The Materiality of Failure:

Using Organizational Archeology to Theorize the De-Organized Firm

ABSTRACT

Using a combination of historical and ethnographic methods and drawing on theories of materiality in science and technology studies theories, we develop the concept of *organizational archeology*, which combines ethnographic, archival, and historical approaches to uncover the different stages of failure and illuminate the micro-processes of de-organization. Using the ethnographic research in a failing national law firm, we identify three such stages of the material process of failure: 1) *deceleration* of artifacts in their circulation through the social and organizational channels within a failing organization, 2) *conversion* of those artifacts that have value in other realms outside the failing organization, and finally, 3) *distillation* of a particular class of artifacts, *organizational artifacts*. Organizational artifacts are those material objects that operate within a specific firm, have limited use in other settings, are generally understood as communally owned and managed by the organization, and have no overriding individual or commercial value outside the organization. Present in even the smallest organizations, organizational artifacts are most explicitly revealed through the process of failure. This emergent definition of organizational artifacts allows scholars working on materiality in extant organizations conceptual tools to identify artifacts that have meaningful organizational valence. By bringing the material perspective to bear upon the process of organizational failure, we extend the theoretical reach of work both on organizational lifecycles and on the study of materiality.

Acknowledgements to follow.

> *Michelangelo was once asked how he had carved his marble masterpiece. The sculptor apocryphally responded that nothing could be simpler; all one needed was to remove everything that was not David. (Galison 1987, p. 256)*

What is the material basis of organization? This paper extends recent research on artifacts and organization through an inductive study of the failure in 2003 of Brobeck, Phleger & Harrison, a national law firm. Confronting an atypical research setting, we necessarily developed organizational archeology, a hybrid research methodology combining elements of ethnography, archival science, and history especially well-suited to the study of failing or failed organizations. Using this method, we discovered three phases of organizational disbanding, each capturing changes in the momentum of artifacts circulating in the organization. These three phases—deceleration, conversion, and distillation—result in the positive specification of unique organizational artifacts and constitute the material burial of a failing organization. The resulting roadmap to studying the failing organization highlights the opportunity to pursue organizational research throughout the organizational lifecycle, while simultaneously offering a complementary, material view of organization defined by the circulation and curation of organizational artifacts.

The study included our visits to four former offices of the failing law firm, our interactions with former members of the organization, and our encounters with the artifacts in the former offices. Everywhere, the materiality of the firm continued to exist even as the organization itself was disbanding. During the process of failure, we argue, an organization can be defined in the negative, much as a photograph is printed from its reverse image: in the world of things, the organization is comprised of those things cared for only by the organization itself. A traditional reading of the literatures on both material culture and organizational failure might suggest that artifacts absent the people, routines, and groups among which they circulated become merely trash.[1] What we find is the

[1] In fact, within the scholarly traditions of archeological and science and technology studies, trash is very much a valuable artifact. Corporate refuse, in particular, has been central to many legal dénouements. Trash has yet to figure in organizational research.

opposite—those artifacts left behind are *organizational artifacts*, the very stuff of organization.

In contrast to the many scholars who have studied artifacts operating within organizations, we were privy to seeing these artifacts *in situ* as the organization ceased to function. Organizational death, or de-organizing, is neither random nor sudden, but an organized process that involves different actors and activities than those present in the everyday life of "healthy" organizations.[2] If, as Harris and Sutton (1986) have written, failed organizations can have "wakes," we were witness to a "burial" evidenced through the organization's disposal of artifacts. This experience raised three questions: 1) how can artifacts be interpreted within the context of organizational failure; 2) what might artifacts tell researchers about the process of failure; 3) and, in turn, how might scholarly attention to artifacts influence theories of organization? The rich evidence that we found in one failed firm helps to tell a story of the process of dismantling the organization and points to new ways of examining the central roles that artifacts play in organizations more generally.

When organizations "die" they leave behind material traces of their existence. In studying a failing organization, we found a paradox along with its material remains: those artifacts that were the most heavily invested with organizational value and meaning were the least likely to be saved. While this finding may not at first seem intuitive, it makes sense when considering these artifacts within the process of disbanding. At the end of that process the organization, the entity that lays the greatest claim to such artifacts, no longer exists. Our experience in the field shows that in the process of failure, the artifacts that are most specific to the formerly functioning organization and that most embody its routines and process are precisely those that are abandoned. During disbanding, an organization often places the materials that are the most deeply invested with organizational meaning at the bottom of the list of priorities on which to spend scarce remaining resources. Forms, files, flowcharts: these are among the many artifacts that organizations inscribe with instrumental, symbolic, and aesthetic meanings, and for this reason, they have been successfully employed by scholars to illuminate the significance of routines and sensemaking within organizations (e.g., Bechky 2003; Star and Griesmer

[2] We are particularly grateful to a reviewer for pushing us to highlight this point.

1989; Abbott 1989; Weick 1995). Not only do artifacts serve as the conceptual link among disparate and sometimes conflicting groups within organizations (e.g., Abbott 2005; Star and Griesmer 1989), they "participate in the constitution of the social dynamics of organizations" (Bechky 2003, p. 746). And yet, in organizational disbanding, these artifacts, which we will term *organizational artifacts*, are often abandoned and, along with them, the last material traces of organizational culture.

This research began as a means of preserving business plans and other, at-risk ephemeral historical materials of the dot-com era when Brobeck, Phleger & Harrison, one of the largest law firms to represent start-up technology companies, failed in 2003. Our archival goals led to ethnographic research in several Brobeck offices with *archival-materials-in-the-making*, artifacts that were no longer actively cared for by a functioning organization but not yet in the purview of historical curation. This field experience led us to an unexpected methodological insight. Clearly a new method was needed for bridging the activities of history, archivy, and ethnography. We term the method that we developed *organizational archeology.* As we observed in Brobeck offices, the processes in organizations to circulate and preserve artifacts had ceased, making the few conversations about the artifacts that we were party to the last acts of meaning making within the dying organization, the last gasp of ethnography. Most of the Brobeck offices across the country were post-ethnographic in the sense that the organization had completely disbanded in those cities. In these sites organizational artifacts were pre-archival in that we were the only ones who were left to cart away these artifacts for interpretation, literally saving them from disposal by preserving them for history. Archival appraisal and ethnographic interpretation were effectively collapsed into a single step. Our final ethnographic actions determined the archival trace that the organization would leave behind.

Our interactions with the material corpus of organization led us to a new, extended view of the organizational lifecycle, in which the functioning organization can be defined as managing, curating, and circulating artifacts within its boundaries. The failed organization meets none of these requirements. Studying Brobeck's failure, we identified three distinct, but overlapping, phases of material activity in failing organizations: 1) the deceleration of artifacts circulating within the organization, 2) the transfer or conversion of the organization's material assets into other settings and different types of resources, and 3) the distillation of the organizational remains into trash and organizational artifacts. Moreover, this material view allows us to see that the organization is defined *pari passu* by the artifacts revealed in the course of disbanding.

Our goal in this paper is to extend recent theory on artifacts within organizations by providing a framework to judge which artifacts matter, when, and why. Methodologically, we provide a tool for extending the interpretive power of organizational artifacts beyond the life of the firm to illuminate the processes of failure and to clarify the work that artifacts do within organizations. Finally, in the broader context in which the material basis of the organization is increasingly important, we suggest that the actions that produce and sustain artifacts help to define the process of organization. Accordingly, in addition to other definitions, we can define an organization materially as the sum total of its organizational artifacts and the actions and routines that produce and sustain those artifacts.

Following this introduction, the paper proceeds as follows: the first section reviews the literature on artifacts in organizations, organizational failure, and the related disciplinary perspectives we employ. Next, we propose our model of organizational artifacts and the practice of organizational archeology that exploits organizational artifacts as points of entry for research. Third, we present the evidence from the multi-sited case study of the failure of Brobeck. We then offer concluding observations about the value of "laying hands" on the failing organization and the window that such opportunities offer into the workings of failing and extant organizations.

FAILURE AND MATERIALITY IN ORGANIZATIONS

Organizational death can be defined as the moment an organization no longer exists as a legal entity (Singh et al. 1986). Much happens, though, between when a firm announces its intention to close or merge and when it ceases to function, and yet there is little in the literature on this process. Aneheier and Moulton argued that organizational scholars in general have yet to "differentiate between failure as a process and failure as an outcome" (1999, p. 14). Many of those who do study the process of failure focus primarily on uncovering reasons *why* organizations plunge into failure, certainly a driving question for organizational scholars. However, failure itself as a research setting presents the opportunity to bring into sharp sociological focus the organizational functions that do remain, the complex social processes that are unique to disbanding, and understudied aspects of the organizational lifecycle.

For example, we know that organizational failure creates a special set of routines and circumstances surrounding the process of disbanding and often leads to new "temporary" organizations established expressly for the process of disbanding (Harris and Sutton 1986; Sutton 1987). Sutton (1983) identified eight activities (disbanding, sustaining, shielding, informing, blaming, delegating, inventing, and coping) needed for managing organizational death. While not specifically focused on the material aspects of failure, Sutton noted that disbanding entails breaking "the psychological and physical links that bind people and things in the organization" (1983, p. 398). Much of the time of disbanding "is likely to be spent performing the routine (and often boring) tasks required for moving people and materials" out of the organization, including "machines, books and office equipment [that] must be cataloged and removed" and "organizational records [that] must be catalogued, disposed of, or kept" (Sutton 1983, p. 399). And yet little is known about how organizations undergo this process, the social mechanisms involved in simultaneously wrapping up business while creating new structures for dismantling, or the ways in which this process is mediated through existing structures, routines, and cultures.

It is through understanding this unique process that failure offers lessons about how organizations in general function. Past research has examined how people in organizations use artifacts to symbolize social categories, inscribe and process meanings, organize tasks, embody cognitive processes, and draw and maintain conceptual boundaries and occupational jurisdictions (Abbott 1989, 2005; Bechky 2003a, 2003b; Beunza and Stark 2004; Breugger and Knorr Cetina 2002; Callon 1986; Galison 1999; Hutchins 1995; Rafaeli and Pratt 2006). Objects, Latour has written, are "actors, or more precisely participants in the course of action waiting to be given a figuration," as when a speed bump "causes" a driver to slow down or a kettle boils water (Latour 2005, p. 71). It is in this way that scholars of material culture, following Latour and other proponents of actor-network theory, claim that artifacts can possess a kind of agency within these settings (Knorr Cetina 1999; Latour 1987, 1991; Latour and Woolgar 1986; Star and Griesemer 1989; Traweek 1988; Winner 1980).

The notion of material culture in organizations is not new. Weick defined organizations as social structures that "combine the generic subjectivity of interlocking routines, the intersubjectivity of mutually reinforcing interpretations and the movement back and forth between these two forms by means of continuous communication" (1995, p. 170), processes that would be impossible but through organizational artifacts. Organizational culture has long been observed as being reflected in the artifacts of an organization (Schein 1990), and in the literature in social studies of science and technology, the role of artifacts has emerged as a key area for debate around the constitution of social organization.

Still, teasing out roles that artifacts play in the constitution of organizations remains an area of empirical concern for scholars. Latour admits that it is difficult to observe what objects do in their complex networks of people, groups, organizations, and other artifacts: "Objects by the very nature of their connections with humans quickly shift from being mediators to being intermediaries, counting for one or nothing, no matter how internally complicated they might be" (2005, p. 79). There are "specific tricks" invented to make objects talk, "to offer descriptions of themselves, to produce *scripts* of what they are making others—humans or non-humans—do" (Latour 2005, p. 79). One way to do this is to observe "situations where an object's activity is easily made visible," including moments of innovation, when objects appear novel, strange, or unusual, or historical, and occasions offered by "accidents, breakdowns, and strikes" (Latour 2005, p. 81). As Vaughn (1996) so powerfully showed in the case of the shuttle *Challenger*, the moment when objects no longer work is a key moment for sociological observation, when the complex social networks and organizational structures in which objects are or cease to be embedded is highlighted.

Research on the material aspect of organizations thus far has been conducted in extant organizations, in which it is possible to observe how *people* interact with artifacts in these settings, the organizational practices around artifacts, and the roles of artifacts in organizational routines (Rafeli and Pratt, 2006). Scholars have yet to test their insights concerning the organizational agency of artifacts absent the people and processes that constitute a functioning organization. If object are actors, as Latour claims, then how might they express agency once decoupled from organizational routines? How might our understanding of the role of artifacts in organizations change when we see them in the setting of failure, when it is no longer possible to interpret how artifacts are acted upon, but rather how they reveal their scripts once decoupled from the actors and paths through which they normally circulate? Could there be a moment in the organizational lifecycle when researchers could determine, to use Miller's (1998) words, "why some things matter" for the organization itself and distinguish these objects from others?

ORGANIZATIONAL ARCHEOLOGY AND THE PROCESS OF FAILURE

We propose a method for examining failing organizations that takes seriously the theoretical concern with the role of artifacts within organizations while making possible observations of the routines, cultures, and processes of failure. Rather than accept failure as a single endpoint to organizational study, our method embraces it as an opportunity to bridge ethnography, archival preservation and history. We draw on industrial archeology, a long-established practice for interpreting the remains of factory work, to build—theoretically and methodologically—a way to uncover meaning in contemporary service sector settings.[3] We term this approach *organizational archeology*. Organizational archeology is the process of uncovering meaning in a failed or failing organization through the examination, preservation, and curation of *organizational artifacts*. Organizational artifacts are those material objects that operate within a specific firm, have limited use in other settings, are generally understood as communally owned and managed by the organization, and have no overriding individual or commercial value outside the organization. Below, we use this method to develop a theory for a material approach to failure in the case of Brobeck.

BROBECK: THE FAILING FIRM AS FIELD SITE

Our findings are grounded in the empirical study of the failing law firm of Brobeck, Phleger & Harrison LLP and our physical interactions with the former staff and artifacts in Brobeck offices in New York, San Diego, San Francisco, and Los Angeles.

[3] Archeology can be an appropriate method and metaphor for studying recently abandoned spaces. Buchli and Lucas (2001) used the material remains in an abandoned British Council house to suggest who lived there and why they left. Our point here is not to determine why Brobeck left the offices they abandoned, or why the firm failed, but rather what was the material *process* through which the firm's failure was organized.

Brobeck's bankruptcy after seventy-five years of successful practice stands as one of the most visible failures in the history of American legal practice (Brobeck, Phleger & Harrison 1996; Kostal 2003; Murphy, Dillman, and Johnston 2005). Founded in San Francisco in 1926, Brobeck mainly served corporate clients in California and the western United States until1980 when the firm opened a satellite office in Palo Alto. The Internet boom of the late 1990s led the firm to pursue a "Big Bet, Big Debt" growth strategy, and Brobeck developed one of the largest law practices representing technology startups in Silicon Valley and elsewhere.

By 2000, the firm had nearly doubled the number of its attorneys in little more than three years. Consistent with prevailing practice at major law firms, the firm chose to borrow money to support growth rather than fund expansion from operating cash flow. During this period, average annual partner compensation continued to increase, surpassing $1 million in 2000. As the technology economy slowed, Brobeck's infrastructure costs and fixed expenses could not be scaled back sufficiently quickly, and average income per partner fell to $611,000 in 2001. By the firm's final full year of operation in 2002, annual revenues remained strong at $320 million, but lease obligations for offices around the country and other costs had soared as a percentage of revenue. Average income per partner reached $245,000, which in turn caused key partners and practice groups to move to other law firms with less debt. The partners decided to cease operations in February 2003. Seven months later, creditors forced the liquidating firm to seek protection in bankruptcy court where 1,145 creditors alleged liabilities of $258 million.[4]

Our interaction with Brobeck grew out of efforts to identify and preserve historically-valuable materials from the firm's extensive records. In the course of our preservation activities, we spent several days at each of the four offices we visited, sorting through materials left behind by the partners, boxing firm and client files, and cataloging business ephemera such as industry directories and guides.[5] As ethnographers, we interviewed former employees and the managing agents of the buildings where the

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[4] Since the firm announced its intention to close, many articles in the legal and business press have looked at the specific reasons for the failure. Kostal (2003) is the most readable account, but the perspective of the bankruptcy trustee is also highly relevant (Murphy et al. 2005).

[5] Both authors were present in New York, Los Angeles, and San Diego. Only one author visited the San Francisco office.

Brobeck offices were located in New York, Los Angeles, San Diego, and San Francisco about their experiences dealing with these materials. We observed the state of each office, photographing and recording the experience with thorough field notes taken immediately after each office visit. Separately, one of the authors met several times with and interviewed members of the Liquidation Committee, select former Brobeck partners, and the bankruptcy trustee and his attorney.

When we gained access to Brobeck as a field site, the firm was already well into the process of disbanding. Called in to help preserve firm documents that might be of archival value, we were immediately confronted with an interpretive puzzle: how were we to make sense of the material remains of a failing firm? In two of the offices, San Francisco and San Diego, former employees and partners continued to work in a loosely structured rump organization created to oversee the liquidation of the firm. A third office, in Los Angeles, was completely abandoned, and a fourth, the New York office, was opened by the landlord to us and to former employees for a brief window to allow artifacts abandoned months earlier to be recovered.

All of Brobeck's former offices were in various states of chaos that embodied and enacted the conflict over the firm's de-organization. File rooms, central to every law practice, were strewn with loose paper, unkempt folders, and upturned boxes. The New York office, the second one we visited, was opened by the landlord for three days for attorneys to remove remaining case files. Los Angles and San Francisco, too, had ceased operations as Brobeck offices, although the San Francisco office housed Brobeck's small Liquidation Committee. In San Diego, another firm had taken over part of the practice so the former Brobeck office continued to function, albeit as a different organization. We could not negotiate access to the firm's other offices between the time of the announcement of the failure and the landlords reclaiming the spaces.

During our time in the New York office, we met two partners, two associates, and four assistants out of a local practice of more than fifty attorneys. What we found was a mountain of abandoned paper, ostensibly left by attorneys for somebody else to haul away. The building's custodial staff, aware that we were there to collect files for historical purposes, assumed we were in charge of the disposal of the literally tons of paper that still littered the file rooms, offices, and closets. They expected that two independent academics would empty the office when in fact we could save only a tiny fraction of what was left behind. Role confusion was rampant, consistent with the uncertainty, fear, and grief that characterizes the process of organizational disbanding (e.g., Harris and Sutton 1986; Sutton 1983; Sutton 1987). What were we to do? Recognizing that our archival, historical and ethnographic goals did not correspond to those of the former members of the organization, how should we have viewed and interpreted the artifacts entombed in this de-organized space? These questions led us to re-theorize the process of organizational failure.

As we discovered, the process of organizational disbanding changes the definitions, stewardship, and regard of certain artifacts. Through the process of failure organizations convert and translate artifacts that were formerly located within their boundaries into different realms. Computers and furniture are sold, transportable files and work may, as happened in the Brobeck case, follow employees to their new positions in other organizations. Finally, things that are of value to no other social entity than the organization are left behind. These three stages of the material process of failure are what we call *deceleration*, *conversion*, and *distillation*.

DECELERATION: THE BEGINNING OF FAILURE

Three different cases of de-organizing occurred in the different semi-autonomous locations of the same firm, giving us a unique comparative lens onto the practices of failure and its material processes. Failing organizations can persist with skeletal staff and resources, as was the case with the Brobeck Liquidation Committee in San Francisco. Failed organizations can be reborn, merged into "new" ones, as happened when Paul Hastings took over a division of the Brobeck San Diego office, along with some of the attorneys and support staff, its organizational resources, and its sleekly designed offices. Failed organizations can simply dismantle and close, as the offices in New York and Los Angeles did**.** In each case, what we observed in failure was the unraveling of soci-technical networks to circulate artifacts. Within a socio-technical network within the organization, to differing extents and at different speeds, the organizational impetus that impelled the circulation of artifacts ceased. We call this process *deceleration*, in which artifacts decelerate through their normal circuits with in the organization. Against the backdrop of organizational failure, the firm's San Francisco office had a faint heartbeat when we observed it four months after the liquation announcement. There was a low hum of activity in the former Brobeck headquarters, even though the San Francisco legal practice by then was largely de-organized. Lights in one corner of the massive office showed a handful of people working. In the rest of the office there were signs of failure. Emergency lighting was the only light in the space. The file clerks no longer maintained records. The mail room had shut down. The majority of the cubicles sat empty and conference rooms were used for storage instead of meetings. Whereas the functioning organization would be providing the impetus, pushing artifacts through circuits within the organization, the motive force at Brobeck had subsided to a weak pulse, and there were activities in only a small subset of the space. This is where the Liquidation Committee was closing the firm, collecting accounts receivable, selling assets, unraveling relationships, and negotiating the end of the firm, closing the channels through which the firm's activities and artifacts had circulated.

Already most of the personal mementos had disappeared. But Brobeck-specific materials—untouched employee manuals, Brobeck-imprinted staplers and calendars, and boxes of printed letterhead—were still evident. The things that a new employee would have once needed to work at Brobeck were still there, but they were no longer circulating in ways that once enacted the routines of the living organization.

We were the last people with any tie to Brobeck to see the Los Angeles and New York offices. We were particularly struck by the stillness of the Los Angeles office, where the lack of the air conditioning on a hot late summer day only added to the stifling quiet. It was literally as if the life had been sucked out of the space, but not before a rampage. Many things stood still, stopped at a moment of organizational death. Trash had not been collected and plants in the corners without brown from the lack of regular waterings. Open soda cans and fast food wrappers sat on file-room shelves. Paper files had been thrown into vast mountains on the floor (see Figure 1).

[INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

One attorney in New York called one of the authors at home to ask us to find a single file folder amidst a mountain of paper in the file room. In functioning law firms, client files are carefully stored, curated, and preserved, as well as destroyed when no longer of value to the organization,[6] and finding a particular file is a typical request for attorneys in such environments. The files had since decelerated within their usual circuits—the systems to manage, retrieve, and circulate them had broken down. The retrieval of a single file, once a routine task, turned into an impossible one.

In San Diego, deceleration quickly gave way to re-circulation. Brobeck's Intellectual Property practice was bought by Paul Hastings, a competing law firm, and when we visited the site, about one quarter of the former Brobeck attorneys and support staff worked for Paul Hastings in their same Brobeck offices on many of the same client matters. A quickly hung plastic Paul Hastings banner hid the brass letters spelling out Brobeck on the building, a material instantiation of this new organization.

In the working file room (the only working file room we observed) former Brobeck staff separated Brobeck client files from those of the new organization. In the case where a former Brobeck attorney was continuing to represent a former Brobeck client, the staff simply attached to the old file new labels corresponding to the Paul Hastings filing system. The new organization had already papered over the old one, imprinting the filing system with new organizational routines. In particular, it had done so through changing the way that artifacts circulate within the firm. The old Brobeck files (of Brobeck clients) were quarantined and still on one side of the file room, while the files of new Paul Hastings clients, animated by new labels, were integrated into a filing system, managed by the clerical staff, and circulated in new ways in the new organization.[7] Two firms occupied the space, one was winding down, its activities and artifacts decelerating, while the other was buzzing as the repurposed artifacts circulated much as they had before the failure. In this functioning office we saw how artifacts within organizations require circulation, or active stewardship. Artifacts move through the organization because of this process of circulation and through it the functioning organization enacts its existence. By contrast, what we observed in the Brobeck side of the practice and in the other offices was the deceleration of artifacts through these circuits, a process that traced the failure of the organization.

[6] We are grateful to a reviewer for pointing out that organized destruction of files is indeed a form of stewardship.

[7] Rather than the utter chaos we observed in other offices, the presence of ongoing records management staff, even though they worked for a new organization, meant that the files of the old Brobeck partnership were still neat and orderly.

CONVERSION: MATERIAL RECOMBINATION

By buying the San Diego intellectual property group, Paul Hastings lay claim to an area of practice. In material terms, by relabeling the building as their own they lay claim to the building and the things and people that remained in it. File folders there may have contained the same client data and information, but it was enveloped in a new metadata structure that was consistent with that of the rest of the Paul Hastings firm. Paul Hastings converted one set of files into theirs, and in doing so, converted a series of professional relationships, inscribed knowledge, and organizational history into their practice.

These new movements suggested a second phase of de-organization was under way. We term this process *conversion.* The process of conversion entails converting material artifacts from the failing or failed organization into other settings or realms. The bankruptcy process entails assessing whether an artifact has economic value outside of the organization and selling those artifacts that do. However, the larger process of conversion we witnessed at Brobeck encompassed a broad range of values, not only economic, and claims not just from creditors but also from people who worked at Brobeck and our own claims as scholars.

In general, economic claims dominate the liquidation process but these are not necessarily related to the material corpus of the organization. Selling off computer monitors seems trivial next to settling a $10 million claim by a single creditor. However, a material view of failure also encompasses a range of other kinds of conversion. The process of organizational disbanding forces an organization to claim certain artifacts and relinquish its claims on others. The absence of certain classes of artifacts suggests that objects once found within the boundaries of the firm were not, in essence, part of the organization. In the abandoned offices we did not find the family pictures, cartoons, or other personal mementos that scholars have so fruitfully studied in functioning organizations (e.g., Rafeli and Pratt 2006). These classes of artifacts were claimed by the departing members of the firm as personal and thus the organization held no claim to them. The conversion process encompasses the economic convertibility of the failing organization's material and financial assets, but is not limited to it.

In San Francisco, several individual offices were being used to store stacks of durable hardware, hundreds of phone handsets, and dozens of used desktop computers with reformatted hard drives. These were set aside in order to be repurposed in other organizations. In New York and Los Angeles, the abandoned sites, we saw no computer hardware, telephones, executive desk chairs, or other expensive office furniture, ostensibly because such conversion had already taken place. Wires and plumbing dangled loose where once an espresso machine had been connected. The luxury visible in the San Diego office (see Figure 2) was already nowhere to be seen in the other offices, likely sold off as the organization sloughed off its material weight. Artifacts that can be repurposed in other settings usually are, especially in the case of failure through bankruptcy in which artifacts with a financial value in another setting—such as computer hardware and office furniture—are seen as convertible into cash.

[INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

The Liquidation Committee itself was a mechanism for adjudicating competing claims on the remaining resources of the firm, material and otherwise. We were granted access to study Brobeck and archive unclaimed files because our interests and claims did not conflict with and were recognized as valid by the Liquidation Committee. The Liquidation Committee was charged with resolving outstanding matters, packaging assets, and shedding liabilities. In the process, they asserted the organization's claims—selling artifacts that were valuable and discarding others, unhitching them from organizational control. This conversion defined the boundaries of the failing organization.[8]

These organizational boundaries are also established through less formal demarcations. In the San Diego office, hastily made paper signs denoted to which organization, new or old, artifacts belonged. Signs hung on office doors, on cubicle walls, and on stacks of boxes in cramped hallways. The signs demarcated the edge of the Brobeck organization and the beginnings of Paul Hastings, serving as the artifactual embodiment of the legal, economic, and social boundaries between the two organizations.

[8] The files around bankruptcy and liquidation become another set of artifacts for the new temporary organization created to disband the practice, starting yet another cycle of circulation, deceleration, conversion and distillation for this less permanent organization. For more on the movement from permanent to temporary organization in disbanding, see Sutton 1987.

On one pillar in the San Diego file room such signs pointing in opposite directions hung below a small, toy basketball hoop. "That's totally Brobeck," a file clerk said by way of explanation of the cultural shift to a new practice that was less amenable to the fun and games that the basketball hoop represented. Whatever conceptual split employees felt about working for a new firm in the shell of their old one might well be summed up in that single image (see Figure 3).

[INSERT FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE]

Brobeck client files had to be separated from the work being done by the new practice for legal as well as organizational reasons, even though the file clerks and office staff, as well as many of the partners, were the same. Of course, active Brobeck case files of functioning clients were among the most valuable assets of the disbanding firm that, like Rolodexes both material and digital, represented the client relationships of Brobeck attorneys. The ones "missing" from all the de-organized file rooms were active client files that attorneys took with them to their new practices. These artifacts had been converted from one organization into another. The cost of stewardship of the files of corporate clients that no longer existed, like the failed dot-coms that we were interested in, outweighed any future economic benefit. Thus, they could not be converted outside of Brobeck.

In San Diego, some things reflected the old organization's culture so well that they no longer fit in the new practice. On a tour of the space, an assistant pointed to a row of empty desks where legal secretaries used to sit, offering another insight into the materiality of the Brobeck organizational culture and the tensions associated with the transition to the new firm.

Assistant: They all had fish.

Researcher: Fish?

Assistant: Yeah, everyone had a fishbowl, and we'd all go around and say "Hi" to their fish. They all had names. Now, even though some of the same people are here, nobody has a fish. It just wouldn't be right.

The pet fish so represented Brobeck culture to those who were working in the new firm that they no longer kept them at work, in deference to their former colleagues who no longer work with them. To the former Brobeck assistants, the fish reflected the old organization's culture, because "it just wouldn't be right" to repurpose them as decorative additions in the new organization. A sense of personal responsibility meant that the assistants had taken them home, even as a sense of organizational culture prevented them from displaying the fish on their "new" Paul Hastings desks.

There remained in all of the offices material artifacts that were of no use to other organizations. Artifacts that could be repurposed sat in one office side by side with artifacts that could not. The former firm's library was in the San Francisco office where approximately eighty linear feet of shelf space held drawer after drawer of card catalog entries describing the contents of perhaps 125,000 unique client matters and file folders stored offsite, including the firm's early records dating to the late 1920s. These cards were the only known guide to as many as 100,000 boxes of paper records outsourced for storage to independent firms—a boon to history, perhaps, but of little value to any other law firm. These were organizational artifacts, revealed through *distillation*, the third phase of the process of de-organization.

DISTILLATION: WHAT'S LEFT BEHIND

Within the chaos of the de-organized spaces, certain objects stood out as having distinctly organizational meaning. In all the offices, we found series of annually updated directories, shelves of employee handbooks, etched metal announcements for new facilities, plaques honoring the firm, and cabinets full of marketing brochures featuring Brobeck's (now ironic) slogan, "When Your Future is at Stake."

What is distilled from this process—what is left behind along with trash—are organizational artifacts. Only organizations themselves can legitimately claim these artifacts. The sometimes blurry line between personal and organizational artifacts becomes much clearer when a former employee carries a small box of goods out the front door: people take with them their framed photographs, but leave behind intra-office memos. This is not to say that organizational artifacts never end up in personal custody, though, as employees may claim such things as souvenirs (Anteby 2003; Anteby 2006).[9] As remnants of failed organizations, organizational artifacts embody organizational

[9] However, Sutton (1983) found stealing is not particularly common in failing organizations, which suggests that even the failing organization can assert its claim over organizational artifacts and assets.

practices, culture, knowledge, and routines from their former circulation within the organization. These are artifacts that operated primarily on an *organizational valence* rather than professional or personal valences within the functioning organization.

The firm's card catalog is one such example of an organizational artifact left behind in the process of failure. Why would anyone (other than a historian or sociologist) want to save a catalog that points to files that no longer exist? The organizational system, or metadata, for understanding, processing, and sharing these old client matters has meaning only within this particular setting. By the time we encountered this complex organizational artifact in San Francisco, there was no one left at the firm capable of properly interpreting its contents. Moreover, the historic client files referenced by the card entries were entombed in sealed facilities to which the firm no longer had access because storage fees had not been paid in months.

What we found distilled in the abandoned Brobeck offices is at least as telling as what we did not find. We did not find framed photographs that once graced executive desks, diplomas that we can only assume once hung on lawyer's walls, or personal commendation plaques. Nor did we find Dilbert cartoons or other ironic posters stuck on the remaining cubicle walls. Scholars have shown how artifacts, including seemingly frivolous ones, help individuals assert their roles within an organization or oppose dominant organizational culture, and thus mediate personal, professional, and organizational identities (Anand 2006; Beckhy 2003; Star and Greismer 1989). These kinds of artifacts, we would argue, are not organizational artifacts, because the organization never lays claim to them. Personal artifacts, such as pictures and cartoons, are always managed actively by their individual owners and are therefore external to the organization . Even if other scholars of materiality and organizations have found them within the physical boundaries of functioning firms, they were missing from the materials remains of Brobeck.

Nor did the lawyers leave any so-called "tombstones," the Lucite-encased, three-dimensional plaques that commemorate the successful consummation of a complex financial transaction, such as an acquisition or an initial public offering. Although these artifacts herald a firm's work in closing a deal, they were personal to the lawyers, purchased at great expense of their own hours and effort. As such, tombstones were not easily replaced and thus were not tied to Brobeck as an organization but to their own individual work as attorneys, perhaps to be displayed at their new practices alongside future tombstones of deals completed there.

Many of these "missing" items have been the subjects of productive inquiry by recent scholars of artifacts in organizations (e.g., Rafaeli and Pratt 2006). From our perspective, such artifacts are not *organizational artifacts*. Their absence suggests that personal valences outweighed inscribed organizational imperatives. Although the artifact may have had meaning in the organizational setting, individuals inscribed sufficient meaning in these artifacts to warrant saving them and to justify their personal claims on them. This would suggest that given a choice, the individual might save a personal artifact in an organizational setting, but would abandon the organizational artifact. What we found in the distillation of the failing practice were artifacts in which the organizational claim won out over any other competing interest.

With abandoned client files, for example, attorneys individually assumed that the organization was the proper steward for the files of clients that no longer existed (e.g., other failed companies) or that were no longer represented by Brobeck partners. The file room of the Los Angeles office, which primarily supported litigation rather than corporate work, was in particular disarray, with many files and other material from previous litigation labeled as trash by practicing attorneys with new cases in new organizations. As we were given a tour around the San Diego office, one partner pointed into a room full of file boxes and said, "That was my case," as we stopped by an office that was used as a "war room" for a large litigation. The room had been turned into a tomb of the paper boxes that remained years after the case had come to resolution. These files are the distillate of prior organizational momentum around former collaboration on large cases. What was once the organizational history of the firm is distilled in the failure process. Even artifacts that probably should not have survived were abandoned *in situ*: Brobeck lost the capacity to shred documents when its need for active, managed disposal of organizational artifacts was the greatest.

Law firms may be unique in this sense in that their partnership structure means that each attorney bears responsibility for his or her own clients—and therefore their records. For matters that didn't concern individual attorneys, files were in the purview of the partnership, an organization that lacked the capacity to shred or dispose properly of them. The distillate included old client files, but client files in general are not necessarily organizational artifacts, as evidenced by the many that were taken. Files for current clients, for instance, represent a form of relational capital that could be converted and redeployed in another organization. The Paul Hastings example shows this clearly as some files were moved into the newly demarcated organization while others were left on shelves on the Brobeck "side" of the file room. The Brobeck signs separating what was left of the old organization were symbolic of a shift that we theorize happens in most failing organizations. In this way, organizational artifacts can reveal aspects of the culture of a failed organization to the researcher. In Brobeck's case the basketball hoop and the fish reflected aspects of the culture of the former organization that no longer fit with the the culture of the new organization.

Organizational artifacts also can play roles in "sensemaking" (Weick 1995) for people trying to understand the logic of failure. In one example, James Miller kept a copy of Brobeck's capital budget during its hayday taped to the door of his bare Liquidation Committee office. During that time, the firm had borrowed as much as $100 million from major commercial lenders such as Citibank. The funds had been used mostly for facilities expansion and capital improvements; the firm's new offices in Palo Alto, San Diego, and Austin featured flat-panel TVs in the lobbies, elegant maple cabinetry in the offices, and tasteful artwork on the walls of their many meeting rooms. The sharp downturn in firm receipts had left the partnership with excess capacity that had been leased at the peak of the technology boom. Miller kept the capital budget taped to his door during the firm's liquidation as a constant reminder of why he was spending his days squeezing revenue from former Brobeck clients and as a warning to himself to never let it happen again.[10]

As an organizational artifact, the capital budget could be interpreted independent of context: as a document its historic value is apparent. The ethnographic observation that it once hung on the door of a senior member of the liquidation committee as a daily reminder of the excesses that he felt had produced the unraveling of the firm adds another

[10] In court filings, the bankruptcy trustee differs with the Liquidation committee on the question of how dedicated the committee was to recovering assets on behalf of creditors rather than paying former partners. Regardless, the final outcome was a cautionary tale for all involved.

layer of meaning to the artifact. In the three Brobeck offices where we were able to interview people in the office, we witnessed how artifacts unlocked stories of the organization and its culture. In New York, one former Brobeck assistant led us to the room where the word-processing staff used to work. In a corner by the door sat a large red plastic cooler. "The attorneys used to bring us beer on Fridays, and we'd throw it in there on ice and have a happy hour at four o'clock. This used to be a great place to work." In the same office, a former partner noticed the view from one of the corner offices as the sun was setting over the Hudson River and said, "This view… This used to be Jim's office and we'd email around and gather in here if it was a particularly good sunset." These two stories demonstrate how artifacts— organizational or otherwise— speak most clearly through the voices of people with experience of them. However, we were only able to gather this sort of triangulated experience of artifacts in three of Brobeck's eleven offices—and even then within a time period of hours or days rather than the months or years typical in other ethnographic settings.

DISCUSSION: CASE-SPECIFIC REFLECTIONS

Organizational artifacts can define the legacy of the failed organization, and in this case our intervention into Brobeck helped preserve documents that otherwise would have been lost. In Los Angeles, as in San Diego and New York, our work as organizational archeologists was constructed as if we were evidentiary janitors, the clean up crew. In all three sites, Brobeck employees and building managers treated us as undertakers expecting that we would remove the corpse of the firm, hauling everything away without any interpretive filtering. In general, distilled organizational artifacts without new stewards may be abandoned.

As if this were not challenging enough, we also confronted a complex ethnographic setting with few interpretive guideposts. A byproduct of legal services is the production, recording, and distribution of paper. On the one hand, paper legal files are invested with and inscribed by organizational and industrial norms and are cared for in accordance with case law, traditions of legal practice, and strict professional codes of conduct. And yet the sheer level of disorganization in the offices that we studied was both surprising and distressing. In this chaos we were confronted with a challenge both theoretical and legal—how could we work with and around the abandoned confidential records and still maintain the integrity of historical and ethnographic research into a failing organization? In this regard Brobeck represents an exceptional case because the confidential nature of the substance of the client files. That so much paper was left behind, abandoned on the legal shop floor, so to speak, highlights the extent of the collapse of organizational protocol, routine, and authority in failure.

There is an alternative explanation for many of the paper files that we found abandoned at the Brobeck sites. The unraveling of the firm occurred at a particular historical moment that embodies the tension between physical and digital records maintenance regimes. The fact that confidential files were abandoned in file rooms is a potential boon to business history, but an unflattering peek into the workings of the American legal profession at the transition from paper record-keeping to digital data management. Perhaps this is one reason we found so many paper files—why preserve non-digital documents, when there is an assumption that a digital version exists somewhere else? These new information regimes are flexible and the surrounding socio-technical system has yet to stabilize, as multiple competing social groups try to mold and fix the emergent regime of electronic records management (One can recognize this in examples of deleted emails being used to prosecute corporate corruption or an office telephone message log being central to a successful insider trading trial).[11] A collection of historically at-risk physical artifacts may never have been acquired, but for the presumed reliability of the digital record, even though the reliability of these new digital systems is far from certain, with some suggesting the arrival of a digital "dark age" (Boczkowski 2005).

Indeed, the Brobeck case illustrates just how ephemeral these digital systems are. The Brobeck digital archive was initially maintained by an outside contractor hired by the bankruptcy trustee. For almost three years, the original Brobeck servers were stored in a converted broom closet without proper cooling, the hum of a box fan on the floor the last faint pulse of the former organization. As equipment failed, drives from these servers were being swapped out and patched together, a last-ditch life support system for a computer system with no proper owner left to see to its maintenance. The assumption that

[11] Michael Brick, "Enron's Many Strands: Records Destruction," *New York Times*, February 2, 2002; Constance L. Hayes, "Stewart Trial Focuses on Message from Broker," *New York Times*, February 11, 2004.

the files will always be accessible belies the historical fragility of this, the most complex of the organizational artifacts left behind.

CONCLUSION: ORGANIZATIONAL ARCHEOLOGY AND ORGANIZATIONAL ARTIFACTS

Organizations consolidate multiple interests—which they often do imperfectly—into what appears as a coherent organizational culture (Young 1989). Organizational failure brings those distinctions into sharp relief. Through organizational artifacts we can see what mattered solely to the organization. De-organization is the sloughing off of what is not specific to a particular organization and what can be recycled and repurposed into others. Even in a case like Brobeck where the partnership form of organization is weaker and the thrust is on individual talent that can be readily recycled into other organizations, we see how some things are left behind. Through the organizational artifacts distilled from the process of failure, we see the organization itself.

Our experience in Brobeck required locating, exposing, and re-constituting the material remains of the organization to give a fuller picture of the multiple meanings of the organization. The postulates of this method of organizational archeology can be summarized as follows: The contemporary organization—though constructed through conceptual, communicative, symbolic, and social processes—is nevertheless embodied in material flows and circulations. Organizational artifacts are tangible, physical manifestations of an organization. Custodianship of artifacts—including active, routine destruction—is basic evidence of organization, and the existence of abandoned, unmanaged, uncurated organizational artifacts is an indication of organizational distress. Organizational archeology entails looking at the relative state of the organizational artifacts across space and across status in the firm to understand the process of failure. This is important to do because abandoned organizational artifacts may reveal the residue of the social organization that once animated them if interpreted carefully. That is, informal social ties and formal organizational structures are partly constitutive of the artifacts; taken out of this context the artifacts may yet reflect a small glimmer of their former contextualized roles in mediating among the competing, conflicting interests within extant organizations. Finally, the residual meaning embedded in recovered organizational artifacts may stimulate recall, meaning, and affect among former members of the organization to which the artifacts belonged.

An expansive reading of our conclusions holds that the very point of a functioning organization is to serve as steward for organizational artifacts, processing information and retaining and caring for the material embodiment of its knowledge, routines, and meanings. In this view, the stewardship of material artifacts provides a barometer with which we can gauge the process of disbanding. Stewardship is an essential responsibility of the organization, and it is a statement of finality for the organization to abandon the artifacts for which it is supposed to care. This follows Sutton (1987) in terms of the process model of organizational disbanding and reconnecting. However, in placing the artifacts at the center of analytic focus, our study shows both the central role of artifacts in extant organization and the activities of disbanding through a material lens. In our approach, the care afforded organizational artifacts reflects the overall regard in which the organization is held by its members.

For many scholars of organizations, failure marks either the endpoint to a study or an outcome, but our research within the multiple sites of a failing organization provided an abundance of evidence to show the different stages of organizational failure and how failure is better conceived as a process over time, rather than a single moment of organizational death. The extent of de-organization varied across the Brobeck field sites, and these different cross-sections allowed us to observe the range of micro-processes that constitute the larger phenomenon of organizational dismantling. In particular, the nuances of the stages of failure are manifest in the different valences that characterized the relationships between people and organizational artifacts during deceleration, conversion, and distillation.

People dismantling the organization define what is “not the organization” by determining which artifacts are non-specific assets and can be reused in other settings. For instance, most computers and pieces of office furniture had been removed from the sites we visited, as their use is not specific to the organization, and they can be resold or reused elsewhere. The next stage involves the processing of multi-valent artifacts and their categorization as personal or organizational. This class of material artifacts is available to members for potential reinterpretation and use, or these may be abandoned.

For our respondents, the red cooler and the basketball hoop were not personal artifacts. They were abandoned, and yet the artifacts were not meaningless. By being able to ask what these particular artifacts did, we gained access to their organization-specific meanings that were only available in the ethnographic setting that may have been otherwise lost.

After individuals have laid claim to the artifacts that they feel are legitimately theirs, after the assets that can be re-deployed elsewhere are removed, after what was left behind is categorized and processed, what remains finally are those artifacts that have no one to claim them, no one to process them in the flows or routines through which they once moved. The net result of the failure process, the dismantling of the organization, is the specification of organizational artifacts by subtraction. The final stage of de-organization, distillation, is the abandonment of organizational artifacts, those artifacts that, because of their specificity, do not have overriding claims or values outside the defunct organization. This is the material burial of the organization.

When postindustrial service organizations like Brobeck fail, physical remains belie the fact that organizations are not solely socially constituted. They also have a material basis that is symbolically, culturally, and communicatively constituted. These material remains underscore the divisions of individual versus collective responsibility. Once people extract the personal effects, what is left in a failed organization is literally the property (both in physical and abstract terms) of a non-entity, the failed organization. In the fortunate case where researchers have access to such settings, organizational remains can be salvaged, ordered, labeled and catalogued—or discarded.

The final stage of organizational failure is when those empowered to dismantle the organization get to define its legacy, with the choice to preserve it, destroy it, or spin it in opportunistic ways. Official definitions of organizational legacy and organizational histories often stifle individual voices.

Even in the absence of respondents' input, these artifacts themselves can tell part of the story of how people understand and process failure and help scholars understand radical organizational change: tenuously maintained fault lines between the organizational and the individual realm are revealed, as are boundaries of the failed organization vis-à-vis other organizations. But the artifacts speak most clearly through the voices of the individuals, providing accounts of the organization that may differ from the official party line or reflect alternative views of organizational culture. In this sense, the parallel accounts encoded in and stimulated by the organizational artifacts constitute an alternate organizational legacy. To borrow Sutton's metaphor, the burial may influence what people say at the wake.

Organizational archeology is consistent with other theoretical views of the organization, but extends prior work in several directions.

First, the emergent definition of organizational artifact allows scholars working on materiality in extant organizations a broad-brush method to distinguish organizational artifacts from other artifacts that happen to be present in a specific setting. Researchers can ask whether an individual member of the organization might take this artifact with him or her in the event the firm was to be dismantled. If so, is the artifact a personal artifact in an organizational setting? If not, could the artifact be reused in an alternative organizational setting? If so, then it is part of the physical capital of the organization. If the answer to both questions is no, then the artifact may be an organizational artifact and setting a potential site for organizational archeology.

Second, by bringing the material perspective to bear upon the process of organizational failure, we extend the theoretical reach of both approaches. Working with the material remains of the firm after its announced intention to dissolve provided valuable insight into the role of artifacts within organizational structures, and the field research we conducted in the course of artifact retrieval revealed the meanings of some of the artifacts that we preserved. The micro-processes of organizational failure produce physical remains that are just as much a part of the story of an organization as are the artifacts associated with its founding and functioning, such as the first draft of an ultimately successful business plan or the framed first dollar seen in retail stores. In these cases, the observation and interpretation of the material artifacts of failure—housed imperfectly in unstable physical settings—may be the only available vantage point on the material remains of the organizational experience.

To the study of failure, we add a material dimension. The experience of the organizational "burial" may in fact alter the eulogy, and with it, the longer-term interpretation of the organizational legacy. For scholars of materiality in organizations, we provide a view of the “corpse” as distinct from the living “body.” We show that organizational artifacts can reflect meaning even after the organization has stopped investing them with explicit agency.

Third, in response to our unique research context, we have developed a new method that combines ethnography of extant organizations with archival science and industrial archeology in the context of the modern professional service economy. The existence of disbanding organizations represents an opportunity to undertake research on materiality at this intersection. We have attempted to prescribe the boundaries around a particular class of material artifacts that we call organizational artifacts, discovered through organizational archeology in these sites and distinguished by their organization-specific meaning.

The failure of the Brobeck law firm changed the lives of many hundreds of people. As we write, its organizational legacy is still in flux. Many of the organizational artifacts which we observed have been lost. A subset may yet be preserved. As a direct result of our archival efforts, almost two hundred boxes of physical records pertaining to the history of the dot-com era were salvaged from condemned Brobeck offices during the summer of 2003. Additionally, we are working to preserve the most complex organizational artifact that Brobeck’s failure left behind, the digital records containing approximately 4 terabytes of data, including 3.5 million individual digital objects, multiple databases, and almost 1,800 distinct email archives. [12]

However, scholarly access to the artifacts is far from settled. Since client files are subject to rules about privilege, many of the artifacts that we archived from the sites are not yet available for analysis as legal negotiations to claim these artifacts for historical purposes are still ongoing at the time of this writing. Beyond the story of how Brobeck de-organized, these materials may one day allow for new historical interpretations of how the firm functioned and why it failed. Our work, we hope, may also set establish a model

[12] The digital records—including attorney work product, firm-specific databases, email and other digital ephemera—are themselves the object of ongoing legal wrangling. In August 2006, the bankruptcy judge overseeing the Brobeck case approved a motion allowing the Brobeck Estate to abandon the digital records in anticipation of the creation of a closed archive overseen by the National Digital Information Infrastructure Program of the Library of Congress, which as of this writing, the Library of Congress and its partners are preparing to establish. Due to the complex rights of confidentiality and privilege attached to some of these records, access to the contents of the closed archive will be subject to strict guidelines set forth in the motion approved by the Court. Interested readers are directed to www.BrobeckClosedArchive.org for more information.

to preserve relevant organizational artifacts of failing and failed organizations for future scholars.

Looking forward, further inquiry might establish whether organizations differ systematically in their regard for organizational artifacts at different stages of the organizational lifecycle. We have identified how organizational artifacts participate in the material process of de-organization, but future work should address the cultural and symbolic processes by which artifacts in organizations become organizational artifacts. Certainly we can see the first dollar bill framed by the struggling entrepreneur or the pictures of new groundbreaking adorning offices, but there is still much research to be done in this area. And, practically speaking, do certain patterns of caring for organizational artifacts anticipate or predict organizational decline? To scholars of materiality in organizations, organizational archeology offers a means of beginning to answer fundamental questions such as which artifacts matter, when they matter, and why.

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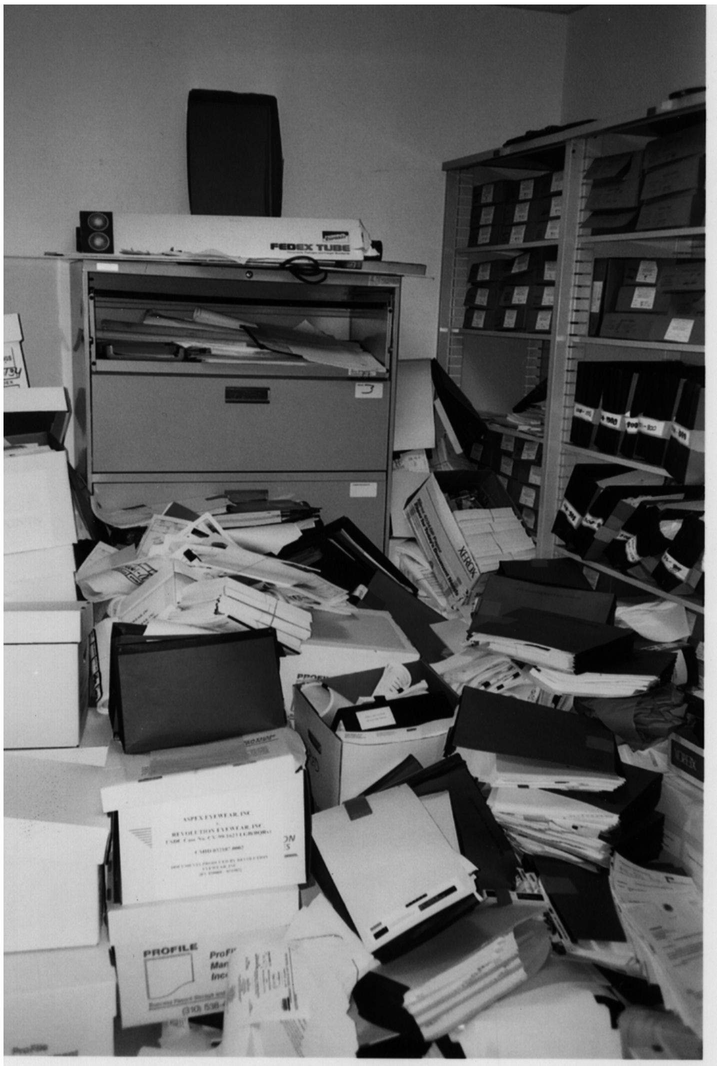
FIGURE 1: The Deceleration of Artifacts

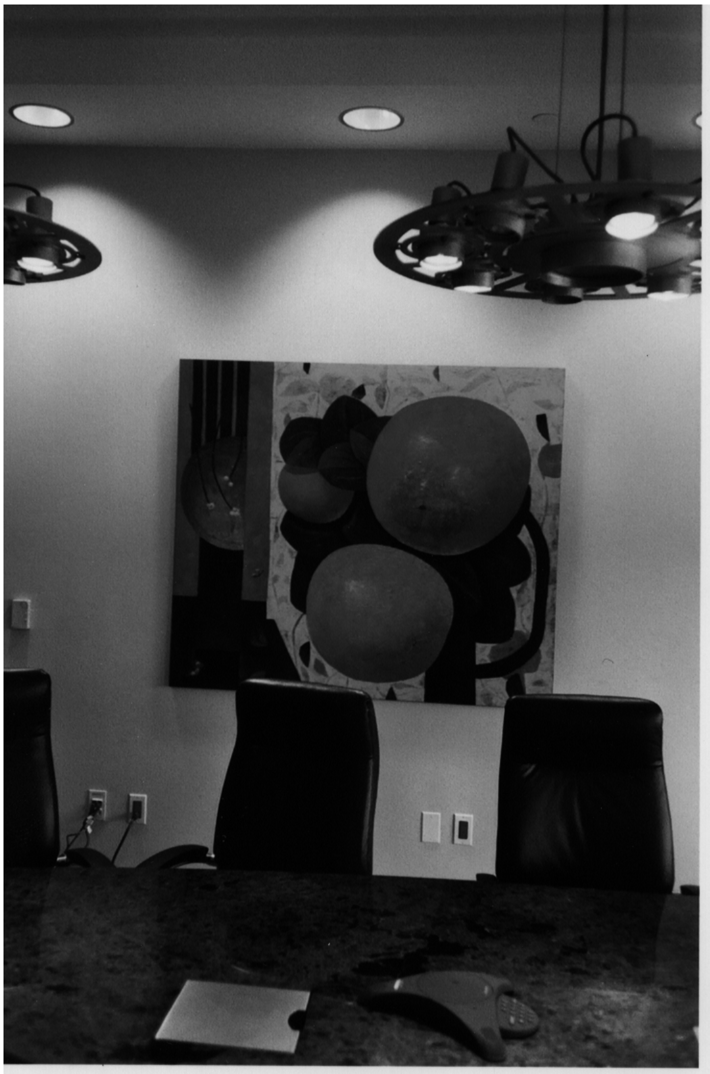
The closed Los Angeles office evidenced a lack of continuing care for organizational artifacts.



Author photo: June 2003

FIGURE 2: High-Tech Luxury at Brobeck San Diego.

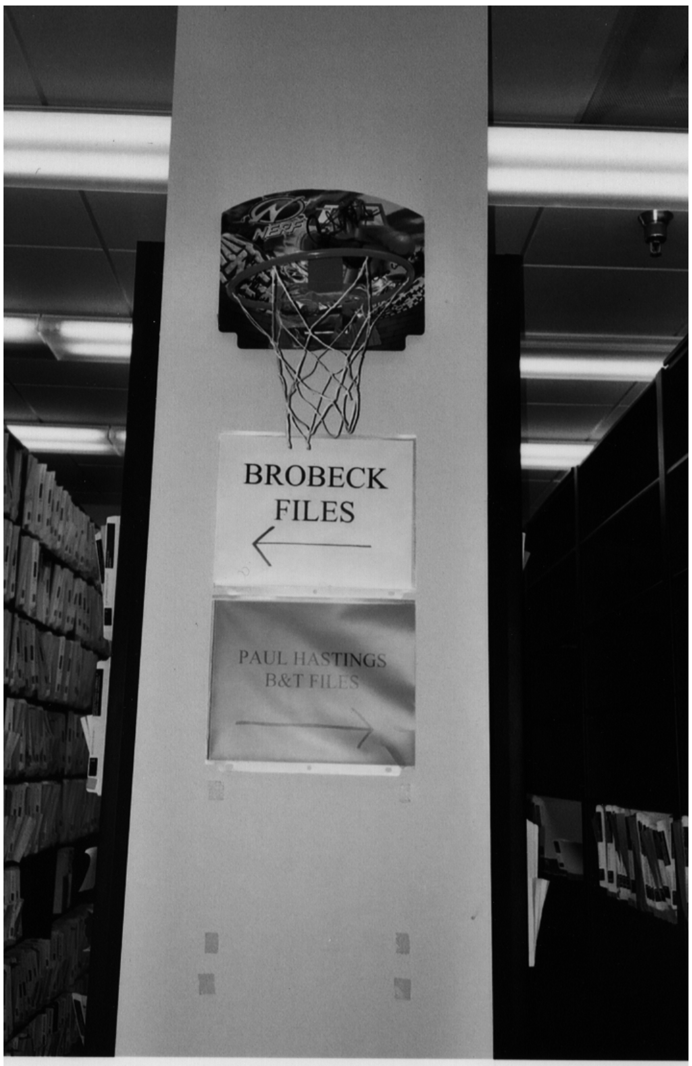
While other offices looked chaotic, the new Paul Hastings practice meant conference rooms were still orderly and featured the same original art and electronic gadgetry that had graced Brobeck.



Author photo, July 2003.

FIGURE 3: Material Conversion of the Practice

The file room in San Diego was neatly divided between "old" files and "new" files, even though for many attorneys that meant moving the files from one side of the room to another. Employees reported that the basketball hoop fit more on the Brobeck side of the file room, but could not bring themselves to take it down.



Author photo. July 2003