary replied more confidently, “And you know that about me. That’s probably why you’re giving me such a weird look.”

“Yeah.”

“But um I think that social media should be yours, and you should be able to post whatever you want on social media.” Here, the image that came to my mind was the early days
of Facebook, long before parents could use the platform, or the multiple anonymous angsty teen blogs Mary and I shared with each other later in life. “Unfortunately, the nature of social media is no longer a personal, social media outlet, social media is your online presence and so, as much as I hate it, this is becoming necessary. And yes, there was a post with one of our volunteers that you know concerned me and I addressed it with the volunteer and said you can’t be posting stuff like this because you are a representative of SPC. They understood and they took it really well, but when that happened that kind of prompted me that we should have a set policy that if something like this happens again then we can kind of refer to the policy.”

*This brief argument in the act dynamic signals an interesting tension in the meaning of social media, generally, and one upon which this policy aims to police. Before getting into the text itself, Mary already voices a (dis)ordering that becomes important for organizing. As social media become more prominent in our society, but particularly among our volunteers, this tension demonstrates an opening and closing of meaning. Social media opens meaning: it now represents multiple facets and posts can be interpreted from multiple positions for multiple audiences (Marwick & boyd, 2010). This meeting and this policy attempt to close, or order, this variety of interpretations to how social media links volunteers with SPC publicly.*

“Any other questions before I start?” Mary asked.

“No, I just have a bunch during,” I replied. A few people chuckled at that, and Mary confirmed that I often have a critical eye for wording in these documents.

Mary then continued and read the following draft that our marketing director, Theresa, drafted for the meeting, especially since she was unable to attend the meeting.

**Overview.** This policy is written to include all Suicide Prevention Campaign and Suicide Prevention Campaign’s Keep Living Ministries volunteers who maintain personal websites, blogs, and social media pages, or who are considering beginning one. We view your rights
positively, and respect the right of our volunteers to use them as an avenue of self-expression and outreach.

As a volunteer for Suicide Prevention Campaign, you are seen by our members and outside parties as a representative of our organization. Therefore, as in all areas of daily life, a volunteer’s personal page is a reflection on Suicide Prevention Campaign, whether or not the organization is specifically discussed or referenced. If you choose to identify yourself as a Suicide Prevention Campaign volunteer, or to discuss matters related to Suicide Prevention Campaign, please bear in mind that many readers will assume you are speaking on behalf of our organization.

In light of this possibility, Suicide Prevention Campaign expects our staff to observe the following important guidelines:

**Notify Your Committee Chair.** If you currently have a personal website or weblog, or are considering starting one, be sure to discuss this with the chair of your committee. Also, if you have any questions, feel free to reach out to your committee chair.

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The policy document itself already closes the indeterminacy of meaning around social media use and the links to SPC. Volunteers are “seen by our members and outside parties as a representative of our organization.” This language works to order and establish a direct link between SPC and volunteers’ social media pages through their involvement. Furthermore, the text recognizes that “many readers will assume you are speaking on behalf of the organization.” This is an interesting recognition in a policy regarding authority. As Taylor and Van Every (2014) wrote, one way to view authority is the authorization of someone to speak on behalf of the organization. This policy poses that such authority may be established by simply volunteering or listing SPC on one’s profile, thus establishing authorization for “readers” of their social media. To mitigate this opening of authority, the policy attempts to close this possibility by establishing a process for volunteers to notify someone in leadership about their social media use. This text authorizes “committee chairs” to take on this authoritative relationship.
Here, I cut in. “Ok, are we really going to make literally every volunteer that we get tell their committee chair that they have a Facebook page and a Twitter and they might be starting a Tumblr?”

“I’m not sure,” Mary responded.

“Ok,” I snickered.

“Now let me preface this by saying Theresa wrote this and I took it straight from what Theresa wrote and put it here. I didn’t do any editing of this at all on my end, I just wanted to send it to you guys as is. So I mean we could take that out.”

“Ok.”

“Well hey,” Dan jumped in. “If she wants to monitor and keep track of all that,” he chuckled.

“Now we could, we could change it and instead of you know, you reporting to your committee chair that you report to Theresa. She is our marketing director. So if she wants to you know monitor these things,” several of us let out soft laughing snorts at this. Who would want to make more work for themselves or “monitor” such mundane things so closely? “I guess when I read it I was more on the understanding that if you were like one of those mommy bloggers and all of your time and energy goes into blogging and you have your own personal website that you’re blogging from and all of your personal thoughts and opinions on everything then we would want to know about it? But normally when someone is like a mommy blogger like they advertise it all over the place.”

“Would we maybe want to specify if that they post something concerning SPC?” Dan asked. “I don’t think we really care that a volunteer has a cooking blog, but if they want to post
something specifically about SPC or referencing SPC, then that might concern us a bit more than
the recipe for corn chowder.”

“I don’t know, corn chowder! That’s important!” Mary said. Lise and I agreed.

“Maybe if they post a recipe, they notify me,” he said, and I laughed to myself at his

words.

“Well my only concern with that would be you know,” Mary switched to a mocking tone,
as if she were trying to mimic someone who’s gaming the system of this policy. “If I want to
reblog something that SPC posted, so technically, I’m blogging about SPC…”

“Yeah, so I would say it would fall under that because it’s about the organization,” Dan
concluded nonchalantly.

“I have a question,” Amanda chimed in as well. After gaining the attention of the rest of
us, she continued. “So first off is this based off of the conversation you and I had at the
Department of Agriculture fair?”

“Yes,” Mary responded simply.

“Ok. So, I’m trying to gather some thoughts,” she laughed. “If I identify on Facebook as
a board member and I share basically everything that SPC’s Facebook shares too, if I would post
something saying ‘I’m part of the KKK’ or something, then I think that obviously wouldn’t be
good? Um.”

“So making exclusions for?” Lisa tried to continue for her.

“But instead of everyone has a Twitter, everyone has a Facebook, things like that,” she
continued. “But if you actively post SPC things on social media, then you should be monitored
as to how you do things. Who you’re associated with, et cetera. It does change, like if I saw a
member of SPC was part of the KKK, I probably wouldn’t like them very much.”
“Yeah, no, please if any of our volunteers is part of the KKK, please bring that to our attention.” Mary said in a mockingly serious tone. “That is something that we’re going to need to discuss.”

“That’s all I could come up with,” Amanda laughed. “I was trying to think of a really bad organization.”

“Yep, you got one!” Mary said. “You found one.”

“You win!” Lisa confirmed.

Above we see the interesting rhythmic push and pull of (dis)ordering, where the meaning of social media that should be reported opens and close. Several members bring up concerns that rely on extreme cases. Does it include all forms of social media? Does it include only blogs that we might not otherwise know about? Does it include only topics and posts that concern SPC? What is the “level” of “blogging about SPC?” If someone blogs about SPC but also about the KKK or other kinds of “really bad organizations” with which volunteers could be associated, is that covered in this policy? As each question demonstrates the openness of the policy’s indeterminacy, it also requests closing off certain possibilities. Each questioning concern in the pushing and pulling act dynamic of concern-solution demonstrates the indeterminacy and openness of the policy. Members actively disorder the text through extreme cases, like a member who is also in the KKK, and this disordering calls forth ordering in the pull of solutions.

“I think that gets covered later,” I said, returning to the document we were discussing. I refocused on who should be notified, and we debated who would be in charge of these issues. Theresa was about to start a social media team, so Mary felt comfortable putting the work onto her. Dave proposed instead of having a formal report, we put in “see something, say something”
sort of policy, where if someone on the board or another volunteer notices a concerning post, we say something to the rest of the board. Lisa proposed that we put in separate rules for blogs, which are lengthier and more thought out than other kinds of social media, and we could just routinely check in on Facebook and other social media things.

“I don’t like the word monitored, because it makes us sound like the CIA,” I critiqued.

“I agree,” Lise chimed in.

“Well what’s a synonym for monitored,” Mary mockingly joked. “Where’s our authors in the room?” Lise, her sister, laughed. “Like what should we use?”

“Checking in?” Lisa suggested.

“Well, so I think that part of our organization is that we are all friends really,” I said. “And even like our new volunteers, we’re trying to become friends with them, so it’s not even that we’re monitoring them, we’re already friends with you.”

“We’ll be viewing?” Mary tried again.

“Do we have to say it like that?” Lise argued. “Can’t we just say that just be careful with what you say about our organization and if you say something that we don’t agree, then we’ll say something. Like we don’t have to be watching you and monitoring you and making sure you’re doing things right, just be respectful and if you say something disrespectful, we’ll say something to you. It’s easy as that.”

“Yeah,” I agreed.

“Yeah, exactly” Dan agreed as well. “And if it’s brought to our attention then we’ll have to deal with this. It’s not like we’re going through like weekly and monitoring people’s sites. Unless you want to start the CIA SPC committee.” Dan and others chuckled at this.
Although not a word used in the policy itself, this discussion frequently repeated the word “monitor.” This word (dis)orders the policy, and the above discussion displays the effects. On the one hand, “monitor” opens the policy language to legitimize policing behaviors for social media. It “makes us sound like the CIA,” in my words, an unwanted connotation. This opening of meaning to include policing or surveilling behaviors also opens tension with being “friends” with other volunteers. “Friends” do not “monitor” or police each other’s social media, but they do regularly view the social media of other “friends.” Through the act dynamics of criticism, brainstorming, and playing with words, new language emerges to (dis)order this policy. “We’ll say something” and “we’ll have to deal with this” simultaneously close, or order, the formality and unwanted connotations of CIA-like surveillance, but these formulations still open, or disorder, the surveillance of organizational governance and policing.

Amanda asked if this was already covered in our volunteer code of ethics, but Mary didn’t think we had such a policy in place. Instead, she stated her expectations with volunteers in their initial contact meeting while she reviewed several policies with them. Amanda suggested a small subsection on “be a good person on social media” to reference a kind of code of ethics and link the documents together, when we create an actual code of ethics or conduct.

Mary repeated the new wording she noted down, and then continued reading.

**Include a Disclaimer [if necessary].** On your site, please make it clear to your readers that the views you express are yours alone and that they do not necessarily reflect the views of Suicide Prevention Campaign. Do your best to identify to readers who may inevitably connect your personal life to your professional life.

Mary noted that this specifically applied to blogs, and she didn’t expect every other tweet to be a disclaimer of this. I questioned when a disclaimer would be necessary, since this isn’t
included in the policy. I noted that it would be most necessary on blogs that are similar in topic to ours instead of food blogs. Dave agreed with me, since “we have very few stances on foods.” She made note of this and continued reading.

**Respect Confidentiality.** You must take proper care not to purposefully or inadvertently disclose any information that is confidential or proprietary to Suicide Prevention Campaign. Be sure that what you are announcing has been made public, either via social media or our website, before posting it. Otherwise, check with our President. Any employee who violates our policies regarding confidentiality will be subject to serious discipline, up to and including immediate termination of volunteering.

Here we argued over wording and roles again. Lise suggested instead of President, people check with their committee chairs. Mary agreed that this was how she “envisioned the hierarchy” anyway. She continued again.

**Respect Our Company and its Volunteer Staff.** Since your site and social media pages are a public space, we expect you to be respectful to Suicide Prevention Campaign, our volunteers, Board members, and partnering organizations. Any employee who uses a personal website or social media page to disparage the name or reputation of the organization, its practices, officers, volunteers or members will be subject to serious discipline, up to and including immediate termination of volunteer status.

“So if any of our volunteers start to get into a social media hissy fit,” Mary elaborated, “and like act like a bunch of dumb teenagers on social media, we can let go of them. Because that’s just dumb and we don’t need people to be fighting over each other. And if any of our volunteers ever posts anything mean about you on social media, we can let go of them!” I found out a year later that this was how the “inciting incident” played out. A volunteer didn’t agree with what Mary had told her to do for SPC, or had some kind of personal vendetta with Mary after they disagreed on a point, and she “vaguebooked” about how horrible Mary was, without
mentioning her name or SPC’s name. However, the nature of vaguebooking means that those “in the know” would know who the post referenced. Even a year later when Mary finally described the incident to me in detail, she seemed to be annoyed at this high-school-aged volunteer, and stated that she had decided not to accept many high schoolers to volunteer for SPC after this.

**Vaguebooking, like subtweeting, is the act of complaining about something that is specific to a person or situation, but not specifically mentioning the person or situation.** The enthymeme, instead, serves to call out the person whom the post references. Vaguebooking as an act can only be carried out through Facebook, whereas subtweeting can only be carried out through Twitter. Both acts could fall under the more general and act of “throwing shade” at someone for a perceived wrong they did to you. Vaguebooking itself relies on (dis)ordering, opening meaning to retain indirect vagueness and closing meaning with details that call out a particular person to those “in the know.” This particular case became organizational when it spurred an entire social media policy. The policy here aims to police these social media “hissy fits.” The language of “respect” opens the possibility to include a variety of potential disrespectful actions, making sure to cover situations like “hissy fits.” The indeterminacy here is left alone, rather than debated, so the disordering remains.

Mary continued reading further down the document after her elaboration.

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**Respect Our Beliefs.** When working for Suicide Prevention Campaigns’s Keep Living Ministries, it is important to remember that volunteer decisions will be made based upon our Christian beliefs. If your personal website or social media page displays inappropriate images or reflects personal opinions or life-style choices that are contrary to Suicide Prevention Campaign’s or Suicide Prevention Campaign’s Keep Living Ministries’ religious beliefs, you may be subject to discipline, up to and including immediate termination of volunteering. For this reason, we encourage you to first seek guidance from your committee chair or our
“Is this only for KLM?” I immediately asked as she finished reading the paragraph.

“Well that’s the question,” Mary replied. “Cuz think about… I mean it definitely should be for KLM since they’re kind of our Christian branch. I think we should hold our volunteers to a bit of a higher standard there. But you know we do have volunteers who don’t adhere to Christian lifestyles, and we can’t force anyone to do that either. It’s just like the content on their Facebook pages, like if someone… Like, I’m trying to find an example.”

“Well,” Lisa interjected. “What if for example um that person who works for the KKK is like hey I wanna volunteer you can say, ‘hey listen, our organization is based on love and mutual respect and blah blah blah’ and even those are beliefs in and of themselves, even though it’s not connected to religion.”

“Right,” Mary agreed. “I mean another example we do have, at least that I know of, we do have one of our volunteers that is gay. And you know, that’s a really hot topic issue in Christian circles and she’s wonderful and I don’t wanna get rid of her! Whether or not I believe in that lifestyle, so that, you know, there is like a religious aspect there and we want to make sure that our volunteers aren’t getting smashed and doing heroin you know whatever else on their Facebook pages, but we also don’t want to discriminate against people either.”

“I think as long as they’re not like,” Lise started. “I mean they can have their own beliefs but as long as they aren’t bashing our beliefs? I think that’d be fine. They keep their life to themselves, but as long as they’re not going out against KLM’s beliefs and what we believe then it should be cool.”

Taking the floor again, Mary noted, “Right. And I think again this is going to be one of those case-by-case situations. If someone posts something on Facebook we’re gonna have to
look at it and be like, ‘does this fall under our social media policy and is this something that we want to take action against?’ We’re gonna have to…”

“So what we need to do is just determine a process for when that happens, what do we do with that. Who’s making these decisions?” Dan interrupted. “If someone brings that up what is the process for handling that? Is there a committee.”

“Well we should figure that out,” Mary said.

“Well just for an example if someone posted something tomorrow, what do we do? Do we go to Theresa, do we go to you? Um does this require a committee of some sort? What are the next steps once someone identifies something questionable.”

“Do we have that on this policy? I don’t remember.”

“No,” I said.

“No we don’t,” Mary confirmed, whether hearing me or not.

Dave chimed in, considering that this clause concerned his acquired organization [see Chapter 4]. “Well as far as even for like KLM end of things, if it’s something that I see would be questionable to KLM as a faith-based branch, if I see it I would probably bring it up on the uh Google Groups for the board of directors just to say, ‘this is what I saw, do we take action on it, should we or should we not?’ So if it’s something reflecting my specific committee, but if it’s a general thing that’s just a general SPC volunteer, I think that would be under Mary or whoever else.”

“So does that decision go to the board of directors or to Mary specifically?” Dan asked, worrying over precision.

“The board of directors,” Dave answered immediately.

“I think it would be a group, I don’t want to be making…” Mary spoke at the same time.
“Ok,” Dan confirmed.

“So we need to at least have,” Mary started. “I think, I think the board is probably a good place to send these decisions. Now another thing to consider is that if someone is posting something really violently awful about our organization like we may not necessarily have all the time in the world to post something on Google Groups and wait a week for everyone to respond. Like there may be more time-sensitive matters here. And I think also especially when it comes to like I guess the disciplinary action of dealing with volunteers, I really think that we should kind of follow the biblical example here, and if someone posts something dumb on Facebook? You know especially committee chairs, if you see something send it to the committee chair and have that person have a one-on-one with the individual and be like ‘listen, what you posted is not really ok, here’s why, remember our social media policy, please be respectful in the future.’” Strike one. “If they do it again, get me involved. Then we have the president and we also have the committee chair being like ‘listen! You need to stop what you’re doing, and like we’re going to be monitoring your social media because this is the second time this has happened.’” Strike two. “And if they do it a third time, then be like ‘I’m sorry, but we can’t trust you on social media, we’re gonna have to let you go.’” Strike three, you’re out! “Or something like that. Just because someone posts something on Facebook doesn’t mean they’re malicious in intent, they’re just having a bad day. But we need to address it in varying degrees of severity.”

Mary paused, took a couple clarifying questions, and then returned to the policy. “So with this wording…?”

“I don’t like it,” I reply.

“You don’t like it?” Mary confirms.
“No, because it sounds like, so how we’ve been talking about this is you’re supposed to respect the beliefs that SPC is associated with and KLM is associated with, and if those beliefs are attacked we should say something about it. But the wording of this, if you just have opinions or lifestyle choices that aren’t the same, then we’ll be talking to you. And I don’t like that.”

*Do we actually delineate the specific beliefs or posts that might violate this policy, or do we set a process in place that ultimately determines them? How open or closed should the policy be so that SPC can police the “right” kinds of problematic social media posts? In this discussion, (dis)ordering the text opens the possibility to police life choices and beliefs, while simultaneously requesting closing off these policing possibilities. The language opens itself to the possibility that your different “opinions or lifestyle choices” might already result in disciplinary action. Are we disciplining social media use, or are we disciplining life choices? A request for the closing of meaning points out its openness. Does a secular organization with a sacred component also express Christian beliefs that can be disrespected? Can an organization be secular if God was one of its founding members?*

*(Dis)ordering questions simultaneously open up and often advocate for a particular closing of meaning at the same time. Rather than determining different language for the text, the act dynamics here flow to suggestion: set up a process by which the surveillers can determine whether a post should be further policed. The policy thus orders and legitimizes a process of review rather than directly policing posts. At the end of this discussion, participants reorient to “wording.” Although the wording opens to include the emergent norm of “not bashing our beliefs,” it also opens to include “opinions and lifestyle choices that aren’t the same.” In voicing the disordering effects, I request change to order them and close in the emergent norm. “So…”*
“You disappeared!” I said to my screen. The whirring of my ancient laptop fan filled the otherwise newly silent room with noise. “No! No.” I pleaded with my computer, frantically clicking and typing to try to wake it up. “Bitte!” This final, German plea is also my resignation. I picked up my phone and paused the recording. By the time my computer calmed down and I could finally get back into the meeting, they had already moved on beyond the social media policy. I suppose meetings don’t wait for you, or at least they don’t wait for me.

Talk about your non-linguistic disorder. A meeting ends abruptly, but only for one, and only through the complex technological assemblage required to meet.

In summary of this first section, the meeting as an emergent event involved legitimizing, an activity bringing together a complex organizational assemblage. The board members, their computers, the software (Google Hangouts), policy drafts, meanings of social media types and purposes, and even God and biblical values come together in legitimizing SPC and the social media policy. The board created this policy to establish “a professional backbone” to take issue with social media posts that disparage the organization, supposedly without consent. The inciting vaguebooking incident, as narrated above, prompted a more “professional backbone” to respond to and police potential, similar futures.

The assemblage brought together through this meeting intimately (dis)orders the policy text throughout discussion. Specifically, members use questions and hypothetical situations to both display the openness of meaning and often also argue to close off certain meanings in the policy. This specific meeting displays (dis)ordering around a variety of meanings, including the meaning of social media generally, questioning the limits of the text, positing alternate frameworks for putting surveillance into policy language, vaguebooking, and questioning which beliefs volunteers must respect.
In this first act, SPC authors a text to translate into future conversations and authorize leadership to act. As I write above, according to Taylor and Van Every (2014), authority is “a property of relationships” that requires an authorization of one actor to act on behalf of another (p. 20), such as the organization, and this authorization must first be authored in communication. As SPC discusses this policy, thereby policing, they are also discussing the possibilities for this text to authorize policing behaviors, such as monitoring social media. Through these relations of authority, the social media policy legitimizes particular actions through its lasting capabilities as a text. Meetings then not only translate documents into conversation, they also author new texts that will authorize future organizational action. Meetings are thus involved in authority, which Taylor and Van Every call “a foundation of organization because in its absence there would be no unifying force” (p. xx).

Four Platforms in Four Years

Throughout the next section, members of SPC discuss the four online organizing platforms, Facebook, Wiggio and Voom, Google, and Microsoft SharePoint. These online organizing platforms legitimize the work of SPC, and meeting talk authorizes them to do so. These platforms work to provide the “professional backbone” of SPC, and talk about them legitimizes both the platforms and SPC through this relation of authority. Each meeting draws together a different assemblage involving these technologies, especially those meetings where decisions to migrate platforms are made. The narratives in this section span the lifetime of SPC, from the first annual board meeting in December 2012, to the last meeting included in data collection in December 2016. Appendix 1 includes the switches between platforms in a timeline of other key events. I provide relevant contextualization and summaries at the end of each
meeting narrative, specifically relating to legitimizing SPC and (dis)order. Many of these narratives are pieces of meetings reproduced in Chapter 4 on deciding as well.

Reviewing the First Transition (Facebook to Wiggio, December 2012)

When SPC started, Mary created a few different groups on Facebook to organize committees and the board of directors. She was Facebook friends with the volunteers for her organization anyway, so the groups made the most sense. However, between the first board meeting in July 2012 and the second board meeting in December 2012, Mary found Wiggio, and decided to switch the online coordination, communication, and document storage over to that platform. Wiggio also provided support for video-conferencing meetings, but an October 2012 committee meeting proved the system to be clunky and undersupported. Mary then searched for and found a different video-conferencing platform, which I have called Voom in other work (Peters, 2015a, 2015b). Although different companies created the text-based medium Wiggio and the video-conferencing medium Voom, these make up the first “platform suite” SPC used for online organizing.

Mary launched into her first discussion of Wiggio with the board after its implementation. “Another thing that I want to talk about is on here, um, and I’ve been talking with each individual committee with this as well, but I just want to hear the board’s opinion. Are you guys ok with Wiggio? Is everyone liking the website? Is it doing what we need it to do?”

“It works,” Sean responded.

“It works. From what I’m understanding most people are getting updates. You guys obviously know that there was a meeting today, you guys showed up. You guys can access the materials that we’re putting on there so that’s working. One thing that I am noticing, there’s not a lot of participation that’s happening on Wiggio. Um, I know that’s also because a lot of
committees there’s not a lot to talk about at this point. But, I know that in our education
committee we’re trying to have a discussion about the resource tool, resource kit, and stuff, and
there’s just not a lot of participation happening. So is everyone kind of in agreement that we
need to participate more on Wiggio? Or do you guys think it’s kind of ok where we are?”

“Depends on the topic,” Sean started, “But yeah.”

“So much on the topic,” Mary repeated so the phone listeners could hear.

“Yeah, the thing is, there’s not a lot going on right now,” Amanda said.

“Yeah, that seems to be the general consensus. But it is much better than Facebook,” she
chuckled. “I think everyone’s in agreement with that. We can keep our nonprofit stuff and our
personal life separate, which is good. And it’s also nice because pretty much anything that I
have on SPC I put on Wiggio, so I mean I don’t think I have any files that you guys don’t have.
So I mean, if my computer were to ever burst into flames, then I know that I could access
everything from Wiggio.” Mary continued to ramble on this subject for another few minutes.
She reported one more networking connection that she’d made that seemed particularly
important, and then decided to adjourn the meeting.

_“Wiggio ‘works,’ and this meeting works to legitimize it. Irony marks this particular
excerpt. As Mary repeated both at the time and throughout organizing SPC, she meant Wiggio
and other online platforms to ‘replace meetings.’ Ironically, Wiggo was turned into a meeting
usurper, in a meeting. Also ironically, given the first section above about the Social Media
Policy, I characterize the move from Facebook to Wiggio as maintaining separation between
‘our nonprofit stuff and our personal life.’ This justification in the act dynamic marks an early
desire to create ‘a professional backbone,’ creating separation between the nonprofit and the
personal. Despite the intertwining of nonprofit and personal through other means, including_
meetings, separating the personal and the professional works to legitimize the latter, and Wiggio creates this relation-through-separation.

The Wiggio Years (September 2013)

As I have shown elsewhere, (Peters, 2014a, 2015a) the following meeting excerpt is an excellent illustration of meta-communication about meetings. In this work, I draw attention to the relations between online organizing and the meeting. As I previously mentioned, Wiggio’s intent was to replace meetings, and some of the same talk is included throughout this meeting. However, as I write in Chapter 4, Mary called this meeting to have contact with the board, who had not met in the nine months between these meetings, and it had been five months since the last official committee meeting. Wiggio did not replace all meetings, and Mary brought this up to set some norms with the board.

“I do want to talk about our meetings a little bit,” Mary started the open discussion part of the board meeting. “Um, cuz, the biggest… fight that I have with myself with meetings is I want to be able to meet with people to, you know, show that we’re a team. So everyone gets together, and we get to brainstorm together, we get to talk face to face or you know webcam or whatever it is. But I also know that everyone has very busy lives, and I don’t want to have meetings just for the sake of having a meeting. Because we do everything online, I can get information to you guys in an instant and not have to schedule a meeting.” This was the purpose Wiggio served for us, after all. “But I still want to be in communication with you guys!” Here, Mary chuckled and so did a few others. “And like have that face to face interaction. Because I want you guys to know that we are a team and that we’re all working together. So that’s kind of my biggest struggle, and I just want to know some of your thoughts on it. What do you guys prefer, do you
hate having meetings? Are we having enough meetings? Should we have less meetings?

Should we not call them meetings? Should we call them fiestas? Would that make it better?”

Lisa, whose idea “fiestas” were in the first place, commented, “Probably. Who wouldn’t come to a fiesta!”

[“What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet” (Shakespeare, n.d., Act 2, Scene 2). Is the corollary here, “What’s in a name? That which we call a meeting by any other name would be just as boring?” Or do names have a power over us and our perceptions after all?]

Lise (the other one) returned us back to the original questions on meetings. “I feel like they’re more productive. I’m more productive.”

“Yeah,” Sean chimed in, “there’s still something about them…”

“Yeah, then you’re focused and when you’re online not everybody’s there at the same time, and you’re meeting at different times. You don’t know what you’re speaking about.” Lise built on the discussion.

“And you always send out to pick a time slot, so we know we can find the time. And this is one hour you know. If you don’t have an hour there’s something wrong.” Sean finished.

“Okay,” Mary said as she took notes on the discussion.

“If you’re in grad school,” Lisa chimed in, “that’s the problem.” This statement brought laughter from quite a few people. Lisa and I were the only two currently working on our master’s degrees, but the stereotype of a busy grad student transcended beyond us.

After a few more minutes in and out of focus on the topic, Mary asked, “So, like, do you feel that we should have a set meeting schedule?”

“No,” Lisa, Sean, and Lise said at almost the same time.
“Cuz really you don’t know when an issue’s going to come up and when it’s not,” Lisa added.

“Because that, oh sorry,” Sean said, realizing he was interrupting Mary.

“Go ahead,” Mary said.

“Like that- that’s when meetings become for the sake of meetings, when things get scheduled.”

“Right, like we have a meeting coming up so we might as well do it,” Mary added.

“Yeah,” Lisa also added, “Something to do besides eat tacos.” Some more laughter came at this mention.

“Yeah, eat tacos,” Mary replied, “That’s the agenda for our fiesta you know.”

“So now when we feel the work is,” Sean’s mic cut out on my feed for just a second, but it seemed to be the crux of his statement. “You bring us all back in with a meeting again.”

“Purpose, purpose!” Lisa yelled, confirming that this statement was important and I’d missed it.

“Yes!” Mary said decidedly, as if whatever he’d said put words to what she had been thinking.

“Yay!” Lisa yelled in a high pitch.

“And did you catch that Katie? What Sean said,” Mary asked me.

Relief and nerves filled me. Relief that I would have a chance to find out this important thing he’d said, and nerves that I was caught not fully listening. “Um, only vaguely,” I admitted.

“Uh, he was just saying that… he was just saying that,” Mary started. “Um, we don’t need to have like sched- set like set meetings like once a month or anything like that because then it’s just meetings for the sake of meetings. But whenever I’m looking at Wiggio and I feel
like there’s just disorganization, that people aren’t on track, that is when- that should be my key to schedule a meeting and put us back on track.”

“Yeah,” I murmured, confirming that I heard her.

“Write that down!” She said to me, and then laughed. “Amanda, write that down in your minutes!”

*This narrative segment demonstrates two important parts about legitimizing. First, Sean suggests and Mary ratifies a norm to have meetings when Mary senses “disorganization” on Wiggio. What is this “disorganization” and how would Mary know it if she sees it? To draw Cooper (1986) back into the discussion, disorganization could be read as the zero degree, or “absolute disorder,” which energizes ordering. Mary’s statement of the norm fits this model: when she senses “just disorganization,” this should energize meetings to (re)order, or, in her words, “put us back on track.” Wiggio, if left unchecked, could disintegrate into the zero degree, or rather, Wiggio could present many excesses that do not necessarily fit within a neat, organizational frame. When the framing of organization, however that may be cast at the time, is not presented on Wiggio, then meetings are the solution. To use Schwartzman’s (2015) terms, participants could bring order to the disorder with the “local sense” of meetings. Meetings, and not Wiggio, can legitimize the (re)ordering of SPC’s “disorganization.” Hence, this norm emerged in a meeting, not organizing on Wiggio. The meeting thus works to legitimize Wiggio as a “professional backbone” for organizing, but when it falls to “disorganization,” meetings will re-order the organization and re-legitimize this “professional backbone.”*

Another important point about legitimizing is the relation to texts. “Write that down” Mary told both Amanda and me. I was taking notes for research, which she knew, and Amanda was writing meeting minutes. In order to legitimize the contribution that had been made here,
the conversation needed to imbricate into a text (Taylor & Van Every, 2000). Meetings legitimize contributions through their imbrication to texts. Conversations, outside of the meeting form, do not routinely imbricate into texts, but meetings often have minutes. These literal texts transcend any one meeting to persist across meetings.

**A Google Interlude (November 2014)**

Over a year later, the board had their first online-only meeting, which we planned to be a brief 30- to 45-minute meeting to discuss a replacement on the board for Sean, the treasurer, who resigned between the September 2014 meeting included in Chapter 4 and this meeting. Prior to the meeting, Mary and I discussed some of the difficulties of Wiggio. At this point, we had shifted document storage from Wiggio to Google Drive, and we were considering replacing Voom as well as Wiggio’s message-board organizing capabilities.

Mary called this meeting to replace Sean on the board and as our treasurer with Craig, with whom Mary had worked with at the bank where she used to work part-time. I logged in early to talk with Mary one-on-one and catch up with each other, which ended up centering on business.

“Yeah, um, you still know about the thingies I made last night,” I said, referring to the electronic board and president review surveys I put into Google Forms instead of the Word documents Mary had.

“Yeah, I posted on Wiggio, but I will tell people again,” Mary responded.

“Ok,” I said.

“Cuz Wiggio is still not giving the notifications that it’s supposed to be getting,” she finished.

“Yeah I get them at like weird times, like I got some.”
“Yeah.”

“Christie? I don’t know who she is.”

“Yes.”

“But she requested something.”

“Yes, yes.”

“I just got that email yesterday, but I got all of your emails back and forth to her like three days ago! So I don’t know.”

“Yes, me too.”

“I don’t understand. It’s so weird.”

“Cuz I was like, wait, I responded to this already. And I was like,” Mary made a confused face at her computer.

“Yeah, yep. I don’t...”

“I hope Wiggio gets their crap together.”

“Or we could not use it anymore,” I mentioned.

“Yeah, I think that might be something I’m gonna give, I might have Amanda research Google Hangouts and see if, um, google offers the same kind of format?”

“They do,” I said at the same time she finished.

“Like we even have separate groups and everything?”

Yep.”

“And like forums and all that junk?”

“Yep, it’s called Google Groups.”

“Ok!”
“If anybody has like a Gmail account?” I continued. “And we can also migrate our SPC emails to Gmail and it’ll still be at SPC.org, that’s what my school email is? It’s @colorado.edu, but it’s controlled by Gmail.”

“Ok.”

“Um, we should be able to do that for free now because we have the 501(c)(3), um, and so yeah. So we could do that and then we get automatic Google Plus pages and then ok?”

“Hold on a second,” Mary interrupted, her phone ringing.

“Yes,” I acknowledged.

“Sorry. Hello? I’ll call you here, I’ll add you in right now,” Mary said to her phone.

Turning back to her computer she narrated what she was doing. “Let’s see, I know there’s a place where I can hit add to call. Ok?”

“You just call somebody,” I offered.

“Alright, bye,” Mary said to her phone.

At this time, Wiggio does not “work.” An expectation of Wiggio is that it will send email updates, and these updates will be in order. Instead, in the relations of Wiggio, the internet, and email reception, disorder appears. Emails never received, or received out of order, demonstrate an excess to the ordering Wiggio was aimed to achieve. Wiggio itself had become an excess, or a “more than.” Fewer and fewer emails came through, fewer responses posted, online conversation slowed to a stop. Wiggio was no longer serving the purpose to organize as a “professional backbone” platform, so SPC sought a new alternative. Google Groups entered our lives in a suggestion for a new kind of order. Google’s reputation and brand were more widespread and appeared more professional than Wiggio, an otherwise unknown website that shut down within two years of this meeting and this first transition suggestion.
Meetings, Wiggio, and the relation between them, came up again in the December 2014 annual board meeting. This time, Mary raised the subject in a discussion of stipulations in the conflict of interest policy. This policy requires board meetings to resolve potential conflicts of interest, and the policy is legally required to be granted nonprofit status. Again, Mary portrays Wiggio as a meetings replacement, but characterizes this relation differently.

“Now again, one of the reasons why we use Wiggio is that we’re cutting down on all of these meetings,” Mary said after concluding her reading of the conflict of interest policy. “And so when we’re talking about something on Wiggio, it counts as a board meeting. We’re meeting together online and we’re discussing it, so.”

“How would you decide which topics count?” Lisa asked.

“It all does,” Mary answered. “It all counts. I mean the entire point of the meeting is to communicate what is going on in an organization and we do that online so it all counts.” [I cringe reading this. There’s so much more that meetings do, and this dissertation stands as a testament to a variety of doings.]

Lisa made some joke about taking meeting minutes for Wiggio that I couldn’t quite hear, but the folks in the room laughed.

“Just print Wiggio,” her now-husband Dan said.

“The point of it being online is that you don’t have to take minutes because you can literally read what people are writing,” Mary said. “So let me tell you, like, ok. So this collaboration panel that I’m on doesn’t do any online communication, they have a meeting, like an official board meeting, the third Friday of every other month, and it is six hours long.”

“What!” Lisa exclaimed, followed by Craig and Dan.
“So unless you want to have six hour meetings every other month, we’re going to continue to do things online,” Mary concluded.

“Does that set the record for inefficiency?” Dan asked, chuckling.

“Katie, write that down, that’s painful,” Lisa said as an aside to me.

“I wrote that down!” I said, confirming that I’d already done so.

“So be thankful this is only two hours,” Mary said.

“We love you,” Lisa said to her.

Mary moved on again, back to reading through the conflict of interest policy.

Conversation ebbed and flowed in between her reading, occasionally interrupting, occasionally joking, and occasionally laughing.

*Now Wiggio “counts as a meeting.”* Instead of replacing meetings, does it move meeting interaction to a different space? Members are “meeting together online” and “communicating what is going on in an organization,” but as Lise pointed out in 2013, it is at different times, and sometimes conversations take weeks to get enough “discussion.” Six-hour meetings might sound “painful,” but they take place over a much shorter total timespan than many Wiggio conversations. Mary wields these “painful” six-hour meetings as a threat of disorderly excesses of time. Dan poses the sheer length of the threatened meetings to “set the record for inefficiency.” This threat mobilizes further legitimizing of Wiggio and our more “efficient” three-hour twice a year meetings. Time has (dis)ordering effects. Legitimizing Wiggio and shorter, less frequent meetings drags current and potential disorder back to order. The threat here does this work. Participate more on Wiggio, or else we will face disorder. Online communication orders SPC efficiently, with lower demands on one’s time. However, if Wiggio
“counts” as a meeting and discussion takes weeks or months to resolve, do Wiggio “meetings” set the record for disorder through the excesses of time?

**Finally Transitioning (Wiggio > Google Groups, December 2014)**

Later in the same meeting, Mary turns to “open discussion” and starts talking from a list of topics she had sent ahead of the meeting. One of the topics was “alternative to Wiggio,” and the following conversation sets up whether or not to transition to Google Groups.

“Next line,” Mary announced. “Alternative to Wiggio. I thought we said no puns,” she scolded someone I couldn’t hear. “So there are a couple thoughts about an alternative to Wiggio. Google groups was suggested now that we’re a 501(c)(3) it should be free to us to use. So if there’s a desire from the majority of the board, I will move everything to Google Groups. Now, fun fact, I already was playing with Google Groups, and I already have our committees set up for all of our committees. And it’s actually set up very much like a forum, so you can click on a topic, and read the topic. So now on Wiggio you kind of have to scroll down to the right conversation, so this one you can literally click on. So, it definitely looks cleaner? But maybe I’m not understanding it correctly? But as of right now, anytime there is any sort of activity it emails you right away. So with Wiggio you could get an email with a summary of the day’s like responses? And with this, I’m not, I’m not seeing that option.”

“So like 20 emails?” Lisa asked.

“Yeah! So if we’re having a full-blown conversation on Google Groups,” Mary continued.

“Oh my gosh,” Lisa said, eyes wide, realizing where it was going.

“You’re gonna have an exploding amount of email,” Mary said.

“Is there an email setting?” Craig asked at the same time.
“I could not find it. So it may exist?” Mary said.

“I think it does,” I chimed in.

“Cuz I could not find it, and I played with it for like two hours.” Mary concluded.

“Let me, let me, how do I get out of this?” I said, more to myself than to be heard. I jumped from Google Hangouts to Google Groups on my screen and started clicking around. While I was doing this, conversation died off a little bit in the room, and then picked up when Lisa mentioned the volunteer appreciation topic that would be next. Mary was also playing around on her computer with Google Groups, perhaps not wanting to be wrong.

“People online, I don’t know if you can really see this,” Mary said, showing her other laptop where she’d pulled up Google Groups to the laptop projecting the online meeting participants.

“It’s just a white screen,” I said. “You literally can’t see anything.”

“I mean, but, to,” Mary started.

“I’m on my own,” I said to them, indicating that I was looking at my own Google Groups screen.

“What are you doing?” Mary asked when Lisa walked over to the computer with the webcam people.

“I’m just showing them,” Lisa said.

“Lisa!” I said, when she was large and looming on my screen to pick us up. “Ah!” We both giggled, and so did some other people.

“The world’s upside down! What are we ever going to do!” I exclaimed.
Once we were “settled” again, Mary started demonstrating Google Groups for the in-person folks, and I continued clicking around the page, furiously trying to find what I was looking for. It was a race against their boredom with the platform to defend my suggestion.

“Ha!” I exclaimed. “I got it! I got it. I got it.” And I got their attention. “So, so you see the, the little settings thing on the right side of your screen, and then there’s a person and a settings next to it?”

“Yep,” Mary confirmed her attention was directed.

“And that’s like your personal settings or something?”

“Yes?” Mary confirmed.

“And then you click on that.”

“Membership and email settings?”

“Yep. Send daily summaries, send combined updates, send me an email for every new message,” I read the settings.

“Ah!” Mary exclaimed. “You found it in like three minutes, good job.”

“I know!” I giggled.

“So you got rid of one complaint,” Lise said.

“So that’s one of two complaints I have with Google so far. So cuz everything looks really nice, and Google is super professional, it’s already where all of our Google docs are, and we can start I mean, our Google Hangouts so far has been working really well, which means we don’t have to use Voom anymore.”

“Yep,” I confirmed, as someone who relied on the video conferencing software.

“I don’t have to ask people to download any other software. That’s nice, you can just do it from Google. All good things. And now we do have the ability to change your email settings.
The one other complaint I have about Google is that the reason we’ve done everything on Wiggio is that it kind of replaces our meetings? And so all of our decisions that we’ve made up until now is literally written on Wiggio.”

“You can print that and file away,” Lise said to her sister.

“We could print it and file it away,” Mary repeated. “I’m fine with that. It’s just a matter of how do I print it? Like do I have to scroll down through all of the conversations?”

“Um,” I said loudly and then paused to get their attention. “So, I’ve done this.” I said, laughing. “For research.”

“Oh course you did,” Mary said, laughing along with some of the other folks in the meeting. I continued to explain the process to her. “Ok! So as long as we have all of that text as like, cuz that’s our documentation. That’s our legal decisions that we’ve made up till now. We need that like documented somewhere. So as long as we can print that and file it away somewhere, that’s great. So what’s everyone’s thoughts? Do you like Google? Do you want to move to it? Are you guys sick of Wiggio?” Mary asked.

“Yes,” Dan immediately replied.

“Yeah,” Lisa and Lise agreed.

Mary commented on one more differentiating feature that made it easy to see when members posted new replies to a topic. “Alright. So, let’s take a vote on this then. Who votes to go to Google? Raise your hand.”

Everyone raised their hands, including Theresa, Amanda, and me on webcam.

“Alright, everyone! Unanimous. So, we will, what I’m gonna do then, what I’m gonna start doing then. Hopefully by the end of December cuz I want this to all be new by January, I’m
going to copy over all of the you know our most recent conversations into these discussions on Google. When it’s all set up I will invite you guys to be part of Google.”

“Google is super professional,” Mary says in praise of Google Groups, amid her two criticisms of migration. As she mentioned, we had already shifted document-hosting and video-conferencing over to the Google platform suite, so the rest of the online organizing seemed to be a matter of time. Together, the “super professional” Google could better support the “professional backbone” that platforms helped to legitimize. The rhythm of legitimizing Google to legitimize SPC works in much the same way as the rhythm in Chapter 4. In this discussion, a similar concern-solution act dynamic is at work, pushing and pulling this deciding that also legitimizes. This time, the rhythm alters, solutions take up more time than simple suggestions. Discussion around an email alert concern crashes in, and pulls back slowly with the technology solution. Google does have the correct emailing capabilities to order online organizing. Another concerning wave crashes in, this time about how to keep “our legal decisions” properly documented. As another technology solution, printing them out to save as paper copies resolves, the wave moves back out. Finally, in the deciding, a unanimous vote calls it: Google is the next platform. This legitimizing establishes a new, more “professional backbone” for SPC.

The Google Years (December 2015)

A year later, Mary checked in on the progress of Google Groups. With the migration completed in January, a full year allowed the dust to settle and see what is happening with the platform. Mary and I talked about the platform during the intervening year, especially the way the affordances of Google Groups did not quite meet our expectations. She begins discussion with this point.
“Alright, the next point,” Mary transitioned. “There still seems to be some issues about communication. Um everyone agrees that there are definite attempts at communication. Google Groups is still, we’re still all on the fence about it. Um, the committee reports have definitely helped, we’re all in the know about what’s happening, but there’s still kind of the struggle of most of our volunteering happening online. And Katie actually had a really great quote, and she had mentioned that ‘Google groups is excellent for information dissemination and critiquing, but it doesn’t really foster idea creation and brainstorming.’ So that’s a fantastic quote.”

“How aren’t you a professor yet, Katie?” Lisa asked.

“Cuz I have to pass my comprehensive exams in the spring and then write a 250 page dissertation first?” I answered. [I laugh at this ambition now as I’m about to hit 300 pages.]

Mary, Lise, and several others briefly discussed and tried to troubleshoot some of the technical problems that appeared in the meeting. All they could hear from me was “blah, blah, dissertation.” I started moving things around in my new technical set up to see what would make my voice work better.

While doing that, Amanda complained that she was having trouble with Google Groups on the Google Chrome browser, ironically. Mary reminded everyone that Joseph, her husband, could troubleshoot any problems people are having. He would soon assume the role of IT Coordinator in SPC. I eventually got my voice working, and we continued.

“I don’t know, I just wanna talk about Google Groups for a little bit,” Mary started. “Because we kind of, we’re, I don’t know what I’m trying to ask you to be totally honest.”

“Do we like Google Groups?” Dan offered.

“I don’t really want to leave Google Groups? I think it’s really nice that we have Google Groups, Google Drive, and Google Hangouts, it’s all kind of integrated, it’s all in one platform?”
Like, maybe there’s a different way in which we should use Google Groups. Maybe we shouldn’t utilize it as our main form of contact.”

“I agree with that,” I started. “I mean, so, it’s great if our main form of contact is supposed to be information, but I don’t think that should be what our main form of contact is? I mean, so I said that, Google Groups is great for telling people what’s happening. Which needs to happen sometimes, um, but if we really want to get moving and start creating stuff, that’s not going to help us.”

“Yeah, right,” Dave and Mary acknowledged.

“We could always use Hangouts for like brainstorming sessions or something, that’s more real time. It would take more coordination, but that would move faster than posting something, waiting a week for someone to respond,” Dave continued.

“Yeah, definitely,” Mary, Lise, and I agreed.

“Absolutely,” Mary said. “Yeah cuz right now, if we want a decision to be made on Google Groups it takes weeks. It does. It takes weeks for us to come to a decision, where if we can just schedule a meeting of some sort.”

“Yeah,” Dave said.

“Maybe part of what Katie was talking about was you know most of what we do on Google Groups is, you know, information dissemination. You know, I talk about events that are coming up, or here’s a mental health fair I need help at, or here’s a policy or here’s a board meeting coming up or whatever. And so maybe we just need, if we post, if we’re going to have quarterly committee meetings anyway, then having things like, we’re currently developing KLM resources. Sort of what we did with the resource kit for the education committee, which took an extremely long time cuz we’re on Google Groups. Me and Dave were just like, ‘we’re gonna do
this in meetings,’ like we’re just gonna wait, and then the next KLM meeting we have, we’re all gonna look at it, we’re all gonna make a decision, and all of it will be done in one day.”

“I think that’s a better way to make decisions, I mean you get feedback right away instead of, ‘oh, this person wrote a week ago, I guess I should respond to that,’” Dave added.

“Yeah, so I guess um, I guess the thing to do then is I’m going to definitely keep posting on Google Groups all of the things that people need to know, policies, announcements, training opportunities, all of that fun kind of stuff. But anytime we need a decision to be made, or we need to collaborate, or we need to be creative, then maybe I’m gonna start scheduling a phone conference or a hangouts meeting or something with you or the committees. So anything creative-oriented, or brainstorming-oriented, we need to pull that away from Google Groups.”

A couple people added on more reasons to move some types of communication from Google Groups to meetings, including real-time critiques or feedback, which required responses.

As I wrote in Chapter 4, I had a few times consulted with Mary about the difference between communication as information and communication as constitution, in an effort to not only demonstrate a difference between informing and creating, but to try to adapt to the affordances of different platform options. Google Hangouts and online meetings made creating and discussion, like the discussion above, easy. Google Groups, however, mimicked message boards, which at this point were largely outdated precursors to current social media and chat-based organizational apps like Slack or Microsoft Teams. Although informing is certainly also constitutive, the effects differed from the effects of creating, collaborating, and deciding. The emergent effects of Google Groups did not align with the emergent effects of meetings, and thus Google Groups was a poor meetings replacement.
Meetings legitimize SPC and organizing in a way that online discussions do not, and this legitimizing brings together an assemblage of bodies, computers, presences, documents, and other contingently obligatory relations like the one involved in this narrative. As I have demonstrated so far, meetings cultivate emergent effects like norms that regard online organizing. In this narrative we see another: Google Groups should be used for informational purposes. These norms are often left unstated on the online organizing platform, and meetings are required to legitimize and authorize these online platforms as professional spaces. Time is one of the most important pieces of the meeting assemblage: meetings, as temporally bounded events, provide a form that legitimizes faster, and therefore better, than Google Groups, especially for certain kinds of communication. As I stated above when participants normed Wiggio discussions as avoiding excesses of six-hour meetings, online organizing discussions often lasted weeks or months with few responses and long stretches of time spent waiting for them. The disorder of this possibly wasted time mobilizes legitimizing to drag participants into a meeting and (re)order its “professional backbone”.

The SharePoint Transition (December 2016)

Mary had decided in the fall of 2016 to migrate platforms to SharePoint to receive more cloud storage space for SPC’s documents, instead of paying Google extra money to get enough space because SPC’s files were overwhelming the free allotment of cloud storage. Mary’s husband, Joseph, helped her move everything over to SharePoint to figure the platform out and make sure everything would work before Mary told the board of directors that this decision happened. In October 2016, she reported that the platform would be ready to use soon and the board would have time to test out the platform in November to test out the features and decide whether to make the full migration or maintain online organizing on Google Groups. The final
meeting of my data collection, in December 2016, had two purposes: to review the SharePoint feedback and vote to migrate (or not), and to vet and approve a new addition to the board of directors, Sam. Both motions passed. This narrative and the following narrative are both from the same meeting, so I summarize each of these at the end, but do not provide set up for the next (and final) narrative scene.

Mary began the meeting with a (rehashed) explanation of the events that led to an open board seat. Dave had stepped down from his position leading KLM back in June, and now Sam had taken his place leading that acquired organization. Last month, Dave sent in his (expected) board resignation, leaving open the board seat, especially for someone who was on KLM. Sam attended the first part of the meeting to introduce herself and answer some questions from the board. After she left, the present members voted unanimously to elect her.

Moving on, Mary unceremoniously transitioned to discussing SharePoint. The primary reason for the move was online cloud storage space. Months ago we had reached the limits of Google Drive’s free storage option for nonprofits, and one option would be to pay for the service. However, the other option was to switch platforms (again) and get free online storage through SharePoint. They offered 1TB of shared free space, which more-than-tripled the amount of storage space. Additionally, everyone with an account received 1TB of personal space.

“SharePoint offers a centralized platform, instead of drive.google.com, and all of those. Plus it’s flexible, so it can grow with us as we grow,” Mary stated. Several heads nodded throughout this, including Dan’s, who had mentioned he used SharePoint at work.

Mary turned the floor over to her husband, Joseph, to review the results of the SharePoint surveys. “The responses were mostly positive,” he noted. “One of the criticisms is that the
platform is confusing and has a lot of stuff going on. Initially, we designed it to look like Google Groups so that the transition would be easier.”

“It’s just so hard to get from here to there. Google was more visual,” Lisa chimed in.

“That’s true, SharePoint is more word-heavy. It can be adjusted to be more visual, I just don’t have the skill set for that,” Joseph pointedly looked at Dan’s face on the computer sitting next to Lisa, or maybe that was how I perceived his look at the device while sitting across the couch from him. Joseph would likely ask Dan, who helped design the technical aspects of our website, to help on this task as well.

“I do have experience with SharePoint, so I can assist with making it more visual,” Dan said, perhaps sensing the pointed gaze. “I like that it is so customizable, so we can modify the way we want it to work, rather than working the way it wants us to.”

“But to address your criticism, Lisa, let’s just go through some of the features together,” Joseph said, leaning in to click around and try to share our screen with everyone else to do some demonstrations. He pulled up SharePoint and pointed out several features like the home bar that help with navigation in SharePoint, and how to adjust alert settings in SharePoint, which was a common complaint on the surveys. He continued to demonstrate aspects of the platform, talking through details that seemed too technical for the moment and the full audience.

“Go back,” Mary said to Joseph. “I want to see people’s faces.” Joseph acquiesced, keeping the SharePoint site running in the background.

“Um, any comments so far?” Joseph asked, looking over Mary at me specifically. I shook my head and kept taking notes for the minutes.

“Is there a way to get a summary sent daily?” Amanda asked, “Like it was on Google?”
“Yeah, let me show you quick.” Joseph said and took control of the screen again. He went back to the alerts settings and showed her exactly what to set up in order to get the daily summary emails. He shifted back to the Hangouts call and looked back at his several pages of notes on the surveys. “Ok, um, one of the main problem points was this question about whether SharePoint will be more collaborative than Google?” He looked back at me again.

“Yep, this is where the problem is, I think,” I finally chimed in. “The whole design is based off of Google, and Google was a replacement that was almost exactly like Wiggio before it. Part of the problem with fostering collaboration online is the design of these platforms, they’re like discussion boards, and they’re more suited to announcements rather than collaboration. I’ve been listening to like all of our meetings in the last week, and one thing that constantly comes up is that we have a problem with getting volunteers to stay and participate. These platforms aren’t set up for participation like what we want, and when we have actual work we want to get done, we do it in these like email chains.”

“I wonder, is it possible to like code email subjects?” Lisa chimed in. “Like a circle or square or something to track the function of the email?”

“Well we have Tasks now, with SharePoint,” Mary said. “So we could figure out how to label those and do that kind of thing.” Despite this capability, we haven’t yet actually tested using it.

“What about using Slack or something like that?” Dave asked. At least, this is what we heard Dave ask through his audio feed going in and out as a small glitch.

“So there is something like that in Microsoft, it’s called Teams.” I answered.

Joseph took over the screen again and shared the view of Teams with everyone to demonstrate its general look.
“Yeah just like that!” Dave said.

“There’s a couple problems with Teams still though, it’s still in development and some essential functions still need to be worked out, like SharePoint integration.” Joseph mentioned as he concluded this new demonstration.

“But the problem with volunteer participation isn’t just a platform issue,” Mary stated. “Committee chairs also need to figure out how to engage with volunteers differently. It’s a multifaceted problem. But we can try out Teams like we did with SharePoint, what do you all think?”

“Sounds good,” Amanda said. Others gave general thumbs up or said yes as well.

“I think we should do it, but we should have something to do on it to try it out,” I agreed. “That’s what I was doing with the fundraising discussion on SharePoint, so I think we need something like that to try out Teams.”

“Oh! I have the perfect thing!” Mary interjected excitedly. “Remember the mission and vision statements? We can put those on Teams to try it out and then we won’t spend like an hour and a half on those in the next board meeting.”

From here the conversation shifted back to the initial SharePoint migration discussion.

“First, who’s overwhelmed? Or confused?” Mary asked.

Lisa raised her hand. “It’s just a lot of stuff.”

“Switching always comes with a learning curve,” Joseph noted. [Hopefully this will be the last time we switch, I wrote down in my notes, but this was left unsaid by the other members of the meeting.]
“Ok, so… Let’s do it like this. Anyone super opposed?” Mary asked, in an interesting take on asking for a vote from the board on this migration. “Slightly? Minutely? Is that the right word?” I nodded when she looked over at me.

Lisa said something that came through vaguely, and the only word I could pick out was “politics.”

“What was that, Lisa? We couldn’t hear you.” Mary asked.

“What if I don’t agree with his politics?” Lisa repeated, slower and louder so that she would come through even if they were having audio issues.

Everyone sat still, unmoved by these words and confused as to their meaning. Mary started to ask what she meant by that.

“I think it’s supposed to be a joke, that fell flat.” I concluded. As this realization dawned on the others, laughter flowed forth from us.

“I botched it!” Lisa yelled so that we could all hear over our laughter. “I botched it,” she repeated after the laughter trailed off.

No one voiced their disapproval or opposition, so the migration passed. Slowly more decisions emerged about which committee would be migrated over first, and what would happen with Teams if we wanted to use that platform instead. Lisa worried that this would make a lot of work for Joseph to deal with questions, but he said he usually answered them while at his full-time job (working on SharePoint for a company anyway). Although we agreed to migrate one team at a time, the volunteer migration happened so quickly it was unclear if any separation between migrating teams happened.

“Now, there’s a very real possibility that we’ll lose volunteers by doing this,” Mary mentioned. “I want to make sure we know that going forward.”
The idea seemed to have already occurred to most of the others. Dan nodded and said, “we’ll be sifting the wheat.” Joseph laughed and repeated the phrase, “sifting the wheat.”

After a few questions about what food preferences folks had for the annual board meeting, and a quick reminder to email Joseph about any questions or ideas about SharePoint functionalities, Mary cut off the meeting fifteen minutes early.

Prior to the meeting, Mary said that she thought SharePoint legitimized us better than Google. This meeting voices a few reasons why this might be the case: it is a “centralized platform,” with one site destination instead of several different Google URLs, and it’s so “customizable.” The selling point here, as Dan puts it, is “we can modify the way we want it to work, rather than working the way it wants us to.” The technology in the assemblage of legitimizing SPC needs to be flexible and adaptable, not demanding. This legitimizes by providing room for SPC to develop what it wants its “professional backbone” to be. Google Groups and Wiggio both provided little in the way of customizing workflow or the design of communication through the platforms. SharePoint, on the other hand, provides near-infinite possibilities, perhaps overwhelmingly. The original sandbox design attempted to mimic the look and feel of Google or Wiggio, but as I voiced, prompted by another person’s survey response, this was inadequate for collaborating or other kinds of organizing than informing. Teams, a new communication platform, still in the Microsoft suite, could replace this mimicked design, and could perhaps create new affordances for online organizing and legitimizing. However, as Mary notes, just changing the technology does not necessarily emerge the desired effects.

Throughout discussion of on-boarding the rest of the volunteers, this migration positions new (dis)ordering. Mary speaks to the “very real possibility” of volunteers dropping out after their invitation to migrate to the new platform. Migrating to SharePoint presents new systems,
new protocols, and new login information to learn. This disrupts the previous order using Google Groups, and introduces a new order. Old ways are now considered outside of the organizational frame, and SharePoint presented the possibilities of the new organizational frame. As migrating to SharePoint opens new meanings and possibilities (and perhaps too many), Dan and Joseph close these possibilities to “sift the wheat” from the chaff. Those volunteers who were “stuck” in the old ways or unwilling to organize in the new ones would be left behind. Through legitimizing a new platform, SPC tries to drag the disorder of Google Groups toward the new order of SharePoint, and take as many volunteers as are motivated to learn the new order along with it.

**Shifting Focus: Before and After (December 2016)**

Every story, including meetings, can be told in multiple ways. Here’s another take on the same event, with shifted focus.

About a half an hour before the meeting started, Mary decided to call Sam. Joseph, Mary’s husband, sat beside her on the couch ready to lend his technological expertise to the meeting’s proceedings. At some point in the last few months he became the presumptive IT person for SPC. Sam could hear us as she signed on, but we couldn't hear her, so Joseph walked her through some troubleshooting steps.

In the midst of these instructions, Lisa picked up in the call. She was running back and forth, in and out of view, crashing pans and pots as she presumably made dinner. Her husband, Dan, had yet to join her. She eventually put herself on mute after several comments about random loud sounds coming through the feed. Suddenly, and without identifiable cause, we could hear Sam. I was sitting further away from the action, trying to allow this “pre-meeting” to happen on its own with only my vigilant observation interfering. Mary went on to explain the
process that we would go through to introduce Sam to the board members present and then how the deciding process worked.

Amanda popped up on the feed next, but we only knew that because her name appeared. Her picture was a grey outline of a person, a placeholder for video, and we similarly could not hear her at all. This made it difficult to find out if she could hear us trying to guide her through troubleshooting the software. Mary figured she had to accept some permissions in the browser, but then would need to log back out and then back in. I told Mary to text her and tell her to call if she was having issues. Amanda followed these instructions, and Joseph sat on one end of the couch trying to walk her through troubleshooting steps as Mary and I sat worrying about how Craig’s feed would do with the software. Lise and Theresa were not going to attend the meeting, and had sent separate comments to include in the proceedings.

Amanda’s face appeared on our screen, just as Craig signed in with the same grey outline and no audio coming through. Amanda’s voice was still absent, so Joseph continued to troubleshoot with her. Craig would have to go through the same troubleshooting steps, and we were already eight minutes past our scheduled starting time.

Mary started shifting in her seat, her voice becoming frantic as she worried about whether everyone would be able to work the software. She repeated that this is why she always asked people to call in about ten minutes early, to make sure that the technology worked. With more frantic worries, she wondered aloud at what point she should call it and switch to our previous platform, Google Hangouts. That platform worked repeatedly, whereas SPC was still new to Skype for Business in the Microsoft suite. Craig started texting with Mary, and Joseph answered for her to start troubleshooting for him, but we still couldn’t hear Amanda, and anxiety started
emanating from Mary, slowly expanding outward from her body to reach other aspects of the room, charging the atmosphere.

At 6:11, Mary pulled the plug on Skype for Business. She messaged everyone and told them to meet her over in (the tried and true) Google Hangouts to continue the meeting. Her frantic worries continued as she tried to set up and share the meeting with everyone who needed to attend. Joseph looked at me over her hunched body and said, “This isn’t good for the Microsoft team.”

During the meeting, Mary’s anxiety alternately pulsed and subsided. After summing up discussion points and last minute questions, she abruptly cut off the meeting and decided that it was over. She said Merry Christmas to everyone, a holiday only ten days away, and then said “see ya later” before we signed off.

Immediately, Mary commented on how great it was that we got through the meeting in just an hour! Even including the technology troubles at the beginning, we had ended fifteen minutes early. “Just awesome!”

I moved away from Mary, back to my usual spot in her living room, lounging across her loveseat. She continued sitting cross-legged in the same way she ended the meeting. Joseph got up and started to hunt in the kitchen for food. Mary and I sat in almost silence. She seemed to concentrate on something that never quite reached for words. I turned to my notes, trying to make sure that I had captured everything I could remember so that I could write up the minutes once I got back to my parents’ house.

Suddenly her stiff posture changed, and her entire body shook as if some chill entered and left her body in a furious rush. She let out a loud, shaking sigh in the process.

Passing back through the room, Joseph asked, “What was that!”
Mary paused, a renewed animation in her as she concentrated for a moment. “I can’t find the word for it.”

“The word,” I interjected, “is decompressing.” Although this word did not feel quite right, it struck me to give the visceral-but-not-nameable energy a temporary hold in language.

Something about her sudden shaking, the not-quite-decompression, struck me as familiar. Perhaps it was familiar as the same movement I made when I was cold, right before reaching for a blanket. The same movement that my partner also questioned, as if it were an unnatural presence. Or perhaps, instead, it was familiar as a shared sense of something that lingered in the air beyond a meeting. The same something that compelled me to linger at their home and conveniently witness this moment, instead of immediately departing.

In a chance encounter, I witnessed something by which I was puzzled. Whatever inspired anxiety and passed through Mary after the meeting did not intersect me in the same way, and was certainly unexpected and unexplained by my ready-made theories of order and organization. It was an excessive disorder in search of explanation. More on this in the conclusion.

Chapter Conclusion

These two acts demonstrate that legitimizing happens in meetings, and through legitimizing, transient effects of organization and culture emerge. In the case of discussing and creating a social media policy, both the policy and the discussion work to legitimate SPC and its potential actions. Through this first act, we saw the intimate relations between meetings and documents. Documents may prompt meetings, but meetings author documents, especially through (dis)ordering in this particular case. As Vásquez et al. (2016) wrote about (dis)ordering, this involves the simultaneous opening and closing of meaning considering the indeterminacy of language. At a number of points during the reading of the text, members posed questions and
hypothetical situations that both opened the meaning of the text to test its limits, and proposed particular closings for the meaning of the text to include or exclude. This (dis)ordering work authors the policy, thus policying, with the aim to later authorize acts of social media policing. This section further demonstrates the relations between documents and meetings as Schwartzman’s (2015) future direction set out. I focused in particular on relations of authority in this chapter (Taylor & Van Every, 2014). Meetings author texts, like documents, which later authorize organizational action, thus legitimizing SPC in the process.

In the second act, addressing the migration between four different platforms in four years, each platform shift is seen in service of creating a more “professional backbone.” This act demonstrates that legitimizing drags disorder toward (different) order. First, Wiggio separates the “nonprofit” and the “personal,” thus establishing a more professional channel for online organizing and “replacing meetings.” However, this legitimizing occurs in a meeting. Meetings not only legitimize SPC as “an” organization, but also legitimize actions like replacing meetings as organizational. Second, the shift from Wiggio to Google Groups is to a “super professional” platform, with a cleaner look but similar functions. During the “Wiggio Years,” online organizing became inefficient, and demonstrated disorder, despite frequent norming (see also Chapter 4 on volunteer participation). Again, the emergent norms resulted from meetings, not the online organizing platforms. The shift to Google Groups allowed several affordances, like using your existing Google login, sending email updates that would likely survive internet transit, and uniformity with document-hosting and video-conferencing platforms on Google. However, Google, too, soon grew stale, and along with other restrictions in document-hosting affordances, the final shift moved to SharePoint. Through legitimizing a new platform, SPC
tried to drag the disorder of Google Groups toward the new order of SharePoint, and take as many volunteers as were motivated to learn the new order along with it.

**Order-Disorder**

Legitimizing worked in SPC’s meetings through *authoring* policies and legitimizing various platform migrations for online organizing. Through these instances, the order-disorder dynamic is at work. As Schwartzman (2015) writes, order “is an obvious and immediate need” that is accomplished or achieved in meetings (p. 737). Cooper (1986) elaborates that order and organization are “a reduction, a deduction, ‘less than’” (p. 321). Disorder, for Cooper, is a “zero degree” which is “an excess, a surplus, a supplement… ‘more than’” (p. 321). Disorder energizes ordering, which frames activities as “in” or “out” of order. Schwartzman (2015) similarly described disorder as the “local sense” of a meeting. “Local sense” describes the assumption that meetings “are ‘doing something’” (p. 742). The “local sense” of meetings involves many excesses, surpluses, supplements, and “more thans” where participants expect order. As Schwartzman (2015) wrote, “there’s something about meetings that makes researchers and participants want to change them, control them, order them and make them predictable” (p. 735). According to Cooper (1986), this “something” is disorder, which energizes ordering. However, Schwartzman continues, “there’s something about meetings that makes them resistant to efforts to change, improve, order, and make them predictable” (p. 735). This is the same “something,” or disorder, which both energizes ordering but resists reduction and deduction. Legitimizing drags disorder to order, following the energizing of disorder, but it cannot be successful at framing all disorder as order. There must be excesses, surpluses, and supplements.

**Excesses, Surpluses, Supplements**
In concluding this chapter, I further explicate an excess, a surplus, and a supplement of the final narrative, or what I described as “anxiety” and “decompression.” In Chapter 2, I introduced affect as one of the many possible effects or contingently obligatory relations brought together through meetings. Lei and Lehmann-Willenbrock (2015) describe “team affect,” and particularly an “ebb and flow of affect” in team meetings (p. 457). As I write in that chapter, this literature of “affective culture” breaks from the individual-centered literature on emotion labor and expressive studies (Köhler & Göhlz, 2015; Raclaw & Ford, 2015; Schwartzman, 1989; Shanock, et al., 2013; Thomas & Allen, 2015; Van Eerde & Buengeler, 2015). Schwartzman (2015) argued that Lei and Lehmann-Willenbrock’s chapter meant we should view meetings “as ‘affect-laden environments’” and that it “suggests the need to adopt a more contextual and less individualistic approach to the study of what actually happens in meeting events” (p. 740).

Although some of these studies touch upon what could be an explanation for this excessive anxiety and decompression, I find the following description of affect from Seigworth and Gregg (2010) to better describe the experience:

Affect is born in in-between-ness and resides as accumulative beside-ness… At once intimate and impersonal, affect accumulates across both relatedness and interruptions in relatedness, becoming a palimpsest of force-encounters traversing the ebbs and swells of intensities that pass between ‘bodies.”” (p. 2, emphasis in original)

Their description provides a better hold on the excessive disorder that I am still trying to comprehend. I could not only hear the anxiety reach Mary’s voice before the meeting, but I felt it move through her, beyond her, to charge the air of the room with electricity. This affect moved her to shift platforms, and it moved me away as soon as the meeting ended. This anxiety
swelled with the meeting, pulsing throughout, and rushed to evacuate after the meeting’s conclusion. Perhaps I have fallen into the trap of ordering: I think I know this woman so well that this force must be an excess, a disorder that energizes my ordering of what is “her” and separating out what does not belong. However, this affective force touched me as well, otherwise I would have just left at the end of the meeting.

Like rhythms of meetings, these affective forces leave traces that can be seen, heard, or felt, and perhaps tasted or smelled. Their presences work through meetings, almost as if they are behind the scenes. This affect’s effects can be seen in bodies: anxious worrying, violent shakes, paralysis in post-meeting relaxation. Rhythm’s effects can be felt through pacing and timing: repetitive cycles of concern-solution, ebbing and flowing between the waves of concerns that require solutions before a decision can emerge through deciding. Both of these are hardly considered in the “order” of a meeting, but each contributes to the “local sense” of meeting: that sense that is local to a meeting event.
Chapter VI

PRESENCE-ING: LOOKING LIKE, FEELING LIKE, AND EVEN “THINKING” LIKE A HYBRID

This chapter focuses on how technology makes organization and culture present, and, occasionally, absent. Some meeting scholars became fascinated with the shift of meetings to include both fully-virtual and hybrid forms, capitalizing on advancements in communication technology (Allison, et al., 2015; Cichomska, et al., 2015). Schwartzman (2015) commented on this burgeoning body of work, noting that future research should certainly take technologies into account, particularly in hybrid meetings. Although “hybrid meetings in particular are becoming ever more popular,” research about them is still relatively new (Cichomska, et al., 2015, p. 676). Schwartzman (2015) calls specifically for research “to develop a better understanding of what this hybrid form looks like, feels like, and even ‘thinks’ like” (p. 744). In Chapter 2, I argued that to do this work, one would need to consider how technology participates alongside human participants in meetings as emergent events.

So far, research on virtual and hybrid meetings has addressed differences in participation rates depending on location and technologies used (Anderson, et al., 2007; Cichomska, 2013; Cichomska, et al., 2015; Vartiainen & Andriessen, 2008), effects of the differences in participants’ abilities to use technologies for the meeting (Cichomska, et al., 2015; Olson & Olson, 2009), strategies for ensuring everyone is on board with the new meeting type (Cichomska, et al., 2015; Montoya, et al., 2009), and technology’s potential for distracted multitasking (Cichomska, 2013; Cichomska, et al., 2015; Wasson, 2004). Cichomska, et al. (2015) note that unlike face-to-face and fully-virtual meetings, participants in hybrid meetings
are more likely to have different ways or modes of experiencing the meeting, however research on these different modes of experience seems to be relatively lacking in the literature.

This chapter seeks to address this lack and take up Schwartzman’s (2015) call for research that can improve our “understanding of what this hybrid form looks like, feels like, and even ‘thinks’ like” (p. 744). In order to accomplish this call, I turn to the final major theme that emerged from my analysis: presence-ing. As a perhaps “foundational” act through which organization and culture emerge in hybrid meetings particularly, technology makes these present. Without technology, and the complex sociomaterial assemblage involved in video-conferencing software, almost all of the meetings in my data collection would have looked, felt, and perhaps “thought” differently than what I display in this chapter. On a more basic level, without technology, my research of this particular organization would not have been possible, because it would not have been made present to me through other possible assemblages. Finally, without the presence-ing work that technology routinely accomplished in meetings, legitimizing and deciding likely would have emerged different (dis)ordering effects.

The very act of technology making a meeting participant present to others, and simultaneously presenting the meeting to that participant, is both taken-for-granted in the literature on virtual and hybrid meetings, and an incredible accomplishment of order. I came to this realization through the multiple technical problems that inhabited these hybrid meetings. Technical problems emerged commentary on technology, participants, and meetings, whereas the regular, functional working of the technological assemblage did not, however this functioning was a more common occurrence than the problems.

Through this chapter, I analyze the emergent (dis)order of this foundational and taken-for-granted act in order to display the look, feel, and “thought” of hybrid meetings. In this
chapter, I claim that the “local sense” of the hybrid meeting included “more than” participants’ views of meeting functions, and instead by capturing the full situated experience of meetings, we see, feel, and think with technology in the production of the event. To accomplish this, I use narratives in three sections to accomplish three different aims. In the first section, I present several short snapshots of what (else) the technology presences in meetings. The “physical” aspects of hybrid meetings changed over the four years that I studied SPC, and those who met in the face-to-face space of these hybrid meetings used several different arrangements throughout my research, each time surfacing a new aspect of meeting. Through these snapshots, I comment on “what this hybrid form looks like” (Schwartzman, 2015, p. 744). Hybrid meetings involve looking at meetings through a screen, and these snapshots show how video-conferencing software brought up images of people sitting in surroundings looking at their own computers or devices. Through these displays, video-conferencing feeds always presence “more than” the human participant, and “more than” the meeting, thus presence-ing disorder.

In the second and third sections, I present the same hybrid meeting through two lenses. The second section tells the tale of a meeting in retrospect, and I based this narration largely off of the meeting minutes. This lens on the meeting presents the “order” of hybrid meetings, or what aspects of meetings “fit” within the frame that becomes recorded. The third section contrasts with the second, as I fully shift narrative voice to the third person. This narrative choice shifts the narrative into a processual, posthumanist take that focuses on the simultaneous working of humans and technologies, among other contingently obligatory relations. By reading these tales alongside each other, I demonstrate the integral part technology plays in the presence-ing of organization and culture in meetings as emergent events. Through their comparison and contrast, I comment on the “local sense” of hybrid meetings, especially how they “feel” and
“think.” Meetings presence distractions, disruptions, and interruptions through technologies, but these points add further rhythmic beats to the feel of hybrid meetings. The “thinking” of a hybrid meeting, and thus the “local sense,” is not located in a shared “sense” of human members, but moves through the mix of contingently obligatory relations in assemblage, including in these distractions, disruptions, and interruptions. These actions make “sense” in the meeting, providing texture to the rhythmic feel, and presence-ing both order and disorder in doing so.

Before launching into the narratives, I provide guidance on the structure of the text once more. As in the previous two chapters, italicized text provides analytical commentary either before or after the snapshots and tales. The third section, despite the length of the narrative, includes a short introduction and summary rather than commentary throughout. I made this choice to maintain the integrity of the narrative scene, and to immerse the reader in the “feel” of a hybrid meeting. I utilize text in square brackets as reflexive asides to maintain an openness to the narratives, when this does not interfere with the purpose of these narratives. These asides work to continue weaving authorial and textual reflexivity through the text (Harris, 2016). Finally, in the third section, I use curly brackets {} to indicate a shift in voice to narrate from technology’s viewpoint.

Snapshots

Hybrid meetings in SPC often involved participants who only attended the meeting through virtual technology, and those who also attended the meeting in a face-to-face space, usually in Mary’s house. Throughout the four years of my research, the face-to-face set up of the room changed, each time presence-ing a different look and feel of the meeting and of SPC. However, importantly, both fully-virtual and hybrid meetings also presence the physical surroundings of the virtual-only attendees through video images on screen. Commentary on
physical surroundings often preceded meetings, some of which is included through the six snapshots below. These are in temporal order, particularly to trace the differences in the face-to-face space of hybrid meetings. In these snapshots, like a camera, I focus on the images on screen, both considering what is “within” the organizational frame, or orderly, and what is “excessive,” or disorderly. As these are short, I provide a summarizing commentary at the conclusion of the section rather than after each snapshot.

April 2013

“I’m turning on a light,” I said, noticing that my tiny projected image was rather dark.

“Ok,” Mary said, acknowledging the brief interruption.

“Ok, ok,” I said, coming back into view and making myself comfortable.

“There is a city on your wall,” she wondered.

“It’s London,” I said, rather matter-of-factly. My image on screen projected a view of my bedroom wall, including the city silhouette positioned above the head of my bed, breaking up the otherwise off-white wall surrounding me. “All the times that we’ve ever Skyped, and I’ve been in my bedroom, and you’ve never noticed London on my wall?”

“Yeah, no, I haven’t. At first I thought it was a shelf, I was like ‘that’s a really cool shelf,’ and then I’m like ‘it’s not a shelf, that’s way too complex to be a shelf.’” We laughed, it was a small image and would have been a very precise and inconvenient shelf to hang above my sleeping head at night. Perhaps she expected a shelf based on her own projected image, from her living room with a shelf floating above her head.

“Did you hear,” she started, “that Lise and Dylan are going to London this year, and they booked their tickets and everything?”
“Yes, I’m so jealous,” I said. We didn’t yet know the trip would be where he proposed. We didn’t yet realize that London imagery would decorate their house, scattered in small photos and large canvases, set up around their living and working spaces. We didn’t yet realize another couple of SPC would also get engaged in the same year, not in London.

We didn’t yet realize how worthless some of Mary’s worries had been about couples breaking up and ruining “her” organization. Contingency plans had been made that would never be needed, or at least we will say that they won’t be needed, leaving the possibility of divorces unsaid.

We didn’t yet realize how personal the organizational would be.

We didn’t yet realize how organizational the personal would be.

We didn’t yet realize.

**September 2013 (From Peters, 2015a)**

I sit down to the September 2013 board meeting about five to ten minutes before it is scheduled to begin. I open up my computer, sign in to our video-conferencing software, Voom, and gather together an agenda and other documents that were uploaded to [Wiggio] earlier in the week. I pick up my mug of tea and click on Mary’s name to call into the meeting. I hear a ringing tone, and then the whoosh sound as she answers. After a few seconds, the video feed pops up, and I can see her at her place at the head of the table set up with some papers and pens. To one side, I can see about half of her sister, Lise. Both of them wave and greet me as I pop up on their screen. On the other side of the screen, I see a hand attached to an arm waving, and hear the voice of Lisa, a mutual friend. I can hear Dan’s laugh, and [Sean]’s muddled voice, but I cannot see them, and I assume
that Dan is sitting next to his [soon-to-be] fiancée Lisa, which puts him closer to
the computer on the left and [Sean] close to the computer on the right.
As I maximize the screen, this view of one-and-a-half bodies plus a few phantom
limbs on occasion takes up about two-thirds of my screen. Along the right-hand
edge, I can see myself in a smaller window at the top, and soon one more image
pops up as Mary adds Amanda to our call. Amanda and I wave hello; we have
bonded over always being the online members in meetings. Dan, Lisa, Lise, and
[Sean] shuffle the papers in front of them and wind down their pre-meeting
conversations and joking as Mary calls the meeting to order. I turn to the
documents in front of me, and I assume that Amanda does the same. Through the
video-conferencing software I can see a total of three-and-a-half bodies, including
my own, which is half of the total participants in the meeting. (Peters, 2015a, p.
63)

Dec 2014

The screen that appeared to me was completely new and yet familiar. Like zooming out
from a picture, my vantage point was that of a constant overlord, on the edges of a meeting that
appeared as if it would play out in front of me. Finally, everyone’s bodies fit in one shot, but
with more backs and sides turned than bodies whose faces I could see. It was like watching
someone’s research footage of a meeting, with the camera set up in the absolute furthest corner
of the room to capture as much as possible about a space. I knew, from previous use and
watching of Google Hangouts, that my image would loom almost-life-sized on Mary’s laptop
when I spoke or made too much noise. “Oh I don’t know about that HD,” Theresa said, upon
realizing where we were and how largely we might loom in the room.
December 2015

As the video pulled up, the screen cast a view of Mary’s living room, for the first time. “Just make yourself at home,” she yelled at Amanda who was headed into the kitchen. One long couch and one short love seat pushed against the walls in an L-shape; both chocolate brown with lime and electric blue throw pillows partially hidden by people’s bodies. A large, solid, wooden coffee table took up the space around which they oriented. On top of the table were papers, a wireless keyboard with a trackpad, and a variety of cups, mugs, and plates of food. Above the long couch were floating shelves with pictures of Mary, her husband Joseph, and other family members in teal picture frames. Above the loveseat on the wall was a clock set five minutes ahead. “I need that in my life,” Theresa said, commenting on a variety of things that were new to her as Mary’s space appeared on screen and we waited.

“I like your red Christmas tree,” she commented. Two white end tables took up space on either side of the love seat, and the far end table in the corner, staring at us through the screen, had a small red Christmas tree on top of it. I’d given that tree to Mary as a gift a few years ago. “It even has tiny presents under it,” Dylan, Lise’s husband, commented. The near end table had a lamp and a large glass bowl. I knew from many visits that the bowl had chocolate and other treats inside for people to take. New bodies passed in and out of the room in a blur, muffled jokes and laughter passed through computer speakers. The scene played out, whether my attention was on it or not, streaming through a small computer camera, images and audio passing through 1,600 miles of internet infrastructure to my monitor.

August 2016

The screen brought up a view of four distinct spaces, one of which I inhabited. In the tiny corner of the screen floated an image of myself in my new office, like a tiny mirror
reflecting the image back to me. Behind my chair were my printer on its stand and a large sheet draped over the mirrored closet doors so that the lasers that rendered virtual reality on another computer in the room would work properly.

Another small image reflected Lise in her office, which I’d visited in person. The virtual rendering missed the large bookshelves with books and travel mementos dominating the wall where her computer was also placed, so there was just an empty expanse of a room behind her chair.

The third image included Mary and Joseph sitting on their couch, a zoomed-in view of just them, the couch, and the bottom edge of a shelf above their heads. That same shelf that held turquoise frames that were out of sight (out of mind) this time.

Fourth was a completely new space with a completely new face. Felicity had blonde hair, with wide-framed plastic glasses that dominated her face, in the now-popular style. A t-shirt and cardigan draped over her in a way that indicated to me that I’d entered a meeting with a designer. This was a design committee meeting, and it would turn out that I was right. What looked like a bedroom appeared behind her, bed made and a giant stuffed animal sitting at the head of the bed. Directly behind her head, peaking out as she moved seemed to be a PlayStation 4 box sitting on the bed. The box behind her made me wonder if she was also a gamer, and which games she played.

December 2016

Sam appeared through the screen in an ethereal-looking room. A large black presence took up the space behind her, and I assumed it was a headboard by its height. Sam sat cross-legged in front of us, just a small image on a screen projecting at us. Points of brightness scattered around the remainder of her image, like softened points of light. “Are those Christmas
lights?” someone wondered aloud at her space. Their appearance dotted an otherwise plain space with small presences of something softer.

Lisa appeared through the screen alongside her, shrinking their images to half the screen. The image projected from her feed provided a stark contrast: industrial, cluttered, and stainless steel. She clanged around her kitchen, passing in and out of view as she finished preparations for dinner. Loud clangs of pots, pans, and oven doors interrupted audio feeds at unpredictable points as algorithms tried to cope with which signal should be rendered most prominent.

_In SPC, hybrid meetings tended to “look like” life._ In April 2013, August 2016, and December 2016, the screen caught views of three different bedrooms from which various virtual-only participants met. Other snapshots looked like offices, but cameras only provide partial views. Although the person or people whose presences appear on screen (and even those who sometimes do not!) are the pieces of “order” considered to fit within the meeting frame, excesses drip through internet feeds. Allusions to the future presence through a silhouette of London on my wall. Phantom limbs presence the presumptively attached bodies. _Full-screen HD views presence potentially unwanted facial and spatial scrutiny._ A red Christmas tree presences a long-held friendship and the holiday season. _A sheet on a wall presences the potential for fully virtual worlds in the same space._ A PlayStation 4 box presences otherwise unspoken identities. And the contrast of ethereal Christmas lights strung in the background contrasted with clanging sounds that interrupt algorithms presences a stark contrast in meeting views, along with an impending dinner time that may threaten to rush the meeting along. These presences, brought by technology, are excessive and often left unreported in minutes, but as disorder they energize particular ordering. Not to mention the occasional pets that themselves interrupt meetings
through their presence onscreen. These hybrid meetings look like the presentation of particular selves (Goffman, 1959), even as they presence (dis)order.

**In Retrospect: Order**

This second section begins the two-section comparison and contrast between a meeting remembered in retrospect, as viewed through meeting minutes, and a meeting in process. Another relation between documents and minutes presents the influence of documents on memory, and perhaps the lasting meaning and order of meeting. This tale thus presents the “local sense” of the meeting, in one sense of this term. Ethnographers are often concerned with “local sense,” in that they want to present the sense that the “locals” make out of circumstances and actions (Agar, 2008; Philipsen, 1992). The local sense of this meeting presences particular actions and effects. After reading, compare and contrast this tale with the third section, viewing the same meeting through a different telling that emphasizes process rather than retrospection.

This meeting is an education committee meeting called in February 2016 as the first “official” quarterly meeting of the education committee. Amanda chaired the education committee and arranged the meeting. Lisa and Dan are meeting together in the same physical space, which presents a hybrid presence, whereas Amanda, Mary, and I all are meeting only through the video-conferencing software.

The meeting started eleven minutes late while Amanda, the chair, waited for enough people to call a quorum. Text messages flew out to several of the absent members, with no response. The five of us gathered in small Google Hangouts images on four different screens continued into the meeting.

We laughed at the first topic on the agenda, the budget, since we were all in the board meeting to set the budget just over a month ago. Amanda continued in the agenda to assign
goals for the present committee members, asking who would be willing to work on some of these features. After some discussion about the support groups page on the website, we decided that it would be better to turn this page into advice about attending support groups and links on how to find them, rather than its current incarnation as a list of local support groups to attend. Lisa volunteered to take on the teacher page and updating it, making the content read more like other pages on the website. Amanda would rewrite the page with information on after a suicide attempt, because she had the most experience with this feeling among the gathered committee members.

The committee moved on to discuss the blog, which Amanda coordinated. She reported that she was slowly working through volunteers to get them to write blog posts. Lisa suggested the idea that we contact big names in the suicide prevention field to try to get them to write blogs. Amanda took on the responsibility of trying to contact some of these big names, since she knew an intern at one of the national organizations.

Next the committee discussed the upcoming presentations in two local school districts. For the first time, SPC would be able to go into K-12 schools and carry out the vision for helping teens and the wider community prevent suicide. Mary spoke passionately about the schools, the plans that she had already made with them set in place, the possibilities of how many volunteers she would need (and not get). She looked forward, nervously, to teaching suicide prevention in health classes. This is what she’d been working on for six years, and what we’d been working on together for four. [A month later, she would ask me how she could make it through teaching the same thing five or six times in a row without getting bored while maintaining the same excitement she has in the first presentation. My answer: pay attention to the room, and the different mix of students, not the content.]
She added that we should take another look at the presentation before she goes into the schools, but we never did.

Amanda introduced the next topic, thinking about sending articles to the social media team to post so that there were continually fresh posts across platforms. Mary said this was great, but Theresa was already on it as marketing director, so we would need input from her.

Suicide Prevention Week appeared next on the agenda, and the group talked about a variety of ideas for promoting this week in September, which was seven months away. The committee deferred decisions to a joint education-marketing meeting on this specific topic to prepare. In six months, that meeting would happen.

Lisa asked if we had a slogan or a tagline, and this prompted discussion about branding. Ultimately, this headed nowhere, but we discussed some possibilities for campaigns and bumper stickers, including comparisons to strategies we had heard other nonprofits try.

Amanda wanted to discuss Google Groups and how to best use it for the committee, however, everyone in attendance used this platform frequently, including to coordinate and schedule meetings. This was evidenced by our presence. Mary reminded everyone that the three strikes rule applied particularly to attending meetings, even though in other discussions and statements of this rule it applied more broadly.

Finally, the committee faced deciding on a backup chair. Mary worried that one of the committee chairs would drop out without someone to replace them. Dave prompted her worry when he notified her of his intention to leave the leadership of KLM. [Over the summer, Mary rearticulated that this worry over backup chairs related to her own worry over whether someone else could take her position if she needed a leave of absence. She had found out about a health concern the same day as this meeting, which she dealt with throughout the spring. Her worries
about an unrealized future still persist into the present.] Lisa asked what was involved in the role, and Amanda said that the backup chair would just be involved in all of the discussions and thus be responsible for knowing all the details of the education committee. Lisa volunteered to fill that role, noting that it was not much different from normal, especially since she was the board secretary anyway.

Briefly before adjourning, Lisa asked about deadlines. Amanda and Mary jointly decided one page a month was a solid goal, and set Lisa’s page deadline for March. Amanda would finish the support group page updates by the end of this month, February.

Amanda adjourned the meeting six minutes late.

*With some added details of my observant memory, this tale includes mostly details written into meeting minutes, imbricated from conversation to text. This narrative includes what decisions we made, who committed to what tasks, who was present, and who was absent, which together demonstrate what constellation of people constituted the education committee in this particular meeting. Perhaps, as we can reflect from the details on volunteer problems included in Chapter 4, we can assume that those who did not attend the meeting might not have felt called to do so. Their presences were not part of the contingently obligatory relations to produce this meeting, and perhaps they had already absenced themselves from discussions, from organizing, and thus from “the” organization.*

**In Process: (Dis)order**

*Same meeting, different story. I constructed this tale from the audio recording of the same meeting, as well as my technological reflections. I use third person narration in this tale to try to write how the hybrid meeting itself might “feel” or “think” like. Throughout the tale,*
notice both the points of overlap between order and disorder in the tales and the new excesses that presence through a meeting in process, instead of the retrospective memories traced in texts.

An image of an empty room stood out starkly against the other images with people in them. Three green dots indicated sound coming from the room, and the noise of someone singing a wordless tune floated through speakers, ghostly in its absence of an apparent human to attach to it.

“Lisa and Dan, are you coming back?” A voice spoke, three green dots and automatic picture enlargement indicating Mary’s feed.

“Just lighting some candles,” Lisa’s voice cut off her ghostly singing. “Gotta have some ambience.” She continued muttering about candles, so her image, with her entering into the ghostly room, remained enlarged.

“Lisa, can you take minutes?” Mary asked.

“I already had them up,” Lisa retorted, mimicking the voice of a sassy teenager.

The images of Amanda and Katie remained small, both relatively quiet during this pre-meeting period.

The sound of typing filled the audio feed, which indicated the active production of minutes, or something else. Amanda, trying to fulfill the role of committee chair, wondered aloud if there were enough people attending, and whether more people were required to meet the quorum threshold of over 50%. Five present virtual people outweighed four absent names listed as part of a Google Groups group.

“We have quorum,” Mary confirmed the math.
Amanda dug through files in Google Drive for a representation of each absent name that would include contact information like phone numbers through which she could text and offer the appearance of inclusion.

“And now that we have quorum, we can kick them out,” Dan joked.

Google Hangouts continued to maintain the present connection between four computers, presence-ing five people, thus quorum continued to present itself.

“Oh, what are their names? I’m going to put them on absent currently in our notes, minutes, blah blah blah,” Lisa asked. This document could stand as a second witness to the amount of names involved, even if the humans attached to them weren’t. They listed names and made sounds of typing.

Silence ensued, as they waited. But this silence was full of the sound of a fork scraping against a plate as Katie ate breakfast. There were also high-pitched sounds without an apparent origin.

“What’s that noise?” Lisa asked, filling the silence further.

“My kitty,” Mary answered, referencing her black cat with a white moustache, assumedly off-screen.

“Your kitty makes digital scratchy noises?”

“Mhm, he scratches things, yeah.”

“Can he beatbox?”

“He beatboxes every morning.”

“That’s impressive,” Dan said, with mocked belief.

“Why isn’t it online? You could be a millionaire,” Lisa noted.
“Cuz I’d have to compete against grumpy cat. And like, how do you compete against that?” Dan and Lisa laughed at Mary’s joke. How does one compete against an established meme for social media attention? A question to which SPC would return later, in a different form. How does one compete against an established suicide prevention organization for social media attention?

Google Hangouts continued to maintain the present connection between four computers, presence-ing five people, as the talk about internet cats continued.

Prompted by time or anxiety to start a meeting, Mary restated where she filed contact information for volunteers. “Just so you know, you all have your own dedicated file,” she said, trailing off sleepily.

Digital feedback produced repetitive audio feeds, like a haunting echo as Lisa and Dan conversed with each other in the same room, not speaking loud enough to arrest the attention of others.

“Oh, (ok,)” Amanda’s voice doubled as she reported her texting complete.

“Yeah, they can jump in,” Mary confirmed, sleepily again, her voice only produced in the singular.

“So, (so,)” Amanda started. “I guess our meeting is starting at 11:11.” Her voice overlapped with itself, softer and delayed by a second or two. Just enough to garble her feed if she were to talk in a quieter voice. Three green dots indicated Mary’s feed could have been the culprit of the doublespeak.

“Hehe,” Mary’s feed carried through loudest, and again in the singular. “Sorry, that’s just great.” Memories of “11:11, make a wish” floated in. A middle school and high school
“game” of sorts, participants got to make a wish at that time if they noticed it. Participants would often notify their friends, just not in the way Mary had done.

A roll call started the meeting, which Mary called simply by listing absent names. Strange feedback noises and the doublespeak required repetition and clarification of names before the meeting could proceed.

“I was going to give a budget report, but everyone here is on the board, so,” Amanda said, skipping the budget topic. “So I feel like everything we’re about to go over is stuff that we already went over at the board meeting, so.”

“That’s alright, we could still use an update.” Mary’s voice dripped with sleep or boredom, at this hour on a weekend morning it was hard to tell.

“So (so),” Amanda continued, the double feed filling in pauses. “For goals for 2016 (16), so we have to start assigning people to do (to do) these things (things). Um (um). So (so). The website content (tent), there’s some things that need to be changed on the website (the website). Um (um). The support group page (age), we want to make it a more general support group page.” Catching up, the feed had briefly produced a singular voice for Amanda before reverting back. “Is there anyone here (here) that would like to take (take) an outside (outside) agency (agency) to do that (that)?”

Mary’s voice filled the otherwise pregnant pause that would prompt someone to volunteer. “Well, it’s not like we’re just linking to some outside agency. The point of the support page right now is the copy and paste, and we continually have to be looking at it, to continually make sure that it’s updated, which is a lot of work. And we don’t have the volunteers to be continually checking this information and continually be calling a hundred
different support groups to make sure they’re still working, and so what, and we talked about this at the board meeting…”

Katie tuned out, although the recording kept running. Surreptitiously, she pretended not to be checking her messages on a side window of her computer. Her face, not her screen, projected presence when her screen could tell a different story…

{Zooming out of the window with Google Hangouts, another window appeared. A different program, easily handled for now. iMessage popped up on screen, a mouse scrolling through for a potentially unread conversation. Clicking back into Safari and the Google Hangouts window, a second Safari tab appeared at a click, and then the mouse dragged out the tab as its own window. A swift click brought up a social media site, the mouse scrolled through again. Sound paused more often in the audio feed, slowing down and speeding up as the Google Hangouts window paused image feeds more often, artificially modulating voices to try to catch up to the present even as it demanded more and more CPU to run.}

Google Hangouts continued to maintain the present connection between four computers, presence-ing five people, despite the wider computer screens telling potentially different stories.

“What? I didn’t understand any of that. The audio got weird,” Mary said, in the singular, to Lisa, who had been doubled and also perhaps glitched.

“Um, I thought we assigned these tasks online, cuz I remember singing up for two things, one of them being website related and the other being not,” Lisa tried repeating, these words rising in volume above her immediately doubled words.

“Oh yeah, one was (was) a page for (for) teachers (chers)!” Amanda repeated, still being doubled. “I had it written (ten) down (own).”
“It’s probably on Google Groups,” Mary said. “But the re-A-son fo a lo o these pa-ages i-i-is.”

{As the computer’s CPU started to work overtime, the laptop fan got louder, as if a medium-pitched buzz constantly filled the room. [As Katie thinks about the sound writing this, her head starts to buzz with it, even as it currently sits silent through her writing.] Slowly, this interrupted Google Hangouts, making these last few words sound like an auto-tuned version of Mary’s voice, or as someone else put it in a different meeting, she sounded “like T-Pain.”

{“What?” Mary asked then. Dave repeated, “You sound just like T-Pain.”

{The mouse started to scroll and click around, the whirring of the fan indicating to the human moving it that not only did her distraction take her attention out of the meeting, but it might also take her computer out of it.}

“For the after an attempt page, you had sent me a link a while ago, Mary (Mary).”

Almost undoubled, Amanda spoke up once more. “Called waking up alive (alive), which I think is great (great).”

“I love that phrase,” Mary said.

“Me too,” Amanda said, in the singular.

“I love it, because it’s a really emotional tie-in, and obviously it’s very emotional to wake up in that place,” Mary continued. “I love how it’s real and it’s not so mental health sterilized. I love this one phrase, and I sent this all to Amanda because she’s the one who’s familiar with this and will have to make this decision, but there’s like one phrase like on the website that was like ‘I know everything sucks, and I know you just failed,’ and what not, ‘but now you need to go get help. But what? You don’t have enough time to go get help? You were going to be dead, so
you have all the time in the world to go get help, so what are you talking about.”’’ This pulled forth laughter from the other feeds.

“Oh my god,” Katie said in a brief moment of exasperation amidst uncomfortable laughter.

“And I’m like, ‘well, that’s true,’ because it’s true. If you were just going to kill yourself, you have all the time in the world to like try and get better, it’s not like you’re planning on going to work today. But again it’s one of those,” Mary said.

“Very morbid,” Lisa noted, while her husband Dan laughed in the same feed.

“Yeah, so, I love and hate the website,” Mary said, turning it over to Amanda to turn into a more professional, sensitive piece. “I did so-o-o-o-mething with it, and sent it to A-a-a-a-a-amanda,” her feed turned into random moments of staccato, putting emphasis on places that might not otherwise be emphasized.

Tuning in and out of attention, mouse moving across windows, there was something said about using local teachers to design content for a teacher page, and bringing in guest bloggers from our network of 40-plus partner organizations, or your coworkers, or famous people in the mental health field. SPC was trying to expand beyond its “borders,” looking to encompass more (cyber)space, claim more bodies for its work, and garner more (social media) attention.

“I’ll send a bunch of emails,” Amanda said.

Google Hangouts continued to maintain the present connection between four computers, presence-ing five people, who now turned to a new topic.

“Next is the events in Midburg and Middle Valley. Mary, where are we on that? Do we have dates on those yet?”
One could imagine Mary putting on her event coordinator hat. “Um, not yet. But here’s an update on where are. Both Midburg and Middle Valley are going to have us come and we’re going to do their suicide prevention training in June. So Midburg decided the way they want to do this is they’re going to have me come in during health class, cuz all of the freshmen students get their health class during freshman year, they’re on like a cycle. So I’m going to come in and bring in the SPC presentation, two presentations. One is mental health, one is suicide, same presentation but basically it’s broken up. So it’s going to cover two days, and it’s going to take two days to hit every freshman. So it’s going to take me a total of four days, I’m going to do our presentation twice, and every freshman will have heard our presentation, yay. And then our mental health fair is going to be added onto their community fair that they do in October.”

“Is that the one you just posted for volunteers for?” Lisa interrupted, asking about a Google Groups post.

“No, no, no, that’s a different one,” Mary answered. “I’m talking about the health fair. So April I’m doing the education piece, June I’m doing the teacher training, and October I’m doing the mental health fair thing. So that’s Midburg. Middle Valley, they’re also doing their training in June, and right now the talks are in September? It’s going to be like a special assembly thing. It would be voluntary for students to come and be part of it. I like it and I don’t like it.”

“Well it gets you out of class,” Katie noted, indicating more people should attend than anticipated.

Google Hangouts continued to maintain the present connection between four computers, presence-ing five people, as talk about schools, events, and details continued.
“But Middle Valley is exciting,” Mary noted, “because they want to base the fair off the Arts Festival. And that’s cool, because when I first got this blueprint thing from God in the hallway of Wegmans, when this first showed up in my brain, and I was like ‘what do you want me to do?’ The image I got was based off of the Arts Festival. So to see this actually happening is exciting.”

{Tuning out, a pen scribbles on paper. Writing something that might never be seen again, might be filed away with something else, or might very well be in the recycle can. Notes that the writer likely hopes will jog her memory a year down the line when she needs to write this up. “This is important,” they might have said. More likely it said something like “Education Meeting, 2/13/16, Blueprint origins of SPC. Wegmans!” The last piece, of course, only relevant to her interests, reminding her of a time long gone in her life when she worked in the service industry, met Mary, and (eventually) became best friends. But this origin location never stuck in her mind, perhaps it was too mundane. Perhaps it was one of three places Mary spent any amount of time, so it seemed less significant to either of them at the time. The perceived significance was the extraordinary – the vision that sparked eight years of organizing. And counting. An emergent vision from the ongoing process of faith, involving Mary, her Christian God, and a communal grief from the loss of five teens in five months to suicide.

{These past moments snap together in this present one, becoming very present in the room, at least in this scribble.}

“I’m trying to think if there’s anything the education committee can really do,” Mary started winding toward a conclusion. “I mean when those events happen, I will need help? So I
mean, I’ll need volunteers to just help set up tables and take pictures and all that fun stuff, but that’s not education-oriented, that’s just volunteers to help.”

“Ok, well whatever you need during this,” Amanda said specifically to Mary. “And we’ll just figure it out. Um, cuz for I’m sorry, Midburg’s in May, right?”

“April,” Mary and Katie said at the same time.

“Alright, the next thing, Amanda started, now in tripled or quadrupled voice. After a pause, whether realized or not, her voice went back to the singular. “To start helping assist the social media team (team), and we’ll probably have to have a meeting with them specifically on what they need. I guess. So um, but Mary you had said you wanted us to send you articles for the social media team to post…” Her voice trailed off here in an array of echoes of something that could have been words but was not quite comprehensible.

“Well, it’s difficult,” Mary started. “When you’re surrounded by social media like our social media team is, you usually stumble upon articles anyway. And we want to make sure they’re relevant and that they’re like up-to-date and recent articles, or if they are old, that they’re so well done that they’re worth posting anyway. And so, um, I don’t know. I mean, just send them things? I think we need to be updating our social media more often than we are now.”

“Theresa’s in charge, right?” Amanda asked.

“Right. Maybe we should just talk about it with her. I don’t feel like I can answer that question, I feel like she needs to be involved.”

“Ok, cool, and then we’ll go from there and decide. What she wants (she wants).”
Google Hangouts continued to maintain the present connection between four computers, presence-ing five people, who moved between topics about social media just as the screen moved between social media apps and sites on the dangling browsers.

Amanda turned next to generating content for Suicide Prevention Week in September, seven months away.

“What kind of content do you want,” Lisa asked for clarification. “Is that like, what direction do we want to take that, like cool videos, us talking about like us doing stuff for that week like why we do what we do. What direction are we taking, like are we taking from different people or creating our own?”

“Create our own,” Mary said immediately.

“Ok, so it’s all gonna be like our own stuff,” Lisa repeated.

“Last year we did a different thing for each day, right.” Amanda asked.

“Yeah,” Mary said. “Last year it was mostly just social media based, which is probably what it would be again anyway. But uh. I’m trying to remember what we did.”

{Silently, or as silently as possible, SPC’s Facebook page pulled up on screen with last year’s posts archived somewhere down the “Timeline” of SPC.}

A long pause indicated something was wrong. Random, mid-pitched squeals and blips of noise, like auto tune in an incomprehensibly slow staccato, dragged out of the speakers. Then silence.

{Phone in hand, still recording audio, she texted furiously to complain about the technology problems. “Goddamnit,” she sighed softly at her computer, whose fan was whirring loudly again. Frantic clicking, a killed feed. Absent of a meeting, she stretched out her limbs, preparing once more to dive in. More clicking.}
“Dot org or whatever,” Mary’s voice came through clearly, briefly, before it went in and out in that T-Pain way.

{Fast, almost caught up, then slow, broken up pace. The glitch seemed to be
more permanent as the computer fan continued to whir away.}

Amanda’s voice came through, something about definitely having a meeting between education and marketing to brainstorm and come up with ideas to get the ball rolling.

{Slowed down to a halt, the only sounds coming through now went up an octave
in small intervals, like a toddler clanging on a toy xylophone. More furious
thumbs tapping away on the phone, sending frustration out into the ether.}

“I’ve definitely heard of it,” Mary said.

“I like the phrase, send silence packing,” Lisa said.

“I think that’s Active Minds,” Amanda added. “So we need to think of something that’s powerful like that, that can send a message, but not steal it from someone else. Uh.”

Google Hangouts continued to maintain the present connection between four computers, presence-ing five people, or at least it appeared to do so once more.

“Question,” Lisa said, interrupting Mary’s rambling about a bumper sticker or window cling campaign with the national suicide prevention hot line (1-800-273-TALK), and people with them getting random notes of thanks and appreciation put on their windshield.

“Yeah,” Mary said.

“What is our like slogan?”

“We don’t really have one?”

“I feel like that would be helpful for that purpose, because when I see SPC on a bumper sticker, if I don’t have time right then to figure out what that is, then I’ll forget about it.”
“No, that’s good. I think the closest thing we have to a like slogan is the helping teens conquer depression in themselves,” and their friends, she filled in the part that glitched out of the audio feed. “But that’s really long.”

“Can we do, ‘living is awesome’?” Lisa asked.

“Maybe that’s a task for our advertising committee to work on a slogan this year,” Dan said, more seriously.

“Everything is awesome,” Lisa sang in the background, that song from The Lego Movie creeping in through her own slogan suggestion.

“Yeah,” Mary said.

“Cuz I completely agree. It would be helpful, cuz I mean, yeah I see millions of bumper stickers for just whatever, but having some short thing that ‘oh! I know what that is!’” Dan finished.

“We need to watch that ‘Branding Shit No One Wants to Talk About’ thing again, cuz like, how do we brand this? Live more awesome, but I think that’s copyrighted. So something like live more awesome.”

“… suicide: yes.” Dan unhelpfully offered. “Is that too dark?”

“But I think the slogan would be a good idea, because then we could use the slogan for Suicide Prevention Week,” Amanda said, in her most singular voice yet.

“Did I miss something?” Mary asked Lisa and Dan, who were both laughing at the screen.

“His idea for a slogan is ‘Kill Suicide’.” Lisa said. Had the feed’s algorithm cut off that first word? Everyone else laughed out loud now. “Exactly, that’s why I was like, ‘can we say that?’ Geez.” Lisa rolled her eyes at her husband.
“If we’re getting to these levels of desperation, then I’m busting out the zombie idea, so,”
Mary joked in a deadpan voice.

“Oh my god,” Katie groaned, as everyone laughed. Regret filled the room. Her memory
had erased or forgotten this moment, but whenever Mary brought it up, she frequently attributed
Katie as one of the originators of this idea. The idea persisted as an inside joke, even if the
“insiders” no longer remembered its origin.

Google Hangouts continued to maintain the present connection between four computers,
presence-ing five people, who all laughed at “Plan Z,” despite its horribly morbid connotation as
a motivation for not killing oneself: don’t turn into a zombie.

“So that’s all the goals for the year,” Amanda said, answering Mary’s request for what’s
next. “Um, we’ll be able to tackle these pretty well. So I just had discussion topics. Um, one
was communication method, and that was about Google Gro-u-u-ps. However, everyone who’s
here are the people who respond to everything on Google Groups, and the ones who are not here
are the ones who don’t respond.” Katie and Dan laughed along with Amanda.

“Yeah, I honestly, I don’t even know what to do about it anymore,” Mary said. “Because
it’s not like it’s just this committee. You know, like there are other people in other committees
that are just not showing up, and it’s just. Right now I’m kind of operating on a kind of three
strikes, you’re out kind of rule where it’s just like, we’re having these like meetings, where you
agreed, you committed to being a volunteer. We can’t like twist your arm, because you’re
volunteering, but if you.”

“But also,” Lisa picked up at the end, just continuing the train of thought. “don’t want
inconsistent volunteers, so go away.”
“Exactly, so I’m kind of doing a three strikes you’re out sort of thing right now where you don’t come to a meeting and you don’t have like a good excuse, you don’t tell us that something terrible’s happened, then you are at strike one. And we’re just going to gently remind you that these meetings aren’t you know optional, like, you should come to them. Um, second time, you know, if you miss a meeting, and you know, you don’t tell us, you don’t provide any like viable excuse that we accept, then we’re gonna be a little more sincere with you and be like ‘hey, if you miss another meeting, we’re, we’re gonna terminate your volunteer status, cuz we just need people who show up, like, what are you doing.’ So.”

“Whatchyou doin with your life,” Lisa mock asked.

“And then third time, just, you’re done. You missed three meetings. You didn’t give us any excuse. You didn’t give us any reason. You didn’t let us know ahead of time.”

Next came the litany of sins. Of the absent, who had viable excuses, and who did not? Someone just said they couldn’t make it? Strike one. The people who didn’t even respond? Definitely give them one! Someone had a gender reveal shower for their daughter? Well, ok. Someone rushed to the hospital, and that’s all they said? Definitely viable!

“And poor Katie last week got the time change mixed up,” Amanda said finally. Katie laughed, it was true, even though she’d forgotten (again). Since she slept through last week’s time, the committee had to reconvene at this later date in order to make quorum – the four others on this litany of sins also missed out. “But Katie responds to everything.”

“We just assumed that you’d died,” Lisa said, prompting more laughter.

“So you really just kind of have to weigh, weigh our volunteers. I was talking about the same thing with Theresa, because all her volunteers are all over the place, because it’s social media. So we’re talking about like seven different time zones that people are like working and,
so, it is very difficult for her to schedule meetings. And so you just kind of have to weigh the volunteer. If you have someone who’s super active like on Twitter, they’re doing a good job, they post every other day, but they like miss meetings all the time?” Mary’s face showed confusion.

“Right,” Amanda said.

“Eh, like at least they’re doing what we’re asking them to do, and at least they’re in contact and they’re doing a good job.”

“I don’t know what to do,” Amanda concluded. Mary repeated her rule, first strike, second strike, third strike. “I mean, for everyone here, everyone’s fine with Google Groups? Everyone’s here, I mean, obviously. Do you want me to send emails with things for you? Or do you like Google Groups?”

“I like emails for uh,” Katie started. “This is the date and time of the meeting. Like, I can eventually respond to a Doodle poll on the Google Groups, but sometimes it takes me a couple days to check that um, folder of my inbox. So like an email that says this is the date and time of the meeting, that would be awesome.”

“Ok,” Amanda acknowledged. “So for like, super important, time sensitive things, send emails. Alright, I can do that. That’s very reasonable. No problem.”

“Yeah,” Dan chimed in. “I think that’s a good standard to follow. Cuz I-I mean I see a lot of the Google Groups stuff, and I’m like, I’ll catch up on that in the next like week or two maybe. Um. Cuz I feel like that stuff piles up quickly.”

“It does, mhm, I agree,” Mary, Katie, and Amanda said at once, but slightly asynchronously.
“That’s a good point, I know everyone has jobs and has lives, and it’s hard to catch up. So that’s a good point.”

These volunteers got that leeway. These volunteers, Amanda’s technical peers from the board of directors, get the excuse of “having lives” and “having jobs.” Was this because they checked in just often enough? Did they follow an unspoken, unheard rhythm to online discussions that those present could decipher, whereas the absent could not? Did the rhythm flow out from the board of directors, or did it just beat loudest near those who had volunteered longest?

“Um, so then we also need a backup committee chair. No one emailed me about it,” Amanda paused, a hopeful but short lived silence. “So we’ll get to that I guess.”

“Like what is a backup chair? I mean, I’ll do it.” Lisa volunteered.

“It’s basically like second-in-command,” Mary said. She listed off a bunch of responsibilities, all that were basically being the chair of the committee without being the chair of the committee. “So that you can just seamlessly move into that place. Like literally the next day, we’re still going, and we don’t need to like drop our pace because Amanda decided to move.”

“Ok, I’d be willing to do it,” Lisa re-volunteered.

Amanda was apparently about to move, with her soon-to-be-fiancé, to North Carolina. But she didn’t know when, exactly, or her timeline, exactly.

“But Amanda will continue being the chair for the education committee. Everything she does right now she does online basically. She just won’t be able to do speaking engagements,” Mary said wistfully.

“And be in person,” Amanda said softly, overlapping.
“And be in person,” Mary said.

“Alrighty,” Mary said, interrupting discussion of forcing Amanda’s brother to grow deep roots in central PA so that she’d have to visit often. “Anything else on our agenda?” Back-seat driving the meeting.

“The only other thing is open discussion, does anyone have any goals, or anything else they want to focus on?”

“Deadlines.” Lisa said. They put in place “a page a month.”

{Phantom clicking, pen tapping. No extra windows, no side distractions. CPU focused on Google Hangouts, very little T-Pain left in the voices. The clarity of voices only noticed in the absence of problems.}

Google Hangouts continued to maintain the present connection between four computers, presence-ing five people, until everyone checked in that there was nothing else to talk about. Then with a few swift clicks, images left the screen, and Google Hangouts quit the connections.

Before moving on to broader conclusions about the comparisons and contrasts between these two tales of the same meeting, I want to pause here to draw attention to a few of these. First, the order of topics remains the same across both. The meeting in process includes more detail, more talk, and more interruptions to topics, whereas the meeting in retrospect states these topics more matter-of-factly. Second, the meeting in process includes more distraction, disruption, and interruption throughout the meeting, all produced somewhere in between human-technology relations. Technology affords distraction while displaying attention. Technology brings its own disrupting, repeating, stuttering, and even tuning out, although often scholars are more concerned with the human production of voice and language. All of these interrupt, sometimes just the speakers, and sometimes the entire meeting as the demands of the software
compete with the CPU’s ability to keep up with demand. Third, the presence of technology is very much felt in process, built into the rhythm of the meeting, as it continues to connect, even when it disrupts.

**Chapter Conclusion**

In SPC’s hybrid meetings, technology’s most fundamental role is to *presence* the organization. Without technology, other aspects of the meeting assemblage would be absent, and perhaps the meeting would continue without them. Or, to stick closer to how meetings in SPC played out, meetings brought together a set of contingently obligatory relations that included technology. As the action where technology plays such a fundamental role, my analysis of presence-ing brought me to try to understand “what this hybrid form looks like, feels like, and even ‘thinks’ like” (Schwartzman, 2015, p. 744). In this conclusion, I summarize my findings about what hybrid meetings look like, feel like, and even “think” like.

First, hybrid meetings involve looking at a meeting through a screen. In the first section on snapshots, I detailed a variety of “looks.” Video-conferencing software, no matter which kind we used, brought up images of people sitting in surroundings looking at their own computer devices. Although only the human images were contingently obligatory to meet (and sometimes, only their voice was obligatory), video-conferencing feeds always showed “more than” the human, and “more than” the meeting, thus presence-ing disorder. Sometimes someone’s bedroom decorations brought conversations or impressions to light. Other times, living rooms or offices presence-d personal artifacts, indicating lives beyond the organizational. Throughout these three chapters I have written in impressions of bored or confused faces, and physical surroundings that intersect with meetings. However, what is considered to be part of the meeting order, often evidenced in meeting minutes, only represents a partial selection of the full
assemblage of meeting. Hybrid meetings already and necessarily presence disorder, thus energizing and simultaneously resisting efforts to order meetings, prompting the need for legitimizing and deciding to drag disorder towards order.

Second, hybrid meetings cultivate particular feelings. As I noted in the contrasts between the meeting in retrospect and in process, the technology used to attend a hybrid meeting also brings its own distractions, disruptions, and interruptions, in addition to whatever we may recognize as human distractions, disruptions, and interruptions. These points add further rhythmic beats to the hybrid meeting, producing auto-tuned voices, emphasized staccatos, and even breaks in the feed for long rests. Betwixt and between these points, the steady rhythmic downbeat of connection continues throughout to presence feeds of (dis)order. This connection maintains the presence-ing of five bodies in four images on one screen, constituting meeting quorum and presence-ing SPC to meet. Building on the rhythm that I found and displayed in Chapter 4, the technology also participates in presence-ing this rhythm to members. Notably, and supposedly, the presence of distractions, disruptions, and interruptions intersects feeds differently, producing a variety of specific effects in the technology-human assemblage brought together through meeting. The effects of these different intersections and further textures of rhythms may move through human bodies in waves of anxiety, like Mary’s worrying and “decompressing” episode in Chapter 5. Hybrid meetings intimately rely on technology’s participation, as well as its distraction, disruption, and interruption. The precarious contingencies involved in maintaining technological assemblages through presence-ing may infect other aspects of meeting assemblages like bodies. At the conclusion of meeting, Mary’s body mirrors the sudden absence once felt in a violent shake. In presence-ing, meetings presence disorderly effects as well as orderly ones.
Third and finally, these analytic narratives provide some insight into what a hybrid meeting “thinks” like. In order to talk about how a hybrid meeting thinks, I return to “local sense.” Schwartzman (2015) defines the “local sense” of a meeting as,

The first and most important assumption a researcher concerned with understanding meetings should make is that the meetings that occur in a particular setting make “local sense” in this context(s). In other words they are “doing something” in/for the setting. This may not make sense to everyone and there may be great resistance to them, but the researcher’s (and also the practitioner’s) first assumption should always be that in some important way they make “local sense.” (p. 742)

To approach these meetings, particularly the third section and the meeting in progress, Schwartzman would advocate that they make “local sense.” However, as I write in Chapter 1, two different interpretations of this statement are possible, which is why I reproduced the full block quote above. “Local sense” here could refer to the classical ethnographic imperative to find the sense that the “locals,” or the people of a community, make in a particular context or setting (Agar, 2008; Philipsen, 1992). For this study, that would involve some of what I wrote in the previous two chapters: finding the actions that seem to occupy the human participants in SPC, and I defined these as deciding and legitimizing, which are two among many, but two that particularly related to technology.

However, “local sense” could also refer to the sense that is local to a meeting as an ongoing event, or rather those aspects of meetings that presence themselves, and could perhaps be sensed by the contingently obligatory relations brought together in meeting. Thus, the distractions, disruptions, and interruptions that provide the feel of a hybrid meeting are not non-
sense-ical, but instead should be assumed to make “local sense,” perhaps to the meeting itself. These aspects provide texture to the rhythm of a meeting. The “thinking” of a hybrid meeting, and thus the “local sense,” is therefore not located in a shared “sense” of human members, but rather moves through the assemblage in the mix of human, technology, document, affect, rhythm, and a range of other contingently obligatory relations. As our focus shifts toward the “local sense,” we start to find that the pieces some scholars, like Cichomska (2013; Cichomska, et al., 2015) and Wasson (2004), consider distractions, disruptions, and interruptions are not so. They are, instead, necessary movements to produce the meeting in process, and as important and/or disrupting as they seem to the narrative, they are forgotten in human retrospect.

I suspect (in the presumptive kind of way that authors do) that there have been distractions, disruptions, and interruptions in meetings that you, the reader, have attended. When we call them distractions, disruptions, and interruptions they become part of the disorder of meetings, and we do not view them as part of the ordering meetings can accomplish. However, as Cooper (1986) writes, disorder or the “zero degree” energizes order. These distractions, disruptions, and interruptions are integral to hybrid meetings and what they are doing in organizing. They make up the “local sense” or how meetings “are ‘doing something’ in/for the setting” (p. 742). In “doing something” these distractions, disruptions, and interruptions energize and mobilize order. Technological problems energize troubleshooting to maintain presences. Presences in images bring in disorder that energizes human participants to inquire about and order them. Throughout these analytic chapters, I demonstrated that “there’s something about meetings” which simultaneously motivates people to “want to change them, control them, order them and make them predictable” while simultaneously making meetings “resistant to efforts to change, improve, order, and make them predictable” (Schwartzman, 2015, p. 735). This
something is disorder, or a “zero degree” which is “an excess, a surplus, a supplement… ‘more than’” (Cooper, 1986, p. 321). Disorder simultaneously energizes order and resists fully ordering.

“There’s something about meetings” and it is disorder.
Chapter VII

CULTIVATING ORGANIZATION: CULTIVATION FOR DESIGN

In this first of two concluding chapters, I address the practical value of this dissertation project and my turn toward treating meetings as emergent events. Usually academic work includes applied recommendations for practice at the end of a final concluding chapter. Instead, I write this chapter as a bridge between my empirical, ethnographic analysis and the theoretical conclusions and implications I make in the final concluding chapter, so that I can bring the work full-circle to the theory with which I began this dissertation. Part of the motivation for this ordering of the text is that it mirrors the way that I came into this ethnography. I became a member of SPC first, and its organizational ethnographer afterward. I include this chapter in this dissertation because my position as an insider-researcher-consultant in SPC prompted me to continually give back to this organization. Throughout four years of fieldwork, and a few more months of involvement while writing this dissertation, I sought out ways to both participate as a member and use what I had learned about SPC to help them organize better. In other words, I not only engaged in participant observation, but in observant participation (Gatt & Ingold, 2013). I wrote grants; I ran meetings; I lent my expertise in communication where the meeting prompted me to do so. I have mentioned several applied moves that I made throughout this dissertation, and there are some notable moves that were important for my involvement, but did not make the final product. I start this chapter with a summary of the moves included, and some that were not included, in this dissertation.

Throughout the analysis chapters, I described several moments of intervention throughout my fieldwork. I summarize these here in chronological order, rather than the order in which they appeared in the text. My interventions started in February 2013 when I suggested that SPC
should reorient its perspective toward communication to better account for what meetings do (cf. Peters, 2014a). In other words, I tried to characterize the difference between the communication as information and communication as constitutive views (Deetz, 1994), asserting that meetings were better suited for “creation and collaboration.” This idea became a theme throughout my involvement and other design suggestions, all of which aimed to cultivate collective ownership of SPC’s future, rather than reinforcing Mary’s (sole) ownership. In December 2014, I suggested that Mary should work to include more people’s voices in conversations to work toward this aim. A year later, I had talked with Mary about how our technologies for online organizing were inadequate for “idea creation and brainstorming,” and they were better suited for “information dissemination and critiquing.” This noticing prompted re-norming around technology use and meetings. Finally, in July 2016, Mary asked for my advice on running the meeting because I could not attend, and I suggested that she let everyone else speak first, then offer the opinions that I wrote in, and then give her own opinions. By making this move, Mary’s voice would comment on rather than set the direction for deciding, thus potentially involving a greater range of ideas.

In addition to these applied moves that I mentioned throughout the draft, I made two other notable applied moves during my fieldwork that led me to this point. In May 2015, I organized and ran a strategic planning session for SPC. I drew inspiration for this from Witteborn, Milburn, and Ho’s (2013) piece in an ethnography of communication forum in the *Journal of Applied Communication Research*. Mary had little interest in running such a session herself, so I took full control of the meeting and the process. During the meeting, I included prompts for brainstorming, based on the suggestions I continually made during my fieldwork which I summarize above. In this primarily practical move, I used knowledge gained through
my fieldwork and through reading broadly in organizational communication and teaching group communication to form the process (Gastil, 2009; Putnam & Mumby, 2014). I started by separating us into three smaller groups (including an online group, by muting our microphone and shutting off the speakers) to have us list as many ideas as possible in fifteen to twenty minutes. After this, we shared our lists of ideas and I listened particularly for themes across these lists or ideas people mentioned multiple times. I found five themes, and for each one we talked about where we could be in five years, three years, and one year on that particular goal. Before leaving, we assigned the one-year tasks to particular people, fulfilling the last part of an act sequence for decision-making that Milburn (2009) detailed.

This strategic planning move led to the final applied move I made in the course of my research, but did not include in this dissertation. Just before I finished collecting data, Mary asked me to run the fundraising committee’s meetings. She said that she thought I just did it “better.” I also know now from reflecting on my data that this switch probably saved her some anxiety as well. In January 2017, for the fifth annual board meeting, Mary asked me if I was willing to facilitate the meeting. As she wrote in her message, “You’re way better at it than I am, and then it gives you the authority to interrupt people [to switch between topics].” Knowing the expectations for a meeting chair from reading the literature on this and also the suggestions for best practices (Asmuß & Svennevig, 2009; Boden, 1994; Clifton, 2006, 2009; Cockett, 2003; Holmes & Marra, 2010; Holmes & Stubbe, 2003; Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008; Kello, 2015; Pomerantz & Denvir, 2007; Potter & Hepburn, 2010; Svennevig, 2008, 2011; Van Praet, 2008), but also knowing that I would be fully-virtual facing a room of people who could have side conversations when I could not (Peters, 2015a), I hesitantly agreed. As I wrote back to her, I agreed to do the following: “keep track of time, switch us between topics, call for votes on things
that require decisions, and other process stuff like let’s take a break.” I ran the meeting this way, and this meeting solidified for me that there was a rhythm to our meetings. I experimented in the moment to figure out how to organize with it instead of working against it.

As these examples demonstrate, theory prompted changes in practice. I used the theories I read throughout my communication education to derive practical implications. These examples also demonstrate that practice generated theory as well. Without the practice of meetings, some of the theory I articulated in the analysis chapters would not have come to be. Many scholars have attended to these relations between theory and practice. As Barge and Craig (2009) write, “practical theory is explicitly designed to address practical problems and generate new possibilities for action” (p. 55). Barge and Craig also describe three approaches to practical theory which take different perspectives on the relationship between theory and practice.

Throughout my research, I have oriented to practical theory as transformative practice (cf. Cronen, 1995, 2001; Shotter, 1984). From this perspective, practical theory “is viewed as a useful resource for theorists and practitioners to help them make sense of situations and take action that is intended to improve those situations” (Barge & Craig, 2009, p. 59). This approach recognizes that there are several conversations that intersect in research. Practical theorists must first engage in conversation with research practitioners, because otherwise “a failure to keep in conversation with research participants inhibits the ability of practical theorists to respond to participants’ needs” (p. 68). In other words, I must correspond with them (Gatt & Ingold, 2013). “Correspondence refers to being in accordance with the flow of events, to moving forward with people in the pursuit of their dreams and aspirations, rather than dwelling on their past” (Otto & Smith, 2013, p. 17-18, emphasis in original). However, practical theorists must also continue conversations with other practitioners and scholars within an area of study, otherwise they risk
lessening “the likelihood of creating theory that addresses important issues and concerns within a given community of practice” (p. 68).

In the remainder of this chapter, I discuss how I aim to use practical theory as transformative practice to make further applied moves for SPC, especially given what I have found in this dissertation. This chapter aims to describe my correspondence with research participants and offer practical theoretical insights to the scholars who have informed my work. In doing so, I articulate the process of using cultivation for design. Before I briefly discuss the process that I used here, I first discuss applied communication research and how Schwartzman, the ethnography of communication, and the Montreal School intersect with my motivation. While I discuss this background, I voice several tensions in doing this applied work. After this, I summarize and describe the process of using cultivation for design. Finally, I conclude the chapter by setting out the next steps for SPC’s meetings journey based on my analysis in this dissertation.

**Applied Communication Research**

Applied communication research is the development of knowledge to make a difference for those whom we study and others in their everyday lived experiences (cf. Barge & Craig, 2009; Cissna, 2000; O’Hair, 2000; Seibold, 2000). The need for applied research comes from a desire to address that we have a responsibility to not only do no harm, “but to do some good” (Frey, 1998, p. 162). My practical motivations for conducting my own applied communication research come from the complex web of relations which professionally, personally, and scholarly entangle me with SPC. As a board member, I signed a contract (and, occasionally, re-sign the same contract or an updated version) that states that I will work in the best interests of SPC, which professionally entangles me with the potential futures of SPC. As the founder’s best
friend, I have a stake in supporting her and helping her succeed, which personally entangles me with SPC. And, finally, as a scholar, I believe research provides something new to the world, and others beyond the academy should be able to access and use these findings. I chose SPC as a research site, and therefore my scholarly commitments tie me to “do some good” for SPC and provide something translatable to others as well. As Gatt and Ingold (2013) write for design anthropology, “it is important to recognize that what is produced during fieldwork… is of a value equal to, if not greater than, what is produced after fieldwork in the documentary form of written ethnography” (p. 148).

There’s Something about Meetings

Schwartzman’s (1989, 2015) work displays some skepticism about the motivations for improving meetings. As she writes,

There’s something about meetings that makes researchers and participants want to change them, control them, order them and make them predictable. But there’s something about meetings that makes them resistant to efforts to change, improve, order, and make them predictable. (Schwartzman, 2015, p. 735)

The faults of interventions, from Schwartzman’s view, is that they cannot make meetings predictable and orderly because meetings themselves resist these efforts. However, “there’s something about meetings” that calls forth the impulse to change them, and this is an important feature of meeting events. As I claim in Chapter 6, this “something” is the “zero degree” of disorder, which energizes ordering (cf. Cooper, 1986). There is certainly a wealth of literature that seeks to order meetings, but this literature often treats meetings as tools, and not events (see Chapter 2 for a summary). This literature misses that designing better meetings “is not about projections and targets, or about the achievement of a steady state” (Gatt & Ingold, 2013, p.
When we view meetings as emergent events, the goal is not to arrive at some end “state,” but rather it is about “keeping life going” (Gatt & Ingold, 2013, p. 144). There is a relative lack of literature that seeks to change meetings while treating them as events and accounting for the “something about meetings” that resists change. These “somethings” indicate the order-disorder dynamic of meetings, and particularly the way in which disorder both energizes and resists order.

Throughout her writing, Schwartzman (1989, 2015) is captivated by the order-disorder dynamic of meetings, and I similarly take up this charge in this dissertation. In her book, she argued that “meetings create pockets of order in an often disordered world, but they are also responsible for reversing, inverting, upsetting, and disassembling organizational worlds” (Schwartzman, 1989, p. 313-314). Order, for Schwartzman, is an accomplishment, and one that could be otherwise accomplished differently or unaccomplished. Disorder, on the other hand, she characterizes as “local sense,” or that meetings “are ‘doing something’ in/for the setting” (Schwartzman, 2015, p. 742). As I have shown earlier in this dissertation, particularly in Chapter 6, this “local sense” does not necessarily mean the sense of the “locals,” but instead applies to the sense of the meeting itself. This kind of “local sense,” which presents sense as disorder that is an “excess” or a “more than” order (Cooper, 1986), is the “something about meetings” which resists change, because meetings are already “doing something,” even if this “doing” is not considered part of the order of meetings. However, despite the resistance of meetings, there is still “something about meetings” that calls forth efforts toward change or ordering.

Therefore, in being called by my meetings and my participants to order meetings otherwise, I must make these moves with the understanding of what meetings are doing, especially their “local sense” or disorder. Without this understanding, I would fall into the trap of thinking that I (alone) can make meetings efficient tools for organizing. As I have shown
throughout this dissertation, there are many other players at the meeting table. I do not have full control of meetings, and as I make applied moves with SPC, I need to continue to recognize how a variety of relations come together in meetings. This order-disorder dynamic of meetings thus provides a tension for my applied moves as well.

The Ethnographer at the Table

As I noted in the initial chapters of this dissertation, my study of meetings brings together two theoretical perspectives for this dissertation. One of these is the ethnography of communication, which Schwartzman (1989) similarly used for her work on meetings. The ethnography of communication was founded with local problems and practical work in mind. Hymes (1974) wanted the ethnography of communication to produce practical research that dealt directly with the world, provided local knowledge, detected conditions and possibilities for change, and generally learned with and gave assistance to communities (cf. Sprain & Boromisza-Habashi, 2013). The ethnography of communication’s applied mode, therefore, is about discovering “local sense,” often meaning the knowledge of locals, and conditions and possibilities for change therein. This applied mode works against the impulse of some meetings scholars to provide generic “best practices” to meetings practitioners (Kello, 2015), instead requiring a researcher to address the unique conditions and possibilities for change present in specific meetings. The ethnography of communication focuses on developing understanding of a community first, and then moves toward the applied mode to become useful on a community’s terms (Philipsen, 2008; Sprain & Boromisza-Habashi, 2013).

In 2013, Sprain and Boromisza-Habashi (2013) brought together fellow ethnographers of communication to grapple with what contemporary applied communication research looks like in this perspective (Carbaugh, Winter, Over, Molina-Markham, & Lie, 2013; Leighter, Rudnick, &
Edmonds, 2013; Townsend, 2013; Witteborn, Milburn, & Ho, 2013). They ultimately describe an applied mode of research for the ethnography of communication, adding to Carbaugh’s (2007) description of five modes of research, and five applied moves for research. These moves include: assessing interventions (Miller & Rudnick, 2008), studying local strategic action (Witteborn, Milburn, & Ho, 2013), contributing to design processes (Carbaugh, et al., 2013; Milburn, 2015), suggesting new forms of communication and sociality (Boromisza-Habashi, 2013), and guiding intervention (Townsend, 2013).

Overall, the applied mode of research involves asking, “how can these [meeting events] be altered to address and manage the social problems they sustain” (p. 185). To address this question, they propose that a researcher makes two commitments: “(1) a coorientation to a social problem with others at the table (fellow scholars, practitioners, and, especially, community members) and (2) a commitment to seek a workable solution with them for that problem” (p. 185). For example, in Sprain’s (2016; Sprain, Carcasson, & Merolla, 2014; Sprain & Hughes, 2015; Sprain & Ivancic, 2016) work, she demonstrates the power of analysis to inform design of public deliberation practices. By partnering with practitioners and designers, she and her coauthors demonstrate the necessity of some features in deliberation (Sprain, 2016; Sprain & Hughes, 2015) or investigate why those features do not emerge intended effects (Sprain & Ivancic, 2016). Furthermore, her work focuses on developing workable solutions, like new training processes for particular roles or reframing existing training in terms of other communication theories (Sprain, et al., 2014). As I move into the applied mode of research, I must not only recognize how I work with other people at the table, as Sprain considers in her work. I must also recognize how I work with a full sociomaterial assemblage, including
technologies, documents, histories, and a range of others brought together in contingently obligatory relation through meetings.

The applied mode of research in the ethnography of communication brings its own tensions to the table. As Sprain and Boromisza-Habashi (2013) write, the ethnography of communication’s “focus on understanding cultural practices can be in tension with the desire to change social life through communication interventions” (p. 182, emphasis in original). Therefore, a first tension pulls the researcher between understanding and changing practices. Philipsen (2008) described a second tension in his address to the National Communication Association, we must ask ourselves how we can become useful to a community or organization on their terms. This describes a tension between the researcher’s motivations and the community’s idea of what researchers can do for them. To address these tensions, I turn to design anthropology’s concept of correspondence “with the everyday lives of the people among whom [I] do fieldwork” (Gatt & Ingold, 2013, p. 154). In relating with participants in this way, I become a participant “among, rather than above and beyond, the ongoing life situation with which [I] deal, where [I] and [my] designs play out in the same level field as everyone else” (Gatt & Ingold, 2013, p. 154, emphasis added).

Furthermore, my research, based in the ontological turn and attention to assemblages (Coole & Frost, 2010; Cooper, 2005; DeLanda, 2006; Emirbayer, 1997), brings out a related tension for the applied mode. As I have demonstrated in this dissertation, assemblages brought together in practice are not only human, and these non-human relations must be accounted for when making applied moves in research. A third research tension lies in the human-articulated terms and the affordances and possibilities provided in assemblages. Technologies, for example, may desire meetings to be ordered in one way, whereas the human members expect meetings to
be ordered otherwise. As the researcher in this case, I play at the edges of understanding and changing, my idea of usefulness and “their” idea of usefulness, and the desires and possibilities put into play by the variety of “players” brought together at the meeting table, especially when these desires and possibilities clash with each other. To address tensions like these, Gatt and Ingold (2013) suggest that “design is not so much about innovation,” because the end point should not be to what one orients, rather design is “about improvisation,” or trying to work among a full assemblage to see how processes could be different (p. 145, emphasis in original).

Cultivating Meetings

The second perspective brought together by my concerns in this dissertation, the Montreal School of CCO, is newly turning toward applied kinds of research. Koschmann (2010) noted that the Montreal School’s “research is still quite abstract and conceptual at this point; it has yet to show the big payoffs that make scholars in other disciplines and organizational practitioners pay attention” (p. 433). His call takes the concern Cooren, Brummans, and Charrieras (2008) express over the need for “considerably more empirical work” (p. 1362) in a similar and different direction. Although empirical work alone serves to ground the conceptual frameworks that scholars in the Montreal School have developed, this work may not serve to demonstrate the power of this perspective for organizational practitioners. Koschmann (2010) continues to describe the applied potential for the Montreal School in that it is a much more promising direction than merely recording various communication types that happen within organizations because it has the potential to demonstrate the unique value of communicative explanations and the distinctiveness of communication scholarship… scholars will be showing the value of a communication perspective in all areas of the human experience. (p. 433)
My work in this dissertation not only provides “more empirical work” to bolster the Montreal School’s theorizing, but I also aim to demonstrate the distinctiveness of communication explanations and scholarship for practice, especially for SPC’s meetings. In doing so, I provide one way to address Kuhn’s (2011) skepticism of engaged scholarship. In making applied moves for meetings based on this dissertation research, I developed a way to use cultivation for design.

Before describing cultivation for design, I want to summarize this concept again. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, this concept needs to be further developed, as it has primarily been used in only three works (Cooren, 2010, 2015b; Cooren, et al., 2013), only one of which is empirical (Cooren, et al., 2013). Cultivation draws the analyst’s eye to how values, norms, beliefs, or ideals are “typically, traditionally, or usually invoked or conveyed by the respective participants” (Cooren, 2010, p. 114). Cultivation pushes past only discovering order and “local sense” themselves, to discover how order and “local sense” come to be. Cultivation posits that participants continually cultivate the values, norms, beliefs, or ideals that present the appearance or feeling of organizational culture (Cooren, 2010, 2015b). As Cooren (2015b) writes, “when you contact with organization, you soon discover that there are specific values, norms, artifacts, or practices that tend to characterize it” (p. 83). These values, norms, artifacts, or practices have been cultivated through communication events, like meetings, over time. Furthermore, Cooren (2010, 2015b) does not assume participants to be only human, and therefore technologies, documents, and meetings may cultivate values, norms, artifacts, or practices which may be unrecognized by human participants in meetings. Thus, cultivation provides a way to discover the “local sense” of the meeting through the actions that bring together assemblages.
When looking across research that utilizes Cooren’s (2010) cultivation concept, it struck me that this concept is powerful not only for retrospective descriptions about practices, but it also draws upon a powerful metaphor that could be used prospectively in design processes. If assemblages have cultivated values, norms, and other effects that “matter” for organizing through a range of practices, then perhaps assemblages could design or adapt different practices to develop the cultivation of new values, norms, and other effects. Cooren (2010, 2015b; Cooren, et al., 2013) has not included this future-oriented application of the cultivation concept in his work. However, when pushed to describe how I hope to improve meetings, and how my ideas would “actually” work, I found that cultivation best described my vision and translated well into practitioner vocabularies. In using cultivation for design, practitioners would need to commit to continually cultivating designed practices, in other words attentively repeating them, in the hopes that these cultivate the kinds of values, norms, and other effects that reflect the kind of organizational culture that is desired.

Moving Forward: Cultivation for Design

Given my commitments to take up Schwartzman’s (2015) calls for future meetings research by viewing meetings through the relational ontological turn (DeLanda, 2006; Cooper, 2006), the Montreal School (Cooren, 2010; Taylor & Van Every, 2000), and the ethnography of communication (Hymes, 1972; Schwartzman, 1989; Sprain & Boromisza-Habashi, 2012, 2013), I set out a vision of cultivation for design. This design process sets out the way in which I think about designing applied moves for SPC based on this dissertation research and my continued correspondence with SPC. I offer cultivation for design to provide one potential way to address the lack of applied research in the Montreal School and skepticism about engaged methods (Koschmann, 2010; Kuhn, 2011). Furthermore, this process provides an example of the design
move for ethnographers of communication that works at the intersections of sociomaterial assemblages. Although my description of cultivation for design comes out of my own research, and thus directly applies to meetings and SPC, other scholars could adapt the process to work for a variety of other projects.

To address Schwartzman’s concern for order and disorder in meetings, I built the order-disorder dynamic into cultivation for design. As I claim in this dissertation, disorder both energizes and resists order (cf. Cooper, 1986; Schwartzman, 2015), and this must be accounted for in the applied mode. Furthermore, cultivation does not only attend to the values and norms that are considered positive effects, but also includes values and norms that are considered negative or even perhaps destructive (see, for example, Dougherty & Smythe, 2004, who address how sexual harassment and violence persist in organizational cultures). Cultivation, thus, emphasizes precarity in design, because it cannot predict, nor does it attempt to predict, results. However, prediction is not the aim of cultivation for design. Rather, it focuses on “giving direction rather than specifying end points” (Gatt & Ingold, 2013, p. 145). As a concept, cultivation is powerful because it seeks out the dynamic processes in meetings that contribute to emergence. In design, cultivation addresses dynamic practices and events, like meetings, in all their complexity, thus focusing on processes of improvisation rather than innovation of products.

Cultivation for design is the third stage of a three-stage process: fieldwork, analysis, and cultivation for design. This process relies on the retrospective and prospective abilitites of practical theory as transformative practice, as well as design anthropology. In retrospect, practical theory “provides a set of tools for making sense of unfolding interaction” (Barge & Craig, 2009, p. 70). Practical theory is therefore useful for making sense of interaction during fieldwork and analysis, often treating these as part and parcel of the intervention process. When
using practical theory prospectively, practical theory “provides a set of resources for theorists and practitioners to employ as they think through and anticipate the type of intervention activities they wish to develop” (Barge & Craig, 2009, p. 69). As I mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, I have made interventions throughout my fieldwork and analysis process, and now I aim to use my findings from this dissertation to prospectively think through and design the applied moves I will make. In the rest of this section, I summarize the three stages of my research, this time with an eye on the application of theory for meeting practices. As I summarize these, I also describe how I navigated some of the tensions I mentioned. Although I separate them here, I often cycled through stages or used them concurrently.

**Fieldwork**

My research began with ethnographic fieldwork in SPC, as I described in Chapter 3. Practical motivations informed my choice of organization. I deeply cared about SPC and became invested in its continuation and growth. Throughout my four years of fieldwork, I remained in conversation with the human participants of my research. In conducting this fieldwork, I made several suggestions to try to meet the needs of these human participants, most of which came from theory in the ethnography of communication (Schwartzman, 1989) or the communicative constitution of organizations (Deetz, 1994; Taylor & Van Every, 2000). I used these same theories, particularly Schwartzman’s meetings framework, to assess my interventions as I implemented them during the course of my fieldwork. In doing this work, I found myself pulled between a desire to understand and a desire to change these meeting practices. Sometimes the suggestions I made relied on changing technology systems to see how this would affect meeting practices. These suggestions came out of periods of analysis that punctuated my fieldwork (Peters, 2014a, 2015a), rather than a concern for technology’s participation in
meetings. This was a small contribution to hold human desires for meetings in tension with the desires of “others” in meeting assemblages.

**Analysis**

I conducted several analysis cycles throughout my research in this greater project. Notably, I conducted analysis to publish two pieces (Peters, 2014a, 2015a) and to submit several conference papers (Peters 2013, 2014b, 2014c, 2015b, 2016a, 2016b), in addition to this dissertation. Although the analysis stage primarily occurs outside of the field, this is the stage where the data I collected and theory became entangled in different configurations to lead to the development of new practical theories. In this dissertation, I developed a descriptive framework to use for analysis, drawing my eye toward temporality, act dynamics, contingently obligatory relations, and emergent effects in meetings as emergent events. In this analysis process, I searched for ways to intersect the conversations I had with my research participants, including the full assemblage, and the conversations I entered with scholars and meeting practitioners. I attended to problems that were both academic and practical, like hybrid meetings and the relationships between documents and meetings. Especially in my analysis for this dissertation, I tried to work to deeply understand meetings as emergent events, while holding in suspense the desire they incite for changing them. Also, in trying to understand meetings, I tried to understand aspects of assemblages that human participants accepted as inevitable or natural, or that they did not even think about. Understanding the assemblage provides me more information in order to use practical theory as transformative practice prospectively, which I address next.

**Cultivation for Design**

This third stage is where I propose cultivation for design is powerfully suited for practical pursuits. The first two stages relatively mirror the use of cultivation in academic pursuits, but to
this point cultivation has not been used prospectively to design changes in practice. Alongside fieldwork and analysis, I continually asked myself to identify whether effects generally seemed to “order” or to “disorder” meetings. This involved asking what practices seemed to work toward more ideal visions of meetings, and which seemed to work against these visions. I faced interesting pushback from some of my participants in thinking through these questions. For example, Mary has a reputation for “hating” meetings, so her ideal meeting would be nonexistent. Other participants, like Lise, expressed trouble imagining what could be different, besides including less reporting acts and more brainstorming. When I asked what went well in meetings, she responded that one of the things that went well is that the president “is always looking for ways to improve how our meetings run.” Lise voiced an important distinction in cultivation for design. Cultivation is not focused on innovation of products, but rather processes of improvisation. The ideal meeting, therefore, is not the goal of cultivation for design. The processes of experimenting and improvising to try to emerge and change meetings, hopefully toward the (shifting) ideal, is the goal of cultivation for design.

As Gatt and Ingold (2013) point out, design correspondence happens during fieldwork, rather than after the fact. In correspondence with SPC, I frequently improvised cultivation designs. For example, in Chapter 4, I mentioned that I spoke with Mary about how she ran our meetings, and how we could try to make the meetings less informational and more creative or generative. This became a conversation that Mary, other members, and I frequently had throughout the course of my fieldwork. As I came to my initial and subsequent conclusions, I noticed that meetings frequently included effects like boredom and silence on the part of other members than Mary about many topics, both of which were unintended. Frequently, members expressed the value of collaboration or including everyone (including volunteers not on the
board of directors) in meetings so that everyone’s ideas contributed to organizing. I also noticed that Mary’s reports often repeated and reiterated decisions and contributions made through other means, like the online platforms I mentioned in Chapter 5. I traced these effects back to actions, like lecture-style reporting (Chapters 4 and 5), reading documents word-for-word (Chapter 4 and 5), and problems with the technologies for hybrid meetings (Chapters 5 and 6), which cultivated these unintended effects. Although some actions (reporting in deciding) demonstrated an attempt to instill order, the effects did not align with this intention, and instead members felt further effects of disorder. This situation called for improvisations in processes.

After discovering these moments of misalignment, desired effects not included, or dis/order, the next step is to design cultivation interventions for meetings. In order to design cultivation interventions, the researcher aims to “enrich theses [practices] and render them more sustainable” (Gatt & Ingold, 2013, p. 141). As I wrote above, the goal of sustainability “is not about projections and targets, or about the achievement of a steady state; it is about keeping life going” (p. 144). Cultivation for design is about keeping life, and practices, going – hopefully toward the (shifting) ideal of practice. Cultivation requires designers to improvise differently. Cultivation must be repeated, because its conceptual foundations rely on the continual repetition of actions to emerge effects (Cooren, 2010). Improvisations in the field, thus, must be repeated to see what effects emerge over the repetitions involved in cultivation.

Choosing the actions to design and cultivate, therefore, requires foresight. As Gatt and Ingold (2013) write, “designing for life is about giving direction rather than specifying end points. It is in this regard that it also involves foresight” (p. 145). Cultivation is a process, and one that purportedly emerges effects through the repetitive use of actions through which these effects emerge. Although designers likely have a (shifting) ideal in mind, this end point is not
the goal of design, the process is. Rather than predicting the future, cultivation designers must use foresight, which is “to run ahead of things and to pull them along behind you, rather than to project by an extrapolation from the present” (Gatt & Ingold, 2013, p. 145). Here, the metaphor of cultivation provides a distinct view of what foresight means for design. Agriculture has developed a set of best practices for growing crops, and farmers often try to envision what kind of conditions they will have for the growing season. They must anticipate the future by “running ahead” and then “pull along” the best tools, techniques, and practices for cultivating crops. In designing meetings using cultivation, I must “run ahead” to anticipate the kinds of financial, organizational, and disordering conditions for the year or the meetings ahead of me. Then, I can “pull along” the best tools, techniques, and practices that give meetings direction toward some ideal. There are, of course, forces outside of my (human) control, and I must try to account for them when designing with cultivation. Some processes of human design may emerge disordering effects because they conflict with technological processes and expectations. In implementation, I must remain agile to anticipate shifting practices to find something that initially works in order to develop a plan for repetition that fulfills the cultivation design.

In my example from my fieldwork, I “ran ahead” to work toward meetings with more collective ownership of SPC, and “pulled along” suggestions to include more moments for discussion rather than focusing on reporting. I also noticed that as the founder of the organization, Mary’s voice tended to sway decisions. In the narratives about online platforms and volunteer problems, she took one opinion, provided hers, and then the matter often felt decided. However, sometimes discussions, like our acquisition meeting included at the end of Chapter 4, included multiple voices of dissent, which several members indicated they desired. Noting this, I specified further that discussion should include open-ended questions from the
meeting facilitator (usually Mary or me), and then make sure that multiple people speak before
Mary provides her opinion to try and counteract those effects. I made these suggestions
understanding the two key qualities of cultivation for design: first, we must continually repeat
these improvisational practices, and second, we must use foresight to determine which practices
to “pull along,” while understanding that there are forces outside of our (human) control. To
account for this second quality, I suggested that people who attend meetings only through virtual
means should be specifically called out in discussions to mitigate delayed audio feeds and
discomfort with interrupting. So far, meetings seem more enjoyable and certainly include
multiple voices that do not just report information.

**What’s Next for SPC**

To conclude this chapter, I want to finish what I started in my fieldwork and this chapter.
I collected data during fieldwork, I reflected through academic analysis and narrative
representation, so now it is time to set out how I will use cultivation for design in SPC in the
years to come. In the midst of officer role shifts to conform with best practices, the board of
directors voted for me to take over the role of president in a meeting on April 8, 2017.
Considering that one of the key responsibilities of the president role is to run board meetings,
here I lay out my agenda for cultivating meetings. I include here a list of four changes or
adaptations that I will introduce to SPC as president in collaboration with the full assemblage of
SPC. As I describe each cultivation for design, I briefly summarize how I arrived at these
particular actions from my analysis in Chapters 4–6.

First, I mentioned throughout the analysis chapters that I had consulted with Mary to try
to adapt discussion procedures in order to promote collective ownership of SPC. Mary is often
attached to the figure of SPC. In Chapter 4, I analyzed her frustration with the board’s lack of
participation to be tied to the assumption of permission needed or granted to the board to speak on behalf of SPC. After this moment, I continued to consult with her on ways to shape discussion so that other members of the board voiced their opinions and so that there could be more disagreement on proposed actions. As I move into the president of the board position, I will work to continue to improve discussion practices and processes to include more voices. In cultivating these hopeful improvements, I will consult the communication literature on discussions to determine a range of possibilities. From this range of possibilities, I will choose practices that seem to align with what I foresee in correspondence with SPC. For example, in a recent meeting I crafted an agenda that only included questions. Our purpose was to brainstorm new ideas and solutions, so proposing a solution and discussing it did not align with the kind of effects for which we aimed.

Second, in Chapter 4 I detailed how deciding in meetings relies on rhythms. Often human members complain about the length of SPC’s meetings, and virtual-only participants lose attention after a certain period of time (roughly an hour and a half, by my count). A way to avoid attention burnout and figure out whether meetings are the “correct” length of time is to cultivate the rhythm of meetings. As the president, I should seek to first, acknowledge that not all tangents are unproductive, because some are necessary in the rhythm to building a meeting; and second, pull back an ending tangent to the pulse of the rhythm. In a different recent meeting, I imposed a ten-minute time limit on discussion topics to end a meeting before a playoff football game (go Pack!). As I started enforcing the time limit, I did not stringently adhere to it. Instead, I felt for the undertow, and ten minutes fit about as much discussion on the remaining topics of the meeting as participants needed. Once, someone brought up a tangent that was unrelated to the current topic, but was relevant for later points on the agenda. Although previously this
tangent would have been interrupted and the president would have asked the speaker to save the tangent for later, or asked for its relevance, I allowed it. Like the waves of concerns moving in and out, as I wrote in Chapter 4, it brought us to a point of deciding that moved the meeting to address it, and then, feeling the current pulling out, I called the meeting back to the agenda’s order.

Third, I discussed affect in Chapter 5 as an excess, or disorder, of meetings (cf. Gregg & Seigworth, 2010). Mary’s suddenly shaking decompression prompted my reflection on what affects move through meetings. I felt anxiety seep into the room from Mary’s body, like an atmosphere thick and electric from a building storm. Her anxiety colored the way that she conducted the meeting, even bringing it to an abrupt end. To foster a better understanding among meeting participants of what each of us brings into a meeting, I aim to design ways to cultivate affects in meetings. As an organization focused on mental wellness, like Schwartzman’s (1989) Midwest Health Clinic, including some kinds of therapeutic talk in meetings is beneficial to practice mindfulness and mental wellness ourselves. Affects affect meetings, so acknowledging their existence as they enter the meeting event would work to build collective understanding of how to best adapt the meeting given these presences. For example, when curiosity enters a meeting, the meeting chair should acknowledge this with questions and information. Or, for an example that did occur in SPC, when boredom enters a meeting, the meeting chair should seek out ways to adapt the meeting to be less rote. In Chapter 5, I described how I asked Mary, the chair, to stop reading the policy documents to us word for word. Acknowledging the boredom as unwanted presence allowed participants to cultivate a different atmosphere, and in the narrative the meeting invited involvement and interest.
Finally, technologies participate in meetings in unexpected ways. As I described in Chapter 6, there may be frequent “difficulties” from a human standpoint, but these are part of meeting with technological assemblages. Occasionally, participants are “kicked out” of a meeting by their technological configurations, or made absent. In order to continue to presence the meeting for those who are accidentally absent, the meeting chair and secretary or minute-taker should design practices to cultivate this presence. For example, the minute-taker could adapt to a style of taking minutes in a Google Doc or online Microsoft Word document that is shared with all the meeting members. If someone is accidentally absenced by their technologies, they can read along with the meeting and catch up when their technological configurations work again. Another possibility is that the meeting chair or minute-taker could take responsibility to send text chats to the accidentally absent members through the meeting software so that they can read and catch up on what they miss while they are accidentally absent.
Chapter VIII

THE MEETING REVISITED

*The formal meeting is a gallery of fronts where aimless, deviant, and central currents of action merge for a moment, perfunctorily for some, emotionally for others. All depart with new knowledge to pursue variously altered, but rarely the agreed courses.* (Dalton, 1959, p. 227, as cited in Schwartzman, 2015, p. 735)

“There’s something about meetings” (Schwartzman, 2015, p. 735), and this “something” drew me in and produced this dissertation. In this final chapter, I summarize my study and discuss the implications of this research for studies of meetings, the Montreal School of CCO, and the ethnography of communication. I start with a short summary of the previous seven chapters, with a focus on research design and findings. After this summary, I discuss several implications and extensions that I contribute to ongoing conversations about meetings, communication’s constitution of organizations, and the ethnography of communication. Finally, I conclude with setting several future directions for research in the conversations to which this dissertation contributes. Thus, I conclude this dissertation similarly to Schwartzman’s (2015) concluding sentiment: “but I am greedy: I want more and will eagerly await the next volume because, as I said, ‘there’s something about meetings...’” (p. 744, emphasis in original).

**Summary**

Inspired by the recent publication of *The Cambridge Handbook of Meeting Science* and particularly Schwartzman’s (2015) concluding chapter, I began this study with a close examination of the future directions for research that Schwartzman (2015) proposed. I focused particularly on the order-disorder dynamic of meetings. Order, in her words, “is an obvious and immediate need” and it is an accomplishment or interactional achievement of meetings (p. 737).
Thus, “it is always possible that the interactional ‘order’ that is ‘achieved’ in these settings will be upset” (p. 739). Disorder, on the other hand, should be found through an assumption of “local sense,” that meetings “are ‘doing something’ in/for the setting” (p. 742). “Local sense,” as I argue throughout this dissertation, references the sense that is local to a meeting, or those aspects that presence themselves, and could perhaps be sensed by the contingently obligatory relations brought together in meeting, like rhythms or affects that may otherwise seem non-sense-ical.

**Foundations**

In order to hold this order-disorder dynamic in view through my study of meetings, I grounded this study in the recent relational ontological turn (Cooper, 2005; DeLanda, 2006), and focused on DeLanda’s (2006) theory of assemblages, which supports an exploration of the order-disorder dynamic. This ontological grounding provides the foundation for a perspective of meetings as emergent events, where order and disorder are emergent effects. Furthermore, my focus on this order-disorder dynamic, and other future directions that Schwartzman (2015) set for meetings research, brought together two perspectives: the ethnography of communication, especially the rich history in research on communication events like meetings (Schwartzman, 1989), and the Montreal School of CCO, especially Cooren’s (2010) concept of cultivation, which focuses on how cultures and order come to be. Altogether, this ontological grounding and these perspectives prompted my research question: How do meetings as emergent events cultivate the transient effects of organization and culture?

In Chapter 2, I detailed the previous literature on meetings and distinguished between three traditions in this research: meetings as tools, meetings as constitutive events, and meetings as emergent events. Emergent events distinguish themselves from the other two traditions by focusing on complexity and emergence through sociomaterial practices. As I detailed the
literature that related to meetings as emergent events, I developed a descriptive framework that informed my analysis of meetings. This framework includes consideration of: time and temporality, space, artifacts, (digital) technologies, values and cultures, and affect and emotion.

**Research Design**

My research design utilized ethnography and practices of the ethnography of communication to inform data collection and analysis. I conducted a four-year ethnography with a small nonprofit organization called Suicide Prevention Campaign, particularly focusing on their meetings, which tended to be held through hybrid or virtual means. The appendices include lists of participants (Appendix 2), meetings (Appendix 3), and key events (Appendix 1) during my ethnography. In Chapter 3, I also addressed issues of reflexivity involved in my ethnography, and detailed my procedures for data analysis. For data analysis, I used four primary categories to code data on meetings, especially regarding technology: temporality, which bounded my units of observation; act dynamics, which included coding for acts and actions as answers to my research question regarding how meetings emerged effects of organization and culture; contingently obligatory relations, which focus on what relations come into being through actions to form meeting assemblages; and emergent effects, or what emerges from meetings as emergent events.

After detailing this framework for analysis, I discussed and demonstrated the steps between analysis and representation, including the codes I used (Appendix 4) and how narratives rather than transcript analysis allow me to represent “an event in all its details” (Muñoz, 2014, p. 16), and narratives represent emergence with the reader in relation to the text. In the conclusion of this chapter, I detailed how previous works on ethnographic writing and representation influenced my writing choices and styles. These inspirations include works from the
ethnography of communication (Muñoz, 2014; Philipsen, 1975), the Montreal School of CCO (Brumman, 2007; Taylor & Van Every, 2014), and anthropology (Narayan, 2012; Rosaldo, 2014; Stevenson, 2014; Tsing, 2005; Van Maanen, 2011).

**Findings**

In the analysis chapters, I detail three ways that meetings as emergent events cultivate the transient effects of organization and culture: deciding, legitimizing, and presence-ing. First, I discussed deciding in meetings, treating this process as one of many that meetings use to ensure their continuation and reproduction, not vice versa (cf. Schwartzman, 1989). In analysis, I found that deciding did not always lead to decisions, thus organizing differently than we might otherwise expect. In several instances, I noticed that repetitive deciding may bring together unique assemblages, or *garbage cans* (March & Olsen, 1976; Schwartzman, 1981), each time, despite cultivating the same problem. I also turned my attention to the ways documents and meetings related to each other in deciding. I found that the relationship(s) between documents and meetings were similar to the relationship(s) between text and conversation through processes of translation and imbrication (Taylor & Van Every, 2000). Throughout my analysis of deciding, I noticed that it happened in rhythms. Rhythm ultimately displays that rationality is not necessarily the guiding force for meetings or deciding, nor should it be. Deciding works in pushes and pulls, pushing in with concerns and discussion, and pulling back toward emergent resolution. Meeting rhythms are an aspect of the “local sense” of meetings, and thus provide one aspect which Schwartzman (2015) referenced when she wrote, “there’s something about meetings that makes them resistant to efforts to change, improve, order, and make them predictable” (p. 735).
Second, in Chapter 5, I discussed legitimizing as another way meetings cultivate the transient effects of organization and culture. Legitimizing cultivates the effect of legitimacy, an appearance that often concerned participants of SPC. In particular, legitimizing for SPC took the shape of striving for a “professional backbone” upon which members could then use to legitimate disciplinary actions through policies or legitimize online work through professional-looking platforms that separated personal social media from working social media. Through (dis)ordering (Vásquez, et al., 2016), SPC authors a text to translate into future conversations and authorize leadership to police members’ social media, thus legitimizing actions and providing a “professional backbone.” In a different set of meetings, I found that shifts between four different online work platforms in four years demonstrated members’ desire to legitimize internal online work, often in an attempt to separate the personal and professional. In this way, legitimizing drags disorder toward (different) order. In the last narrative of the chapter, affects demonstrated their import for meetings, solidifying anxiety and decompression as two affects that worked in legitimizing. Affect, like rhythm, therefore contributes to the “local sense” of meetings.

Third, Chapter 6 demonstrated how presence-ing worked in meetings with technology. Hybrid and virtual technologies rendered the order of organization and culture present, as well as the disorder(s) of excesses like physical surroundings, possibilities not yet realized, and technical glitches. In this chapter I developed “a better understanding of what this hybrid [meeting] form looks like, feels like, and even ‘thinks’ like” (Schwartzman, 2015, p. 744). In doing this, I demonstrated that the “local sense” of hybrid meetings includes “more than” participants’ views of meeting functions. I found that especially the “thinking” of a hybrid meeting, and thus the “local sense,” is not located in a shared “sense” of human members, but rather moves through the mix of contingently obligatory relations in assemblage, including distractions, disruptions, and
interuptions. Therefore, these distractions, disruptions, and interruptions are integral to hybrid meetings and what they are doing in organizing. In “doing something” these distractions, disruptions, and interruptions mobilize order.

Finally, in Chapter 7, I used my own findings and the descriptive framework that I developed to suggest a way to use cultivation for design. Prompted by my participants throughout my fieldwork to improve the functioning of meetings and other kinds of communication, or to “do some good” in other ways, I include this chapter to explore how my findings in this dissertation can contribute to design. I orient to design through Gatt and Ingold’s (2013) correspondence relation, which “refers to being in accordance with the flow of events, to moving forward with people in the pursuit of their dreams and aspirations, rather than dwelling on their past” (Otto & Smith, 2013, p. 17-18, emphasis in original). I propose cultivation as a key concept for prospectively designing for transformative practice (Barge & Craig, 2009).

Cultivation for design involves two key qualities: improvisational practices must be continually repeated and researchers and participants must use foresight to determine which practices to “pull along” while understanding that there are forces outside of their (human) control. I conclude this chapter with four cultivation designs that I will implement in correspondence with other participants as I shift into the role of president.

Implications

My findings in this dissertation usher in a variety of implications. In this section I discuss the implications of these as they contribute to Schwartzman’s call for future meetings research, conversations in the Montreal School of CCO, and conversations in the ethnography of communication. I address each of these conversations in turn.

Implications for Schwartzman’s Future Directions
I designed this study to specifically address many of Schwartzman’s (2015) calls for future directions in meetings research. In this section, I discuss the implications of my findings for the kinds of conversations she started in her piece. In doing so, I first address how this study contributes to understanding the order-disorder dynamic, particularly focusing on the “local sense” of the meeting. Then I discuss how meetings are not tools, but instead provide different visions. Then I address her three more explicit future directions. First, how my study extends our knowledge about the relationship(s) between documents and meetings. Second, how my study contributes to understanding time and attention in meetings. Third, I wrap up this section with a description of what hybrid meetings look like, feel like, and “think” like.

Schwartzman (2015) begins her work describing an order-disorder dynamic in meetings. Order, which I have often shorthanded here in this dissertation as organization and culture, emerged through a variety of meeting actions. Beyond the interactional order that conversation analysts and others have studied previously (Asmuß, 2015; Raclaw & Ford, 2015), my work in this dissertation extends order to consider how deciding often reproduced previous versions of order through repetition, how legitimizing cultivated order in a “professional backbone,” and how hybrid meetings presenced organization and culture through technology.

Throughout this dissertation, I also focused on the disorder, or “local sense,” of meetings. Rhythm provided a “local sense” of the meeting through deciding, legitimizing, and presence-ing. Different aspects of meetings carried different staccatos, timbres, tones, and paces. I claimed that aspects of meetings that might otherwise be considered distractions, disruptions, and interruptions are necessary for the production of meetings, despite often laying outside what is considered to be order. Similar to Schwartzman’s (1981) concept of dancing, the rhythm concept provides language for “something about meetings” that resists efforts for change.
Rhythm, like disorder for Cooper (1986), is an “excess” or a “more than” order, but the necessary foundation out of which order is made possible as a “reduction” or a “less than.” Furthermore, another essential feature of organizing in meetings is legitimizing, which continually drags participants from disorder to order. This dragging through legitimizing provides an answer to the “something about meetings” that calls researchers and participants to want to change, control, and order this powerful constitutive form of communication. Finally, I found that despite often being considered disorderly, distractions, disruptions, and interruptions in hybrid meetings were integral to how meetings “do something” for organizing.

As Schwartzman (1989, 2015) has argued since her initial work on meetings, many times meetings are treated only as tools for organizing by other means. However, like her work, I demonstrate in this dissertation that meetings are not tools. Instead, I claim that meetings are emergent events. In Chapter 4, I demonstrated that meetings are events for organizing which cultivate transient effects of stability, which could be alternately named organization or culture. In Chapter 5, I showed how the legitimizing actions of meetings ordered organization and provided its desired, professional character. Finally, through Chapter 6, I described meetings as multifaceted events and experiences, particularly regarding the hybrid character of the meetings I studied. These three findings extend Schwartzman’s (1989) claim that meetings are not tools, but rather meetings are events. As I claim here, viewing them as emergent and not constitutive events allows us a look into how “meetings create pockets of order in an often disordered world, but they are also responsible for reversing, inverting, upsetting, and disassembling organizational worlds” (p. 313-314).

One of Schwartzman’s (2015) calls for future meetings research was to interrogate the relationship(s) between documents and meetings. Although she posed that Latour’s (2005)
mediator concept seemed to be promising, in this dissertation I used the Montreal School’s text-conversation dialectic as theoretical jumping off point (Taylor & Van Every, 2000). Through this perspective, I demonstrated that documents (texts), like the acquisition contract in Chapter 4, prompt meetings, focus discussion, and finally (re)create further meetings (conversation). Furthermore, documents establish and locate authority (cf. Taylor & Van Every, 2014), prompting its exercise in the process of organizing and legitimizing, as I detail in Chapter 5.

Schwartzman (2015) also called for attention to develop theories of time and attention in meetings. In Chapter 4, I demonstrated how the ebb and flow of deciding temporally punctuates the experience of meetings, providing a timely rhythm. In both Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, I discussed repetitive actions that refocus attention toward ongoing phenomena. In Chapter 4, the repetitive deciding about a mobile website and volunteer problems continually refocused attention throughout the lifetime of organizing. In Chapter 5, discussions of platforms took up time and attention within multiple meetings, and across these meetings, showing that time and attention prompt relationships between meetings. Finally, in Chapter 6, I demonstrated that among the looking, feeling, and “thinking” of hybrid meetings, technology allows for the display of attention during moments of technological “distractions” like checking social media posts or email. Furthermore, this chapter demonstrates the difference time makes in what is considered to be part of a meeting, especially in the shift between a meeting in retrospect and a meeting in process.

This brings me to Schwartzman’s final call for future research: “to develop a better understanding of what this hybrid [meeting] form looks like, feels like, and even ‘thinks’ like” (p. 744). Chapter 6 centered on this specific call for future research. Through this chapter, I demonstrated that how hybrid meetings look depends on what technology presences, and they
tend to look like life, including disorder. Furthermore, the full “local sense” of hybrid meetings, or how it feels and “thinks,” is accessible only in moments of meeting participation. Often these details are forgotten in retrospective memories or documents of meetings, although they powerfully shape the lived experience of meetings.

**Implications for the Montreal School**

This study contributes several implications for the Montreal School of CCO as well. First, this dissertation provides a long-needed empirical example of the Montreal School’s theoretical power in practice. Cooren, et al. (2008) called for “considerably more empirical work” (p. 1362) for the Montreal School, which remains a largely theoretical project. As Koschmann (2010) noted, the Montreal School’s “research is still quite abstract and conceptual at this point; it has yet to show the big payoffs that make scholars in other disciplines and organizational practitioners pay attention” (p. 433). My dissertation, based on a four-year ethnography of meetings, provides a new example of empirical work in the Montreal School, especially regarding concepts of (dis)ordering and cultivation. Furthermore, my study utilizes ethnography which allows me to demonstrate some of the longer-reaching effects of communication’s constitution of organization, primarily through cultivation.

Second, this dissertation focuses on cultivation, an underdeveloped concept in the Montreal School’s efforts toward theorizing how communication constitutes organization. Cultivation draws the analyst’s eye to how values, norms, beliefs, or ideals are “typically, traditionally, or usually invoked or conveyed by the respective participants” (Cooren, 2010, p. 114). Only one study of cultivation demonstrates its empirical value (Cooren, et al., 2013), whereas the other works that describe cultivation are theoretical and only draw on examples instead of original empirical work (Cooren, 2010, 2015b). In this dissertation, I took cultivation
as a central concept to discover how organization and culture come to be, thus focusing on
cultivation through several means. I discovered three actions that cultivated organization and
culture: deciding, legitimizing, and presence-ing. Each of these actions repeatedly appeared in
meetings, thus they continually worked toward cultivating. These actions likely cultivate
organization and culture in other sites, although further empirical work is required to discover
other means through which cultivation produces organization and culture.

Third, this study provides a framework for using cultivation for design. This move
contributes one possibility for the Montreal School to demonstrate the practical value of this
perspective. Cultivation for design aims to not only use the power of this concept in reflecting
on past practices, but also for designing improvisational practices to work toward (shifting)
ideals. In doing this, the designer uses foresight to “run ahead” and determine which practices to
“pull along” while understanding that there are forces outside of (human) control. Cultivation
for design demonstrates a way to help organizations change while attending to the ontological
and epistemological roots of this concept in the Montreal School.

Finally, my study adds to the variety of writing and representation practices used by
nonanthropological poetry, and Taylor and Van Every’s (2014) recent book demonstrating a
different mode of analytic transcript representation, I asserted the power of narratives for doing
representational work within the commitments of the Montreal School. As I wrote above, the
power of narratives lies in their ability to represent “an event in all its details” (Muñoz, 2014, p.
16). Rather than transcript excerpts and analysis, as used in Cooren, et al.’s (2013) empirical
piece on cultivation in addition to other studies in the Montreal School, narratives provide the
representational structure to incorporate contexts and display sociomaterial practices as they are,
rather than focusing closely on spoken language. Furthermore, narratives enabled me to utilize the multivocal style of writing I included in Chapters 4–6, which allowed me to display emergence in relation to the reader’s broadening understanding of meeting experiences. Ultimately, the writing styles and choices that I made epistemologically braid the knower with the known (Van Maanen, 2011), thus recognizing my role in the process of emerging new knowledge.

**Implications for the Ethnography of Communication**

Finally, my dissertation provides implications that extend the ethnography of communication. This study is grounded in an ontological turn with which the ethnography of communication has yet to become acquainted. I introduce this turn to the ethnography of communication and draw the attention of researchers in this tradition toward the ways in which technologies and other more-than-human actors participate in communication events alongside humans. Although focuses on technology have entered recent conversations in the ethnography of communication (see Milburn, 2015), these discussions often fall short of the sociomaterial focus of other technology scholars (see, for example, Orlikowski, 2007). As part of this ontological turn, I push the ethnography of communication to start to consider how cultural forms emerge or come to be, thus further pushing work in the direction Katriel (2015) set out. This shift is similar to a shift for which Milburn (2009) advocates, from “being” culture to “doing” culture. This ontological commitment pushed me to design a new descriptive framework for analyzing the emergence of meetings, which I detailed in Chapter 3. This ontological shift also opens up new questions for investigation, including: How do events come to be? How do the patterns ethnographers often find come to be? How do meetings become culture or organization?
My study also reconceptualizes a foundational concept of the ethnography of communication: communication events. Communication events, such as meetings, have been a hallmark concept of the ethnography of communication since Hymes’s (1972) original programmatic statements for this perspective. Communication events serve as one of the primary sites where communities integrate language and social life. Schwartzman (1989) claimed that meetings were a specialized form of communication events that could be found across cultures. In this dissertation, I extended Schwartzman’s (1989, 2015) view of meetings as events to consider them as emergent events. In doing so, I treated meetings as events that are a “bounded segment of the flow of activity and experience” (Bauman & Sherzer, 1975, p. 109).

In Hymes’s (1972) and Schwartzman’s (1989) statements of the communication events concept, both scholars were interested in patterns across meetings that displayed the cultural form of events, or meetings in particular. However, this focus draws our attention to the order of meetings. In my extension of this concept through the ontological turn, I discovered a way to find both order and disorder in meetings as emergent events. By foregrounding the event itself, rather than the people who participate in it, I claim that scholars can view how more-than-human actors act and affect the form and function of communication events. Each chapter demonstrates the power of this shift. In Chapter 4, I demonstrate the power of documents in meetings, as well as the discovery of meeting rhythms that structure interaction. In Chapter 5, I discussed how policies and technologies, like online platforms, show their import for capturing time and attention in meetings. Finally, in Chapter 6, the narratives represent how the “local sense” of the hybrid meeting included more than the participants’ views of meeting functions, instead capturing the full, situated experience of meeting, especially technology’s roles in the production of the event and the disorder-order dynamic. Overall, this move involves decentering the human
in events, and also looking for not just patterned communication, or order, but also including the uniqueness, or disorder, that emerges from specific events.

Finally, the writing and representation style that I chose for this study pushes the ethnography of communication to (re)consider its ethnographic roots. I was drawn to this tradition through Philipsen’s (1975) stories, and I found Muñoz’s (2014) work energizing to revitalize a tradition of writing and representation with narratives. Although I too enjoy a carefully crafted discourse analytic article that pulls apart the pieces of conversation in just the right ways, I feel drawn to the shorter narrative prefaces that set the scene for ensuing articles of ethnographic works. Just as recent cultural anthropologists have turned toward careful considerations of writing and representation of the worlds they ethnography (Narayan, 2012; Rosaldo, 2014; Stevenson, 2014; Tsing, 2005), I made similar moves in this dissertation. The multivocal style of my narratives attempts to walk the boundary line between fully narrative representations, like Muñoz’s (2014) work, fully discourse analytic work included in many if not most recent studies, and the inspirational beginnings with Philipsen’s (1975) creative weaving of stories and analysis.

**Meeting Comparisons**

Another hallmark of the ethnography of communication perspective is the comparative mode (Carbaugh, 2007), where an ethnographer compares empirical works around the same communication practice. Through this process researchers find both similarities and differences that can inform the transferability and uniqueness of a study’s findings. Among the scholars who have used the ethnography of communication in organization(s), Milburn’s (2009) and Schwartzman’s (1989) works come closest to the kind of analysis that I produce here. In this
section I address three comparisons across our studies, with particular attention to the importance and value of treating meetings as emergent events.

In her study of two nonprofit organizations, Milburn (2009) found that meetings were often a site for making decisions. Our studies agree that decisions are not singular products, but rather are outcomes or effects of processes. Our findings regarding the processes of decision-making or deciding, however, differ. Milburn argues that decision-making is a kind of talk that relies on an act sequence: identifying and describing problem(s), weighing options, posing optimal choices as legitimate or actionable, and finally identifying the people able and willing to carry out one or more actions. In my study, I found that deciding did not follow this act sequence, and instead worked in rhythms. Concerns arise in the process of identifying and describing problem(s) and weighing options. As participants address a concern, deciding returns to the looming emergent decision, rather than immediately moving to the next act in sequence. When someone voices another concern, and the rhythm repeats. This rhythmic undertow is key to understanding the “local sense” of meetings.

Documents are another area which I can compare my analysis to Milburn’s (2009) findings. Milburn, preempting Schwartzman’s (2015) call, focused on documents in nonprofits. She found that documents contributed to the “stability” of organizations, and rendered future organizational actions meaningful. I discuss the role of documents in Chapters 4 and 5 as texts (cf. Taylor & Van Every, 2000), especially considering how they translate into conversation, and how conversations imbricate to texts. Texts, like the social media policy in Chapter 5, not only render future actions meaningful, but the policy authorizes action in the first place (cf. Taylor & Van Every, 2014). In this sense of texts, documents provide the stability and meaningfulness of organizing that Milburn (2009) references because their lasting character traverses across
fleeting conversation. My analysis here, therefore, demonstrates how documents contribute to the “stability” of organizations through (dis)ordering, and also how they render future organizational actions meaningful in the order-disorder dynamic.

Finally, my study here also compares to aspects of Schwartzman’s (1989) analysis of Midwest Health Clinic. In her own work, Schwartzman (1989) wrote about the emotional styles of the therapists in meetings at Midwest. She described a group of people who valued expressing emotions during meetings. In SPC, members did not use the same kind of therapeutic or emotional talk during meetings, except to express passion, which I did not explore in this study. However, throughout this work, I wrote about affect (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010; Seigworth & Gregg, 2010), particularly in the tale about Mary’s sudden shaking decompression in Chapter 5. Schwartzman’s (1989) work did not account for the kinds of affective atmospheres meetings bring with them, which can cause agitation, anxiety, and the need for decompressing, if that is even the right word for what happened. My empirical findings about affect are unique from the literature on meetings and affect or emotion (Lei & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2015), and I would like future empirical analyses to focus on this phenomenon in order to see if there are similarities or differences that can be traced across meeting events. Affect was another of my findings that contributed to the “local sense” of meetings, thus coming closer to understanding the order-disorder dynamic.

**Future Directions**

This dissertation centers around one rich ethnographic case study of meetings, and thus in the spirit of the ethnography of communication, I want to see more ethnographies of meetings and comparisons between and across them. Furthermore, this dissertation involves a researcher positioned as an insider to the phenomenon under scrutiny here: meetings. Although this insider
status may seem limiting in some respects, it enabled me connect dots that may have otherwise
gone unnoticed and to readily correspond with participants because I was also intimately
invested in the success of SPC. As researchers take up the call to study and understand meetings
differently, I want to push this body of research in several directions based on my own findings
and curiosities.

Like Schwartzman (2015), I want to see more work that pushes the boundaries of our folk
theories of meetings. Like the answers that I posed in this dissertation, I want to see more
research that develops the relationship between order and disorder in meetings. I also hope more
researchers take up the torch against tightly coupling individual intent, organizational processes,
and organizational action in interpretation of meetings and other forms of organizing.
Additionally, future research should push at the relationships between meetings and documents,
particularly focusing on how each shapes the other and in what ways. Perhaps there is a future
study in taking the perspective of documents which views meetings as part of the documenting
assemblage, thus turning the tables on my work here. Furthermore, more focus should be given
to time and attention in meetings. This was not a primary focus of my study, but time and
attention snuck into narratives. Finally, I added understanding of how one hybrid meeting form
looks like, feels like, and “thinks” like, but this is work that should be repeated elsewhere to
compare results. What aspects are technological? What aspects depend more on the particular
human users? As a meeting form that seems to be on the rise in our technological age, I look
forward to much more research on hybrid meetings.

As meetings researchers attend to these pushes for future directions, in this dissertation I
add a perspective of meetings as emergent events, which so far had not been articulated in the
literature on meetings research. The power of this perspective, based in the relational ontological
turn (DeLanda, 2006; Cooper, 2005), lies in its ability to demonstrate *how* effects like organization, culture, and the order-disorder dynamic come to be. In this project, I claimed that deciding, legitimizing, and presence-ing answered these questions. Using the wealth of literature on the effects of meetings as inspiration, I urge future meetings researchers to use this perspective and discover *how* these effects come to be.

On the subject of emergent effects, I want to see more attention to affect in meetings. Lei and Lehmann-Wilhenbrock (2015) push this research toward more contextual than individual assumptions about affect. However, they did not engage with the body of work generated in affect theory (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010), which produces interesting intersections with the view of meetings as emergent events, especially since affect theory and meetings as emergent events share similar ontological foundations. Furthermore, as I discovered rhythm in the analysis included here, I hope that future meetings researchers take up this emergent effect to discover the ways that it works in other meetings.

As both the ethnography of communication and the Montreal School grapple with applied moves and the practical value of our scholarship, I hope that my contribution of cultivation for design provides a(nother) way to address this practical value. One of my own future research directions will be to “revisit” this project after some time has passed, to reflect on and describe the results of my design interventions that I detail in Chapter 7. As the first statement of cultivation for design, I anticipate that others might be able to adapt this to different kinds of research and concepts. I anticipate that my work, and others who adapt cultivation for design for their own purposes, will powerfully demonstrate the practical value of communication research in organizational settings.
Finally, this dissertation prompts future research that pays attention to writing and representation for research. As meetings research, the Montreal School, and the ethnography of communication move forward, each of these literatures should reflect on their writing and representation practices. Although there are notable exceptions to the typical writing and representation practices in each of these areas (Schwartzman, 1989; Brummans, 2007; Muñoz, 2014, respectively), more researchers should discover and use writing and representation practices that adapt to their results and theoretical foundations. In this dissertation, I used narratives to represent “an event in all its details” (Muñoz, 2014, p. 16), and to represent emergence with the text for the reader. Anthropologists have recently re-turned toward a focus on writing practices (Narayan, 2012; Rosaldo, 2014; Stevenson, 2014; Tsing, 2005; Van Maanen, 2011), and I want communication research to similarly take this moment of ontological turning to widely reflect on its writing practices.

Conclusion: The Meeting Revisited

I conclude this dissertation similarly to Schwartzman’s (2015) concluding sentiment: “but I am greedy: I want more and will eagerly await the next volume because, as I said, ‘there’s something about meetings...’” (p. 744, emphasis in original). The tales of meetings that I include throughout this dissertation come out of organizing SPC alongside other members and more-than-human participants, and I would not have been able to produce this work without them. Without SPC’s initial lack of meetings, I would not have found myself as intrigued by this form as I became over the last four years. It is my hope that SPC’s stories resonated with you, the reader, as you wove your way through the text.

However, my work is also largely inspired by Helen Schwartzman’s near-tireless advocacy for more research on this illusive communication event. Many other scholars have
drawn inspiration from her work, and I cite much of that work throughout this dissertation. Here I add another volume to these efforts, with a shifted ontology, different perspectives, and an ethnographic focus. I look forward to more work like what I have produced here, because I, too, am greedy for more. After all, there’s something about meetings…
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doi:10.1016/j.pragma.2010.01.016


APPENDIX 1

TIMELINE OF KEY EVENTS

Timeline of Key Events for Suicide Prevention Campaign

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>May</td>
<td>Mary’s vision (from God) for SPC – a mental health fair. Began organizing on her own</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>May</td>
<td>Volunteer interest meeting; detailed steps to becoming an “official” nonprofit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>May</td>
<td>Facebook groups created for online organizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>July</td>
<td>First board meeting held to approve incorporation documents, bylaws, and necessary policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>September</td>
<td>Switched online organizing platform to Wiggio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>October</td>
<td>Katie received IRB approval (exempted status) to study SPC’s meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>January</td>
<td>Filed for nonprofit status with Pennsylvania, then IRS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>April</td>
<td>IRS 501(c)3 status granted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>September</td>
<td>Discussed and approved Keep Living Ministries acquisition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>December</td>
<td>Switched online organizing platform to Google Groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>October</td>
<td>Applied for first grants to implement school events (now a three-stage process – teacher training, student education, and mental health fair)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>March</td>
<td>First school events coordinated with local school districts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>December</td>
<td>Switched online organizing platform to Microsoft SharePoint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>December</td>
<td>Katie stopped data collection of meetings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 2

PARTICIPANTS

Participants by pseudonym, organizational roles, and years involved

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organizational Role(s)</th>
<th>Years Involved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>Secretary (2012-2013), board member, chair of education committee (2012-present), member of community resources committee</td>
<td>2012-present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craig</td>
<td>Treasurer (2014-present), board member, co-chair of fundraising committee (2014-2016)</td>
<td>2014-present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>Board member, member of education committee, member of KLM, member of fundraising committee, member of design committee, web developer</td>
<td>2012-present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dave</td>
<td>Founder of KLM, board member, chair of KLM (2014-2016)</td>
<td>2014-2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doug</td>
<td>Board member, member of education committee</td>
<td>2012-2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dylan</td>
<td>Member of design committee, “photomancer”</td>
<td>2012-present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felicity</td>
<td>Member of design committee, graphic designer</td>
<td>2016-present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph</td>
<td>IT coordinator, member of KLM</td>
<td>2012-present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>President (2017-present), board member, internal consultant, chair of community resources committee (2012-2013), co-chair of fundraising committee (2016-present), grants coordinator, member of education committee, dissertation author</td>
<td>2012-present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Secretary (2014-present), board member, member of education committee, member of KLM</td>
<td>2012-present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lise</td>
<td>Secretary (2014), board member, chair of design committee, chief graphic designer</td>
<td>2012-present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Founder, president &amp; chair of the board (2010-2017), executive director, member of all committees, co-chair of fundraising committee (2014-present), event coordinator</td>
<td>2010-present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Board member, chair of KLM (2016-present)</td>
<td>2016-present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sean</td>
<td>Treasurer (2012-2014), board member, chair of fundraising committee (2012-2014)</td>
<td>2012-2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theresa</td>
<td>Board member, chair of marketing committee (2015-present), member of design committee</td>
<td>2013-present</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### APPENDIX 3

#### MEETING RECORD

Suicide Prevention Campaign Meeting Record

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11/24/2012</td>
<td>Fundraising Committee</td>
<td>Documents, Recording</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/1/2012</td>
<td>Education Committee</td>
<td>Documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/8/2012</td>
<td>Board of Directors (annual meeting)</td>
<td>Documents, Recording</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/15/2012</td>
<td>Marketing Committee</td>
<td>Documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/22/2012</td>
<td>Community Resources Committee</td>
<td>Documents, Recording</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/24/2013</td>
<td>Marketing Committee</td>
<td>Documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/12/2013</td>
<td>Community Resources Committee</td>
<td>Documents, Recording</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/28/2013</td>
<td>Education Committee</td>
<td>Documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/28/2013</td>
<td>Board of Directors</td>
<td>Documents, Recording</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/15/2013</td>
<td>Board of Directors (annual meeting)</td>
<td>Documents, Recording</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/22/2014</td>
<td>Fundraising Committee</td>
<td>Documents, Fieldnotes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/6/2014</td>
<td>Board of Directors</td>
<td>Documents, Recording</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/5/2014</td>
<td>KLM</td>
<td>Documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/5/2014</td>
<td>Design Committee</td>
<td>Documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/26/2014</td>
<td>KLM</td>
<td>Documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/2/2014</td>
<td>Board of Directors</td>
<td>Documents, Recording</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/7/2014</td>
<td>Board of Directors (annual meeting)</td>
<td>Documents, Recording</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/21/2015</td>
<td>Education Committee</td>
<td>Documents, Recording</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/25/2015</td>
<td>KLM</td>
<td>Documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/18/2015</td>
<td>KLM</td>
<td>Documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/27/2015</td>
<td>Board of Directors</td>
<td>Documents, Recording</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/8/2015</td>
<td>Katie’s Annual Review</td>
<td>Recording</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/5/2015</td>
<td>Board of Directors (annual meeting)</td>
<td>Documents, Recording</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/9/2016</td>
<td>KLM</td>
<td>Documents, Recording</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/21/2016</td>
<td>Fundraising Committee</td>
<td>Documents, Recording</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/4/2016</td>
<td>Design Committee</td>
<td>Documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/13/2016</td>
<td>Education Committee</td>
<td>Documents, Recording</td>
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APPENDIX 4

ANALYSIS OUTLINE

I. Deciding
   a. Hopes/Progress
      i. Wiggio, Google Groups (vs. meetings)
      ii. Email newsletter
      iii. Mobile website
      iv. Website updates
      v. Bloggers
      vi. Marketing (social media)
      vii. KLM acquisition
   b. Internet Work
      i. Website (content)
      ii. Social Media
      iii. Grantwriting
      iv. Emailing potential collaborators
      v. Craigslist (and other) recruiting volunteers
      vi. Googling
      vii. Design
   c. Work Channel
      i. Shifting to Wiggio/GGroups
      ii. Announcements vs. decisions, critique
      iii. Post more often
      iv. Need active goals
      v. Inactivity on Wiggio – extra activity on Mary’s email
   d. Disappear/Absence
      i. Volunteers “drop off the face of the earth”
      ii. Assumption is agreement
      iii. 3 strikes you’re out rule
      iv. Not responding?
      v. How to retain volunteers?
      vi. “Dead weight”
   e. Obstacles to Work
      i. Board changes
      ii. Response time
      iii. Schedule hassles
      iv. Computer-ese
      v. Age (tech savvy, skills, comfort of older volunteers)
   f. Awful/Fears
      i. Email glitches, Wiggio alert troubles
      ii. Low payoff (email newsletter)
      iii. What is Google Groups good for?
      iv. Website migration trouble
      v. Wiggio / Google Groups not interactive
Overwhelming platform design
Social media and bullying, suicide

II. Legitimizing
a. Polic(y)ing the Brand, Polic(y)ing Ourselves (relating public, org, and volunteers)
   i. Social Media policy discussion
   ii. Inciting incident(s)
   iii. How “formal”/strict to be with volunteers
   iv. Wording it properly (“monitoring”)
b. “A Professional Backbone”: Platforming (relating volunteers)
   i. Need to coordinate work online “to replace meetings” – people have “busy
      lives”, this is more convenient, (an underlying expectation of “being”
      online?)
   ii. Wiggio from Facebook (too “personal”)
      1. Norming – optimal number, disorganization = meeting, post and
         acknowledge rule
      2. Document storage – using documents in meeting, migrate docs to
         Google, storage confusion
      3. Work on Wiggio – Choosing KLM logo, resource packets
   iii. Google Groups from Wiggio
      1. First suggestion, second suggestion (2013-2014)
      2. Sandboxed
      3. Voted in
      4. Purposing and use – announcements rather than collaboration
   iv. SharePoint
      1. Migration for free storage (Mary’s decision)
      2. Board sandboxed and reviewed
      3. SharePoint review meeting (2016)
v. Email detractor
      1. Access emails ok?
      2. Lise’s to-do lists
      3. Email vs. Groups

III. Presence-ing
a. Wonderful
   i. Calling in/out
   ii. People just appear (Google Hangouts)
   iii. Acknowledge computer (presenting mode)
   iv. Virtual group in strategic plan meeting
   v. See people’s surroundings
   vi. Share screens
   vii. Adjust “view” of people
   viii. Multiple people at once
   ix. Thumbs up, raising hands
   x. Physically move laptop & conversation
   xi. Introductions and distance
b. Inter-tech collaboration
   i. Phone and video conference
ii. Watch videos
iii. Emailed documents to read now
iv. Texting others about attention
v. Googling info
vi. Skype chat and video
vii. File transfers
c. Hybrid Presence
   i. “Where are we” laptop, tv
   ii. On the way and arrival (Strat plan)
   iii. Turn taking trouble
   iv. Phone falls down
   v. Point @ screen doesn’t indicate
   vi. Point of order – take a break
   vii. Double conversations
   viii. Online group (strategic plan)
   ix. Hear well enough to take min?
   x. Sound tests
d. Awful
   i. Virtual people ignored
   ii. Mic levels interruption
   iii. Internet died
   iv. Computer froze
   v. Kicked out, returning
   vi. Audio glitches
   vii. Mic problems (sound like T-Pain)
   viii. Mic delays
   ix. Browser issues
   x. Video glitches
   xi. Navigating presenting screen
   xii. Can’t hear people
   xiii. Person not in room
   xiv. Mary’s computer died
   xv. Interruptions due to tech designs
e. Inter-Tech Interruptions
   i. Internet died
   ii. Reminder and other computer sounds, typing
   iii. Phone interruptions (calls, ringtones)
   iv. Text messages
   v. Hangouts drawing and screenshots
   vi. Mic feedback sounds