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**The interplay of agencies in institutional disruption:  
An explanation of the slow death of asbestos in France**

**ABSTRACT.** Although central to many debates in neo-institutional theories, the concept of agency still remains fairly ambiguous and sometimes elusive. In particular, the agency concept tends to conflate two different phenomena, the power of agency (the capacity to act in a given social context) and agentic power (the capacity to act independently of structural constraints). The paper explores the interplay between these two types of agency in the slow abandonment of asbestos in France from 1970 to 1997. Based on archival data and interviews, we graphically reconstitute a deinstitutionalization process composed of a series of actions. As an important contribution, the paper puts to light a pattern where different types of agencies are combined in a momentum. Peripheral actors bring agentic power to another actor in the field who then induce different kinds of efforts supported by power of agency. Thus, agency is circulating and being transformed from an actor to another. The slow abandonment of asbestos is explained by the dispersion of agentic power: actors tend to be incorporated in the consensus they have contributed to bring out, weakening their agentic power.

While some scholars have explored the deinstitutionalisation phenomenon (Greenwood et al. 2002 ; Hiatt et al. 2009 ; Maguire and Hardy 2009 ; Oliver 1992), more seldom have been the studies that reconstitute and explore the succession of actions in the process, explaining how these actions interact and account for the process of institutional disruption. To “delegitimize an established organizational practice or procedure” (Oliver 1992 p564), to disrupt taken-for-granted assumptions, and to annihilate logics of maintenance, deinstitutionalisation requires specific work (Lawrence and Suddaby 2006 ; Maguire and Hardy 2009). To do that, the meticulous analysis of a series of actions is particularly relevant, all the more than it has been overcome in the institutional literature up till now (Lawrence et al. 2009).

At the heart of this debate about actions to change institutions, *agency* is a central concept. However, this word subsumes a series of complex issues in the sociological and organizational literature, leading sometimes to confusion. Drawing on Campbell's call (2009) for distinguishing power of agency and agentic power, this paper aims at exploring how these two phenomena are related and contribute together to social change. Our interest revolves around the role of different types of actions, rather than a focus on disruptive events in the longitudinal process of deinstitutionalisation. We have reconstituted through secondary data and primary data the story of asbestos in France. Then, from this story, we build a graphical process representation, underlining the succession of institutional actions and their interaction. An effort does not necessarily produce immediate effects on institutions, but can be associated, combined, translated, adapted by other actors and then produce significant effects at a macro level. In this process we explore the interplay of agencies and we assess whether some patterns can be identified.

Some actions and events have the power to radically contribute to institutional disruption. Several scholars have emphasized deinstitutionalization cases, which illustrate the capacity of actors to alter and destroy existing institutions (Hiatt et al. 2009 ; Maguire and Hardy 2009 ; Oliver 1992). While many studies about institutional change have relied on longitudinal analysis over several decades (amongst others Chung and Luo 2008 ; D'Aunno et al. 2000 ; Greenwood et al. 2002 ; Hoffman 1999 ; Leblebici et al. 1991a ; Tolbert and Zucker 1996 ; Tolbert and Zucker 1983), studies about institutional disruption or deinstitutionalisation have emphasized the role of jolts (Meyer et al. 1990) that destabilize established practices. Jolts catalyze the evolution of the field and precipitate its change. As instance, Maguire's and Hardy's research (2009) underlines the publication of *Silent Spring* as a jolt that initiated the decline of DDT.

While jolts play a very important role in institutional disruption, it is also important to take into account longer periods and the succession of actions leading to institutional disruption. Institutional change cannot be attributed to a single event. Instead, change is the effect of a social construction of events that are collectively assimilated, sorted out and theorized.

Our goal is to develop what elements, in a particular course of actions, can account for the slow decline of asbestos in France, after decades of dialectical efforts.

### *Agency, agentic power and power of agency*

The major thrust of contemporary institutional research has been a deeper investigation of agency. The “structure versus agency debate” (Hirsch and Lounsbury 1997) has probably constituted a central concern for institutionalists” (Heugens and Lander 2009). To go beyond oppositions between a pure entrepreneur and an entirely constrained individual, some scholars have invited to a deeper grasp of the agency concept (Battilana and D'Aunno 2009 ; Lawrence and Suddaby 2006 ; Lawrence et al. 2009). While these attempts for a better conceptualisation of agency are promising, it still remains “slippery” (Campbell 2009 ; Hitlin and Elder 2007 p170). Being closely associated with the agency-structure debates, it inherits some inextricable sociological and philosophical issues, such as the autonomy of actors, the definition of interests and intentions, the awareness of reality and finally the question of free will. While some scholars belong to the Locke’s tradition in which agency is the foundation of rational choice, individualist action and progress in general, other scholars, closer to Kant’s view, perceive agency as an intermediary between free will and normative constraint (Emirbayer and Mische 1998).

Not surprisingly, many scholars have tried to decipher the “vagueness” (Emirbayer and Mische 1998 p962) of the agency concept, especially in the sociological literature (Campbell 2009 ; Emirbayer and Mische 1998 ; Fuchs 2001 ; Hitlin and Elder 2007 ; Sewell 1992). These reflections have not contributed yet to a stabilisation of “agency” and some of its foundations still appear fuzzy. For example, Alexander (1992) criticizes sociologists for their tendency to conflate actors with agency. Some other times, agency is simply employed as a synonym for action. This lack of consensus about agency raises the question of its utility to describe social issues (Loyal and Barnes 2001).

Following a brief overview of the term “agency” in the sociological literature, Campbell (2009) observes two distinct approaches. On the one hand, agency is perceived as “the power that individuals possess that enables them to realize their chosen goals” (2009 p408). On the other hand, “agency” is essentially opposed to structure and it is described as the capacity of individuals to act independently of social constraints. However, it is not obvious to equate the realization of chosen goals and the capacity to act independently of social structures. It is on the contrary two different phenomena. The former refers to the question of individual power, interests and intentions while the latter relies to the resistance to structural power. This basic distinction must be taken seriously to account for the transformative capacity of actors and it leads Campbell to distinguish “*power of agency*” (type 1) and “*agentic power*” (type 2). Power of agency is required to achieve goals. It is necessary to engage into actions, whether they are repetitive, traditional, adaptative or creative. Power of agency impacts on the environment of actors and requires autonomy, will and sometimes creativity. However, these qualities apply “to the means through which action is accomplished” (Campbell 2009 p410). As for agentic power, it is also based on voluntarism, autonomy and creativity but these qualities are applied not only on the means of action but on actions and goals themselves. Agentic power is used against social structure.

**Collective action process and institutional work**

The combination of these two types of agency is not necessarily a solitary exercise. To account for change, an increasing number of scholars have investigated the role of collective action, and especially the combination of efforts exerted by individuals or groups with different interests, capabilities and values. To annihilate logics of maintenance and to unveil taken-for-granted assumptions, deinstitutionalization requires considerable efforts.

Social movement theories have greatly contributed to the understanding of collective efforts aimed at change, especially through political behaviours and dialectical actions (Hargrave and Van de Ven 2006). Drawing on Rucht's definition of a social movement, deinstitutionalisation can be perceived as the result of "an action system comprised of mobilized networks of individuals, groups, or organizations" (1999) that attempts to disrupt institutionalized elements by means of collective protest. Several scholars have investigated the impact of social movements on institutions, as well on the regulative, normative or cognitive pillars (e.g. Hiatt et al. 2009 ; Johnson 2008 ; King 2008 ; Morill et al. 2003 ; Rao et al. 2003 ; Snow et al. 1986 ; Soule and King 2006).

However, the outcomes of social movements and collective action are difficult to predict (Hiatt et al. 2009) and only few studies explore their impact on organizations and industries (Schneiberg et al. 2008 ; Sine and Lee 2009). Since they consist on political behaviours and struggles, aiming at promoting or denigrating specific structures and practices, they imply a complex network of actions, intentions and interests. Finally, they alter organisational landscapes in different ways, leading sometimes to unexpected consequences. The study of Hiatt et al. (2009) emphasizes both intended and unintended effects of social movements in the case of alcohol consumption in America. Their study underlines for example the development of unexpected initiatives and entrepreneurial actions.

A focus on collective action to apprehend institutional work offers an interesting perspective. There is a complex intertwine between purposive efforts, institutional effects, and collective movements so generated. Most of institutional studies are focused on processes that connect actions with institutional effects but overlook most of concrete practices employed by actors, as the product of interactions. Meanwhile, these actions rely on different levels of mobilisation. As a matter of fact, institutional work may disrupt an institution, but may also fail to do so. Studies of institutional work should take into account all kinds of activities aimed at changing, disrupting or maintaining institutions, independently of their actual effects. As Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca (2009 p11) put it “the study of institutional work offers an invitation to move beyond a linear view of institutional processes [...]. Because it points to the study of activities rather than accomplishment, success as well as failure, acts of resistance and of transformation, the concept of institutional work may contribute to a move away from a concentrated, heroic, and successful conception of institutional agency”.

### ***Institutional change and agency***

As we emphasized earlier, agency is a key concept to explain institutional change. Its role is yet controversial. Lamberg and al. (2010) distinguish two sets of assumptions which originate change in different sources. From a structuralist perspective, actors are embedded in dense social networks, and thus, they mainly enact routines and habits. In that case, change is explained by exogenous jolts which may divert actors from their routines. From an individualistic point of view, the question of interests is more central, and change is a consequence of purposive actions. Individuals design and implement institutional changes (Fligstein 1997). The description of agency as an interplay between power of agency and agentic power reflects a promising avenue to escape the strict opposition between

structuralism and methodological individualism. Some individuals, at a particular time, are endowed with agentic power, for example due to contradictory logics (Leblebici et al. 1991b ; Seo and Creed 2002), and some others with power of agency. To that extent, there may be a dynamic oscillation between power of agency and agentic power, between individuals and through time. The understanding of the dual and complementary types of agency may lead to a better understanding of the institutional dynamic, especially considering the interplay of efforts in the collective process of change. While agency is a key concept that has mainly been used to account for the capacity of entrepreneurs to change institutions, the way agency circulates between different actors in the case of collective change has been overlooked. As table 1 illustrates, we may organize different studies about institutional change taking into account the type and the source of agency. From existing studies, we can note that institutional change is often due to power of agency, enabled as well at a field level and at an organizational and individual level. Yet, most of these studies overlook to which extent agency circulates within a field, combining agentic power and power of agency to generate change. This leads us to important questions:

How type 1 and type 2 of agency are linked in the process of change? Is there a temporal pattern? Do actors oscillate between agentic power and power of agency in the process of institutional change?



		Type of agency	
		Agentic power	Power of agency
Field level	Source of agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Contradictory institutional arrangements may trigger actors' reflexivity (Battilana and D'Aunno 2009 ; Emirbayer and Mische 1998 ; Seo and Creed 2002)</li> <li>- Jolts may contribute to the emergence of new ideas and capacity to resist against existing structures (Fligstein 2001 ; Greenwood et al. 2002)</li> <li>- Existence of complex and multifaceted problems may foster questioning, creativity and reflexivity (Phillips et al. 2000)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Incomplete institutionalization and heterogeneity of practices fosters change through day to day actions (Clemens and Cook 1999 ; D'Aunno et al. 2000 ; Tolbert and Zucker 1996)</li> <li>-Combination between heterogeneous institutional arrangements and high level of institutionalization facilitates change (Dorado 2005)</li> </ul>
Individuals or organizations		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Organizations and actors at the periphery of a field are more likely to break with existing institutions (Leblebici et al. 1991b) and struggles against existing structural constraints</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Organizations and actors at the margin of different fields are more likely to produce change through their daily practices (Levy and Egan 2003 ; Rao et al. 2000)</li> <li>-Individuals with long term interests are more related to institutional changes (Lamberg and Pajunen 2010)</li> </ul>

Table 1: Studies about institutional change according to source and type of agency

## METHODS AND DATA

To study the interplay of power of agency and agentic power, we focus on a single case. It illustrates an exemplary deinstitutionalisation process over several decades. From a “magical mineral” to the “the public enemy number one”, asbestos has been progressively considered as a lethal substance and has been forbidden in 1997 in France. Several reasons have motivated the choice of studying this long process of institutionalization change. First, the controversy in France has brought major social struggles and has generated a large coalition of opponents and defenders of asbestos. Second, this case is remarkable considering the very long period for asbestos to be deinstitutionalized: asbestos has been forbidden in France only for 1997, instead of

the 80's for most other industrialized countries. The French case raises the question of the interplay of diverging institutional efforts and requires a deep analysis to understand how actors collectively interact and contribute to institutional change.

Asbestos is a natural mineral that has been considered as a “magic” substance. It has been a key material, especially to answer the needs of the demographic revolution in France and to repair the damages caused by the Second World War. In the 70s, asbestos was used in the production of about 3000 products in France and was the main lag employed in the construction industry. It remained massively used in the 70' until the scandal of Amisol workers and the mobilization of the “Collectif de Jussieu”. The “Collectif de Jussieu” communicated in mass media and succeeded in connecting different movements. In particular, it enrolled some Amisol workers, which constituted a a tipping point in the debate. It provoked strong reactions from the asbestos industry which produced their own texts challenging the opponents' claims about the noxiousness of asbestos. This crisis period had led to the controlled use of asbestos in France from 1977 and resulted to a general consensus: a new committee called CPA (Asbestos Permanent Committee) was created. This committee, constituted by industrials, researchers and workers' representatives, had to take decision concerning asbestos in France. This raises an interesting issue: how such a consensus has been decided in spite of divergent interests? The all-interesting point is that actors engaged in the disruptive work, at that time, did not want to ban asbestos. Calls for abandoning asbestos appeared very lately. This aspect is due to the co-existence of conflicting interests and sociological evolution such as unemployment, fear of outsourcing or demands for better working conditions. We can note a shift in the central concerns of the debate between 1970 and 1997. During the 70s, debates more particularly revolved around unemployment. The hazards linked to asbestos had to be controlled to facilitate the protection of employment. This

contextual fear of unemployment and the fact that professional risks were not topical issues explain the consensus around the controlled use of asbestos, rather than its ban. During the 80s, questioning whether asbestos should be used was not frequent. In the 90s, there was a change in the perceptions of work and especially the issue of the working environment took more importance. Claims for the ban of asbestos appeared only in the 90s after the first cases of disease and death caused by asbestos and due to the publication of an alarming scientific report by the INSERM. Finally, asbestos was banned in France in 1997.

### **Research design**

To understand how different types of agency interact in the process of institutional disruption, we explore the story of asbestos in France and especially the institutional actions between 1970 to 1997. The case is well-documented, which allows us to constitute a rich material of secondary data. This material is analyzed in different ways to identify and explain the efforts implied in deinstitutionalization. We began by collecting data in the form of secondary accounts (Lear, 1997) to ensure convergence and triangulation on events. We relied mainly on archival data (the press coverage of the scandal of asbestos in France, public reports, tracts, books, public reports...). Then we interview key actors of the field. Secondary data and interviews are the basic material to reconstitute the story of asbestos. We then turn this qualitative story in a database of institutional actions that took place from 1970 to 1997. We identify from the story of asbestos 55 institutional actions and we represent these actions and their relationship on a timeline. One difficulty of this approach is to identify the proper qualitative datum, that is the action or incident that may participate to the process of institutional change. In our case, the basic unit we rely on is an action, whether it is achieved by an individual or an organization. In particular, we have selected actions which may potentially challenge the

existing institution, whether it is intentional or not. To that extent, we have excluded from our chronology repetitive actions and routines that only consist in the reproduction of institutionalized practices. This selection of actions was discussed and validated with experts: Pr Brochard, epidemiologist who belonged to the CPA; M. Thébaud-Mony, scientist, member of the INSERM and Ban-Asbestos; M. Ledoux, lawyer for the asbestos victims in 1994; M. Parigot, professor at Jussieu and founder of the main association that protects asbestos victims. Our aim was to understand the cause and consequence for each action. The experts validated with us the links between different actions but also their context.

In addition to that, we study institutional change at a macro level. To do that, we rely on archival data analysis. We have constituted a corpus of representative texts from press, House of Parliament, books, press release to identify the main issues around asbestos at different times. Through these texts, we tend to identify the main evolution of the perceptions concerning asbestos.

	1970-1977	1978-1992	1992-1997
<b>Authors of the texts from the corpus</b>	- Asbestos Union (press release) - Media (press, radio, TV) - Workers' Union (tract) - CIRC (Public Institution)	- INSERM (public Institution, report) - Asbestos Union (white Paper, press release) - Government (Decree) - Workers' Union - Professors (letter to the government) - CPA - Press	- Inserm - Senate - <i>Collectif de Jussieu</i> - Academy of Medicine - CPA - Press

**Table 2: Sources of texts**

These texts represent for four different periods, from 1970 to 1997, the evolution of beliefs, norms and values associated with asbestos. These archives have been analyzed to decipher the

most notable evolution in the perceptions around asbestos. This analysis has been assisted by Prospéro (Chateauraynaud 2003), a piece of software particularly well adapted for the longitudinal textual analysis. This method enables us to associate actions with their institutional context. We then explore the potential relationships between actions and institutional evolution of asbestos. To build the timeline, we position the 55 actions according to the type of agency they mainly reflect. Finally this timeline has been debated with two scientists and one expert and in case of divergence was discussed to reach an agreement.

The following lines detail the story of asbestos in France between 1970 to 1997. We then build a visual representation of the series of actions implied in the deinstitutionalization of asbestos, as they appear from the following story.

## **THE SLOW DEATH OF ASBESTOS IN FRANCE**

### *1970-1977: the first scandal of asbestos in France*

The period between 1945 and 1970 can be seen as a ‘golden age’ for the international asbestos industry. Some scientist and doctors published yet studies that demonstrated the link between asbestos and disease. First victims of asbestos appeared at the end of the 60s. Many former employees of the Johns-Manville company, one of the main producers of asbestos in the USA, were involved in a class action suit against the company for asbestos occupational disease. Studies were confidential and American problems stayed local. However, industrials forecasted difficulties in the coming years. In 1971, industrials organized an international conference about asbestos in London. All European and Anglo-Saxon producers were there. The debate focused on risks linked to asbestos. Actually, the real aim of the meeting was to elaborate guidelines to avoid proceedings. It constitutes an interesting illustration of proactive

defensive work. Then, in the European and American markets, a handful of experts lobbied for the sake of asbestos companies. This meeting led to the creation of the COFREBA in France. The COFREBA is the first lobbying organization created in France. Accordingly, the promise of the asbestos lobby – that asbestos can save lives and is economically necessary – appears increasingly attractive. However, public institutes, such as the WHO (World Health Organization) or the INRS (a French institute in charge of health protection), organized conferences and published guidelines about asbestos. This activity illustrates that asbestos risks were recognized, not to say well known but one of the enduring challenges was to learn how to use it safely. At the end of 1972, the ILO (International Labour Organization) and the IARC (International Agency for Research on Cancer) reaffirmed that there are some controllable risks linked to the use of asbestos. These papers or research convey mainstream ideas as they are shaped by industrials . The most basic beliefs were that asbestos is useful, strategic for rebuilding and for the army, and natural. The latter element was put forward to justify why asbestos can bring out some risks. For practical purposes, problems or conflicts about asbestos in France were limited to local events in factories where workers campaigned for better employees working environment. Asbestos is not a special problem; it is a dust like others. Workers wanted to have a better working environment. However, there were not aware of the exposure risks.

The main disruptive event during this period occurred a few years after the beginning of an industrial strike in France. In 1974, a strike began at Amisol, a French asbestos producer and transformer. It was not caused by the fear of asbestos but because of the closing down of the company. Workers, most of them were women, were in strike to avoid unemployment. At the same time, some professors from a famous University in France, Jussieu, pointed out the presence of asbestos dust in their offices. Without any responses from political or scientific

spheres, the action group, led by a charismatic professor Henri Pézerat, investigated the different dimensions of asbestos. First, they understood that it was dangerous for health. Then, they realized the power of asbestos industrials in the organization of the field in France. To sum up, they bumped into the silence: industrials have the total control over debates. Professors from Jussieu decided to create a social event to alert media. They have heard about a small factory in the center of France called... Amisol. Henri Pézerat and his colleagues decided to go there to visit the company and inform employees about risks. The misery of these women and the death of about 10 of their colleagues since the beginning of the strike, created a media-event. It is the first time the use and consequences of asbestos were questioned. This industrial controversy revolved around such questions as: What are the real dangers of asbestos? Are workers and population in great danger? How to avoid new deaths caused by asbestos? Is asbestos a controllable material? The media fuelled the industrial debate that became a social one. The French consumer association "60 millions of consumers" and journalists investigated and understood that asbestos is everywhere without any care. In the middle of the 70s, 3 000 products were made with asbestos in France along hundreds of buildings flocked with asbestos. One of the main French TV channels decided to broadcast three TV programs against asbestos that amplified the political debate. Industrials had no option but to develop their defensive work through conferences, publications and meetings with politicians. This discussion was reinterpreted in the tradition of risk assurance through the question of level of exposure. During the year 1976, there was an increase in the number of publications from both scientists and industrials. Scientists, who led the movement from Jussieu, accused industrials of diminishing the importance and impact of asbestos, instead of analyzing the problems and the issues related to the use of asbestos (consequences for workers and environmental victims). Scientists call for scientific projects that could determine reliable risks thresholds. The industrial and domestic controversies generated such

a national debate, that the main issue for politicians is to take decisions that bind by law the use of asbestos in France. Governments put forward economic arguments focused on the profitability of asbestos, thus implicitly supporting the requests of industrials. Accordingly, asbestos was not banned and was considered as a controllable material. Thus, five laws were voted. Their aim was to protect workers without jeopardizing the industry. Between 1977 and 1982, industrials organized a post crisis defensive work to limit the impact of political decisions. Opponents entrusted the government with the problem of asbestos.

*1977-1992: the organized silence*

Definition of the nature of the risk triggered a debate in the political arena. The defensive work led by the industrials led to the creation of an original committee the “CPA” (in French “Comité Permanent Amiante”). This committee was responsible for all the questions connected with asbestos. It gathered industrials, researchers and workers’ representatives. Funds came from industrials through a consulting company. The CPA was the central entity in the field. As a normative organization that gives stability to the field. It bridges economic interests with protection of workers. In fact, the main issue for industrials was to implement the controlled use of asbestos in France through the CPA. During this period, the CPA also produces some shared beliefs, legitimating the asbestos as long as there is a central entity that can control, prescribe and ensure stability. Concerning the actions during this period, it is extremely interesting to observe that none of them intend to disrupt the use of asbestos. From the past subversive actions, the only persisting dimension is the use of scientific studies to define the proper employ of asbestos. This normative constraint finally became a reason to pursue the use of asbestos which is guided by scientific recommendations. To that extent, the asbestos defenders exploited these existing norms to create a regulative organism called the CPA. This organism constituted a formidable device to maintain the use of asbestos, mainly



guided by scientists and industrials. To that extent,, there is a long period (5 years) of inaction. The struggles in the field were concentrated in a closed organization. In that way, divergences remained in a private sphere and were not covered by the media. Some European directives were voted in France, but without disrupting the field.

*1992-1997: the new scandal of asbestos in France*

While the government and the CPA generally argued that the use of asbestos was controlled, some political parties took a more critical view. However, their voice was not loud until the complaints of widows in 1992. Their husbands were teachers in a school flocked with asbestos. These men were not workers from the asbestos industry. One of the main differences between the first and the second crisis is the appearance of “real visible victims” of asbestos. Given the nature of the event, it is unsurprising that the controversy initially revolved around social and health principles. In the same time, Julian Peto, an English scientist published the results from his epidemiological study: hundreds of deaths are forecasted for the next years in Great-Britain, where restrictions and protections are higher. This finding is a huge argument for Henri Pézerat to emerge from his silence. A conference is organized in Jussieu to present Julian Peto’s research. H. Pézerat created a group of scientists and lawyers to implement a legal strategy to obtain the ban of asbestos. The re-emergence of questioning has generated a renewed interest, and led to the reopening of investigations. The CPA did no longer appear credible and was self dislocated. In this context, the ANDEVA (association for the protection of asbestos victims) was created, which had a strong institutional impact: asbestos became a national problem, and the juridical responsibility of the government and asbestos industrials was questioned. These criticisms turned asbestos into the national enemy number one, and led to a series of actions which eventually put an end to the use of asbestos through regulative decisions. The “reborn” controversy revived the older

debates on Amisol. The media fuelled and amplified the political debate: the asbestos crisis became a public health crisis. The French government took a more cautious position and claimed that investigations should be conducted before conclusions could be drawn. With this point of view, the INSERM published a study that announced hundreds of deaths for the next 20 years. In view of this situation, the French government has no choice but ban asbestos in France and implements a system of compensation for the victims.

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INSERT Figure 1 and figure 2 ABOUT HERE

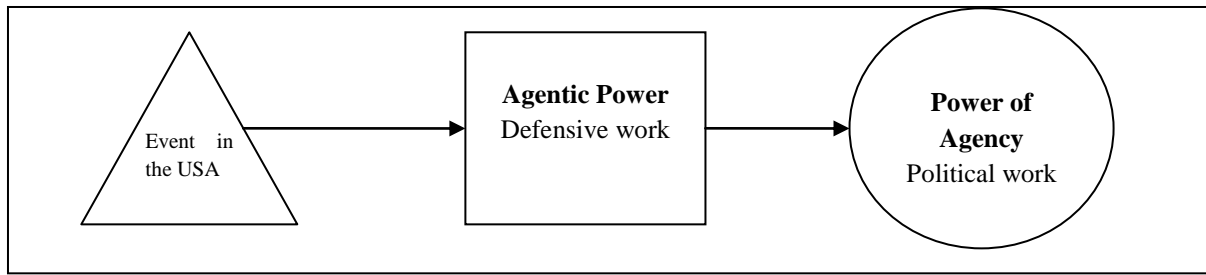
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## **DISCUSSION**

The goal of this historical study was to address the role and importance of different types of agency and the dynamic between actions in the case of institutional change. Essentially, we provide evidence of the existence of pattern between the different types of agency.

We propose a timeline (figure 1) that synthesizes the interplay of agencies in a process of institutional change. Our aim is to analyze the different sequences that emerge from the analysis.

*Sequence 1:* We can see that one event in the USA (complaints against Jonhs-Manville) led to a series of actions of defensive work. These actions reflect the use of agentic power to maintain an institution. Then, as a consequence, we can observe a series of actions that result from power of agency. Indeed, we can observe a kind of political work through the adoption of laws and the publications of reports from public institute. It the first time the practice of asbestos was questioned.

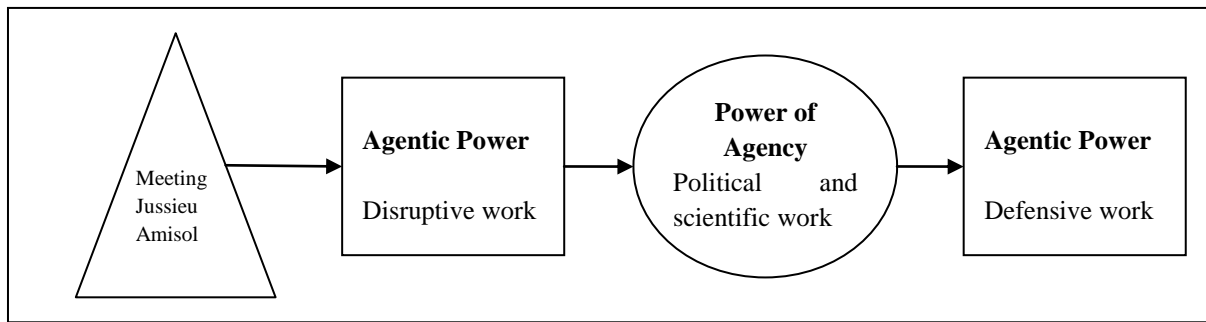


One interesting point concerning this sequence is the interdependence between the three types of action listed here. Indeed, alone, the event in the USA didn't have any impact on asbestos in France. However, this event has been captured by central actors in the field endowed with agentic power. In their strategy of maintenance, this event had a special impact for the industrials. It is the first time they imagined the end of the "golden age" of asbestos in France. They decided to structure the field around the guidelines proposed at the international conference. For example, they created a real producer-union, the COFREBA. This new organization and structure allowed them to control the field and impede the actors endowed with power of agency (INRS, WHO for example).

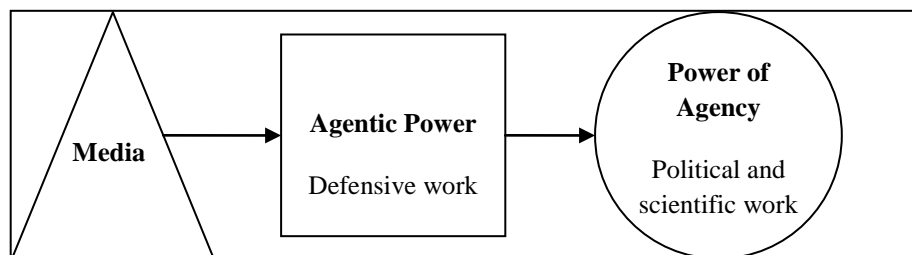
The complete sequence had an institutional impact: research studies were a source of legitimacy. It is induced by the questioning of the practice and the strategy of dominant actors to prove the complexity of asbestos.

**Sequence 2:** The meeting with Jussieu and Amisol's workers can be interpreted as an action at the periphery of the field. Some actors at the periphery of the field, such as intellectuals or artists that support the strike in Amisol or residents that are afraid of being polluted, create the conditions for a disruptive work that relies on agentic power. These series of actions bring about reactions of actors that have power of agency (government, institutes). Then, in response to these actions, industrials develop their defensive work with agentic

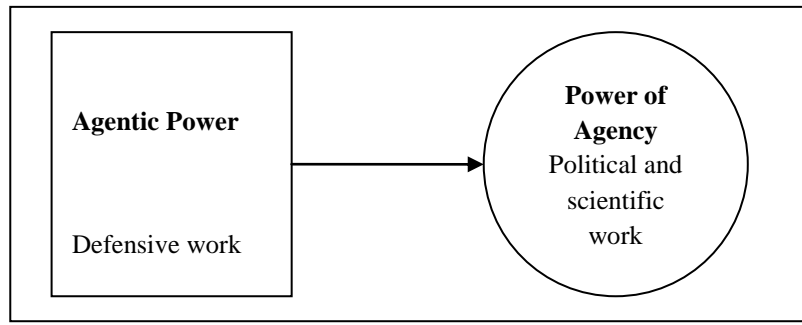
power. This agentic power enables them to limit the impact of the power of agency of government and the agentic power from the disruptive work.



**Sequence 3:** Media, at the periphery of the field, fuelled and amplified the debate. They created a new arena for actors with agentic power. Thus, these actors develop from both side defensive or disruptive work. These debate led to the re-emergence in the debate of actors endowed with power of agency.



**Sequence 4:** At the end of the 70s, the field seems to be under the control of industrials, endowed with agentic power. They implement the CPA and impose the “controlled use of asbestos” in France. We observe the absence of disruptive work during the period. Industrials use their agentic power to control the field. Besides, the decisions taken by the government also depend on the power endowed by industrials. Actions are adaptations of European directives as a minimum.

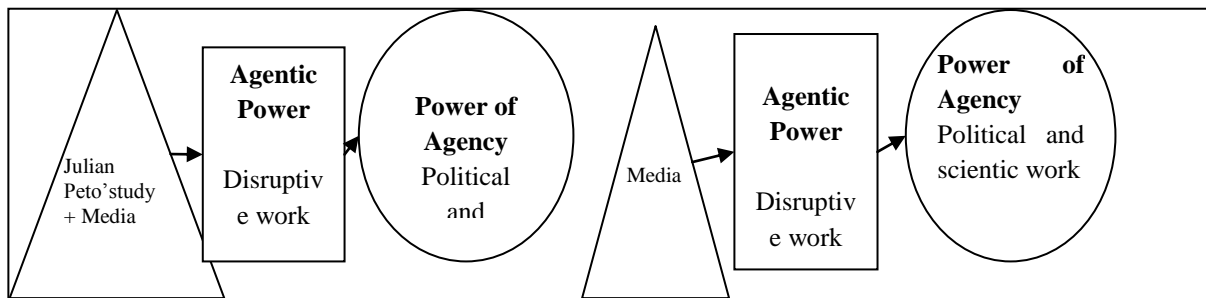


**Comments about sequences 2 – 3 - 4**

The meeting between Jussieu and Amisol can be perceived as an action led by an actor at the periphery of the field because the workers weren't aware of the risks (they were on strike to obtain the reopening of the factory) and the professors from Jussieu were not specialists of asbestos. Amisol and Jussieu created an event: the proof (Amisol workers) and the knowledge (legitimacy of scientific professors). This situation gave them an agentic power. They used it to question asbestos and “re-define” the field with negative aspects. This capacity to question the use of asbestos offers opportunity for scientists (especially from public institute) to study consequences of asbestos. The new arena created here challenged the dominant actors (represented by the industrials) and Jussieu's movement captured their agentic power. The interesting point is also that this movement spread power of agency to public institute and governments. The actions of these individuals contributed to foster the disruptive work during this period. As we can see on the timeline, at the end of sequence 2, industrials made their mark on the process with their agentic power. They used it to develop their defensive work. This dynamic between actors concerned by asbestos explains why its use has not been banned at the end at the first crisis. The action at the periphery offers the possibility for different types of actors to have an agentic power. This agentic power introduces new issues and challenge the field. In some cases, it forces actors such as government and public institute to react with their power of agency. However, agentic power,

possessed by non-dominant actors, is not sufficient to disrupt the field. It does not allow them to convince and enroll dominant actors, endowed with the effective power to change institutions. For example, the government took timid decisions, and only tried to limit the threshold of exposure.. This type of decision confirmed industrials in their position and, more important, it annihilates the efforts of certain actors and the agentic power they have used.. The sequence 4 represents the period of the controlled use of asbestos in France. Industrials are endowed with agentic power and controlled the field. This period explains why the deinstitutionalization process was so long in France comparing to other countries. The agentic power of industrials was used to set new rules in the field and impede the capacity of other individuals to change institutionalized elements concerning asbestos. This power also shaped actions from actors endowed with power of agency like the French government that limits its action to the adaptation in French law of the European directives (actions that are the minimum to do).

*Sequence 5:* We find the same pattern in the last sequence. Media (still local) and Julian Peto, at the periphery of the field, led actions that have created a new arena for actors that wanted to disrupt the practice. Professors at Jussieu have an agentic power that carry public institute (such as Inserm) away. A new media mobilization leads to real disruptive work. In this sequence, actors who want to defend asbestos don't have power anymore. It is a silent period for them as if the cause was only lost (due to international pressure and reality of the facts). The disruptive work leads to a series of actions from the government. These actions relied on power of agency. It was finally the ban of asbestos in France.



The sequence 5 is really interesting because it represents the process that led to the ban of asbestos in France. As we noted in the previous sequence (sequence 4: the CPA in France), industrials controlled the question of asbestos in France. Non-dominant actors didn't have any way of acting anymore. The capacity of reemerging in the debate was possible with the publication in Great-Britain of Julian Peto's study. This study is a key event in the process because it offers a new capacity of "being heard" for silent actors. Like in sequence 1, the danger of asbestos is proved. Henri Pézerat creates a kind of new committee at the University of Jussieu (we can talk about the re-birth of the mobilization). The aim of this action is now to obtain the ban of asbestos in France. They use their agentic power to denounce the consensus of CPA and to elaborate a strategy to put an end to the use of asbestos. During this first part of the sequence, actors endowed with power of agency are influenced by industrials. The agentic power of non dominant actors forced them to act but their decisions are timid (they only order studies from the INSERM). They used their power of agency to constrain the effects of the agentic power of subversive actors. A second series of actions from the periphery of the field reinforced the agentic power of the challengers. Actors endowed with power of agency changed the aim of their actions. As industrials lost their legitimacy in the field due to new proofs about the noxiousness of asbestos, they also lose their power in the field. As we noted in previous sequences, the entire sequence is necessary to explain how challengers can be endowed with a sufficient agentic power to challenge the institution. Agentic power shaped the field especially when actors captured the power of agency of their opponents. When only

one category of actors has agentic power, they create a momentum where actions are led by individuals or organizations with power of agency. These actions are consistent with the interests of actors endowed with agentic power.

### *Conclusion*

A question guided our inquiry: why is the deinstitutionalization process of asbestos in France so slow? By answering the above question, our study contributes to a greater understanding of the role that the interplay of agencies plays in the process of deinstitutionalization. That said, we do not offer a decisive argument to this question. We should analyze further the field, and explore in particular the causal relationship between actions and institutional change. However, our longitudinal approach reveals the interest of studying the circulation of agencies in a field. Doing so, we identify a pattern of actions that explains one dimension of institutional dynamics.

We put forward a view of deinstitutionalisation as a cumulative process, not a disruption essentially provoked by a jolt. This paper describes a long process and drawing on the concept of institutional work, we have identified a series of efforts which have impacted the use of asbestos. This study does not focus on actions which succeed in disrupting an institution, but on all kinds of efforts oriented toward the institution. As Lawrence and al. (2009) explained, not enough studies analyse different types of efforts even those which are unsuccessful.

Also, one important contribution of this study is the representation of an institutional process over a long period, between 1970 and 1997. To analyse these actions and their relationships, we have constituted a visual chronology. It highlights the institutional impacts of actions and



their relationships. Applied to the case of asbestos, we can observe clusters of actions. This particular phenomenon is well adapted to the concept of momentum. Jansen (2004) distinguishes *statis-based momentum* and *change-based momentum*. In both cases, actors' efforts are inscribed in a specific path and course of actions. The former represents an energy associated with persisting or with extending a current trajectory and the latter refers to an energy associated with a new trajectory. We can observe from our study that institutional actions are not necessarily constrained by a momentum for change or stability. However, we can notice that some groups of actions are perceived and rationalized as local momentums and participate to create other momentums. For example, the actions 4, 5, 7 and 9 can be interpreted as a momentum which institutionalizes the need for scientific caution to use asbestos. This momentum of actions (achieved by fairly neutral actors) is reinterpreted by other actors. It is considered as an alert and then leads to a second momentum: the public denunciation of asbestos. A set of actors, motivated by divergent interests produce a series of actions which all contribute to the public criticism of asbestos. Similarly, the defensive actions 19, 21 and 24 are not a direct answer to a single actor. They seek to respond to a set of disrupting ideas produced by the previous momentum.

Finally, our emphasis on two types of agency is a key contribution to set a bridge between two approaches to explain institutional change: the structuralist or the methodological individualism view. We point out the fact that some actors may have the power to go beyond structural constraints but without institutionalizing their view. That is why, power of agency and agentic power appear closely related to explain change. Besides, this study also invites to explore further the notion of power. The circulation of different types of agency reflects a circulation of power, as well institutional power and individual power. The amount of power in a field appears as a key concept to explain the conversion between agentic power and

efficient power of agency in the process of institutional change. It is also consistent with the call of several institutional scholars to give more attention to power to account for institutional phenomena (Lawrence 2008)

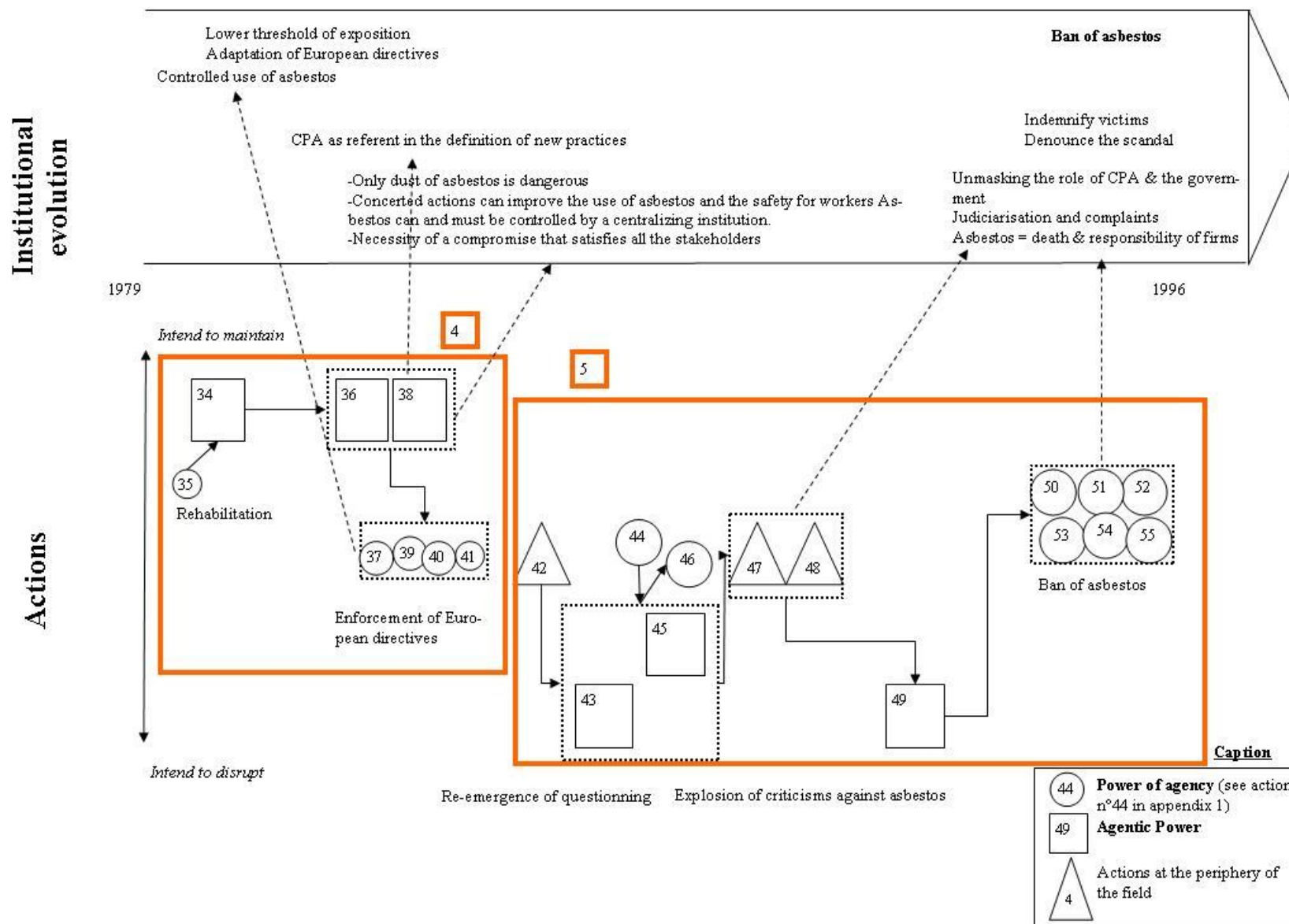
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**Appendix 1: List of actions**

iD	Action	iD	Action
1	Organisation of an international conference about Asbestos in London with European and Anglo-Saxon producers	32	Adoption of protective measures to transport asbestos
2	Creation of COFREBA	33	Law to ban flocking for all kinds of buildings
3	Beginning of an industrial strife in Ferodo (French producer of asbestos)	34	Organisation of conferences in Paris to promote asbestos
4	Organisation by the WHO of an international conference in Lyon (France)	35	Asbestos industrial unions change their name and become an association
5	Publication by the INRS of documents to explain how to use asbestos without any risks	36	Creation of the CPA
6	Complaints of asbestos workers against Johns-Manville (American asbestos producer)	37	Organisation of asbestos removal work in schools
7	Organisation by the ILO of an international conference in Genève. Publication by the ILO of a report "Asbestos : risks for health, how to prevent them"	38	Organisation of a worldwide symposium in Montreal
8	Creation of a special committee in Eternit to control security and working environment	39	Adoption of law to limit exposure
9	Declaration by the CIRC that most of asbestos products are carcinogenic (still uncertainty about the main form of asbestos)	40	Ban of all kinds of asbestos (but chrysotile)
10	Beginning of an industrial strife in Amisol	41	New lowering of tolerated exposure
11	Creation of a social movement in the University of Jussieu	42	Complaints of professor's widows
12	Meeting between Jussieu and Amisol	43	Organisation of a conference in Jussieu
13	Call for solidarity for Amisol workers	44	Recognition by french scientists
14	Beginning of new types of negociation in Amisol	45	Creation of the CAPER
15	Publication by the INRS of documents to propose limit to exposition	46	Winding-up of the CPA
16	Adoption of a law (to protect workers under 18)	47	Publication of an french investigation
17	Pulling down the limit of exposition	48	Broadcasting of a TV program against asbestos (prime time)
18	Modification of the french recognition of asbestos industrial diseases	49	Creation of the ANDEVA
19	Publication of lot of booklets, advertisements by asbestos industrial unions	50	Complaints of 5 sickmen
20	Organisation by th CIRC of a conference about the asbestos risks	51	Publication of an official report (INSERM)
21	The asbestos producer unions write to the French Prime Minister	52	New lowering of tolerated exposure and adoption
22	Promotion through the media of the Amisol's scandal	53	Law to protect workers
23	Consumer associations denounce the presence of asbestos in wine and in consumer goods	54	Obligation for owner to diagnose asbestos in buildings
24	Organisation by the asbestos producers unions of a conference to defend the use of asbestos	55	Ban of all kinds of asbestos (Imports and use of asbestos)
25	Broadcasting of 3 TV programs against asbestos		
26	Publication of a book by asbestos industrial unions		
27	Violent answer from a famous scientific that denounces asbestos practices		
28	All kind of asbestos are recognized as carcinogenic by the CIRC		
29	Publication by the "Collectif de Jussieu" of a pamphlet "Danger, Asbestos"		
30	Ban of flocking for lodging in France		
31	Adoption of a law to limit the exposure of workers		



## *List of acronyms and actors*

### Acronyms

**ACGIH** : American Conference of Industrial Hygienists. Today, **membership** is open to all practitioners in industrial hygiene, occupational health, environmental health, and safety domestically and abroad.

**Chambre syndicale de l'amiante** : Union of asbestos producers. It becomes the “association of asbestos”. The lobby of asbestos in France that controlled all the production and the use of asbestos in France. This union manages to impose and supervise the “controlled use of asbestos” in France.

**CIRC** : *Centre international de Recherche sur le Cancer* (CIRC) is part of WHO (World Health Organization).

**COFREBA** : *Comité français d'étude sur les effets biologiques de l'amiante* (COFREBA), premier lobby de « l'or blanc »

First lobby of the “white gold”, the COFREBA is a French committee in charge of biological studies to measure the effects of asbestos.

**CPA** : *Comité Permanent Amiante*.

French committee in charge of the control and the organization of the ‘controlled use of asbestos’ in France. This committee is under the supervision of the French government but its funds come from industrials. Doctors, trade unionists, scientist, asbestos industrials belong to the committee. This structure is unique and is the emblem of the ‘controlled use of asbestos’.

**INRS** : *Institut National de Recherche et de Sécurité*. French national institute devoted to research and security about the questions of industrial diseases and work related accidents.

### Firms

**Amisol** : Amisol is a French firm specialized in the production of textile. Amisol embodies the scandal of asbestos in France in 70'. Amisol's workers deaths and diseases were the proof of the dangers linked to a professional exposure.

**Eternit** : Eternit is the leader in the production of asbestos cement and building products. It is one of the main actor in the promotion of the ‘controlled use of asbestos’.

**Ferodo** : Ferodo is French firm specialised in the production of equipments for cars (car brakes, clutches etc..). Ferodo used to employing lost of asbestos in the production of their products. Ferodo is now well known as Valeo.

**Jussieu**: Jussieu is a university recently built, with asbestos flocking, in Paris intra-muros in the 1960'. Professors and researchers alarmed governments and gave a media coverage to Amisol's workers. What's more their implications changed the issue : asbestos risks are not only industrial risks. In the 80', the movement disappeared and reappeared in a different way in the 90' to promote the ban of asbestos and asbestos removal work.