

Phenomenal Complexity Theory and the Politics of Organization

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Emergence must not become yet another excuse for idealism and the assumption that the idea behind appearances is the truth; or for empiricism and the claim that the world outside of consciousness is true while subjectivity is false. Emergence enables the phenomenal study of organization as social process(es) to acknowledge intentionality and ethics. In his article Hugo Letiche explores the epistemology of *intentional emergent coherence*, which via emergence links organizational studies to consciousness studies and to “practices of meaning.” In his reaction, David Boje examines the Tamara-izing of organization in relation to Letiche’s PCT (phenomenal complexity theory).

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PHENOMENAL COMPLEXITY THEORY (PCT)

Phenomenal complexity theory entails making three choices: prioritizing experience and consciousness above the outcomes of the “natural bent”; choosing a logic of dialogic complexity rather than one of dualistic cause and effect; and a willingness to link the experiential to the complex. These choices define a paradigm for the study of organization wherein the social valuing of organizing and organization can come into its own. It becomes possible to study the politics of organization, in terms of lived community and the shared experience of the Other, two factors that underlie the significance of the *polis*.

CONSCIOUSNESS AND EXPERIENCING, VERSUS OBJECTIFICATION AND THE “NATURAL BENT”

The tension between consciousness and experiencing on the one hand, and objectification or the “natural bent” on the other, is an epistemological issue that has always haunted the social sciences. Any social science that tries to base itself on the assumption of one basic truth or a single theoretical ground becomes unable to deal with the dialogical relationships between researcher and researched, subjective and objective, world and consciousness. Epistemological critiques—of idealism wherein truth is found in ideas behind mere appearances and of empiricism wherein truth is in the world separated from consciousness—focus on the inadequacies of theoretical partiality. Phenomenology, via its emphasis on the “lifeworld,” identifies “making sense of the world” with “having a world,” whereby perception and action, self and world, subject and object imply one another. Consciousness and experiencing are approached here from the phenomenological perspective.

Lived experience and quality of existence issues do sometimes play a crucial role in organizational studies, for instance in the ethnography of work life. Critical or postmodern texts have reflected on work-life issues or managerial ideology. However in organizational studies, a major clash is likely between researchers and researched when the human and social significance of “organization” and “organizing” is addressed. The commitments and assumptions of critical management studies, postmodern analysis and labor process theory are not shared with the managerial research subjects. But access to research sites and funding often depend on the acceptance of research (results) by management. Researchers are frequently forced to seek agreement from management on what is worth studying and for what purposes. As long as organizational researchers present themselves as pragmatically useful—that is, as capable of furthering efficiency and effectiveness, or as supporting organizational learning and creativity, or as inducing innovation and renewal—they can (perhaps reluctantly) be acceptable. Alternatively, researchers can cultivate academic irrelevance and ask to be tolerated as innocent intellectual gadflies.

When debates in organizational studies are about such subjects as the (lack of) ontological difference between people and objects in organizing (actor network theory), the epistemes of hyper-reality in business discourse(s), or the nature of fractals in the scaling of organizational theory, very few in business take note or get upset. But if organizational researchers address the socio-political significance of corporate activity, this questioning will touch on the crucial sensitivities of the managers and the managed. If research becomes entangled with what management perceives to be its self-interest, management will try to gain control over that research. The following are illustrations from experience:

- A student proposed to write a critical thesis on environmental issues surrounding flight by air and was told not to do so because a major aircraft manufacturer was too important a source of research funding.
- Investigation showing how managers planned the introduction of new medicines to keep the price of medicines artificially high in Africa was put under lock and key out of fear of publicity that could jeopardize “gifts” from the pharmaceutical industry.
- Data on *sub rosa* local and provincial subsidies to industries were left out of a report so as not to embarrass those involved.

The boundaries of *laissez-faire* tolerance of research and researchers are quickly reached. Even when corporate power and researcher dependence are not at issue, organizational studies often find it difficult to deal with first-hand experience of organization and organizing. Posing questions about the social consequences or significance of organizing and organization puts social-ethical considerations into the field of organizational studies. Normally a strict division between organizational studies and (social) ethics permits organization to be naturalized. Organizational studies often try to naturalize organization—organizations are something “out there in the world,” requiring study. Supposedly no value statements are attached to this assumption, but acceptance of organization as a given conflicts with one’s experience of organization as something problematic.

Critical journalists, from Turkel (1997) to Walraff (1979a, b), have examined workplace experience. But studies like Hochschild’s (1985) on airline stewardesses, Watson’s (1994) on middle managers and Kunda’s (1993) on IT specialists are rare in organizational studies. Anyone who has done organizational fieldwork knows that managers and the managed talk spontaneously and at length about their experiences (Munro & Mouritsen, 1996). Organization is not a self-evident or neutral given for the organized.

For instance, during the Japanese management hype of the early 1990s, I was commissioned to do a study on a Japanese auto manufacturer in Europe. I expected that the European managers would discuss Japanese management; far from it, they wanted to discuss their specific personal experiences. Examples were voiced of incomprehensible English, conflict avoidance, organizational chaos and an analytical management style. The current (Japanese) CEO, I was told, was trying to remain as vague as he could, playing one European manager off against the other. For the interviewees, Japanese management did not exist. Different Japanese managers varied enormously, more so than did European managers. The tactics of vagueness and incomplete information used by the current Japanese CEO had prompted the European managers to meet weekly to compare notes on what they had been told and to plan counter strategies. The European headquarters was degenerating into (social) guerilla warfare, which was described in great detail and with much relish. Not organization but skirmishes, tactics and competition were described.

Organizational studies may assume that organization exists and that it can and ought to be studied. Nevertheless, if basic definitions of organization and organizing are merely assumed, then organizational studies will only be built on unexamined assumptions that are tautological: Organizational studies study organization.

In organizational studies, questioning basic assumptions often triggers managerial resistance. In the social sciences, the researcher/researched relationship is always difficult. Human consciousness trying to study the products of human consciousness is problematic. Can one be both the subject and the object of research? Methods have been attempted based on prediction and falsification, focusing on statistical relations and behavior, but this hasn’t made it any clearer what organization or organizing really is. What is the epistemological status of organization? Is organization an object (a noun), a metaphor (an adjective) or an activity (a verb)? Are organizations a product of social agreement(s); that is, are they constituted in their members’ or stakeholders’ consciousnesses, or are they rational, goal-defined structures that are the products of a supra-human economic rationality (or somehow both of these)? Are organizations objects, or do we reify social concepts when we think of them as objects? Unsolved questions include: *Is organizing rational?* and *Can the process(es) of organizing be known? Do universal elements of organizing exist? Is a (general) theory of organizing possible?* How can one deal with so much conceptual indeterminacy?

One response is to adopt the “natural bent” and simply assume that organization and organizing exist. The definitional conundrum can be avoided via an appeal to common sense. The desire of managers not to have to examine their own role(s) or practices critically, can be met by reducing organizational studies to what is accepted in normal managerial discourse. The researched then take possession of the researchers and of the research discourse, and organizational studies reproduce the managers’ social and political agenda(s). The research repeats what managers say and functions as an apologist for managerial prerogatives. But such organizational studies have no theoretical rigor. The researchers’ lack of distance from the researched does not make possible an independent viewpoint of observation, reflection or critique.

A skeptical examination of organization, which questions managerial usefulness and doubts the effectiveness of “command and control” or debunks shareholder value, will be met by managerial disbelief, horror and anger. Organizational studies that attack managerial rhetoric will meet with resistance and will have (philosophically) to justify their perspective. Although there is

ethnographic evidence that managers neither do very much organizing nor are very good at it, this remains an “unacceptable” text for most managers (Mintzberg, 1973). While work processes may best be left to run themselves and may be better off without managerial interference, one is not supposed to proclaim such things in organizational research (Ackroyd & Thompson, 1998). The effectiveness of organizing and organization is not supposed to be questioned. It is the norm to assume that without managers and organization there would be chaos and economic ruin. Management is equated with efficiency and effectiveness. It is “self-evident” that organization and organizing need to exist. Organization is assumed and activities are studied that supposedly belong to it. Organization and organizing are not questioned as basic categories of perception. Their fundamental legitimacy is never doubted.

Nevertheless, fieldwork does not reveal organization and organizing as primary categories of thought or discussion. Middle managers voice their doubts about their seniors and vice versa. Many question the goals and purposes of corporations. Everything from immediate in-company micro-politics to global corporate issues is discussed, but in pragmatics— that is, the use of text or language to get things done—there is very little discussion, as such, of organization. Organization is not an experiential concept that is part of managers’ daily repertoire.

In our ethnographic research we find concrete immediate discussion of events and processes. Commentary about people and personalities is common, normative and political discussions occur, but organization and organizing are rarely thematized. Socially normative statements tend to resemble the following:

First voice: My initial feeling is one of great sorrow about the position adopted by the big corporations, which from my discussions with scientists working on global warming seems to be either terribly badly informed or willfully greedy and irresponsible. I hope that someone will be able to convince me that their approach is neither of these things, but scientifically valid. Complex problems are wonderful to discuss as small issues of management, but the present is fraught with danger and it seems to me that if we are seriously concerned with applying complexity theory—“doing it not just talking about it”—then this is a problem demanding meaningful intervention.

Second voice: Even with current efficiencies, a 10,000 square mile field of solar panels would provide sufficient energy for the entire planet (at current requirements). Though this area sounds rather large, it is actually rather small, given that the area of the US is 3.6 million square miles, alone. This statistic suggests that the environmental problem is purely cultural (specifically political). This realization was a real disappointment to me, as I’d always believed that alternative energy technologies just weren’t ready to take over. I hope I am proved utterly wrong because I believe that the lack of progress in the switch from oil to sun (or whatever other alternative sources) is the result of highpowered corporate self-interest protecting their wealth and position and demonstrating little concern for future wellbeing. But since when have corporations demonstrated much interest in anything other than short- to medium-term profits?

Third voice: Isn’t it rather unfair to blame individuals in particular, as it seems that the capitalist program has succeeded in institutionalizing greed quite well? Given the time scale mismatch between everyday business (years at the most) and global environmental solutions (decades at least), I can see no chance of any real progress until our fundamental mindsets evolve to be a little more sensitive to qualitative issues, rather than narrowly defined quantitative issues (such as financial profit).

First voice: Complexity thinking offers a framework that might facilitate this cultural shift, but given that more and more of our planet’s inhabitants are finding it increasingly difficult to just get by, it’s going to be very difficult to persuade people that broadening their outlook might help. Western culture seems to have lost the skills necessary to manage with such complex and ambiguous issues. Skills such as dialog and negotiation have given way to argumentation and polarized debate. We have the technology to address the environmental issues, but we need an institutional revolution/shift/evolution (delete as applicable) to create the appropriate motivational environment to give the corporations the insight and courage to make some drastic changes to their energy policy.

Second voice: The solution to the problem might be simpler than I suggest—it may not need global cooperation at all. If such a solar field were constructed then there would be very little need for one to change one’s energy lifestyle as energy would be limitless (almost) and non-damaging—it simply requires a reorganization at the corporate level, not at the cultural level. We would still need a cultural change to allow a reasonably peaceful world in such a globalized society, but that’s another issue...

Admittedly, more ethnographic evidence is needed to support the contention that organizing and organization are not lived concepts and that managers’ “text” centers on the one hand on immediate social concerns and on fairly abstract political issues on the other. Business evidently belongs to an aggregation level somewhere between the individual/immediate and the social/political. The structuration of organizing and organization is very messy, because it involves the individual and the global, direct interaction as well as economic factors, personal history and longrange trends. It is and it is not experiential; it is and it is not abstractideological.

In organizational studies the assumption is maintained between organizational researchers and those (managers or managed) whom they research that they experientially inhabit a common world of organizing and organization—but if the researched and

the researcher inhabit different worlds, then in which world is organization to be found? Researchers and the researched supposedly refer to the same thing when they talk about Texaco or Standard Oil. Organization is assumed. Differences of opinion and conflicting assumptions of meaning demand explanation.

Such debate is normally avoided by assuming a single unitary world of organization, inhabited by the “most fit” organizations. Organizational ecology is used to transform what is, into what ought to be. The organizations that ought to exist are the ones that really exist; only organizations that should survive actually do survive. Organization then exists prior to critical consciousness; companies precede experience. A plausible reason for the existential and epistemological reversal of the experiencing subject and his or her perceived object is that an experiential or inductive definition of organization would never succeed. The enormous variety of experience would not add up to a single object, definition or entity. If the category “organization” is to hold it has to be assumed, and this is what the “natural bent” achieves.

Because human subjects discover themselves by coming to awareness thrown into a pre-existing world, the natural bent matches their personal history. Nature, history and society all exist before the individual becomes conscious of them. In the natural bent, these structures are assumed to be real and it is the experiencing individual who has to discover his or her identity. If organizational researchers abandon the natural bent and question the fundamentals of organization and organizing, conflict between research rigor and corporate self-image is inevitable. Since it is a premise of research methodology that the ability to understand a phenomenon is linked to the rigor of questioning, research that uncritically makes use of the natural bent is pretty flimsy. However, by retaining the natural bent organizational studies can be made to seem realistic. Organizations “are”—radical doubt is synthetic, artificial and academic.

If researchers are to reject the natural bent, an alternative perspective is required. An appropriate tradition of radical doubt is to be found in phenomenology, which requires researchers to “bracket” or question their basic assumptions. Phenomenology’s goal is, in the end, to see the phenomena under study more clearly. Phenomenology replaces the naïve realism of the natural bent with a considered and reflexive realism. Phenomenological realism examines what is studied from a variety of perspectives and compares the results. It attends to the variety of alternative texts and possible interpretations.

For instance, it acknowledges that organizing and organization are not one thing, but encompass a multitude of possible viewpoints. Juggling many possible descriptions and conclusions makes the constituting role of the researcher crucial. Organizing and organization are products of the researchers’ chosen perspectives. They refer to specific political commitments and need to answer to appropriate ethical questioning. What is gained in phenomenology is that the experience under study is identified in its human context—“organization” becomes “lived (or experienced) organization.” Hereby one addresses organization in its human or social significance. The raw experience of organization is identified, structured, and thematized.

In organizational studies, organization is always made to “mean” something. The experiential study of organization confronts the researcher with multiple interpretations, a variety of opinions, and many possible narratives. The Japanese managers in the automobile company insisted that they were consistent and that the weak analytical skills of their European colleagues were responsible for misunderstandings. There was no regime of “divide and rule” but merely pragmatic knowledge management. The Europeans complained about missed opportunities and an annoying refusal to comply with EU environmental regulations. The Japanese talked about slow processes of cultural adjustment and developing Europeanization. The narratives did not match; the experiencing was inconsistent. Other groups in the company reported yet other experiences. The Dutch IT personnel who ran the computer center were technically highly competent. They talked about their independence and expertise. The Japanese managers left them totally alone, “to get on with it.” A large number of black people worked in the warehouse and had only a primary school education. They found that their jobs were very well structured and that senior (Japanese) management was supportive. They talked about chances and opportunities and a good working environment. The “lived world” may therefore not lead to consensus. Diversity of perspectives, variety of commentaries and multiple reactions are often characteristics of experience.

Current organizational practices confront the observer—even one who tries to maintain the natural bent—with definitional complexity. The networked organization, the distributed organization and knowledge management all challenge traditional definitions of the firm and of organization. Who does and does not belong to the organization is often unclear. The ability of the organization to command obedience and loyalty is languishing. Predictability and recurrent patterns are diminishing. Traditional organizational boundaries have grown vague. Achieving the successful delivery of products and services often entails a multitude of stakeholders in a wide variety of relationships. Some interactions may simply be bureaucratic, but many are not. There is an enormous variety of dependencies, multiplicity of processes, divergence of understanding and heterogeneity of cooperation.

Subsuming all of this to rules of organization or organizing is an act of enormous reduction. Such reduction permits the researcher to avoid dealing with complexity by assuming that knowable laws of organizational relationships and structures already exist. By presupposing knowledge of organization and organizing, the researcher escapes indeterminacy. The unknown—for instance how new organizational practices operate based on little studied innovative technologies—is made to appear familiar. Ambiguity is subsumed to well-known but ill-defined contingencies. Clarity is bought at the cost of looking backward to more stable and easily forecast conditions. The present is defined in terms of a simplification of the past.

Looked upon inductively, organization is a totalization of all sorts of experiential material. In the natural bent, this totalization

does not seem problematic because it is accepted as an *a priori* of human social existence. If we assume that social reality exists prior to consciousness and that social order logically precedes individual existence, then organization can be accepted as a logical precondition of social existence. But if we assume that organizing and organization are the products of human action and that human existence and consciousness are prerequisites for any organizing to occur, then organization is a product of consciousness and its existence requires explanation. In the experiential perspective, organization follows consciousness; in the natural bent, organization is prior to consciousness.

Experiential thinking is very messy. How does one find a way from the enormous diversity of individual consciousnesses to a definition of organization or organizing? Despite the problems that an experiential perspective poses, that perspective will be pursued here. The existential and epistemological inadequacies of the natural bent determine the choice. Human consciousness is a prerequisite for, and thus logically prior to, organization.

DIALOGIC COMPLEXITY VERSUS DUALISTIC CAUSE AND EFFECT

Organizational studies do not merely involve a subject/object relationship, but confront us with triadic logic. In organizational studies, relationships need to be understood between the *Self* of the authorial I (or the researcher), and the *Other* of the researched (and of the quotes and references) and the *Organization*, which is embedded in structured interactions and social configurations. Only by assuming three levels of discourse—that of the *writer*, of the *Other(s)* and of *organization-ness*—do organizational studies become possible. Organizational studies are a system that requires all three levels to operate. Each level exists in relationship and dependency to the others. The writerly self differs from dyadic (self-other) relations of Otherness, and from embedded collective practices. Texts of organization and organizing differ from the researcher's persona and from actual organizational activity. Structuration and governance, institutions and practices differ from both the observers and the observed.

All three levels do contribute to consciousness's process(es) of constituting language, identity and awareness. Dyadic "self/other" relations differ from social structures, even though such structures are enacted, sustained, created and (often) voiced in such relationships. Examples of dyadic analysis include psychoanalysis—as in the role of the mother and father in the Oedipus complex—the (capitalist) marketplace—as in the role of seller and buyer—and Marxism—as in the conflict between labor and capital. The triadic epistemology pursued in this article does not illuminate polar conflicts so much as shed light on complex interrelationships. The claim is that the emergent processes of complex structuration resemble the constant dynamic interaction of the environment with the subject, and the subject's constant meaningful connection to its world. The continual movement forward and backward from subject to world and world to subject is reproduced as consciousness, as social interaction and as organization on the different aggregation levels. Consciousness, interaction and organization emerge from complex patterns of relationships between self and perception, self and other, and in collective governance.

The triadic epistemology is meant to grant access to consciousness's emergent awareness, to difference's emergent interactions, and to organizing's emergent order. In research, the self and the abstract or reified order are reconstructions. Human consciousness is thrown into circumstances and discovers itself in the world, taking action. The human actor comes to consciousness as an engaged, practically committed and involved being. Existence and process precede introspection and awareness. Emergence is achieved via activity in circumstance, interaction with others, and social existence. In human experience it is prior to individual reflection and philosophical (self-)awareness. Trying to understand the consciousness of the self, or the structures of reified organization, is a reflective process that concretely embedded and socially positioned individuals can attempt. However, to do so they have to overcome the assumptions or prejudices of their prior engagements.

Many managers resist any such reflective process, which distances them from their immediate activities. For instance, on MBA courses managers often reject social science reflection as "soft" and "irrelevant." The conceptual apparatus of organizing and organization requires a self-aware consciousness that is willing to thematize on-going social interactions. It abstracts, identifies, labels and analyzes social processes, which often helps little with getting practical managerial tasks done. In fact, the thematicization of implicit skills can make it more difficult to complete tasks at hand—analyzing riding a bicycle makes it much harder to do it. There is no guarantee that once practice has been reified and abstracted it will be easier to perform and master.

Organizational studies assume, often going against the grain of managerial response, that reified conceptualization of organization is superior to activity. Organizational studies are a body of thought, a series of intellectual constructs produced by acts of consciousness. Organizational studies deal in abstractions, reifying human activity. But the social activity of emergence goes on somewhere else—in between consciousness, circumstance and conceptualization. The in-between exists in the dialogic interactions that link the different aggregation levels of organizing and organization (Figure 1).

Phenomenal complexity theory (PCT) illuminates the definitional processes that logically precede the study of organizing and organization. Instead of assuming organization and organizing, and studying what has already been assumed, PCT explores a knowledge strategy of emergence. The researcher's self is the perceptual, ethical and critical tool that makes possible the conscious examination of organizing and organization. Organizing and organization emerge in a researcher's interaction with experienced circumstances.

The researcher's self is understood here in the tradition of William James, as a central point in an experiential stream of consciousness. The self manifests itself as an awareness, occurring in interaction with others, in a social field of activity. This

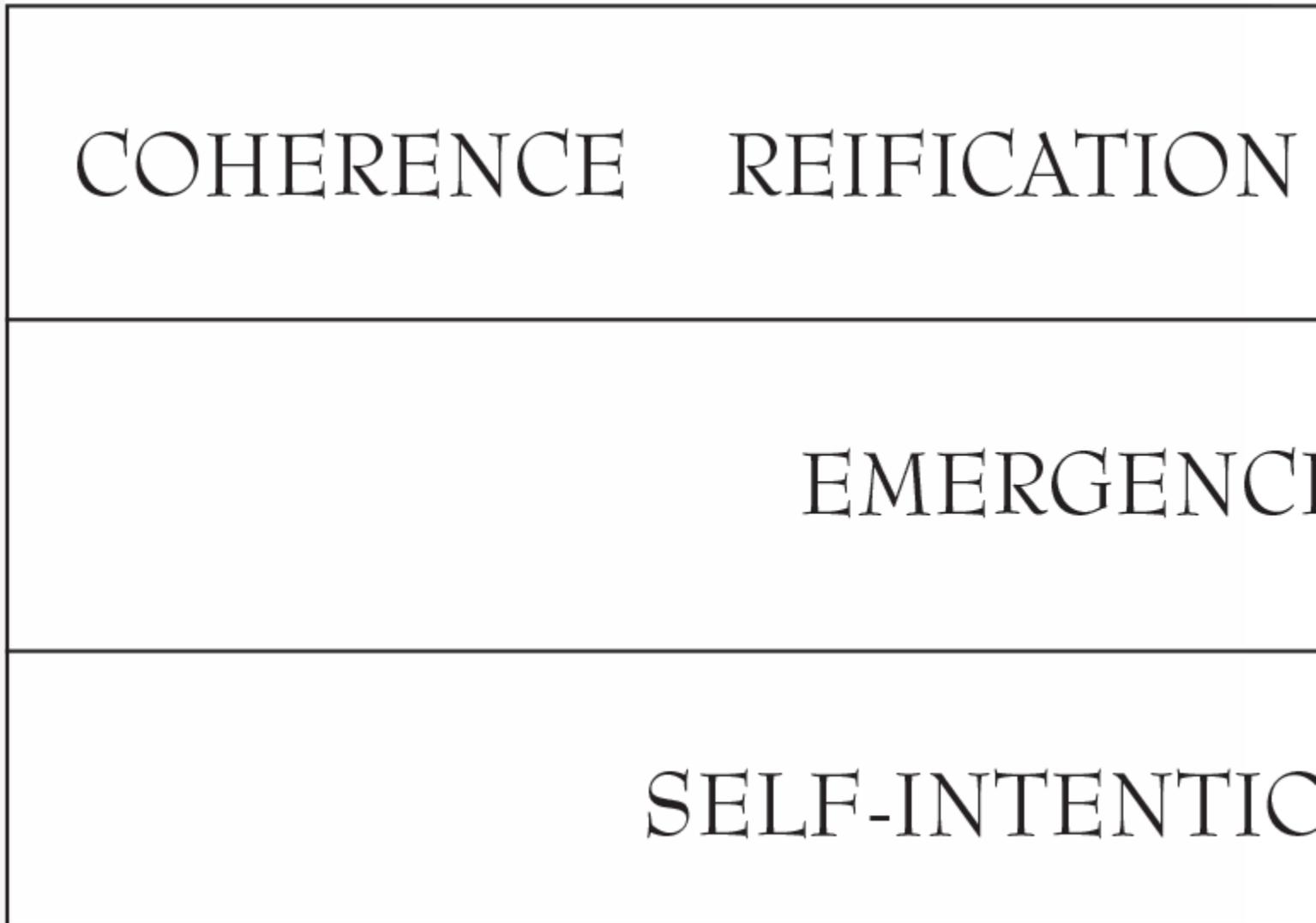


Fig. 1: Different aggregation levels of organizing and organization

circumstances, analyzes events and produces commentary. The combination of self and world is made explicit when assumptions are clarified, researcher reflexivity is examined, and the methodology of investigation is rigorous. Researcher consciousness is synonymous with the perspective from which research is undertaken and is what makes possible the data collection (observations) on which the conclusions are based. Research thus demands an experiencing self and a world that is experienced. Research is a product of an active meeting (emergence) of a subject (self) and an object (world) wherein the two meet to produce a text (the research).

The self of research is manifest in the authorial "I" or voice found in the research text. This voice records events, describes circumstances and provides commentary. In research, the researcher's voice presents the events that are deemed relevant. The researcher, via a persona or voice, (re-)represents circumstance as data, observation and information. Raw circumstances of consciousness are transformed into (re-)represented text. Research produces textual (re-)presentation. The self of the researcher, which is grounded in his or her consciousness, is the perceptual tool on which research is based. Research (re-)represents awareness; that is, it textualizes an awareness occurring in consciousness. Consciousness is where the root definition of the researcher's self is formulated. Research functions as interaction between self as consciousness, perception or observation, and representation (in text). Successful research texts have a life of their own; their descriptions, observations and ideas are reified, self-evident truths. The concepts gain a reality of their own for those who have studied them. The text becomes unquestionably real to its reader.

Organization emerges when elements of the self, such as motivation, activity and purpose, are linked to the social environment. Organizing is a process of shared order. The self makes social interaction possible by realizing shared contact. The self's ability to reflect on its social actions is crucial to the ability to know about organization. The self determines what sort of organizing and organization can be comprehended. But the self is a product of shared cognition and shared identity structures, which are collectively assumed and accepted. The forms of identity that the self is willing and able to assume limit what sort of

organization and organizing are possible. How the self is appropriated in interaction and interacts with the Other establishes the basic patterns of organizing. Prestructures of organizing are grounded in the self and its emergent relationship(s) to the Other. The social and political results of organizing are rooted in how the self owns consciousness in relationship to the Other.

In the natural bent, organization is set free from the self/other relationship. Organization is examined as if the self and its shared structures of consciousness are not relevant. Organization is assumed to be a separate level of aggregation, cut off from the self, the social and the other. But if organization is a shared social construct that needs to be understood in the context of the self/other dynamic, then its study has to be grounded in the practices of the self/other relationship. If organization is a form of collective meaning, then its social grounds, manifestations and consequences are crucial. Thus organization needs to be understood as a series of social statements about the I/other relationship.

How research deals with the relationship between the self and consciousness determines its nature. Researchers appropriate consciousness as their own. They choose a point of view from which they will represent circumstances—for instance, by constructing social events as organizing and organization. Researchers in organizational studies portray circumstances in terms of a consciousness that experiences organizing and organization. Organizational researchers thus appropriate circumstances via a consciousness attuned to themes of organizing and organization. Other forms of appropriation produce other worlds or experiences.

Researcher consciousness governs what is cognized. Only those things that researcher consciousness is prepared, or able, to see can be investigated. All research operates within limits set by its assumptions, language and instruments. Thus, the sort of reifications that the researchers accept co-determine what emerges. Researcher consciousness is inherently social; that is, constituted in the give-and-take of social behavior. Research is not a nominalist activity. Researchers cannot simply create realities. The fact that a researcher names something does not automatically mean that the name will stick. Research is social—meanings attach themselves to phenomena when the research community and/or the culture at large experience a resonance between the idea (term, name, concept) and the object (experience, phenomena, circumstance). The process of describing and naming, analyzing and explaining is unpredictable. We do not know when or why a particular representation will adhere to a specific given. Research is a dialogic process wherein self (stream of consciousness) meets circumstance (emergence) and potentially leads to reification.

In research, a hermeneutic circle of assumptions and results is always present. Occurrence, or what emerges to the mind's eye, depends on the structure of consciousness that self applies to events and to the textual research conventions that follow. Researchers create the world via their assumptions that get (re-)presented in research; but the social world produces the assumptions with which the researcher goes to work. The authorial I, or the self of the researcher, is a product of consciousness. Consciousness is grounded in complex social, cultural and psychological processes of dialog.

Thus the self operates in a socially emergent field of organizing. Experience of emergent circumstances, events and consciousness occurs in interaction. Emergence is a product of changes in aggregation level—for instance a shift from the level of individual consciousness or self to that of self-other interaction. The shift from personal consciousness to social event or action can produce unexpected results. For instance, artistic individualism can be rewarding and justified as an individual project, but at the same time irresponsible or destructive as a social action. Strong outings of emotion can be creative for the individual, but signal mass hysteria for the group.

Of course, the level of the self never exists in a pure form; experiential consciousness or self occurs in language—that is, in a socially mitigated form. However, language use in introspection is not the same as that in social interaction. There is a qualitative difference in the nature of the two aggregation levels. And social artifacts or rules, embedded social codes and forms of collective structuration are on yet another aggregation level. The lines of demarcation between the aggregation levels are not sharp, but that does not mean that the different levels of aggregation do not exist.

Emergence is the study of what happens when there is movement from one aggregation level to another. It wrestles with the nonlinear, unpredictable results of such movements. Organizing and organization are names given to aspects of such movement(s) between aggregation levels. The interactions between self, self-other and structure are emergent. Emergent organizing and organization are processes of complex adaptive or reactive activity, grounded in dialogic relationships between self and other, individual and group, organization and context. The self experiences the work situation by translating circumstances into consciousness, with the perceptual and conceptual apparatus or utensils that it has at hand. Emergent organization is a mixture of self and world, assumptions and perception, data and concept, circumstance and categories. Experience and structure interact in a dialogic process, wherein persons and circumstances define one another.

Organizations often repress the processes of emergence, in order to focus on the reified abstractions of emergence. The processes of emergence are often perceived to be too unclear or unpredictable. But relegating emergence to the organizational object makes contact impossible with the generative processes crucial to organizational change, development and innovation. The problem for organizational studies is that emergence is a product of the self. Organization is an outcome of consciousness. It is not an economic fact, but a phenomenon of consciousness.

Organizational studies have often assumed the *homo economicus*—supposedly, organization inherently followed the logic of economic rationality and no other *raison d'être* was required. Economic survival, most often conceptualized as the product of

competitive advantage, was the sole goal. It assumed that organizations should pursue rational objectives, leading to welfare generation and organizational survival. The study of organization was separated from the study of consciousness, or that of social phenomena. Once one admits that the study of organization falls (at least in part) under consciousness studies, a very different paradigm is necessary. One has to explain the link between individual and collective consciousness, and how that link produces social and political structures. Organizational studies grounded in consciousness studies will be inherently dialogical.

Current research on the physiological level, in consciousness studies, presents consciousness as resulting from the complex dialog of weak signals in the brain. Cognition or meaning is thus dialogical, distributed and emergent. Likewise, individual consciousness is a product of personal interaction, theoretical background and social assimilation. Consciousness occurs in language—individual and shared, collective and unique, personal and culturally determined. As deconstruction has made clear, every text refers to myriad other texts, providing context, comparative meaning, and a dialog or debate within which it functions. Consciousness is shared and individual, experiential and intellectual, purposeful and undergone, passive and active. Organization grounded in consciousness is emergent. That means that what comes out of complexity is not predictable, ahead of time. Unexpected, unanticipated and genuinely new results are possible. People, making sense together of themselves and their activities, can generate unforeseen and original actions. Organization and organizing can be understood as creative social processes, instead of as economic determinism.

Organizational studies can be thought of as the product of a self, capable of owning its consciousness, while examining work experiences. This makes it possible to avoid the pitfalls of either the natural bent or rampant idealism. Organizing and organization are not interesting as uncritical and unreflected naïve realism, nor as purely philosophical categories. An experiential examination of organizing needs both to take shared circumstance into account, and to examine its own conceptual assumptions. Otherwise, the experiencing self cannot be reflexively aware of common actions, shared efforts, or the mutuality of communication.

“Owning” is the link between self, consciousness and emergence. The self takes possession of consciousness in a concrete context. The self/circumstance relationship is manifest as practical activity or organizing. The self owns consciousness as agency—that is, as an ability to do something and as an awareness of activity. Owning is lived in shared interaction. The owning of consciousness, by self, can be made visible in ethnographies of work. How the self appropriates organization in consciousness varies enormously. The self can exist as everything from total rejection of organization to absolute identification with it (Kunda, 1993). Consciousness can manifest itself in rationalization, openness, alienation and creativity. When the self is in opposition to organization, it is alienated; but when it is totally absorbed into organization, it loses its identity. Critical neo-Marxist sociology describes economic repression and alienation. Theories of consumer and spectacle society describe the self as overwhelmed, with its reflective abilities made powerless. A Disneyfied or McDonaldised society reduces the self to the lowest common denominator, thereby threatening to destroy the self’s window on the world or consciousness.

Thus consciousness occurs on the level of the self, emergent interaction occurs on the level of the self/other relationship, and reification occurs on the level of abstracted artifacts. Consciousness is the precondition for emergent, shared activity, and activity is the precondition for objectified organization or reification. Each level is defined in terms of the others.

The natural bent limits itself to the emergent level of organizational events and does not examine the structures of self that make organizing possible, or the reified structures that characterize the artifacts of organization. The complex dialogic processes are the basis of organizational studies grounded in consciousness studies. The natural bent ignores all these relations, seeing organizations as “objects out there.” It negates the complex hermeneutic processes that underlie organizational cognition. And without all these processes, there is no emergence. The complexity, which is the root cause of emergent phenomena, is denied by the natural bent.

The natural bent creates images of undynamic organization, at equilibrium. Because it leads to a hermeneutic (way of understanding) that is static, it produces a version of organization and organizing that is not dynamic. In the natural bent things do not emerge; they just are. Seen from the natural bent, emergent processes are reified. Organization belongs on the one (objective) side, and consciousness (self) on the other. The duality is inherently conflictive, but consciousness can reveal a dynamic self of aspirations and felt needs. This is a self, driven by desire, constantly lacking things to which it aspires, and fully intentional. Such a self is an unlimited source of renewal and activity. It is linked to multitudinous desires, possibilities, hopes and projects found in a rhizome of interaction and activity.

Thus the study of organization and organizing, as a form of consciousness studies, and as realized in emergence, threatens organizational studies with a level of complexity that they cannot handle. The organization as object, as reification, remains problematic. The organization as artifact can be examined for its ethical and social significance. However, by describing organization as a necessary prerequisite to human material existence, some try to escape critical questioning. Because society depends on organization(s) to generate necessary material wealth, organization(s) can be construed to be more important than individual consciousness. As organization is a form of constant on-going economic activity, it cannot really be stopped to be objectified. Organization as psychological process, and organization as ethical result, can be placed out of bounds. A very narrow perspective on organization and organizing can be maintained wherein individual and social complexity are banned. Individual as well as collective ethics are then as good as absent. But all of this can only be sustained via the existential denial of the self, and of consciousness, and of their roles in organizing.

INTENTIONAL EMERGENT COHERENCE

The three levels of self, other and reification come together in organizing, but the relationships remain instable, partial and dynamic.

Epistemologically speaking, there is no perspective from outside the triad from which a holistic truth or all-inclusive methodology can be defined. The working of the epistemological triad can only be viewed from within the self-same triad. Thus organizational studies operate within epistemological complexity and cannot avail themselves of a privileged external position—that is, perform a “God trick.” The study of organizing and organization, as well as practical efforts at organizing and organization, entail acts of complex relationships wherein meaning has to be negotiated, established and preserved.

This process is analyzed, here, as *intentional emergent coherence*. The level of self is epistemologically prioritized. The theoretical work of this article takes place on the level of awareness, and thus of consciousness. It is directed to what can be known, discussed or put forward about organizing and organization. An article inevitably re-presents circumstance in text; managing can de-emphasize consciousness and text, to focus on (inter)action. The loss of self, characteristic of being thrown into the hurly-burly of managing, is not a characteristic of the “I” (persona) of an article. This poses the question of how far the epistemology of organizational studies can ever resemble that of organizing and organization. If organizational studies belong to a different episteme to that of organizing and organization, what is the relationship between the two?

If either organizational studies or the practice of organizing want to create a stable truth effect, then they have to ban the knowing subject and the subject-other relationship. The self can form a rhizome of desire and activity within organizing, but it cannot organize on its own. Organizing is social and requires more than a single self. Knowledge about organizing entails acts of consciousness. Organizing is a process of shared activity; knowledge of organizing is a textual act of reflection—that is, of self. In so far as we can know organizing and organization, we know it filtered through the conceptual apparatus of self. The tension between the writer’s (researcher’s) individual consciousness, and the social activity that is studied (organizing), is an unsolvable epistemological dilemma.

The truth effect of organizational studies appears stronger if we ignore the constituting consciousness behind the text, whichever text it may be. Reified presentations of organization make it appear as if organizations could write their own text(s). A strong truth claim pretends to present organization in and for itself, but the claim is hermeneutically ridiculous. A weak truth claim acknowledges that text re-presents what organizing and organization mean to consciousnesses. If organizing and organization are mere textual signifiers, do they still mean something important, significant, or worthwhile to the persons involved?

Organizational studies are a discourse to be queried, assessed, and reflected upon. In that discourse, the activities of organizing and organization exist as re-presented human consciousness. Are the texts good or bad, just or unjust, important or trivial? Organizing and organization are re-presented consciousness, focusing on social meaning. The emphasis on meaning makes us focus on signification, values and sense-making—or on what organizing and organization signify, intend and purport. Organizing and organization entail not only the self and consciousness, but also self/other interaction and forms of structuration. Seen from the perspective of the knowing subject, these take on the form of *intentional emergent coherence*.

Intentional emergent coherence links the experiential to the complex. Identity is achieved on the intentional level. It is on this level that the self determines activity. Organizing without the self is clearly impoverished. Individual desire, hope and will play a major role in organizing, but the power and weakness, creativity and blindness, generosity and pigheadedness of the self are rarely found in organizational studies. Intentionality, with all its limits, complexity and dynamism, is needed to understand organizing and organization. The self/other relationship generates organizational action. The results of interaction produce emergent patterns of activity. If enough coherence is produced, organizing can be communicated, sustained and become meaningful. Meaning is embedded in organizational practices and structures.

Intentional emergent coherence is, of course, paradoxical. What is intentional—desired, wanted, hoped for—is not yet coherent. What actually emerges is different from what the self intends. Emergence is much more messy than what is re-presented. When organization is re-presented as coherent, it lacks the contradictions, hidden motives and forces of lived desire that make it possible. The intentional is never coherent; it is desire, rhizome, and inchoate. The emergent is grounded in processes—movements or interactions that obey no one’s law and mirror contradictory forces. Coherence can be experienced, but as soon as it is structured, codified or known, it is gone. The effort to clarify coherence drives it out of existence.

Descriptions of organizing and organization, as intentional emergent coherence, are possible, but such descriptions will be of complex adaptive systems (CAS) and characterized by continual change. Complex adaptive systems are far-from-equilibrium, open systems, which are dynamic, capable of innovation and can transcend their own practice. In complex adaptive systems, entrainment occurs between self and consciousness, emergent structure and organizing, reified structure and knowledge. Entrainment entails the repetition of rhythms across aggregation levels, whereby different levels of phenomena are linked in their movement and organization, to one another. In entrainment, *différance* moves (acts) together (in unison). Such coordinated activity is what organization and organizing are all about (DeLanda, 1991). The dynamic links of entrainment make complex adaptive systems, or organization and organizing, appear coherent. Complex adaptive systems are dynamic; they can

be thought of as manifestations of desire or *jouissance*. In effect, the terminology of radical (postmodern) organizational theory can be translated fairly easily into the terminology of complexity theory, and vice versa.

The ethics of emergence need to be defined in terms of the experiential processes that are involved. Organizational studies have focused more on the nature of organization and organizing, than on social justice, the quality of collective existence or the human construction of meaning. The social ethics of organizational activity are most often defined as external to organization. Organizations are defined as open systems, but often this openness only extends to competitive factors and to considerations of effectiveness or efficiency. Political theorists and social ethicists may study the social effects of organizing, but organizational researchers normally do not.

Two of the terms of intentional emergent coherence are (at least implicitly) ethical. *Intentionality* assumes purpose, or purposiveness, of action. Organizing is intentional if it is directed toward aims and goals. The assumption is that organization requires purposiveness, or a lived sense of expectations and direction. Organization is not mere absurdity, violence, and chance. Organizing is undertaken on the assumption that it will produce some sort of desired result. *Coherence* assumes that meaningful order and purpose are possible. Action can cohere or be(come) orderly and structured. Thus complex activity is unpredictable and dynamic (emergent), as well as purposeful (intentionality) and able to achieve coherence (socially meaningful order). But corporate intentionality may not be coherent. It can strive for wealth and independence for some, and suffering and exploitation for others. Managers can pursue power for themselves and weakness for others. Intentional emergent coherence assumes some form of empowerment, wherein organization is not divided against its self. Obviously in any organization there will be (some) differences, competition and conflict. But an organization that aspires to coherence assumes that the self/other relationship can be organized in a manner that is fundamentally cooperative. If organizing is defined as a “zero-sum power game,” then intentional emergent coherence is unachievable.

The social and ethical evaluation of organizational activity is often thought to be external to the field of organizational studies. The focus on organization and organizing often pushes the experiencing individual, and the ethical identity of the organization, outside of the boundaries of study. Phenomenal complexity theory tries to know what the self creates and how the self is created. It tries to know what the social order creates and what is created by it. It is an examination of emergence in its fullness.

CONCLUSION

Organizational studies are a form of complex consciousness wherein the activity of differing aggregation levels makes for emergence. Here organizational studies differ from social sciences, which are defined to avoid, as far as possible, crossing from one aggregation level to another. For instance, the self is rendered in psychology, the self-other relationship in sociology, and culture (artifacts) in anthropology. Organizational studies are epistemologically contaminated by three levels of aggregation: the self (i.e., motivation, creativity, business analysis); the self-other (i.e., organizational learning, group dynamics, leadership, entrepreneurship); and the objectified or reified (i.e., organizational structure, market economy, strategy). Dealing with so many aggregation levels makes organizational studies into the prototype of a complexity (social) science.

Indeterminate emergent processes make organizational practice dynamic and highly context dependent. Activity within emergence constantly has to check its goals and results, examine its processes and actions, and question its identities and analyses. Dealing with emergence requires constant alignment of self, self-other and the embedded. The claims and counterclaims of the differing aggregation levels have to be negotiated, regulated and dealt with.

In civil society, emergent circumstances, interactions and awareness interact. Organizational studies need to make all of this accessible to consciousness as text. To be true to the complexity and dynamics of their subject matter, organizational studies have to entail interactive logic, process thinking and dynamic analysis. Dealing with relationships of self, self-other and embedded structure defines an emergent (organizational) practice that is radically open to the Other and to circumstance. Such an understanding is political in the sense that it carries the prerequisites to deal with the Other, with shared circumstances and with interactive processes.

TAMARA-IZING PCT

Does mainstream organization theory toss the politics of textual (and narrative) meaning into a black hole? Above and in previous articles Letiche has presented the basics of phenomenal complexity theory (PCT) and I have developed Tamara storytelling organization theory (TSOT) as an example of the complexifying narrative (and textual) processes engulfing the Disney Corporation (Boje, 2000b; Letiche, 2000). Letiche and I think that this dialog presents a way out of reducing the politics of meaning, to a black hole.

In a review of social construction (constructivist and interpretivist) theories and epistemologies, Schwandt (1994: 130-2) presents four criticisms, summarized below:

- *The problem of criteria.* In the absence of an adequate warrant (criteria), accounts are critiqued for solipsism (they are only my accounts) and relativism (all accounts are equally true or false). Solutions include claiming middle ground, making a bid to rescue realist intuition from correspondence theories, and ignoring the separation of mind and world and heading for pragmatic ground to generate further inquiry.
- *The lack of critical purchase.* This is the inability to separate fact gatherer (disinterested observer or traditional ethnographer) from values (engaged activist with interest in change as part of ethnography) or to critique the very accounts we produce, ignoring the differences in what Burrell and Morgan (1979: 254) call “sociology of regulation” versus “sociology of radical change.”
- *The problem of authority.* Postmodernist ethnographers argue that defining interpretation as acts of inscription vests authority and control in the anthropologist as inscriber and suppress the dialogic dimension of constructing interpretations of human action.
- *The making of epistemological claims.* This is a critique of arguing from psychological claims by a knower doing (and constructing knowledge of an individual mind) then telling it to render epistemological conclusions about the known (out there).

Most fundamental is the charge that various versions of social construction (and sense-making) theory disengage from experience, in order to objectify it; some in Cartesian fashion. The objective of investigation and the investigator get separated, even in analyses that repudiate mechanistic and behaviorist cause-and-effect ways of knowing. Social construction is ostensibly about the intersubjective character of meaning and inquiry. We participate in the very production of meaning via participation in the hermeneutical circle of readings and interpretations (Schwandt, 1994: 121). Our inquiry and cultural criticism, and even oppositional cultural aesthetic, makes us complicit with ethical issues in our own lived experience and in our participation in the spectacle of the production, consumption and distribution of texts. There is a politics of meaning circulating in the texts we distribute; there are no value-neutral interpretations or constructions, even in those that purport empirical or objective realism. “Knowledge and truth are created, not discovered by mind. They emphasize the pluralistic and plastic character of reality” (Schwandt, 1994: 125). We stretch and shape reality in the ways we construct knowledge, and this is what PCT and TSOT seek to explain by reinscribing differences to essentialisms and totalisms, thereby recapturing the politics of meaning.

PCT

Letiche, in an earlier article (1999), conceptualized PCT as redefining the possibilities of emergence theory, by accentuating the experiential consciousness and aesthetically generative *jouissance* (pleasure) that is excluded by the reductionist rationality of cyborg-technologism in many models of chaos and complexity. The problem with such reductionism is that human existence becomes equated with progress, a rational science *sans* ethics, and organization studies revert to the positivist realism of nineteenth-century social Darwinism excluding the politics of meaning. Letiche did not shove PCT (or politics of meaning) into the black hole of social constructions and sense making; he theorized emergent complexity as a dynamic interaction between consciousness and world: “There is no human world without consciousness and no consciousness without a world” (1999: 20). “Social construction” and “sense making” have become devoid of emergent processes of dialogic interactivity, the mutuality and simultaneity of dynamic negotiating and the complexity of the politics of meaning grounded in open interaction. “The speaker and the spoken, the knower and the known, co-evolve [in processes of dialog] conceived to be a process of co-authored text” (Letiche, 1999: 33).

Letiche (2000) relies on Bergson’s (1900, 1938) work, as inspiring a social science in-between rationalism and subjectivism. The rationalist models of complexity and emergence are about mathematical modeling and simulation experiments, as in the models that simulate fitness landscapes, attractors, and bifurcations, at the edge of chaotic adaptive systems. One downside of the rationalist approach, as Letiche (1999) posits, is that emergence can be reduced to a social Darwinian position that is opposed to social ethics.

PCT is about emergence and self-organizing, and the experience of storytelling in Tamara is included as part of this epistemology (way of knowing) and ontology (being in the world).

TSOT

Previous research (Boje, 1991) explored the multiplicity and contentiousness of collective storytelling processes in times of change. Storytelling organization is defined as a “collective storytelling system in which the performance of stories is a key part of members’ sense-making and a means to allow them to supplement individual memories with institutional memory” (Boje, 1991: 106). The pathway out of the black hole of “social construction” (Boje, 1991, 1995) is to conceptualize storytelling organization theory as an emergent interactive dialog of collectivity, called “Tamara.” Tamara interweaves co-authored stories

told by storytellers wandering over and networking simultaneous theatrical stages as characters change their identity from one scene to the next. Tamara gives storytelling organization theory a dynamic context of multiple struggling storytellers, each story a particular framing of reality being chased by wandering and fragmenting audiences.

In the past, organization theory has written stories without attention to plurality and economic context, the dynamics of temporality, and the morphing of human identity. Tamara is experimental fiction that invites the audience to fragment (instead of remaining stationary spectators) and wander over a dozen simultaneous stages as actors, to trace the infinite play of differences in meanings of stories co-constructed with the audience (turned spec-actor: spectator and actor). This enables the detecting of indeterminate changes in spec-actor characters (we become part of the surveillance), and thereby exposes our complicity with hegemonic practices that marginalize other voices. We become spies to our own complicity in a play about Fascism (the subject of the original play). Such multilevel experiences can be generalized to form an interpretive theory of Tamara.

Tamara is a discursive metaphor highlighting the plurivocal interpretation of organizational stories in a distributed and historically contextualized meaning network—that is, the meaning of events depends upon the locality, the prior sequence of stories, and the transformation of characters in the wandering discourses. (Boje, 1995: 1000)

TSOT analyzes how communities of discourse compete and negotiate politics of meaning, by legitimating intertwined networks of stories of the present, restorying the past and articulating possible futures. In the management of writing, and the writing of management, constructing and choosing the happy story over competing voices is less a search for the truth than a form of politically naïve economic complicity, which marginalizes alternative stories and voices (Boje, 1995: 998).

In sum, TSOT is storytelling organization theory, in the fragmenting context of Tamara; a wandering and emergent linguistic complexity, in which stories are the plurivocal medium of interpretive exchange and where storytellers live out the collective and pluralistic dynamics of the politics of meaning, as each character is realized differently depending on the stories that people co-construct and the networking of the multiplicity of stages. It is an emergent complexity, which captures story characters in a panoptic, interconnected network of surveillance, of contesting and intersecting gazes, where the politics of meanings depends on the characters that we follow from one episode and stage to the next, as the performers transform themselves over time (Boje, 1995: 1001).

My task here is to combine PCT and TSOT. At the same time I want to move from single to multi-organizational examples, where it becomes more difficult to commodify official stories as the story, without encountering the contrary and relativity of stories of other stakeholders. The multiplicity creates a panoptic gaze, as this multiple, continuous and anonymous power becomes an eyewitness in a network of interorganizational relations and intersecting gazes (Boje, 1995: 1027). The panoptic is reversed: Instead of representing the crushing power of one gaze, it represents the freedom of being confronted by multitude, variety and plurality. As organizing contexts co-evolve, new organizations and voices emerge with alternative storylines that can change the meaning of collective stories or invoke change in the Tamara of story passageways. This accomplishes Lyotard's (1984) objective of breaking up grand narratives, by disintegrating any one story into a mass of intersecting localized accounts.

PCT and TSOT challenge the root metaphors of organization studies.

Our new metaphor is more discursive, more the conversation and the play, than the mechanistic or organic materiality of mainstream theory metaphors. Lyotard (1984: 17), for example, argues that a conversation in an institution carries with it supplementary constraints, on which statements are declared admissible and within its bounds: "The constraints function to filter discursive potentials, interrupting possible connections in the communication networks: there are things that should not be said." Certain stories are more hegemonic and characterize the Tamara of particular institutions, but ways of resisting and telling marginalized stories remain. Tamara and PCT call into question the language practices of managerialism, performativity, and the junk science (science contracted by corporations to legitimate unethical practice) of business writing. The writing of "knowledge" in organization studies, a process of increasing commodification as the university becomes both enterprise and publisher, is increasingly controlled by mega-corporate interests. The regime of story, gazing and telling, introduces the politics of meaning into sensemaking and into the social construction of theories.

There is more here than the sum of all the knowers' points of view. Letiche (2000) relies on Bergson's (1900: 116) concept of *durée* as entryway into temporality. *Durée* is an experiential duration, not a point in time, followed by another, and another before, and then another after. In terms of Tamara, *durée* is the collective memory, the experiences of temporality registered in the "storytelling organization" (Boje, 1991, 1995). The storytelling organization constructs tales of present, past and future, with multiple storytellers engaged in collective acts of storytelling.

In Tamara, the experiential *durée* is not a linear succession of stories told, but a dynamic collective theater. The collective temporality is a storied, experiential *durée* of collectively constructed social memory. There are also important acts of ante-narrative, the drive to tell a story before a storyline has been socially agreed. Ante-narrative is fragmented, nonlinear, incoherent, collective, unplotted and pre-narrative speculation; a bet. To traditional narrative methods, ante-narrative is improper storytelling, the wager that a proper narrative could be constituted (Boje, 2001b). Tamara storytelling is also the anticipation of stories to be lived in, or future potentialities, as yet unrealized. A call to story—what has yet to be storied—is an ante-narrative

change to collective memory and potentiality. TSOT and other generalized forms of Tamara thus create the intentionally emergent multitude of perspectives on a situation that are left to the observer/participant to be rendered coherent.

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