

The path from symptomatic description of the American Theft of State to restoration of health has yet to be invented

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Introduction

The title of this essay states a major problem of American politics. The “Defense” section is a defense of the problem statement. The “Proposal” section offers, not a solution, but a vision of what a solution would look like if it were to be realized.

Defense

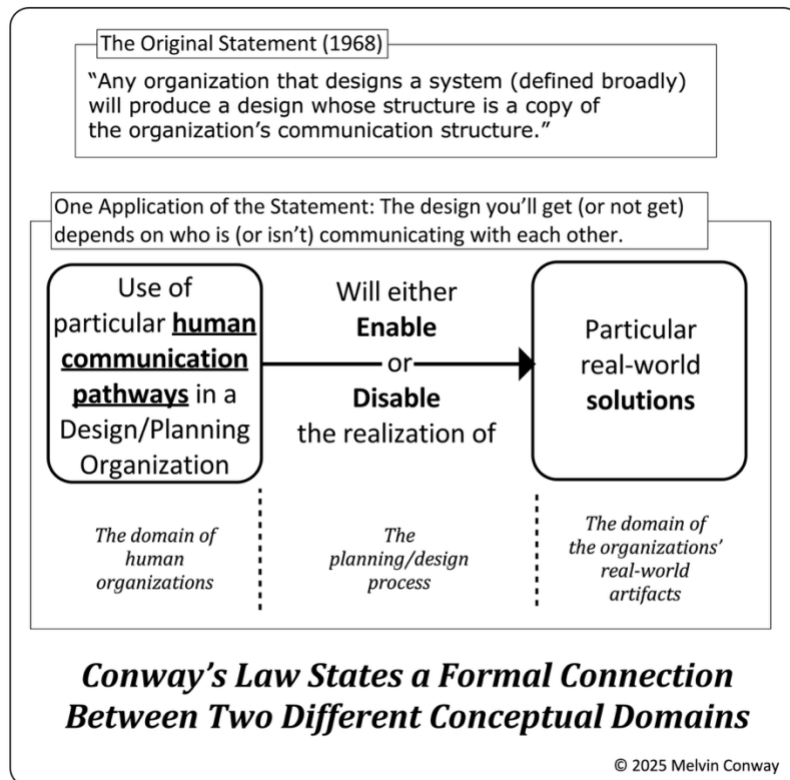
This defense of the problem stated in the title is short but deep; it is based on reasoning from structure, not content.

1. When the body politic is irreversibly damaged, as it is on the way to becoming in America, restoration will require a major design activity. That activity will be designing a complicated human organization that will function according to a written specification¹.
2. It is well understood in the software design community, and in other communities that deal with large-scale designs, that the success or failure of a design activity is highly dependent on the way the design organization is structured.^{2 3} Specifically, certain communication paths in the design organization ***must be present and actively used*** in order for certain kinds of coordination in the resulting product to exist; see this graphic.

¹ This does not necessarily imply Constitutional amendment. There has been significant, and increasing, damage to public and private health and to public services that can be repaired, at least in part, by a wide-awake and energized Congress. In particular, the public has yet to recognize the deep damage to the functioning of Government services by DOGE.

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conway%27s_law

³ Original paper: <https://www.melconway.com/Home/pdf/committees.pdf>



3. (This is where we depart from conventional political thought.) An information-intensive society of the scale and interconnectivity of modern America must be understood, not in terms of hierarchies, as it currently is, but in terms of **interconnected networks**.⁴ Such political "systems thinking" requires collaboration across multiple disciplines that include mathematics, the sciences, and the humanities.⁵

⁴ The current political disagreement about an American "unitary executive" is about this topic.

⁵ <https://melconway.com/Home/pdf/UbiquitousConnectivity.pdf> . Example 2 (pp. 31-end) develops the conclusion that, to the extent that bringing atmospheric carbon emissions under safe control requires major fossil-fuel corporations to reduce revenue, the effort will fail because a compulsion to grow is mandated by a feedback loop in our legal-economic system. Such an argument requires multidisciplinary thinking, which is disabled by our academic system.

4. The inter-departmental mixing required for such systems thinking is discouraged by our education system. Our higher-education system produces a product that is a mirror of itself; it divides its working material into two populations according to the departments in which the students are trained: the *Reading-list Folks* and the *Problem-set Folks*.⁶ It is widely understood that these departmental groups don't willingly mix. C.P. Snow has written about this,⁷ and the academic research-support and career-advancement incentive systems enforce partitioning by academic discipline.

5. **Conclusion.** The design activity envisioned in Step 1 above cannot happen under current circumstances. The talent that would be necessary to make up the design organization does exist but it is widely distributed, both within the Academy and outside among the Professions, with (a)no available communication paths for collaboration and (b)no support system that would be necessary for a sustained effort.

⁶ <https://melconway.com/Home/pdf/Body-Building.pdf>

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Two_Cultures

Proposal

“True, but not useful”. This is my reaction to most of the political commentary I see. The political commentariat is comfortable with stating diagnoses but generally seems to have no clue about solutions.