Career Narrative for Guggenheim Fellowship Application

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I have a tin can on my desk that I bought in Budapest in the autumn of 1989. It's considerably smaller than your standard tuna can and extremely light in weight. If you tap your fingernail on it, it gives a hollow ring. But the label, complete with a universal bar code, announces in bold letters that, in fact, it's not empty: "Kommunizmus Utolso Lehelete" – "The Last Breath of Communism."

If I were so inclined, I could take my tin can as a facile metaphor for the transition in Eastern Europe. The last breath of communism marketed by a clever entrepreneur represents the irrepressible urge to truck and barter released by the fresh winds of the free market. Exhale communism, inhale capitalism.

I can't use the tin can as such a metaphor because I know the conditions under which it was actually manufactured. (More on that below.) Instead, I'll use the tin can as a marker in my career narrative, a mid-point between graduate studies at Harvard ten years earlier and chairing the Sociology Department at Columbia ten years later. How was it that I came to be in Budapest shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall? How did my earlier research accomplishments allow me to make sense of the can? And what are the major contours of my work since?

As a graduate student trained by Theda Skocpol and Alessandro Pizzorno, I was interested in comparative sociology, especially with understanding the similarities and differences in industrial organization in capitalist and socialist economies. I received a fellowship from Harvard for dissertation research in Yugoslavia to study "peasant-workers," an analytically strategic social group because they lived in two social worlds – village and industry – and moved between them on a diurnal basis. But Tito was dying, the political situation was completely uncertain, and I was prohibited from doing fieldwork in Croatia and Serbia alike. I returned to Harvard and began studying Polish. But a year later, the possiblities of field work in Poland were cut short by martial law.

My dissertation had to be based on library and archival research. It focused on a comparison of Taylorism and Leninism -- not in the conventional way that Lenin was fascinated by the prospects of introducing Taylorism into state-owned firms, but on each as new class projects tied to "scientific" knowledge claims in different domains. Whereas the scientific management of the firm claimed legitimacy on the basis of the "laws" derived from "time and motion studies," the ability to manage an economy scientifically rested on claims to knowledge of the "laws of motion of history." The irony was that the attempt to scientifically manage an economy through the budgetary instruments of central planning made it impossible to introduce rationalized principles of scientific mangement within the firm.

The dissertation got me a job in Sociology at Duke. More importantly, the articles that made up, or evolved out of, the dissertation won the attention of two senior scholars who were generous

with their support and encouragement. Pierre Bourdieu invited me to Paris. (My first visiting apointment there was in the Summer of 1983 at his invitation. In the Fall term of 1986, I was a Visiting Research Associate at the Centre de Sociologie Politique et Morale at the invitation of Luc Boltanski.) And Janos Kornai invited me to Budapest. "You're a persistent young man," he said upon hearing that I still wanted to do field work after my Yugoslav and Polish disappointments. "Come to Hungary and we'll do what we can to help you get access to firms." My first research visit to Budapest was in the late summer of 1983. Many, many visits have followed since. (During the 1993/94 academic year, I was a Visiting Fellow at the Collegium Budapest/Institute for Advanced Study at Janos Kornai's invitation.)

From 1983 to 1989, I worked with a young sociologist, Janos Lukacs, in field work in Hungarian enterprises and engaged in an ongoing dialogue with Kornai as well as with Csaba Mako (an industrial sociologist), Laszlo Bruszt (a political sociologist), and Istvan Gabor (a labor economist). This research was supported by grants and fellowships from the International Research and Exchanges Board (1985-86) and from the East European Program of the ACLS/SSRC. In 1984-85 I took a leave from Duke at Harvard's Center for European Studies supported by one of these ACLS/SSRC Postdoctoral Fellowships.

This field research provided the basis for several major studies in comparative institutional analysis. One of these, "Rethinking Internal Labor Markets: New Insights from a Comparative Perspective," explored patterns of labor allocation and reward in the capitalist and socialist firm. Its central premise can be presented in capsule form: in capitalist economies, where the firm faces uncertainties from a market environment, managers and workers seek to mitigate these uncertainties through a set of internal bureaucratic rules operating according to a classificatory logic. In state socialist economies, by contrast, where uncertainties originate in a bureaucratic environment, managers and workers seek to mitigate these uncertainties through a set of internal market transactions operating according to an affiliative logic. This paper won the 1989 annual award from the Organizations and Occupations Section of the American Sociological Association for the best article published within the preceeding three years in the field of organizational analysis.

At the same time that I was elaborating institutional comparisons across social systems, I was also taking the lead in promoting systematic comparisons across socialist economies – specifically, China and Eastern Europe. In the Spring of 1986, I was co-organizer (with Victor Nee) of the first international conference that brought together economists, sociologists, and political scientists from the US, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, and China. *Remaking the Economic Institutions of Socialism: China and Eastern Europe* (Stanford University Press, 1989) was the result of that meeting. The lead essay of that book, "Toward an Institutional Analysis of State Socialism," by Stark and Nee charted a new course for the study of state socialism as it argued against the state-centered bias of the dominant paradigms. In their place it pointed to the relative autonomy of society, that is, to the emergence of spheres of activity relatively autonomous from the state as subordinate groups limit the manuverability of state elites. The validity of this view (which appeared first in my essay with Charles Sabel in 1982 and was elaborated with Nee during the 1986 conference) was dramatically confirmed by the events in East Central Europe in 1989.

My career narrative has arrived to the Fall of 1989 and to the streets of Budapest where I bought the tin can containing “The Last Breath of Communism.” Why couldn’t I use it as a facile metaphor for the toggle-switch “transition” from communism to capitalism? The problem the can presented for the dichotomies of public to private, or plan to market, was that it was not produced in the garage workshop of a petty entrepreneur but right in the heart of a state-owned enterprise by a workteam which, since 1982, had been taking advantage of legislation that allowed employees of socialist firms to form "intra-enterprise partnerships." Like many thousands of such intrapreneurial partnerships, this group of thirty workers in a large factory had been running factory equipment on the "off-hours" and on weekends, subcontracting to the parent enterprise and getting orders from outside firms. The limited batch run of "The Last Breath of Communism" was a good joke, but the venture had been a serious one.

Since 1983, I had been studying these intrapreneurial partnerships (18 such groups in six Hungarian enterprises). These internal subcontracting units were a curious mixture of public property and private gain. As they blurred organizational boundaries, the partnerships were a form of organizational hedging: managers gained flexibility within the terms of state property, and workers gained higher incomes without losing the benefits of employment in the socialist sector. Not entirely unlike the “peasant-workers” that I had wanted to study in Yugoslavia, the partners were living in two social worlds. But this was an even more extraordinary social laboratory for an organizational sociologist: in the same factory, using the same technology, workers were moving on a daily basis from bureaucratic to non-bureaucratic organizational forms as the organization of work, selection of supervisors, and methods of internal payment were left to the discretion of the subcontracting units. (“From 6 to 2 we work for them; from 2 to 6 we work for ourselves,” went the common expression.) In a series of papers I explored how this fascinating organizational innovation was a bricolage of public and private and a mixture of multiple evaluative principles from the logics of markets, redistribution, and reciprocity. One of these papers (“Work, Worth, and Justice,” published by Bourdieu in *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*) was drafted in Paris where I was working closely with Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thevenot while they were writing *De la justification: Les economies de la grandeur*.

From my research in Hungarian factories during the 1980s, I concluded that the societies of Eastern Europe were decidedly not systems organized around a single logic; nor were they likely to become, any more or less than our own, societies with a single system identity. A modern society is not a unitary social order but a multiplicity of orders, a plurality of ordering principles for reaching agreement, a polyphony of accounts of work, value, and justice. Change, even fundamental change, of the social world is not the passage from one order to another but rearrangements in the patterns of how these orders are interwoven.

Thus, instead of transition, I examined transformation, in which the introduction of new elements most typically combines with adaptations, rearrangements, and reconfigurations of existing organizational forms. Instead of institutional vacuum, I examined institutional legacies rethinking the metaphor of collapse to ask whether differences in how the pieces fell apart have consequences for rebuilding new institutions. Instead of examining country cases according to the degree to which they conform to or depart from a pre-established model, I looked at differences in kind and asked how different paths of extrication from state socialism shape different possibilities of transformation. Instead of building tabla ras on the ruins of

communism, I examined how actors in particular locales and settings were rebuilding organizations and institutions with the ruins of communism. I looked at actors, already accustomed to renogiating the ambiguity of contradictory social forms, face new uncertainties by improvising on practiced routines. Instead of grand schemes of architecture,of social engineering, and designer capitalism, I examined transformative processes of bricolage.

Most important, instead of thinking about institutional change or organizational innovation as replacement, I examined it as reconfigurations and rearrangements of existing institutional elements. In short, I thought of organizational innovation as recombination.

My research on these themes during the early and mid 1990s was supported by various grants and fellowships including several grants from the National Science Foundation (1990-91, 1991-92); grants from the National Council for Soviet and East European Research (1991-93), the World Bank (1994-95), the International Research and Exchanges Board (1995); postdoctoral fellowships from the ACLS/SSRC (1989-90 and 1995-96); brief Visiting Fellowships at the Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen,Vienna (January 1993), and the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (June 1993); and extended Visiting Fellowships at Cornell's Society for the Humanities (1989-90), and the Collegium Budapest (1993-94). My contributions to economic sociology in this period included "From Plan to Market or from Plan to Clan?" (1990) "Path Dependence and Privatization Strategies in East Central Europe" (1992), "Recombinant Property in East European Capitalism," (1996), and *Restructuring Networks in Postsocialism: Legacies, Linkages, and Localities* (co-edited with Gernot Grabher, Oxford University Press 1997). Each of these articles (as well as the lead essay, "Organizing Diversity: Evolutionary Theory, Network Analysis, and the Postsocialist Transformations," for the Oxford volume) have been widely translated and reprinted. I am especially pleased that these papers are available in several East European languages and are used for teaching purposes in the region.

Alongside my research on changes in enterprises, I also studied changes in the political field with special interest in the relationship between transformations of politics and property. In the decade of the 1990s the societies of Eastern Europe faced the distinctively postsocialist challenge: Could the extension of property rights and the extension of citizenship rights be achieved simultaneously? The simultaneous emergence of newly propertied classes and newly enfranchised subordinate groups posed the central postsocialist problem of how to restructure economies when those who perceive their interests to be threatened by economic change have the means to replace political incumbents and choose among competing political programs. *Postsocialist Pathways: Transforming Politics and Property in East Central Europe* (co-authored with Laszlo Bruszt, Cambridge 1998, and written while I was a Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, 1995-96), addressed these problems in a comparative study of Hungary, Poland, East Germany, and the Czech Republic. Our book received the 1999 Distinguished Publication Award from the Section on Political Economy of the World System of the American Sociological Association. As a sign of its centrality in the discipline of sociology, my "Recombinant Property" paper and the Stark and Bruszt *Postsocialist Pathways* book were featured in the two major symposia that the *American Journal of Sociology* (1996 and 2001) has organized on the postsocialist transformations.

Meanwhile, I had moved from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, to Cornell, to Columbia in 1997 where I was appointed Arnold A. Saltzman Professor of Sociology and International Affairs and became the chair of the Department of Sociology during a period of institutional rebuilding.

My intellectual development since moving to Columbia has been strongly influenced by my affiliation with the Santa Fe Instititute. I have had visiting appointments at SFI in the summers of 1998, 1999, and 2000, and was honored to be appointed to its External Faculty in 2000. In analyzing the East European transformations, I had been drawing on recent developments in evolutionary theory to caution that although all-encompassing privatization and marketization might foster adaptation in the shortrun, the consequent loss of organizational diversity might impede adaptability in the long run. This theme, together with my questioning of attempts to restructure an economy by design and my attention to the emergent properties of property, resonated with the Institute's emphasis on emergent, self-organizing processes. My contributions to network analysis of the East European transformations continue to find stimulating interlocutors in SFI faculty such as John Padgett, Walter Powell, and Duncan Watts.

During the 1990-2000 and 2000-01 academic years, I explored these themes further in a Sawyer Seminar entitled "Heterarchy: Distributed Intelligence and the Organization of Diversity," sponsored by a major grant from Andrew W. Mellon foundation. To that seminar and to a workshop at SFI in fall 2000 I invited scholars from sociology, political science, philosophy, computer science, biology, legal theory, and science and technology studies. Heterarchies are new organizational forms that involve lateral accountability and heterogenous evaluative principles. The collaborative structures and the organizational reflexivity they promote do not result simply from flattened hierarchy but also from the active rivalry of competing and coexisting organizing principles. Heterachies make wealth by fostering more than one way of evaluating worth. My publications on this topic include studies in *The Biology of Business* (edited by John Clippinger, Jossey-Bass, 1999) and *The Twenty-First-Century Firm: Changing Economic Organization in International Perspective* (edited by Paul DiMaggio, Princeton, 2001). My critical contribution to economic sociology, "For a Sociology of Worth," was prepared as the keynote address for the European Association of Evolutionary Economics (Fall 2000) and is forthcoming in *Theory, Culture and Society*.

In addition to chairing the Department of Sociology and directing the Heterarchy seminar, I have also been active in directing a new Center on Organizational Innovation. At mid-century, organizational analysts at Columbia, including Peter Blau, Alvin Gouldner, Paul Lazarsfeld, and Robert Merton charted the rise of bureaucratic organizations and the emergence of mass communication through case studies of work groups and the demographics of audience reception. At our century's turn, the challenge of our new center at Columbia is to chart the emergence of collaborative organizational forms in an era of interactive media. As part of these efforts, I have recently completed an ethnographic study of a new media startup firm in Manhattan's Silicon Alley co-authored with Monique Girard and forthcoming in a special volume of *Environment and Planning* on "projects" as organizational forms.

My new interests in technology and my longstanding interests in organizational innovation in Eastern Europe recently combined in a research project supported by grants from the Aspen Institute (2000-01), the National Council on Eurasian and East European Research (2000-01),

and the National Science Foundation (2001-02). This study addresses, on one side, the emergence of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as new types of actors – new, not simply because they are making new kinds of representational claims outside of electoral politics but also because they exhibit new organizational topographies, frequently involving regional, transnational, even global networks. It addresses, on the other side, the emergence of the Internet and related information and interactive technologies – new, not simply because they provide a new medium of representation in a virtual public sphere but also because their adoption makes possible fundamental changes in the character of organization.

The postsocialist societies of Eastern Europe provide an extraordinary laboratory for exploring the coevolution of organizational forms and interactive technology: the emergence of voluntary associations in the region coincides with the digital revolution. Prior to 1989, there were almost no NGOs in the conventional sense in Eastern Europe, and the Internet was in its infancy. Before 1989, the small number of beleaguered voluntary associations communicated by *samizdat*, frequently circulating texts that were literally in manuscript, some even in the handwriting of elementary school children who had painstakingly copied a parent's writings so it could circulate more widely. Today, both NGOs and the Internet are experiencing exponential growth throughout the region. In the time span of little more than a decade, the technological framework in which voluntary associations are operating has gone from the limitations of a pre-Guttenburg setting to the opportunities of advanced communication technologies.

As the postsocialist societies face the challenge of regional and global integration, NGOs serve as digital crossroads – boundary-spanning networks linked in transnational webs enabled by interactive technology. With my collaborator, Laszlo Bruszt, we are exploring the new forms of organization, representation, and accountability that emerge with the introduction of new interactive technologies. We are extending our earlier work on democratization to examine new patterns of representative politics in which interactive technologies are creating new representational forums. We examine NGOs as sites of competing and coexisting value systems (efficiency, solvency, mission, participation, mobilization, etc.) in which the ongoing rivalry of evaluative principles can be a source of organizational reflexivity fostering innovation. At the same time, however, this organizational heterogeneity can give rise to problems of accountability – with the danger that actors who are accountable according to many principles become accountable to none.

Having completed my term as Chair of the Department of Sociology, I am eligible for a sabbatic leave in 2002-03 which I will devote to the project (outlined in my plan) that extends and deepens my earlier work on property transformation in East European capitalism.