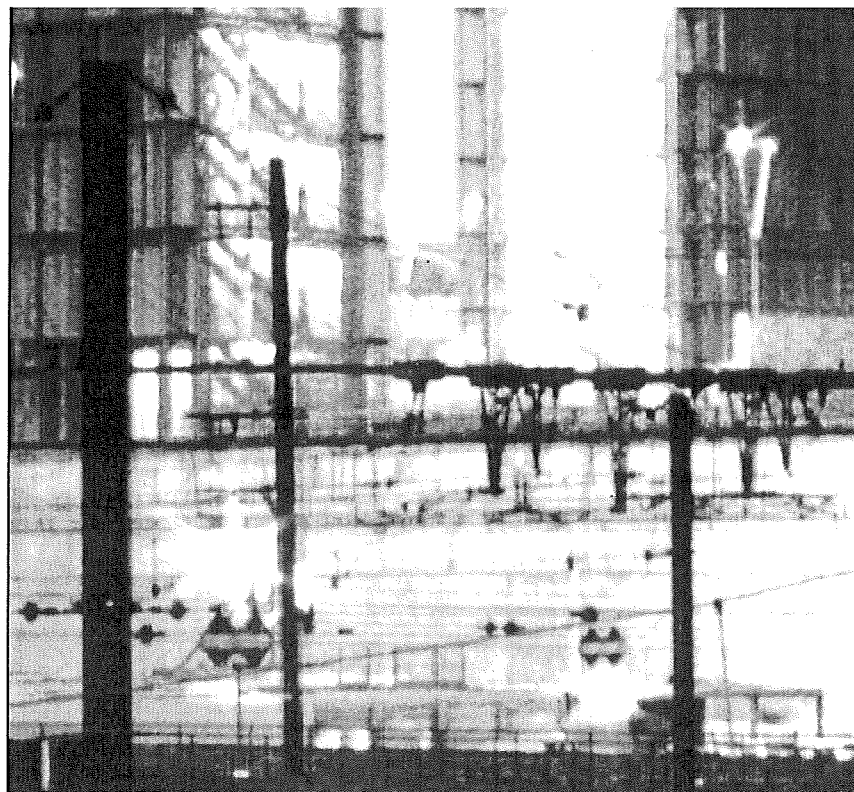




Perpetuating Entrepreneurship through Dialogue

- A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST VIEW -

Chris Steyaert

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Chapter five

Guideline. Another question inherent in our central research question deals with how the social process that gives form to the development and transformation of meaning configurations can be understood. In *fragment 19*, the question is examined again by relativizing the notion of 'shared meaning' in this collective process. In place of this notion, collective creativity is approached 'as a dialogue'. The idea is then that the organizing process, as it tends towards collective creativity, can be conceived of as a performance of conversations in which actors exchange a wealth of different meanings and continue to do so based on the quality of the dialogues which they are able to write together.

In order to render this argument more concrete, a two-track strategy is followed. On the one side, a theoretical conversation between cognitive and social constructionist accounts of meaning configurations is set in motion in *fragment 20* and *fragment 21*. This leads us back, in *fragment 20*, to psychology and the early days of the cognitive approach in order to explore the relationship between 'cognition' and social processes. This is intended as the beginning of a further exploration of the relationship between meaning configurations and the related notion of 'cognitive maps', both in operational and epistemological senses (*fragment 21*). Meaning configurations are situated in the social inter-play. The other track followed is the story of two high tech firms, Quartet and Vision, and the development of meaning configurations within the firms. Through the use of a 'story', the meaning configurations are woven together as a dialogue between different voices in the collective sensemaking process of the two high tech firms.

The two tracks come together in *fragment 23*, which proposes a dialogic approach to perpetuated entrepreneurship. A theoretical interpretation of the cases is developed on the basis of Bakhtin's idea of dialogic meaning creation. This is the central (hypo)thesis of our study: continuing creativity collectively requires a Bakhtinian dialogue among the different interpretive repertoires, the so-called voices. This thesis stresses the importance of 'difference' in the organizing process, offers a more critical view of the concept of 'sharedness', and suggests important tools for elaborating and making more concrete the social dimension of organizing as 'conversation'. The idea of dialogue fits the theater metaphor of organization, and reinstates the dramaturgical version of social constructionism which was one of its most important instigators. The art of continuous collective creativity is then to have no voice left out of the dialogue on the entrepreneurial stage.

Meaning Configurations in the Organizational Conversation: Reviewing the Notion of 'Shared Meaning'

Is There a Need for Shared Meaning?

This study focuses on a complex organizational task, which is not exclusive to entrepreneurial companies alone, and which we have called 'the continuity of newness as a collective activity'. This task is embedded in the transition from an entrepreneurial initiative to an organizationally continued entrepreneurship, which we framed as our general research question: 'how is the transition made from an entrepreneurial initiative to an organizational entrepreneurship?'. Taking a social constructionist perspective, we shall approach this transitional phenomenon as a process of (re)constructing meanings, and we shall try to understand the social dynamics of this sensemaking process within an entrepreneurial context. In order to concretize this 'general' question, let us 'operationalize' this question as follows: 'How do organizational meaning configurations evolve during the evolution of the entrepreneurial firm?'. This question can be tackled by distinguishing two separate but related questions. The first question asks how these meaning configurations change during the evolution of the companies studied: how can this change be described? and, how can this change be understood? The second question refers to the relationship of the organizational meaning configuration with individual meaning configurations: how are the individual meaning configurations of the entrepreneur and his collaborators related to each other and to a so-called organizational configuration?

In asking ourselves how individual and collective meanings evolve over time, and how they relate to each other, it is supposed that the concept of 'shared meaning' plays a central role. Development is seen as a continuous construction and deconstruction of shared meanings (Donnellon, Gray & Bougon, 1986). The notion of 'shared meaning' has long been an important functional concept to clarify and to explain how organizations can be instruments of collectivized action. The definition of 'an organization' by Walsh and Ungson (1991, p. 60) as "*a network of intersubjectively shared meanings that are sustained through the development and use of a common language and everyday social interaction*", and by Smircich and Stubbart (1985, p. 727) as "*a set of people who share many beliefs, values and assumptions that encourage them to make mutually-reinforcing interpretations of their own acts and the acts of others*", is illustrative in this connection. Shared meanings function as a glue for social order and they orient organizational members

What form of alignment, other than shared meanings, can be held responsible for the continuation of their collective creative activities? As an alternative we suggest the theater metaphor and the notion of dialogue, which can shed a different light on how collective action is performed through conversations in which meanings are intersubjectively connected and aligned from the diversity of voices and players.

Conversation Seen in Terms of the Theater Metaphor: Dialogue

When Clov asks Hamm "What is there to keep me here?", the blind Hamm answers his companion and servant, "The dialogue." A surprising answer in Samuel Beckett's play *Endgame*, which is known precisely for the way its dialogues may be conceived of as interwoven monologues, and its conversations as communicative misunderstandings. The dialogue is here praised as fundamental in a play, a genre, in which dialogues are the most important instruments. Praising the dialogue in a dialogue. Form and content coincide here: the dialogue here becomes self-explanatory. The dialogue can be a tool for developing a middle perspective on organizations, whereby the classical distinction between individual and organization is transformed into a succession of intersubjective conversation moments. At the same time, the dialogue is the development and survival of a (young) organization, and not something that needs to be sought outside it. By invoking the dialogue we take two steps in one go. Firstly, we draw on an old, albeit hardly dominant metaphor for looking at organization; that is, the metaphor of the theater. Secondly, we appeal to one of the instigators of social constructionism: a dramatic version of social reality.

Organization as theater

The organization-as-theater metaphor does not appear in Morgan's *Images of Organization*, in which the organization literature is ordered around eight metaphors (fragment 3). This is quite curious, as Morgan is no stranger to the theater metaphor. *Images of Organization* is the disillation of his more than 900-page dissertation that he wrote at Lancaster under the guidance of Robert Cooper. In this doctoral thesis he devotes a whole chapter to the theater metaphor, while in *Images* it receives only three lines among the bibliographical notes. Why Morgan carried out such a drastic reduction is not immediately evident. It has been insinuated that the theater metaphor was not acceptable to American academics because it was 'too arty and too crafty'.³

² For a more extensive discussion of the theater metaphor in organization theory see C. Steyaert, *Organizations as Theater: the Future of an Old Metaphor* (1992b).

³ This according to Gibson Burrell, then a fellow doctoral candidate together with Morgan at Lancaster. Taken from a lecture at the 10th SCOS conference on *Organization and Theater*, Lancaster, U.K., 1992.

and teams towards a joint goal and a common vision. Shared meanings, in the form of respectively shared values and a shared mission, seem to be influential in the development of an organizational culture (Schein, 1992) and a business strategy (Bergquist, 1993).

Although shared meanings have been 'adapted' as a norm for organizational effectiveness in concepts such as 'minimal sharing' (Weick, 1979), 'shared agreement' (Garfinkel, 1967), and 'equivalent meanings' (Donnellon, Gray & Bougon, 1986), the idea of 'what sharing means', especially in relation to social processes, has received less attention and has not been fundamentally questioned. Our research analysis and theoretical development, as we shall document throughout this chapter, induces us to examine this notion more closely. The easiness with which 'shared meanings' are taken for granted throughout organizational literature, and which resolves the problem of how joint action can be understood, is an attitude we cannot share here. While shared meanings are necessary as a form of alignment, they can compromise the need for variety and diversity which is necessary in continuing creative activities. It would seem to me important to focus more on the process of sharing than on its outcome, to embed 'sharing' in social and interactive contexts, and to go beyond the idea of 'sharing' by exploring the notion of 'difference' as (equally) important in the development of collective creative acts. 'Sharing' is then one kind of intersubjective alignment when persons-in-interaction are working together. Czarniawska-Joerges (1992) is one of the few organizational scholars I know that has questioned the assumption of 'shared meanings': "It is often assumed that collective action requires shared meaning. This is true to a certain extent [...]. She, however, suggests that "a collective action is possible in the face of many meanings that are only partly shared. It is the experience of a collective action that is shared, more than its meaning." Instead, she speaks of 'intersubjective meanings', which she borrows from Berger (1989, p. 211), who is in turn based on the hermeneutical philosopher, Charles Taylor. 'Intersubjective meanings', which constitute shared practices, are "self-definitions of social agents, implicit in the underlying language, which involve visions of self and relation to others and society." According to Czarniawska-Joerges (p. 38), these intersubjective meanings interrelate in order to create networks whose most stable parts become common meanings; that is, common reference points in a given thought world. Here again, the question remains open as to how common meanings emerge from stabilized interrelationships.

In short, the notion of 'shared meanings' is the bridge which has to connect the personal with the collective, the individual with the organizational, and by which one of the central problems of organizational theory is resolved. What alternative can we invoke then to tackle our research questions? How are individuals' meanings interrelated through the social process? And, how do these meanings change throughout the development of the high tech firm?

¹ See also the ethnomethodologist Garfinkel.

Whatever the reasons may be for this omission, of the series of metaphors that organization specialists use in order to learn to understand organizations, the theater metaphor is one of the oldest, and a theater analysis of organizations already has a long past history. Ever since Shakespeare penned his "*All the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players*"⁴, the way has been open for the comparison of life with the theater. The organization-as-theater metaphor is a further embellishment on this theme as it approaches the world of organizations in theatrical terms.⁵ In a superficial sense the language game of the theater is taken over and is applied – sometimes rather unnaturally – to the ins and outs of organizations. Organizations are (like) plays, and their members actors who play roles. There are lead roles, secondary roles, and double roles. They carry on dialogues with each other, and their leaders have their monologues. The environment of the organization is the public: organizations appear, present themselves, perform, steal the show. Actors come and go, they grab the spotlight, and end up in the wings. Some are happier working behind the scenes. In organizations there are political and romantic intrigues being played out. Auditions are granted, parts are cast, rehearsals are held, and there is of course much improvising and directing. The actors' characters are often difficult, the sense of ensemble stumbles and proceeds awkwardly, actors fall out of character, and a prompter is suddenly required. Organizations put on dramas, or better, they seem to go through successive dramas. One or more scripts are used. The text is rewritten more than once, passages are skipped, characters scrapped. Sometimes it all seems like a soap opera and the director seems fresh from *Dallas*. Sometimes it is a many-layered Shakespearean tragedy – firms can also have their Hamlets, Othellos, or Lears. Usually, however, the operative genre is tragicomedy. New organizations come in front of the footlights, have their première, sometimes experience a black-out, and for some the curtain falls for the last time.

Certainly the usefulness of the metaphor also depends on the language used. The word 'director' can apply both to a company director or a stage director, a comparison that can lead to very insightful conclusions for the former. More central yet, for both the business and theater worlds, is the notion of 'performance', which has been extensively worked out by Goffman (1969). In the world of organizations, 'performance' is the most important criterium of achievement, indicating the general level of functioning of an organization and its members, while in the world of theater arts, performance is the main way to speak of the representation of a work.⁶ 'The performance' of the organization – the company results, but also the public 'showing' it

ultimately makes – must thus be related to the organization of the 'performance', the underlying dynamic organizing process which leads to the representation of the organization.⁷

Geertz (1980, p. 27) remarks that "a constructionist view of what theater is – that is, poesis – implies that a dramatic perspective in the social sciences needs to involve more than pointing out that we all have our entrances and exits, we all play parts, miss cues, and love pretense. [...] [To] take the drama analogy seriously is to probe behind such familiar ironies to the expressive devices that make collective life seem anything at all. What can 'such a thoroughgoing exploitation of the drama analogy in social theory' mean?" When organizations are considered as theater it means that one is speaking to the essence of theatrical reality: its dialogical nature. The dialogue is here the action. Petrey (1990) has made clear, drawing partly on Elam, partly on speech-act theory, how the distinction between a play's action and its dialogue can be contested. In line with a performative vision of language, it is believed that dialogue constitutes action. She asserts that speech-act theory is concerned with the social process of verbal performativity, and that dialogue enacts collective life. Her claim is illustrated by a quotation from Elam (1980, p. 159, cited by Petrey, 1990, p. 87): "It is this social, interpersonal, executive power of language, the pragmatic 'doings things with words', which is dominant in the drama. Dramatic discourse is a network of complementary and conflicting illocutions and perlocutions: in a word, linguistic interaction, not so much descriptive as performative. Whatever its stylistic, poetic and general 'aesthetic' function, the dialogue is in the first place a mode of praxis which sets in opposition the different personal, social and ethical forces of the dramatic world." This 'setting in opposition' shows that a dialogical conception is directed towards the variety of personal, social, and cultural interpretations which live within an organization, and how they are related to one another. The shared interpretation is here the exception rather than the rule. Once consensus has been reached, the dialogue falls silent. And, in Beckett's words, there remains only the dialogue to carry things further.

Looking at organizing as a dialogical process means that we must again pick up the thread of one of the predecessors of social constructionism, dramaturgical sociology.

A dramaturgical version of social constructionism

Social constructionist scholars, including those in the field of organization studies, seem to be attracted by the theater metaphor (Bruner, 1990; Czarniawska-Joerges & Wolff, 1991; Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992; Mangham & Overington, 1987). Czarniawska-Joerges (1992) calls the theater metaphor the most fitting to express the complexity of organizing processes. The work of Mangham and Overington (1987), which means to be "a first, contemporary attempt to use the theatrical model as a general conceptual resource for understanding social interaction in

⁴ This continues: "They have their exits and their entrances; and one man in his time plays many parts" (*As You Like It*, II, iv).

⁵ The theater metaphor is current not only in the study of organizations: it is, for example, also used in anthropology. According to Geertz (1980) the drama analogy is one of the most important tendencies in anthropological thinking, since "in recent years there has been an enormous amount of genre mixing in social science, as in intellectual life generally." For an example using a great deal of input from the theater world, see R. Schneiders *Between Theater and Anthropology*.

⁶ The coincidence of two such central concepts in one word does not occur in the Dutch language.

⁷ See Jeffercut (*The Organization of Performance and the Performance of Organization*, 1992) who makes this connection for theater groups (and not for profit organizations).

organizations”, is one of the most fully developed versions. The authors further develop dramaturgical sociology, mentioning, besides the influences on their work of Burke and Duncan and to a lesser degree Goffman, the efforts of Burns (1972), Hare (1985), Briset and Edgley (1975), Combs and Mansfield (1976), and Wilshire (1982). Drama is a metaphor which allows them to make a specific and detailed conceptual analysis of social interaction in organizations: that which takes place in the theater is reflected in organizations, and may be conceived of as ‘the expressive performance of social relationships’ in which status and feelings are key issues. For Mangham and Overington (1987), the world of theater forms a metaphor that is not simply coincidental and superficially useful, a metaphor that we use dozens of times in our daily language use; it is rather a conceptually based metaphor which is current within the evolution of organization theory. Mangham and Overington, indebted to the intrinsic and epistemological foundations of symbolic interactionism, develop their dramaturgical approach to organizations within a social constructionist framework. The following assumptions, which Mangham (1987) cites as underlying a dramaturgical analysis, make this clear:

- ‘meaning’ is a guide to action and that ‘meaning’ arises through interaction
- the self in all its aspects is a social product; ‘that who I am’ arises out of interaction
- we are all actors; that is, we are both affected by and affect situations
- the unit of analysis therefore is not an individual or a trait but interaction within a context
- as situations develop, social actors construct and reconstruct meanings with reference to the performance of others and of themselves.

The drama of entrepreneurship

The meaning configurations which we use for describing the evolution and development of a high tech firm are embedded in an organizational conversation, to be conceived as the dramatic inter-play among actors, groups and organizations. The social process is seen as an ongoing consecution of conversational events, in which “a conversation is a dramatic work, even if a very short one, in which the participants are not only the actors but also the joint authors, working out in agreement or disagreement the mode of their production [...] Conversation, understood widely enough, is the form of human transactions in general” (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 196-197). Our further research now consists of exploring how the organizing process towards collective creativity can be conceived of as a performance of conversations in which actors exchange a wealth of different meanings and continue to do so based on the quality of the dialogues which they are able to write together. To accomplish this, we shall combine the stories of the development of two high tech firms and interweave them with a theoretical development of ‘organizing as

conversation’. The theoretical development involves three steps. Firstly, the social nature of sensemaking will be made concrete through a number of concepts from psychology and elsewhere. Secondly, this discussion will be firmly rooted in the field of organization studies, with the comparison between cognitive maps and meaning configurations as the most substantial pretext. Thirdly, a dialogical conception of meaning generation will be developed, on the basis of the ideas of the literary theorist Bakhtin. In order to give form to the development of the high tech firms, the story of their evolution will be presented as narratives, structured around interpretive grounded concepts and centered around meaning configurations. In light of the theoretical developments, a reinterpretation of their development will be made, serving as an answer to our research question. This will lead to a theoretical hypothesis of the way organizations are able to develop and maintain their creative potential.

From Basics to Rhetorics: the Social Nature of Meaning Configurations

In fragment 8, while discussing Weick's theory, we examined critically the social dimension of sensemaking, as it is conceived from an organizational perspective. Two shortcomings were mentioned as we characterized the discursive and cultural embeddedness of social interactions as under-emphasized. We need to find a way to inscribe language and cultural context into the social process. This fragment is then a second attempt to give substance to the social process, and to make up for these shortcomings. This time the literature on cognitive theory in psychology will be taken as a point of departure as we confront it with the criticisms of different texts, ranging from pragmatism to Soviet psychology, but always returning to the same argument, that there is a lack of interest in the social origin of cognition. We shall try, through a review of both historical and more recent psychological literature, to reconsider cognition in social terms and to document the way meaning configurations are primarily of a social nature. In my opinion, this is not a gratuitous exercise: it helps to draw a more refined picture of a social constructionist perspective and show how it is critically interwoven with the history of psychology; it can aid in making clearer the distinction between 'cognitive maps' and 'meaning configurations' made in fragment 21; and it can help us to conceive of entrepreneurial innovative activities as a social process. It is also worth noting that this fragment continues the critical evaluation of the cognitive approach as formulated by Bruner and as it was integrated in outlining the process of sensemaking from a narrative perspective in fragment 7: there it was said that the focus on meanings and sensemaking was lacking and oppressed by the interest in information and information processing.

About and Beyond Cognitivism

It can not be denied that cognitive psychology has become the dominant approach within psychology. Psychology has in many respects become cognitive psychology. In the *Annual Review of Psychology*, which gives a bibliographical review of all domains from scientific psychology, albeit in an integrated text, a majority of the contributions in the 1993 edition¹ make

¹ As may be seen in the following examples : *Social Cognition and Social Perception* (S.T. Fiske), *Thinking* (K.J. Holyoak & B.A. Spellman), *Information Processing Models : Microscopes of the Mind* (D.W. Massaro & N. Cowan), *The Structure and Organization of Memory* (L.R. Squire, B. Knowlton, & G. Milner), *Social-Cognitive Mechanisms in the Development of Conduct Disorder and Depression* (K.A. Dodge), and *Social Foundations of Cognition* (J.M. Levine, L.B. Resnick & E.T. Higgins).

make reference to the cognitive approach in their title. The cognitive approach runs through the discipline of psychology like a continuous thread. As a consequence, such subdomains as perception, social psychology, motivation, memory, psychopathology, and developmental psychology seem to be less disconnected, and the fragmented character of psychology a bit less dramatic (Wertsch, 1991; Bruner, 1990). At the same time, a dominant cognitive approach can be mentioned – called ‘cognitivism’ by Still and Costall (1991) – in which individually situated mental processes are the central focus. During the last decade (and actually for much longer), as it will become clear, the cognitive dimension has been approached in very different and new ways. It is not the dominant position of ‘the cognitive’ that has to be revised, but its dominant content. The usefulness, feasibility, or validity of the cognition concept itself is not questioned, but critical questions addressed to cognitive-oriented scholars can direct the cognitive approach into an interesting but controversial period of self-evaluation. Although there has always been a pluriform but marginal ‘opposition’ (from behaviorism to phenomenology), it seems as if only now its pressure is being felt, its presence seen.

In *Against Cognitivism*, Still and Costall (1991) published one of the most critical volumes available on cognitive psychology. According to the editors, the achievements and merits of cognitive psychology have for the most part been enumerated in standard reviews (Baars, 1986; Gardner, 1987; Schlechter & Togliola, 1986). Their aim is to create the possibility for alternative approaches to present themselves. *Against Cognitivism* is a major revision of a version which was published in 1987 under the title *Cognitive Psychology in Question*. Why then five years later a half-hearted edition, with partly original, and partly completely new chapters? Why this ‘redoing of the old?’ (p. 3). The 1987 edition received extremely negative and condemnatory reactions in the reviews found in *Current Psychological Research and Review*, *British Journal of Psychology* and *The Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology*. The book was accused of being against (cognitive) psychology itself. Therefore, the editors decided to bring in more recent developments as well as to strengthen the arguments of several older chapters. At the same time, Still and Costall persist in their obstinacy and come up with a new provocative title which shows in a playful way just how ‘against’ they are.

Among the critical questionings and alternative foundations of the cognitive approach, let us discuss the perspectives of some historical precursors, like James and Bartlett, whose writings have recently been ‘remembered’, and some pragmatic considerations as found in the texts of Mead, and Soviet psychology, especially the work of Vygotsky, who seems increasingly to be considered one of the main scholars in psychology. In their contributions, these scholars give us all, be it in different ways, important clues for reconsidering cognitive processes in social terms and for understanding the social nature of meaning configurations.

Historical precursors and pioneers

Two pioneers of psychology may now have the floor, the mercurial William James and the eminent Sir Frederic Bartlett.

William James (1842-1910) and the ‘vague’

William James’ reveals to us one of the first traces of a social-process view of cognition. Following Still (1991, p. 21), James’ ideas on human consciousness have “opened the way to new accounts of the origin of knowledge – pragmatist, social constructionist and perceptual realist accounts that have provided psychology with some of the most important alternatives to cognitivism.” James reacted against the dualism of Descartes, in this joining Vico and other antagonists such as the ‘philosophers of the Romantic movement’ of whom Coleridge is one of the best-known (Still, 1991). In particular, James questioned Descartes’ principle of ‘*les idées claires et distinctes*’, which left no room for vagueness and complexity. Instead, Descartes stressed solid knowledge based on our ability to represent the world truly and by force of method, which eliminates vagueness from scientific discourse. James, however, accepted vagueness as fundamental to the stream of human consciousness. It is inscribed in the transitive parts within the stream of thought. In this stream of thought James distinguished ‘substantive’ and ‘transitive parts’. However, a substantive part, such as a perception, idea, or emotion, cannot be seen as ‘a-part’ from the stream; these, rather, are constructions that emerge as we make the process explicit through language. James (1950) refers to the metaphor of the stream to explain the process quality of human consciousness and to suggest what psychology should be studying: “*Even were the pails and pots all actually standing in the stream, still between them the free water would continue to flow. It is just this free water of consciousness that psychologists resolutely overlook. Every definite image in the mind is steeped and dyed in the free water that flows round it.*”³

This ‘reinstatement of the vague’ is part of a broader stream of ideas which deals with the transitory character of psychological phenomena, considering life as open and uncertain, and seeing knowledge as experience and preference oriented.⁴ William James seems to me the appropriate pioneer to help us root our study of creativity in high techs within the earliest ideas of psychology. Art and creativity played a central role in James’ life, as mirrored in the outlook of his work and his opinions on truth, knowledge, cognition, and the mind. James

³ In the history of psychology, James is mentioned in connection with functionalism, and in the history of philosophy, with pragmatism, even though as psychologist and as philosopher he almost defies classification. Most important was his anti-dogmatism, whereby with keen critical sense he called into question a number of sacred cows. Within psychology he is still known today in connection with the James-Lange theory of emotions. But there is also interest in other aspects of his work; for instance, his conception of development (see the works of Tulviste, as can be read in Wertsch, 1991).

⁴ Quoted by Diggins (1994) from James, Pragmatism and Humanism, *Writings*, 456.

⁵ This part is based on the excellent chapter on William James, *The Pragmatic Affirmation: William James and the Will to Believe* by Diggins (1994).

had a notion of reality as changing,⁵ and spoke of a 'synechistic pluralism' to conceive of reality as 'endless unactualized possibilities'. He questioned the principle of causation which "rules out the novelty and contingency of historical reality" (Diggins, 1994, p. 110), in line "with his buoyant vision of an open-ended universe in which man is free to order it according to his will and imagination" (Diggins, 1994, p. 111). The universe is pluralistic, with room for change and indeterminacy, with a rich diversity of experiences, and with a 'loose play' of events. In development, the key is creativity: "In our cognitive as well as in our active life we are creative. We add both to the subject and to the predicate part of reality. The world stands really malleable, waiting to receive its final touches at our hand. Like the kingdom of heaven, it suffers violence willingly. Man engenders truth upon it."

James is important for our understanding of development and knowledge as a creative process, which he links more to individual activity than to social interaction and political ideologies. His attention to the social dynamics of development is after all rather minimal, especially in comparison to Dewey and Peirce, who took pragmatism in a more public direction. Diggins' conclusion (1994, p. 157) shows clearly this primacy of the individual, leaving the social somewhat in the background: "Even though he could occasionally wax collectivistic and insist that people can profit by trading on each other's ideas: even though he could talk about the need for ideas to agree with realities and for philosophers to see how 'all human thinking is discursively' because 'all truth is a language affair and thus gets verbally built out, stored up, and made available for everyone', even though, in short, he wanted to see philosophy take a linguistic as well as a public turn, James remained more concerned about the individual and his and her personal freedom and passionate volitional nature in a universe where truths clashed rather than converged."

We shift now to the United Kingdom, where we have a comparable image of Bartlett, with the individual as foreground and the social as background – an arrangement that seems not to reflect his original interests, however.

Frederic Bartlett (1886-1969) and the 'social'

Sir Frederic Bartlett, who can be seen as one of the pioneers of cognitive psychology, and who occupies a privileged position because of his studies and experiments on memory and thinking, seems to have been quite sensitive to the social foundation of cognition. Bartlett is actually re-read by authors who contest the notion of the memory as an internal and individual process (Edwards & Middleton, 1987). In his classic book, *Remembering: A Study of Experimental and Social Psychology*, Bartlett discusses the social and cultural context of cognition. However, Costall (1991) refers to a still earlier work from 1923, *Psychology and Primitive Culture*, which takes a much more radical point of view on the relation between the individual

and the social than does *Remembering*, which is more of a transitional study. He considers the relationship between an individual and a group using examples from primitive cultures, and tackles more generally the relationship between psychology and sociology. He argues that psychology cannot divorce itself from sociology, because we arrive then exactly at what we need to avoid; namely, explanations which "always ... go back to the individual as he may be pictured to exist outside of any social group" (p. 8).⁶ Later on, in his book *Thinking, an Experimental and Social Study*, Bartlett came up with the similar conclusion that thinking has its roots in social interactions and in the social norms which guide these interactions (Hosking & Morley, 1991). He compared scientific, everyday and artistic thinking and he stressed the social nature of scientific thinking by claiming that it is "fundamentally cooperative, social, and cannot proceed far without the stimulus of outside contacts" (p. 123).⁷ However, as Bartlett pursued his career, and became more and more involved in developing psychology into a mature academic and applied discipline, his interest in the social grounds of cognitive processes disappeared.

This one-sided reading of Bartlett's work has a most surprising effect. In handbooks and in academia he is offered as one of the instigators of the cognitive revolution because in this psychological work he was interested in the higher mental functions, renouncing atomist and mechanical explanations, with great respect for the unique but complex patterns in human actions and feelings. More specifically, this is because of his conception of the memory as based on a transformational process through which the similarity between the original stimulus and a remembered stimulus can be at best vague and probably limited. Remembering and knowing are constructive processes in which a person takes an active part. This is, however, only the half of Bartlett, whose work was a lot less 'straight' than characterized and disseminated. His anthropological work is striking in its affinity with sociology, which should make his view that cognitions are socially and culturally embedded something less than a surprise. Especially characteristic is his 1928 article in which he unveils what he understands by 'social constructiveness'⁸ in the context of an attempt to explain how groups develop: "Probably the main way in which 'social constructiveness' is exercised is that all incoming cultural elements, whatever their origin, having to do with the same general sphere of life, will be dealt with by the activities which determine the trend of development of the receptive group in relation to the sphere of culture involved." Bartlett is also absolutely clear when it comes to the primacy of the social: "This type of change is truly social and cannot be expressed in terms of individual psychology." His concern that the experimenter should not lose contact with the world outside the laboratory also gives pause.

⁶ As quoted by Costall (1991).

⁷ As quoted in Hosking & Morley (1991) p. 94.

⁸ *Social Constructiveness* was also the title of the four short articles by Bartlett, MacCurdy, Armstrong, and Haddon, published in the *Journal of Psychology*, 1928, in connection with a colloquium around psychology and anthropology in Cambridge.

⁵ Diggins (1994) refers to the essay, *Notes on the Notion of Reality as Changing*, that James wrote a year before his death.

What sort of pioneer is Bartlett, after all? It becomes clear that the handbooks and university lectures do not offer a neutral picture; however, in line with his thinking, we may say that the way we re-present and remember Bartlett and other authors is a function of a socio-cultural and politico-institutional process – a process that even Bartlett could not escape in the way he presented and remembered himself.⁹ This causes Costal (1991, p. 51) to conclude: “If we are to treat Bartlett as a ‘pioneer’, it is as a pioneer of two approaches to cognition, at odds with one another. There is the familiar kind of cognitive psychology which either disregards the social and cultural, or, at best, ‘privatizes’ them within our heads, and there is a radical alternative that Bartlett also helped to define. The subject of this psychology remains the individual – but as nested within a social order, a participant in a social world”. Bartlett’s vision of the social character of cognition has now generally been recognized within part of cognitive psychology, as we shall see. First, we shall give the floor to one of his contemporaries. This will take us from Cambridge to the United States, to the Chicago of Dewey and Mead, as we continue along the pragmatic trail started by James.

Pragmatist considerations: Herbert Mead (1863-1931) and the ‘new’

One of the most important American philosophical schools is pragmatism (Diggins, 1994; Oger & Buckens, 1992). Next to James, the recognized founder of pragmatism, Dewey, Peirce, and Mead are the important representatives. Taken together, their inquiry into pragmatism is approachable in social and public terms. Although Dewey is better known today as a philosopher, he also showed much interest in psychological questions. He was one of the first to remark that psychology studies the individual in isolation and human mental functioning in a cultural and organizational vacuum. He raised this argument in his presidential address to the American Psychological Association, entitled *Psychology and Social Practice* (Wertsch, 1991), and published an introduction to social (!) psychology. Dewey disagreed with the (psychological) supposition that a person’s private experience can be isolated as an existing reality: “The privacy of enjoyments and sufferings in their occurrence seem to describe a social fact.”¹⁰ Diggins (1994) mentions that Dewey suggested that mental knowledge does not confine itself to introspection alone but instead is conditioned by the public context of moral sentiments and epistemological impediments. He objected to what he called ‘the false quest for certainty’, which has been urged upon us by Greek philosophy. The world of Dewey is the world of experience, “a world of change and flux that can never really be known because it is shaped by the shifting ‘shadows’ of impressions and opinion” (Diggins, p. 219). This world does not presuppose another reality (to be distinguished from experience), nor an eternal and universal truth. The knower is immersed in

the flux and should not become paralyzed by the idea of a universal truth. Knowledge comes through practical activity; knowing is doing and acting. Knowledge is thus produced, and its truth is “never actual but potential, never total but partial and tentative” (Diggins, p. 233). Knowledge becomes appreciated in its practical consequences and its use. This idea should in the first place be cited through the works of Peirce who believed that knowledge should focus primarily on the ‘practical bearings’ of theoretical ideas, since science is nothing until its theories are tested in practice (Diggins, 1994). This process requires a collective inquiry, a search for public consensus in a community setting. Diggins (p. 168) notes that “Peirce wanted to elevate the idea of consciousness from the individual’s encounter with ‘pure experience’ to a grander vision, one in which the thinker is part of an ongoing process of interpretation and communication”.

Mead, a complex figure who was in no way imprisoned by academic and institutional norms, further developed this idea by seeing knowledge and consciousness in relation to the societal context. Herbert Mead, who was a friend of Dewey’s, is one of the most intriguing scholars of this century. He had an urge to find new and original insights and influences across different disciplines. His work has been subject to very different interpretations, as he has been seen as a metaphysic, a behaviorist, a semiologist, a symbolic interactionist, an idealist, and a pragmatist (Joas, 1985). Mead was more at ease with oral than with written communication. He did not write much, and what he wrote was very cryptic (Weyns, 1994). His main study, *Mind, Self and Society* was not actually written by him, but compiled on the basis of his own notes and those of his students. In this work, he saw the self emerging in the communicative process through language, gesture, and symbolic action in general. With this book he not only became one of the main precursors of social constructionism, but he shows explicitly to be interested in creativity as a social process.

Weyns (1994) calls Mead a ‘philosopher of the new’ who never stopped looking into the question of how something new can come into existence. The new does not come into being in a vacuum, and yet there are always new things in the world. That which occurs in the present moment has never happened before and at the same time belongs to the world. According to Weyns, this apparent paradox forms the background motif against which Mead’s socio-psychological and sociological work must be placed. This sort of paradox is, in my opinion, both a ground motif and an ‘escape-hatch’ for all research into innovation and creative entrepreneurship: how can we understand the creative acts in organizations without denying that (organization) which has gone before?

Although often neglected, newness takes a central place in Mead’s thinking: newness is the main characteristic of the social process, while at the same time the social is the main feature of newness (Weyns, 1994). This can be understood in general terms, by looking at Mead’s con-

⁹ There are several examples of the ‘received view’ being drastically revised at the moment (see for example Morris (1991) on behaviorism).

¹⁰ Quoted by Higgins from J. Dewey (1942). How is the mind to be known? *Journal of Philosophy*, 39, 29-35.

ception of time. Mead claims that there is simultaneously a continuity of the present and the past, and a discontinuity of the present with the past. While there is always something new emerging, there is as necessarily the continuation of the 'old': "*The new in the world belongs to the world*" (Weyns, 1994, p. 16). The present is both a reference to the past and a location of the new. This implies that the past cannot one-sidedly determine the present, as the past only receives its existence in the present. This (abstract) vision of time is linked to 'the social', since in Mead's thinking, temporality and sociality cannot be disconnected.

Mead's view on 'sociality'¹¹ will be developed in his model of the 'self'. For Mead, the social process is primary, as the human mind and human reality are constituted in the social interaction process. The development of the self also emerges from human interaction. The above paradox between continuity and newness can also be seen in the relationship between the creative individual and his or her social context: "*The individual, however original and creative he may be in his thinking or behavior, always and necessarily assumes a definite relation to, and reflects in the structure of his self or personality, the general organized pattern of experience and activity exhibited in or characterizing the social life-process in which he is involved, and of which his self or personality is essentially a creative expression or embodiment. No individual has a mind which operates in itself, in isolation from the social life-process in which it has arisen or out which it has emerged, and in which the pattern of organized social behavior has consequently been basically impressed upon it*" (Mead, 1934, p. 222). In that way, the person is always emerging, between what he was and is becoming, and the experience of this 'becoming' (one's self-consciousness) is a consequence of developments in the social interaction. This is illustrated in Mead's model of the self. Inspired by William James, Mead distinguished in the self the 'I' and the 'me' which he defines as follows:

"*The 'I' is the response of the organism to the attitudes of the others; the 'me' is the organized set of attitudes of others which one himself assumes*" (p. 175). The 'me' emerges from a person's capacity to take the attitude of the 'generalized other'¹²: "*To have self-consciousness one must have the attitude of the other in one's own organism as controlling the thing that he is going to do. What appears in the immediate experience of one's self in taking that attitude is what we term the 'me'. It is that self which is able to maintain itself in the community, that is recognized in the community in so far as it recognizes the others. Such is the phase of the self which I have referred to as that of the 'me'*" (p. 196). The 'I' is then the entity in ourselves which responds to the 'me'. This response is to a certain degree uncertain, as we never know with certainty how the 'I' will respond. While one can be conscious of some action (for instance writing a text), this does not yet include a consciousness of the responses to this action. But when these responses come into play, then the 'I' already is

¹¹ Mead developed this view on 'sociality' not only for human interaction but also for other 'systems', see Weyns (1994) or Mead's *The Philosophy of the Present* (1932).

¹² The 'generalized other' is seen as "the organized community or social group which gives to the individual his unity of self" (p. 154).

part of the 'me': "*The 'I' of this moment is present in the 'me' of the next moment. There again I cannot turn around quick enough to catch myself. I become a 'me' in so far as I remember what I said*" (p. 174). From this model, it becomes clear that the self is both a social and temporal structure and that Mead's vision of time is incorporated in this model of the 'self': the relationship between the 'I' and the 'me' resembles substantially the relationship which we draw between the present and the past, as the 'me' can be seen as the past of the 'I'. As newness is inherent to the 'now', it is the 'I' which can change the 'me'. Every person is always in some respect renewing oneself and the social order, dependent on how the 'I' will respond: "*It is because of the 'I' that we say that we are never fully aware of what we are, that we surprise ourselves by our own action*" (p. 174).

Soviet Psychology: Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) and the 'developmental'

A number of Soviet psychologists who can be grouped in the so-called cultural-historical school (Engeström et al., 1990) and of whom Lev Vygotsky is the best-known, have received some attention (Wertsch, 1991) within Western psychological and educational research (Bronckart, 1985; Schneuwly, 1985) in the course of the last decade. Originally 'forgotten' for social and political reasons, their work is an important step towards the development of a socially founded vision of thinking and remembering. Bakhurst (1990) clarifies that the way in which their work is currently represented, and the role in this of forgetting and remembering, of conserving and blurring, is itself an example of the social influence on (scientific) 'remembering' and of the importance of a 'collective memory' and how this is developed. For Vygotsky, knowledge actually results from a complex socially and politically colored process of remembering. After his early death, his work was excised from the history of Soviet psychology, and in his own lifetime he had to move from Moscow to the Ukraine, in the context of the emergence of Stalinism. Only in 1956 was he rehabilitated, while his collaborators had preserved his thinking by word of mouth for more than twenty years. But Vygotsky was not a solitary genius; other important Russian psychologists should be mentioned as well. Bakhurst (1990) adds to Vygotsky's vision those of Voloshinov and Ilyenkov, while Wertsch¹³ (1991) combines the ideas of Vygotsky with those of the literary scholar Bakhtin to create a sociocultural view of the mind (fragment 23).

The social origin of mental functioning in the individual is one of the basic themes in Vygotsky's conception of human action. The social precedes the individual, and he in fact considers the individual to be quasi-social. The psychology of an individual reflects an aggregate of internalized social relationships that will determine the structure of the person

¹³ Vygotsky's work has largely been introduced and commented upon by Wertsch, who has integrated it into a sociocultural approach of mediated action.

(Wertsch, 1991). To document this point of view, he refers to the development of the child¹⁴ in the following general statement: "Any function in the child's cultural development appears twice, or on two planes. First it appears on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane. First it appears between people as an interpsychological category, and then within the child as an intrapsychological category. This is equally true with regard to voluntary attention, logical memory, the formation of concepts, and the development of volition.... It goes without saying that internalization transforms the process itself and changes its structure and functions. Social relations or relations among people genetically underlie all higher functions and their relationships."¹⁵ Concerning this internalization, Shotter (1993b, p. 111) remarks that "even fully 'internalized' (cognitive) processes, taking place wholly 'within' individuals, if they are to be accounted as socially appropriate, that is, as both intelligible and legitimate, must also honor in their formation certain moral privileges and obligations." The social origin of the mind is illustrated in the idea of the 'zone of proximal development', which refers to the distance between a child's actual and potential development as mediated through social support and guidance by adults or peers. The development of the child, and especially the potential that lies ahead of the child, becomes visible and is stimulated as a result of the opportunities created by the social context (i.e. parents, friends, teachers).

Wertsch points out that this vision departs radically from the normal line of thought within psychology and that in the places where agreement does exist, this is often made only minimally explicit. Vygotsky's ideas go further than the assumption that individual mental functioning originates in our participation in social life: "Even when we turn to mental [internal] processes, their nature remains quasi-social. In their own private sphere, human beings retain the functions of social interaction."¹⁶ Vygotsky assumes the connection between intermental and intramental processes to be a complex one, requiring further explication (cf. third theme, below). The one is never exclusively determining for the other, as is often reasoned in psychology. A second claim which flies in the face of general thinking in psychology has to do with the idea that the higher mental functions, such as thinking, attention, and memory, are not only individual but can also be social forms of activity; this is an idea that Bartlett also put forward, although independently of Vygotsky.

The emphasis that Vygotsky puts on the social origin of a person's mental functions can, according to Wertsch, not be understood without in turn emphasizing two other themes in his work.

A first theme is connected with the fact that Vygotsky saw his study as a form of genetic analysis. He accordingly called his most general position on the social origin of mental func-

tioning 'the general genetic law of cultural development', as quoted above. The developmental aspect is crucial for Vygotsky. Mental functioning can only be understood if one examines its development, both in terms of its coming into existence and its subsequent transitions. Vygotsky's thought here follows the principles of the flux metaphor, as he holds that essence can only be understood in terms of movement.¹⁷ He himself attempted to demonstrate this in the development of the child, but Wertsch points out that other 'genetic domains', such as phylogenesis, sociocultural history, and 'microgenesis' (for instance, a training session) could also be considered in this connection.

A second theme concerning 'mediation' looks at how human action is shaped, or in Vygotsky's terms, 'mediated'. Human action is mediated by tools (technical tools) and signs (language, psychological tools). Shotter (1993b) sees this theme as maybe the most important innovation; namely, to see the word (language) as a tool through which persons shape each other and themselves. In Vygotsky's view, people can change themselves through the use of their own social activities and by changing their own conditions of existence. This development is less a matter of using any 'natural' potentials we may contain within ourselves as individuals, but exploring how to make use of these 'psychological tools' among which language is crucial (Shotter, 1993b). Vygotsky does not study language in isolation but as it mediates human action and mental functioning. It was clear to Vygotsky that thinking cannot be studied in itself, since thinking and speaking are strongly connected¹⁸: "The relation of thought to word is not a thing but a process, a continual movement backward and forth from thought to word and from word to thought. In that process, the relation of thought to word undergoes changes that themselves may be regarded as developmental in the functional sense. Thought is not merely expressed in words; it comes into existence through them." This shows that action cannot be isolated by mediational means. The relationship with the idea of social situatedness becomes concretized: as these means, like language, originate in social life, the link between both themes is not casual, but necessary. Vygotsky situates the rise of mediational means chiefly on the level of the intersubjective relation, but Wertsch points out that there may also be a broader conception of social forces possible here (cf. below).

The Social Foundation of Cognition in Current Psychology

It should become clear from this review that alternative visions of cognitive processes have been developed within as well as outside psychology, and that they are actualized in current

¹⁴ Note that studying development is basic to understanding psychological realities, according to Vygotsky.

¹⁵ Cited by Wertsch (1991, p. 26) from L.S. Vygotsky (1981). The Genesis of Higher Mental Functions. In: J.V. Wertsch (Ed.) *The Concept of Activity in Soviet Psychology*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe.

¹⁶ Cf. footnote 15.

¹⁷ "To study something historically means to study it in the process of change" (Vygotsky, 1978), cited by Shotter (1993a, p. 119).
¹⁸ Especially in the later works *Thought and Language* (1986) and *Thinking and Speech* (1987).

cognitive psychology (Resnick, Levine & Teasley, 1991). Furthermore, we are interested in a social constructionist approach to cognition, which integrates these psychological and extra-psychological insights. A social constructionist vision of cognition is doubly grounded: cognition is seen as a social process and as a rhetorical activity. It should be remarked that a social constructionist account will avoid the use of the word 'cognition'.

Cognition and memory as social processes

Cognition and cognitive processes play an important role in how people make sense of their world and in the emergence of a meaning configuration in specific. A social constructionist approach stresses the social origin of cognition. Cognition is seen in the first place as a social process. At first glance, such a conception of cognition looks like a radical and unacceptable statement for all those who are used to an individualist conception of 'cognizing' and other mental processes such as 'remembering' and 'thinking'. Although this individualistic view has dominated cognition research within psychology, a social conception of cognitive processes has been gaining ground (Wertsch, 1991; Levine, Resnick & Higgins, 1993). This is in line with the idea that cognitions should be understood within their contexts. Levine, Resnick and Higgins review the social foundation of cognition and see the birth of a new discipline called *sociocognition*. For this they link contributions from social psychologists with those of anthropologists and ethnomethodologists. In its minimal version, this refers to the influence of social beings on our cognitions.¹⁹ In a more fundamental version, cognition is seen as a social activity. In the first version, the focus is on how individual cognition is affected by social factors, "namely the meaning people assign to events is transformed because their actions take others into account." In the second version, the social and the cognitive are fused. The assumption is challenged "that cognition is exclusively an individual act, clearly distinguishable from external social processes that may influence it." Here the influence of Mead (1934) - whom we named as one of the founding fathers of social constructionism - is stressed, although it has been largely ignored by students of cognition. The distinction between the two versions - between interaction that stimulates cognition and interaction that constitutes cognition - may become less crisp as the field continues to develop, according to Levine, Resnick and Higgins (1993).

As consequence of this view of cognition, the memory is seen as a socially constituted activity. Individual memories cannot be seen as internal mental processes which are independent of interpretive and communicative practices characteristic of a specific community or culture. A similar transition from the focus on the influence of the (social) context on individual memories, towards a vision which sees forgetting and remembering as an inherently social

¹⁹ From mere presence - as in social facilitation or social loafing - to the influence of expectations or mental representations of others on individual cognitions.

activity, can be noticed here. What is meant by 'memory as a social activity'? Middleton and Edwards (1990, p. 10) make the claim that "the very integrity of a person's mentality depends upon participation in an environment which owes its very shape to socio-cultural practices. [...] Remembering and forgetting are to be taken as activities that are embodied and constituted within the pragmatics of ordinary social and communicative practices, and the symbolic significances of the natural and made world". This idea can be further illustrated in the following three social 'memory' practices. Firstly, the social nature of memory consists of collective remembering, as persons remember through conversations and communications in social situations, in the classroom, at work, in the family. People share memories of past events they have lived through, together or apart. Thus, remembering is a social process where the memorized output is more than the sum of the individual memories. In seeing someone again memories are also reawakened²⁰ and are recalled. Secondly, the social character of memories becomes obvious in the practice of commemoration, in which persons are taught what to remember and what not to. This kind of remembering is often a social ritual, in which the past is re-presented in a special way. The past is not simply recalled, but becomes actualized in the memory process. This is not a neutral process, but rather, people tell stories, focus on anecdotes, offer appreciations and evaluations. Remembering becomes re-thinking. Also, contrary interpretations of the past are concealed in the act of commemoration. Conversational remembering and formal commemoration are two forms of how we reconstruct the past jointly, although they are slightly different (Middleton & Edwards, 1990, p. 8): while conversational remembering is open-ended, providing for many on-the-spot revisions, reconstructions, and selections of what is remembered, public commemorations generally have a more fixed, ritualized, and catechismic quality, to be repeated time after time. Thirdly, the notion of institutional remembering and forgetting, particularly relevant to organizations, refers not only to the fact that organizations invest in an 'institutional memory' through creating records, minutes and archives, but also refers to the production and manipulation of what its members should remember. Remembering and forgetting is socially organized.

Shotter and the rhetorical quality of cognition

The question now becomes how Shotter (1990, 1991, 1993a, 1993b) manages to stress the rhetorical perspective in the social constructionist approach. He is interested in a less cognitive and more socially responsive, social constructionist psychology, in which the rhetorical nature of our ways of speaking are explored (Shotter, 1991). Shotter (1990) also stresses the rhetorical nature of more specific cognitive functions, such as remembering and forgetting. Finally,

²⁰ Remark how our language represents memories as internally located images which are waiting to be 'woken up'.

he (1991b, 1993a) examines how the cognitive approach itself, together with the claims it makes, can be clarified by studying their rhetorical structure. In general, his argument goes against the information-processing version of cognitive psychology which uses the computer as main metaphor. Shotter (1991, p. 58) argues that "*the computer model fails to characterize the way in which people's everyday actions are always 'situated' or 'placed' within a social and moral, as well as a historically developed, political order, actual or imagined.*" He argues that "*an 'information-processing system' without an identity, without an understanding of who it is and how it is 'placed' in a social situation cannot be held responsible for its actions.*"

In the rhetorical perspective, as developed by Billig (1987), the formative nature of language in the construction of reality is stressed. The ways we speak are central, since the main function of speech is to give shape to and articulation to a social reality. Shotter refers to the 'accounting practices' as used by C.W. Mills. His view on language is very compatible with those of the present writer (Steyaert & Janssens, forthcoming), which see language not as representational but as performative, as well as with Vygotsky's view of language as a form which mediates action: "*The major reorientation of recent theory and observation in sociology of language emerged with the overthrow of the Wundtian notion that language has as its function the 'expression' of prior elements within the individual. The postulate underlying modern study of language is the simple one that we must approach linguistic behaviour, not by referring it to private states in individuals, but by observing its social function of coordinating diverse actions. Rather than expressing something which is prior and in the person, language is taken by other persons as an indicator of future actions*" (quoted by Shotter, 1990, p. 123). 'Motives', for instance, very popular in early motivation psychology, do not refer to intra-individual states, but "*motives are words. Generically, to what do they refer? They do not denote any elements 'in' individuals. They stand for anticipated situational consequences of questioned conduct*" (Mills, 1940, p. 440). Thus, "*the motivations of men, and even the varying extents to which various types of men are typically aware of them, are to be understood in terms of the vocabularies of motive that prevail in a society and of social changes and confusions among such vocabularies*" (Mills, 1967, p. 162). As such, they create space for possible actions, and for various kinds of relationships. This shows that the rhetorical is part of everyday life where people account for themselves in all kinds of social settings, among them organizations, where they talk and argue about their life and their work.

According to Shotter (1990), the rhetorical nature of language has a persuasive and a poetic aspect. While the former is commonly associated with rhetoric (fragment 14, chapter three), the poetic side is less familiar. Shotter (1986, 1993b) goes back to Vico²¹, one of the first well-known and radical opponents to the dualism of Descartes, who created his own

²¹ Vico's work is the object of renewed interest (de La Ville, 1994; Shotter, 1986; Sall, 1991).

Scienza Nuova. Using a flux-metaphor, Vico is aware of the idea that the flow of actions is vague, heterogeneous, and unformulated, and in need of a first form which language can create (Shotter, 1990). Language has a poetic power, which means it is able to shape, to make, and to give the unformulated stream a socially legitimate articulation. Vico uses the notion of 'sensory topics' (or places) by which persons create themselves and share 'identities of feeling'. These first anchoring points give rise to 'commonplaces', or shared moments which contribute to a common reference and exchange of feelings: "*These are the feelings or intuitions - the sensory topics or commonplaces that make up the basis of a community's sensus communis - in terms of which our first words can have their sense, and against which, much later, the adequacy of our concepts may be judged*" (Shotter, 1993b, p. 55).

Shotter's vision (1990, p. 131) of the relation between the social and the rhetorical can be summarized in the proposition that "*the constructive process is not only formally one of a social kind, but moreover, that it is also structured as a rhetorical [] process [] especially in relation to the 'giving', or the 'lending', to an unorganized stream of activity a first form of some kind.*" More recently, Shotter (1993a, 1993b) has elaborated his rhetorical-responsive version of social constructionism by exploring conversational realities and dialogue, drawing not only upon Vico and Vygotsky, but as well on Wittgenstein, Bakhtin and Harré (fragment 23).

Conclusion

The primacy of the 'interpsychological'

The conceptual framework we developed throughout chapter two, based on combining both a narrative and a Weickian perspective, led us to look at the evolution of the young high tech as both a developmental-contextual and social-cultural process. Firstly, this social constructionist approach could be linked to the pragmatist work of James and Mead, where, starting from a flux-vision of reality, creativity is seen as an essential part of all human action. New and creative action, especially along Mead's lines, is formed through public commitments and social interaction. Secondly, our social constructionist approach could be refined by re-viewing and re-reading a cognitivist perspective and by examining more closely its focus on the interpsychological processes of human action. This point of view can be traced in the work of Bartlett, who already mentions the cultural, social, and public context of cognitive processes, a viewpoint that is currently gaining ground in psychological research, where the idea that social interaction constitutes cognition is studied by psychological scholars of a more cognitive as well as a social constructionist persuasion. We are especially interested in the study

of the social process as it generates new actions and possible worlds. The work of Mead, Vygotsky, and Shotter on the relationship between interaction, language, and creation gives us a first indication of which direction to explore further; namely, to approach the social construction of entrepreneurship as a stream of communicative and conversational events. In the process, on the basis of Vygotsky and Shotter, among others, but also falling back on Winnicott, it becomes clear that a focus on the interspace, the 'interpsychological middle ground' - the 'inter' in 'interactions' - that makes conversations possible, can become an important step in the interpretation of the case study, and more specifically, in the 'linking' of different meaning configurations.

The becoming of the young firm and mediational means

The work of Vygotsky, which is at the same time 'historical' and 'recent', plays a stimulating role in reconsidering (mental) actions from their developmental and social origins, as mediated by language and other psychological tools. We consider the development of new firms as another of what Vygotsky called a genetic domain where intermingling a historico-developmental and social perspective can foster the understanding of entrepreneurial dynamics. The theme of mediation further refines our motive of redirecting Vygotsky's perspective towards the development of young innovative enterprises. In their development, we may look at the way these enterprises make use of mediational means and at the same time themselves construct them. In this we need not limit ourselves to the direct level of social interaction, but rather we can broaden Vygotsky's approach to include a larger, organizational and institutional field. This is all the more interesting, since one of the limitations often attributed to his work is that he overconcentrated on the parent-child relation and on small-group interaction in general, resulting in the neglect of a broader socio-cultural approach (Wertsch, 1991). The (small) enterprise offers a sort of middle perspective which allows development to be situated by social interaction within a broader institutional, historical, and cultural framework, by means of which each level can extend the other. The practical question which then arises concerns how such a framework can be filled in.

How to conceive of the social interspace?

Weick's organization theory (fragment 8) orients entrepreneurship as a continuously ongoing interaction process among actors about meaning: "...sets of *interacts* are assembled into *processes*, and *processes* constitute the *organization*" (Weick, 1979, p. 20). However, the question of how this 'assemblage' can be understood and how the idea of 'social interaction' can be grasped, remains one of the most difficult issues in organizational psychology, which has con-

ceived the social mainly as aggregates of persons (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992). Furthermore, it has been said that Weick's theory is not explicit enough on how social interaction is carried through into social organization, embedded in its historical and cultural context (fragment 8 and 9). The need now arises to describe more explicitly the social process involved in sense-making in terms of both points. To do this, we shall need to develop a dialogical conception of social interaction in the entrepreneurship process - a development that can shed light on the continuity of creativity both through the succession of conversation moments and through the accompanying identity development. In fragment 23 I shall draw on Bakhtin and Wittgenstein, and confront their work with existing models in organization studies.

The exploration in this fragment has had yet another purpose: the way is now clear for a distinction between 'cognitive maps' and 'meaning configurations'. This distinction will be addressed in fragment 21.

Fragment Twenty-one

Positioning Meaning Configurations

This fragment continues the exploration of the social nature of cognition as discussed in fragment 20 which reviewed past and current thought streams both inside and outside psychology. This will be accomplished in two steps. Firstly, the debate as outlined in fragment 20 will be anchored within the organizational field. The growing body of cognitive studies in organizational psychology will be critically examined: it would appear that the problems that have been touched upon in connection with cognitive psychology also play a role in applications within organization studies. Secondly, a distinction will be made between 'cognitive maps' and 'meaning configurations', drawing directly on the implications of this debate. In fragment 8, we explained the role of 'cognitive maps' in the organizing process as conceived by Weick, where it is both a form of retention and a way to structure the process of enactment and selection. A whole research tradition has grown up around cognitive maps, which has given a strong impetus to the development of a cognitive organization psychology. On the basis of a number of critical reflections associated with the use of cognitive maps, the use of 'meaning configurations' will be suggested, which accords with our social constructionist approach. In our study, meaning configurations are used in the interpretation of the cases (fragment 22) to describe the relational field of meanings a person, group, or organization is using towards their life, their work, their organization, and to certain events or experiences. A meaning configuration is an interpretation of a person's or a group of person's narrative on how they are constructing 'their' reality.

Moving the Debate on Cognition to Organization Studies

A cognitive approach of the organizing process

The concept of the 'cognitive map' belongs to the tradition of cognitive psychology, originating in the ideas of Tolman (1948). The study of cognition in organizations has burgeoned in recent years (Schneider & Angelmar, 1993; Walsh, 1989), and analogous to the field of social cognition we may speak of organizational social cognition (Gioia, 1986). A so-called cognitive organizational psychology is in the offing. The cognitive quality of organizations has been phrased in terms of the 'thinking organization' (Sims & Gioia, 1986), and of 'organizational memory' (Walsh & Ungson, 1991). The latter is more in line with the information-

processing perspective in psychology, where 'cognitive map' joins a long list of knowledge structures of organizations.

Despite the growing stature - albeit not yet dominant - of the cognitive view of organizations, this approach is overshadowed by a number of difficult-to-solve problems, of which those scholars who are involved are all too aware (Gioia, 1986; Schneider & Angelmar, 1993; Walsh & Ungson, 1991). Two of these problems will here be further examined: anthropomorphism and reification.

A first problem being wrestled with by organizational social cognition is anthropomorphism, which also applies to many other organizational concepts, from learning ('the learning organization') to surviving ('the awake organization').¹ Do organizations learn? Can they be 'awake'? Or are we talking about the people in the organization. In fact, this problem can lead us to the heart of the larger organizational question; namely, what is an organization, and how does one make the transition from the individual to the organizational level? Human characteristics are often attributed to non-human entities - in this case, to an organization. The reproach of opponents is that 'persons cognize, but organizations don't cognize' (James, Joyce & Slocum, jr., 1988). Organizations have no brains for their memory and ultimately only humans have cognitive capacities. Proponents make abstractions of the biological system and claim to be able to demonstrate that that which is valid on the individual level is also applicable on the organizational level (Schneider & Angelmar, 1993).

The second problem deals with reification and the degree to which phenomena such as organizations are 'objectivized' (read 'materialized'). Reification means "to treat an abstract concept as if it referred to a thing" (Weick, 1979, p. 34). The reification problem is not limited to cognitive psychology, but also forms a part of philosophical, general psychological, and sociological discussions (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; de Laat, 1988). Through reification, notions such as 'cognition', 'memory', and 'cognitive maps' are used 'thing-wise'. One then loses sight of the fact that these are abstractions and cannot be conceived of as independent, 'thing-like' units. Reification illustrates that "man is capable of forgetting his own authorship of the human world, and, further, that the dialectic between man, the producer, and his products is lost to consciousness. The reified world is, by definition, a dehumanized world" (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 106). The search for ingenious methodological 'solutions' (for example Schneider & Angelmar, 1993) also illustrates how knowledge is conceived of as a thing. Organizations do not exist in and of themselves; they exist only as a product of human affairs, as social constructions. Opting for a process approach and a process language entails an attempt to bypass the dangers of reification and extreme objectification.

¹ See respectively Senge (1990), and Corbours et alii (1991).

In fact, in both cases the problem is relatively easily solved, if the descriptions 'organizational cognition', 'memory', and 'mind' are conceived of metaphorically. For a number of authors, this is the case (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Gioia & Sims, 1986; Weick, 1990; Weick & Bougon, 1986), but the arguments are not all that consistent. Gioia and Sims (1986, p. 1-2) begin this subject at the beginning: "The thinking organization [...] is merely an expressive metaphor. [...] In this view, everybody 'knows' organizations do not think; it is people in organizations who think. [...] In another sense, however, 'the thinking organization' is a rich metaphor chosen to recognize the view that there is no difference between organizations and their members [...]. Thus, when people in organizations think, organizations think. In this interpretation the metaphorical title therefore applies more literally". The question is: do you still have a metaphor if you take it literally, or do you have rather an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms? For Gioia and Sims, anthropomorphism is allowed sometimes and sometimes not - that is, it is a little bit allowed. In Schneider and Angelmar (1993, p. 14) the game is wide open again: "Organizations think too", and to talk about the 'thinking organization' is not just a metaphor but refers to an empirically demonstrable capability of organizations." In Weick and Bougon (1986), a metaphor is suggested by the title *Organizations as Cognitive Maps*, but it is only a suggestion, for "a cause map is the organization" (Weick, 1979, p. 141; Weick & Bougon, 1986, p. 132), and "the map is the territory" (Bougon, 1992; Huff, 1990). Certainly it is a problem which for a cognitivist on principle cannot be solved using the metaphorical argument, since it is accomplished by making an appeal in the first place to a linguistic solution that lies outside cognitive logic.

Gioia's confession: an illustration

The problem outlined above will have made it clear that a cognitive approach to organizational processes has a number of inherent difficulties which necessitate an alternative approach. A similar conclusion is, curiously enough, reached in *The Thinking Organization*, a book that comprises 'the current thinking about cognitive processes in organizations'. In the final chapter of this book, Gioia (1986) attempts to formulate a personal view on the 'state of the art in organizational social cognition'. In an openhearted confession that is rather unusual for scholarly literature, he states: "I confess to some ambivalence about this task. Sometimes I think that the state of our art and science is quite advanced and that we have come a fair distance in our knowledge about cognition and action within the social context of organizations and about the nature of organizations in general. At other times I believe that the state of our art and science is almost hopelessly primitive and that we are making progress at a painfully slow pace - perhaps too slow to keep up with the development and burgeoning importance of organizations in modern life" (p. 337). A list of 'implicit metaphors' follows throughout the course of the book, which, under closer scrutiny, deal chiefly with the

shortcomings of the study of cognition and the areas that it (still) fails to address. A first metatheme is a plea for organizations to be approached not only within a narrow scientific framework but also in an "intuitive, insightful, perceptive, nonrational, and holistic" manner. He continues that "effective management also retains an ample measure of the artistic" (1986, p. 339). Whether we should do this in order to be more effective remains an open question, but Gioia sees in the distance the rise of an organization studies as "a science-of-art or an art-of-science." A second metatheme offers the option of looking at the actors in an organization from a gestalt point of view. Seeing them purely in terms of cognition, he admits, is far too one-sided. And this editor knows what he is talking about. Without pretending to be exhaustive, he sums up what he sees to be deserving of attention: action, context and environmental factors, and affect. However, to me, this in no way solves the problem completely. Can it be simply said: 'this is what we are studying, but it actually should be something else'? Everything is disassembled - cognitions, actions, feelings - only to be put back together again afterwards, as if cognition were a purely intrapsychic activity, and not an action. The third metatheme deals with 'bridging eclecticism', an endorsement of the holistic vision: just as social cognition is not a *tabula rasa*, neither is the domain that studies it; this domain is indebted to disciplines such as linguistics, philosophy, and philosophy. I agree with this editor that the tendency to an interdisciplinary conception of organizations is unstoppable; however, the meaning of eclecticism is still open to question. If organizations demand a dialogue between many conversation partners and perspectives, implying essentially a social process open to study, by the same token organization studies cannot merely be a 'cognitive' or intellectualized science, torn loose from its social context. An epistemology of knowledge demands a social epistemology, and organization science is perhaps nothing more than an organization epistemology. The fourth metatheme is concerned with process. Although Gioia realizes that 'the journey matters as much as the destination', he sees the study of that process as mainly functional, with the goal of better results for companies, or so that we can better control and predict behavior. Gioia sees this support for results in a very Cartesian light, first arriving at a cognitive solution, and then implementing it, or letting the head do the thinking first and then letting the body do the rest. This would seem to me to be rather antagonistic to his other more holistic position.² A fifth theme starts from one of the most important conclusions of cognitive research, that individuals are essentially lousy at processing information (thereby placing its own object of study in a less than attractive light). And yet people in organizations are in fact quite good at making sense of their situation and making clear decisions. Gioia simply concludes here that this is further 'evidence' for the artistic vision of management, but he does not suggest setting up studies into

² Gioia returns to this point later, and although he claims that action and cognition are virtually inseparable - and we know from Weick that action precedes cognition - he does not consistently follow this line.

this sort of sensemaking and decision-making process to complement the study of inaccurate information processing. He wants it both ways: in the introduction to this same book he makes it clear that "successful organizational members of organizations are typically proficient processors of information and creative architects of meaningful experience" (1986, p. 2). A last metatheme focuses attention on paradox, dilemma, ambiguity, and equivocality as being the most central elements of the business of organizing, taking precedence over the processing of clear and articulate information.

In summary, what this confession offers is a form of organization studies that may be characterized as artistic, holistic, eclectic, process-sensitive, meaning-oriented, and dilemmatic. A spirited inventory and confession by an editor who has not decided if he should be pleased with his book or not. Whether in the bargain he digs the grave for a cognitive organization psychology that he has in part himself enacted, is a question I shall leave aside. From our perspective he seems to open the door for both a cognitive and a holistic approach at the same time in what appears an almost prophetic vision of an approach that is not cognitive but which contains the seeds of social constructionism, the same seeds, coincidentally or not, that I have in any case been attempting to nurture in this dissertation. In further discussion, Gioia indicates as much: in the first place, the chapters that link cognition to concerted action proceed from a social construction of the reality of organizations³ and are thus concentrated on 'interlocked behaviors', 'language', and 'symbolic processes'. Secondly, the study increasingly demands a focus on change in organizations, that is meant to be seen "as a process of making sense of new experience." Thirdly, Gioia explicitly deals with organizational creativity, and offers a direction other than a cognitive one, focusing on "paradoxes, dilemmas, ambiguities, and uncertainties", "a broader view of management as simultaneously art and science", and "a more holistic view of the processes of organizing." Finally - and here Gioia flings the door wide open - other approaches are suggested, "including phenomenological, interpretive, ethnographic, humanist, and structuralist approaches to learning about organizations."

Positioning Meaning Configurations

Cognitive maps will now be examined in the context of the background outlined above, in which it is clear just how much the vision of cognition and of 'mind' in general has undergone a major shift and been totally rethought. This larger discussion was initiated with the

³ I have skipped one metatheme, dealing with the extension of cognitive processes towards a more liberal conception of 'thinking', and even towards unconscious cognitive processes.

⁴ This is, however, a cognitive interpretation of social constructionism: "Organizational reality is a socially constructed one, forged out of a consensus vision and action that exists largely or completely in the minds of the organization's members" (p. 348).

situating of a social constructionist approach in fragment 6 and in the discussion of a narrative vision of meaning in fragment 7, and it has been thoroughly developed in the preceding fragment. This discussion was 'moved' to the field of organization studies using a comparison between cognitive and social constructionist organization psychology. The concept of the 'cognitive map' can now function as a specific theme to make concrete the conversation between the two forms of organization psychology.

The trouble with 'cognitive maps'

Research on cognitive maps or 'causal maps' - to use the alternating terminology of Weick (Weick, 1979; Weick & Bougon, 1986) and other scholars (see Eden, 1992) - has been growing rather quickly (Bougon, 1992; Calori & Sarnin, 1993; Cossette, 1989; Eden, 1992; Huff, 1990; Langfield-Smith, 1992). Particularly in the domain of strategic management, cognitive mapping has reached a very influential position (Huff, 1990). In spite of these numerous research efforts, the investment has in my view not really paid off so far. It is quite difficult to get an overview of the domain, which offers a somewhat dispersed spectacle: there seem to be as many approaches as there are users. Fiol and Huff (1992) assess the research on managerial cognition and on cognitive mapping in similar terms: "*The work being done is currently disparate and loosely coupled.*" This should not surprise us, since using cognitive maps is a complex activity which requires a lot of subsequent decisions and presuppositions on the part of researchers. In my view, it is appropriate to maintain this broad spectrum of approaches and operationalizations, but it seems just as necessary to tackle the numerous urgent and fundamental questions which can be posed concerning 'cognitive maps'.

One of the troubles we can see with cognitive maps, is that in Weick's theory, they are situated in a process theory but that this theoretical context gets lost in the study of the maps themselves. As a consequence, cognitive maps have become isolated in many respects from such a theoretical embeddedness, alternative or otherwise. However, more troubling is that some of the (fundamental) criticisms which I have been formulating on the cognitivist account (this fragment, as well as fragment 6, fragment 7, fragment 20) can be directly addressed to the research on cognitive maps. The critical distinctions of social constructionism in its attitude towards cognitive psychology can be mirrored in distinguishing cognitive maps and meaning configurations:

- the study of cognitive maps or 'mental maps' (Huff, 1990) is mentalistic, since "*organizations are composed of subjective constructs that are housed in the minds of its members*" in the words of Wacker (1981) who used the grid method (Kelly, 1955) to develop a cognitive methodology of organizational assessment. Its aim is to assess "*an organization's*

cognitive infrastructure - i.e. the constructs by which organizational members imbue organizational events with meaning." Although some may see little difference between the person who cognizes and the person who gives meaning to the world he or she lives in, it has become clear from our social constructionist conceptualization (fragment 6 and fragment 20) that the social process is set aside when assessing one's 'infrastructure'. As a consequence, the study of cognitive maps negates the relational qualities of knowledge and action. Knowledge and representation of action is an intramental phenomenon which researchers have to elicit through their research methods, and which the involved parties have to be made partly conscious of (Walsh, 1989).

- the study of cognitive maps is sensitive to reifications and anthropomorphisms. Just as it is difficult to say that 'organizations cognize', it is even more problematic to state that organizations have cognitive maps (in their mind). Cognitive maps cannot be studied in isolation but are socioculturally situated. An argument is thus raised against a decontextualized study of 'maps'. Although Cossette and Audet (1992) have stressed the contextuality of mapping idiosyncratic schemes, they seem to have a strong tendency to reify as they write: "*The cognitive map of Mr. Brown contains 57 concepts, treated here as variables, and 87 links*" (p. 333). In describing the map, very little of the context is implied or made explicit by narration. Once they have graphically constructed the map, they examine above all the map itself, the relations between variables and the influence of links. Fiol and Huff (1992) refer to what Tolman called 'context maps' which provide details about features of the terrain and about the way these features are linked. However, context maps themselves seem to be contextless, and can be studied as extensions of organizational members. As a consequence of reification, the flux nature of organizations is denied.

- the study of cognitive maps does not take into account language or its own rhetorical strategies. Maps are often defined as pictorial or graphic representation (Huff, 1990; Fiol & Huff, 1992). For instance, Cossette and Audet (1992, p. 327) define a cognitive map as "*a graphic representation of a set of discursive representations by a subject with regards to an object in the context of a particular interaction.*" As a consequence, most attention goes to how this graphic representation is constructed and to methods of mapping. For instance, Huff (1990) sees five mapping choices or generic 'families' which represent a range of cartographic techniques, while each basic choice is associated with a circumscribed set of visual representatives. Much less attention goes to the discursive

representations as mentioned in Cossette's definition. The functionalist view of language, which typically dominates a cognitivist approach, brings some confusion on the relations between maps and the outside world, and between maps and action. For instance, Bougon (1992) makes a distinction between 'concepts' which reside in the mind of participants and public outer 'labels', through which people tag private inner concepts for writing or communication purposes. While reducing communication to 'labeling' and 'tagging', Bougon (1992, p. 381) admits as well that the map is the territory: "*There is no other 'underlying' or 'deeper' reality to be discovered. The socially constructed reality of a system of cognitive maps congregated by cryptic labels is the social reality.*" Equally complex is the claim of Cossette and Audet (1992, p. 331) that "*the map is a graphic representation of mental representations that the researcher conjures up from the discursive repertoires formulated by the subject about an object and drawn from this reservoir of mental representations. This involves a quadruple cognitive operation of reduction-transformation-conservation that prevents making any correspondence between the map and either the subject's thoughts or the object of this discourse.*" I am of the opinion that such a conception of 'cognitive maps', systematically linked to visual representations here cuts its own throat. Again, these authors make an 'abstraction' either of an interjection based on a linguistic theory which situates cognitive content and visualization in the communicative process, or of a social revision in which maps are retrieved from peoples' heads and localized in ongoing social interactions, be it in social research or practice.

Rethinking cognitive maps through meaning configurations

The problem⁵ set out above compels us to re-think cognitive maps and to initiate a number of critical 'corrections' in the use of meaning configurations. Fundamentally, two obstacles need to be cleared out of the way. In the first place, meaning configurations need to be contextualized, and secondly, they should be conceived of as articulations. Such corrections have equally methodical consequences.

If it is problematic to state that individual cognitions are a matter of (purely) intramental processes, it is even more difficult to posit this for an organizational context. Instead of characterizing organizations as (having) cognitive maps, one should stress the socio-cultural situatedness of cognitive maps. Meaning configurations as social constructions are embedded in the ongoing narrative sensemaking process, conceived in terms of continuously ongoing social interactions.

⁵ These problems are not exhaustive, and their consideration from a critical perspective on the cognitive approach would require a re-view of typical themes of mapping research, such as: how can one work with multiple maps in research and in intervention? and, how can maps be used in organizational change?

How can we avoid making an abstraction of this social process? Most research on cognitive maps typically makes a distinction between individual and organizational maps. The question is to what extent maps can go beyond the individual level. In general, maps are concerned with data about an individual which is in line with the individual tradition of cognitive psychology. In the organizational domain, we are also interested in maps which relate to groups or organizations. The construction of these (composite) collective maps is not an easy task, as we already know from Kelly's grid method. This so-called aggregation problem is dealt with in several ways. Firstly, on the level of data collection, scholars have attempted to build maps directly with a group (Eden, 1992; Langfield-Smith, 1992). Secondly, on the level of map analysis, group maps are developed by aggregating maps from individuals (Bougon, 1992). Thirdly, maps on a collective level are derived from documents and text materials which refer to a certain business firm. While these approaches can many times be characterized as sophisticated solutions (Bougon, 1992), in our view, they make an abstraction of the social nature of meaning configurations. Meaning configurations are embedded in the ongoing conversations of the high tech firm.

This requires a second 'correction' which concerns the linguistic nature of meaning configuration. Meaning configurations contain the articulation and discursive practices from the different organizational members as they make sense of their experience during the interview with the researcher. Meaning configurations resemble then what Vygotsky has called 'linguistic or pictorial tools'. In fragment 23, we shall further elaborate this view on meaning configurations which inscribes them in a linguistic and literary theory.

Instead of looking for sophisticated ways of visually representing or of reifying meaning configurations in order to store them as stable mental contents, we shall use three tactics for constructing meaning configurations (see also fragment 13, chapter three): (1) bringing together concepts drawn from the narratives into a holistic picture (this will be our way to go beyond 'loosely coupled' grounded concepts and is the reason why we speak of configurations (instead of maps), since they relate and integrate different concepts); (2) connecting configurations and narratives closely in order to retain the discursive practices of the interviewees; and (3) connecting concepts to persons, parties, or groups, in order to safeguard the social dynamics of the ongoing conversations.

Thus, in the next fragment, which deals with the evolution of the sensemaking process in both cases, we will make use of meaning configurations, interweaving them against a background of both holistic and concrete entrepreneurial contexts, instead of reporting them as separate and fragmented bodies of knowledge, cognitive maps scattered throughout the organization literature (Whitley, 1984; Tsoukas, 1994). In this way I hope to safeguard the context as

the constitutive whole in the emergence of consecutive entrepreneurial events and to follow Pettigrew's advice (1987, p. 650) concerning the context of organizational change and transformation; that is, "to beware the singular theory of process or indeed, of social and organizational change. Look for continuity and change, patterns and idiosyncrasies, the actions of individuals and groups, and processes of structuring. Give history and social processes the chance to reveal their untidiness." Such a line of reasoning is in line with contextualism,⁶ which takes the historic event, continuously changing over time, as root metaphor (Tsoukas, 1994). Therefore, the meaning configurations and the case stories, as they will be presented, should be considered together, very much like two sides of the same coin. In Pepper's terms, the suggested meaning configurations can be seen as the 'texture' of the stories, connecting the actions and events, complemented by the stories (i.e. the narrated context) which constitute their quality (Bouwen & Steyaert, 1990b; Tsoukas, 1994). These charts can in the first place become generative for the context from which they have been derived. In a contextualist world view, the aim would not be to transform meaning configurations – textual charts – into more generalized models. On the contrary, multiplying and developing these charts into new ones as new contexts are explored seems to me more appropriate, since this allows a consideration of the specific qualities of the conversations and interpretive frames in the new context.

Fragment Twenty-two

The Development and Change of Meaning Configurations: A Tale of Two Cases

Introduction: a Short Recapitulation

In this fragment we shall tell the stories of two different high tech Flemish companies: the Vision and Quartet cases, which the reader has already encountered in fragments 16 and 17. Both innovative companies were described there in terms of the basic organizational dilemma of creation versus integration (fragment 16). We indicated furthermore the nature of the texture they managed to develop to be able to handle this tension (fragment 17). While both companies exhibited an approximately similar growth-process in their first six to seven years (Quartet actually grew faster), since then they have followed very different paths. The two narratives have taken different courses with regard to the perpetuation of innovative entrepreneurship. Despite serious crises, Vision managed temporarily to secure and expand its innovation potential, while it became increasingly difficult for Quartet to create any creative development, and consequently to survive in the self-created context. In order to trace these two paths, we shall make use of the narrative form. The purpose is two-fold: to give a sketch of how assigning meaning evolved in the further histories of both companies, and to indicate which variety of 'voices' play a role here. In doing so, we create a third way of synthetically presenting an interpretive study of a company (in addition to second-order concepts illustrated by vignettes, and meaning configurations in the form of interpretive charts, documented with fragments from interview texts). At the same time, let us take the restrictions into account which we discovered in the first two forms.

In fragment 13 I mentioned why we switched to the narrative form and how we 'constructed' the narratives. In short, we wanted to depict more clearly the context in which concepts and meaning configurations were developed. Closely related to this, we also wanted to link the perspectives – within which certain meanings (and concepts) were formulated – more directly to the formation of interpretations. This is closely bound up with posing the question of the notion of 'shared meaning' (fragment 19), and placing this idea more in the foreground in order to make the variety of perspectives and 'voices' audible. Instead of interpretive charts, the narrative is employed as a form to promote the conversation between meanings and the interplay of different perspectives. The narratives were written concurrently with

⁶ Contextualism is elaborated in fragment 26.

deriving the interpretively grounded concepts, and these concepts are used to 'structure' the narrative. The story of Vision comes first, followed by that of Quartet, which will be presented comparatively. The use of narrative is the next logical step after stressing the narrativity of the social construction of reality (fragment 7), the use of storytelling interviews (fragment 11), and the discussion of the narrative level in reporting research (fragment 14).

The Story of Vision: a Re-vision From a Deep Valley to 'Picking Cherries'

The story so far

In the story of the textural organizing at Vision (fragment 17) we could see how with the arrival of a new entrepreneur, two years after the start up of this high tech, the organizing was transformed by developing a commercial logic, which supported a highly focused task domain. This transformation was characterized by a close connection between refining the social network and defining technological and commercial boundaries. In order to rebalance the tension between the highly dominant creating mode and a hardly known integrating mode, a pruning strategy was used, which gave a more pronounced texture to the firm and which defined the boundaries of social roles, relationships and tasks. This evolution was accomplished by developing a management team which would seek consensus around the issues in order to find a balance between creating and integrating.

At the time we finished the first part of the study, this transformation was well-advanced, and a bona fide and secure niche was in sight, although the employees in the company weren't sure about this. This tension remained, and everyone remained curious about what the future would hold for Vision: in the long run, would it be able to make something of the entrepreneurial dream come true and be able to develop a basic technology with applications for a world-wide market? Would it be possible to harvest after all the years of sowing as well as pruning? In the meantime, the time-span began to weigh heavily after seven years of uncertainty. We emphasized the question of the extent to which the pruning strategy had weakened the innovative potential.

At the time we revisited Vision, the firm was about to celebrate its tenth anniversary. The years between our two visits had been very turbulent and the word 'crisis' had become part of the vocabulary. The entrepreneur told us: "*You've come at the right time. If you had phoned me sometime in the past few years, I don't think I would have allowed you to come. It was too difficult then. But we've managed to survive, and now we're getting ready for our anniversary. Actually,*

I was reading the report you made last time... you see, we're preparing a small exhibition for our anniversary weekend, and I've been re-reading some documents. May I invite you?" What had happened to Vision? It seemed as if the firm had experienced a re-vision, and that our follow-up of Vision's story would require a re-vision of its organizing process...

The sequel of this story will be told through a conversation between some of Vision's key actors: the new entrepreneur Jorge, the R&D director Gistal, the marketing director Anten, and the production director Gidden. In the background we shall hear a chorus, which mixes voices from the past, fragments from the in-house report, and comments by the researcher. Firstly, we shall present the continuation and further development of the meaning configuration, while referring to the sensemaking process as it was presented in Vision's first developmental stage. Secondly, we shall clarify how this meaning configuration can be connected to the earlier sensemaking process as it was once foreshadowed on Vision's birth announcement.

Continuing the configuration

In the years which followed, Vision continued along the trail that it had blazed in the first six years of its existence. At the same time, however, that trail was no longer sufficient, and a second niche in their technological territory was developed. This implied that the meaning configuration was partially repeated, and partially rewritten. This tension between continuation and change was illustrated on three different levels. On the level of the task domain, where previously sharp delineation had been chosen, boundaries were defined less strictly. A second task domain - with new technology and a new market - was developed around a project that had belonged to the 'gene pool' of the first years. On the level of the team, the consensus approach was continued, but the rearranged team took up a more 'strategic' position and, at the same time, strengthened its own position. On the context level, we see that the world which Vision created for itself was still characterized by freedom and uncertainty, but that there was nonetheless more control and ease. We shall explore these three levels one at a time, but begin the story with the celebration of Vision's tenth anniversary.

The tenth anniversary: a family celebration

A brilliant, warm, Saturday afternoon in May. Vision had constructed itself a new building, a low construction with different wings, located in an industrial zone, not far from its former location. The building with brightly colored, yellow windows, was surrounded by a green lawn. A tent had been set up for the evening party, to which all current and previous personnel and their families were invited. For this company, where around forty people came to work every day, a cozy family party had been chosen to celebrate the company's anniversary

instead of an academic session. Normally a quiet work place, on this day it was a bustle of activity. People were walking back and forth with bouquets and large plants. Colleagues introduced their families and children to each other; an ex-colleague was greeted with a shout of recognition and a hearty handshake. This is how people celebrate their own constructions and creativity.

As I was going inside, I was passed by someone who - as the person in charge of research and development at the university - had helped this high tech firm get off the ground. The door, normally electronically safeguarded, stood wide open. A young man, with the enthusiasm of an inexperienced guide, greeted me and asked me if I also used to work for Vision: "I'm new here, you see, and I don't know so many people yet." He looked astonished as I briefly explained my connection with Vision and gave an unexpected answer. But his enthusiasm was none the less for it: "This tour is ideal practice for what I do in my new job in marketing: translate the complexity of our technology into a language that's understandable for customers, for laymen." He led me to the room where the first generation unit was displayed: "This is where it all started. Now we're already up to our fourth generation." In the following room there was another unit - the company's newest acquisition, from which, 'between us', a lot was expected. A short video tried to explain how the system worked: "I'll let you take a look for a little while," my guide said, as he left. The reception hall, where I had recently interviewed Jorge, had been turned into a small exhibition space, where the history of the company was outlined with photos, drawings, notes, and a few, rare press statements. On the wall there was a summary of the comings and goings of personnel - the social history of this small company in a nutshell. One of the research managers, who had 'exit' written next to his name (to indicate that he had left the firm), came up to greet me. He was still doing odd projects for Vision, but was now engaged in the fundamental research work for which he had previously had no time. In the meantime, my guide had rejoined our chat and invited us to have a drink to toast the company. Memories were revived, images from the past were replayed, as if it had all happened just yesterday. After ten years, the company updated its memory, and wrote its own chronicle: what it wanted to retain, what it wanted to forget - a story, the way it wanted to remember itself in the future. Everyone toasted 'to the next ten years'.

In order to reach this anniversary party, the company had waged a furious battle with itself for the last few years. In the period 1987-1988 two people had left the management team - the marketing manager and one R&D manager. Personnel turnover did not restrict itself to the management team, however, as a few developers also left. The expectation of being able to grow into a company which developed technology for a new industry could not be realized. The 'booming' industry also turned out to be an illusion. Furthermore, the company's techni-

cal capacity ended up not being able to compete with the working conditions in big companies. In one year's time, four developers left for the company where Jorge himself had once been located. The new marketing manager, Bender, kept an eye particularly on Europe, while Jorge began to track the daughter company in the States. Bender did not stay long, however. His place was filled by Anten, who had been working in the American branch since 1986. With this reshuffled team a management buy-out was carried out, whereby the management team obtained more than half of the shares. Later, there was also a shareholding plan for the whole company. But the growth in turnover was never really realized. The breakthrough on the American market - where it is not easy to gain visibility and where one is dependent on the whims of the customers - did not materialize. It seemed possible that the European market too was becoming saturated. The R&D group was restructured, the equipment was improved, and above all, creative development opportunities were provided. They began to realize that if they wanted to grow, one niche would not be sufficient. In 1990, the company moved into a new building, the construction of which had been overseen by the production division. In the early nineties, Vision had managed to occupy the Asian market and, against all predictions, had acquired a position and landed a few equipment builders. A subsidiary branch was set up in Japan. But the economic recession made its presence felt. In 1991, Vision's most important customer got into difficulties, taking Vision with it. The financial resources had to be strengthened. The crisis could be averted. They managed to develop a second product, which became the core of a new niche and a new market. Vision no longer worked solely for equipment builders, but also for end-users. Instead of developing a new distribution channel, Vision used an outside system. They also turned to an external, Asian partner for the part of the technology and know-how with which they were not familiar.

Recreating: a voice from the first days

With the arrival of the new entrepreneur, a niche approach was chosen: looking for a place in the market where other companies were not active, were not yet active, or did not want to be active. With this approach, dozens of projects and applications were terminated, and the focus was placed on one niche, in which competition was on the basis of the quality of the technology. As a result, a niche could be expanded during the first development period for the machine-builders market. Landing a contract with one of the big machine builders played a decisive role here.

Afterwards, this turned out to be a weak link. The vulnerability of Vision's position became clear when the machine builder's company drastically reduced its order. The need for a new product was acute. A decision was made to explore a second trail - a trail which had

previously never been discussed. The company had committed itself with all its might to the success of a niche which apparently was only the beginning of a much longer series. The unbalanced tension between creation and integration which the entrepreneur had encountered, was rebalanced in the following years by the development of an integrative logic which was interwoven in the organizing process. With the decision to expand a second niche, the company was thrown back upon its creative potential, which had ended up on the back burner during the previous few years. A creative phase emerged. Vision could not expand the second niche in the same way as the first one: *"We brought a bunch of new things in,"* said Jorges. Repetition was not possible, it was a question of re-creation, a second start.

A second product was defined, which also meant a new market. The company needed to reorient itself technically and commercially. Internally, a new development needed to take place, but this time, the product was intended for the end-user, which implied a great deal of external technology, which was usually supplied by the equipment builder. The current market approach, which had taken the company several years to define clearly, was not useful and required new commercial channels. The development of these channels would take a long time, assuming that Vision would be able to finance it. With this second project, the entire company was not only involved, but was in fact due for a complete revision: the script was rewritten, rolls were reallocated, new languages were learned, different and further stages were explored.

The discovery of a second product, in which chances for development were seen, was preceded by an almost 'academic' search, within which new options were created. The door was once again wide open for creative logic: *"What was interesting for us was... yeah, it was making new things, that we could be doing something fun; anything else wasn't interesting for us,"* said Gistal. Various innovative companies were explored for potential partnerships; the possibility of adding new applications to the existing niche was examined. But the final choice was simple and surprising at the same time. One of the dormant applications waiting to be developed was worked out, not for the existing market, but for a new market - that of the end-user. Vision did not expand this commercial network themselves: they managed to enter into a partnership with another small company, which they had run into 'coincidentally' during their search for innovative companies. By means of this connection, a new network was able to be added to Vision's sphere in short order.

In order to accomplish this project, a synergy was needed between a variety of strengths which in part the company already possessed and in part had to develop along the way. The fundamental research aspect of the project called upon a competency again dating from the first years of the company. The company's very first employee, Lootens, was someone

whose voice had not formally been heard of over the years, but who nonetheless had had a significant impact on the technical side of things. Lootens was responsible for all the methodological questions of our development projects: *"Each application passes through his hands. If he says that something's impossible, we don't do it. When he opens his mouth, we listen. He's an authority."* This voice from the first days, which strongly interpreted the academic logic, had not been pruned away and turned out to be an important author in Vision's script, and more specifically in the second chapter that it was writing. Vision's whole developmental side relied heavily upon its 'scientific-ness' which it did not value any less highly than the so-called fundamental research at the university: *"Our technology requires a lot of experimentation, but the universities need to do that too; of course we don't try out an infinite number of variations; only what we need, what we want to know. We optimize each case, because that's the only way to make it profitable. But that's not so different. The boundary between fundamental and applied research is pretty fuzzy, it's an artificial distinction. Our research isn't less scientific, and furthermore, it's well coordinated."* The research that Vision did was focused on applicability: *"It's true that we have a rather wide range of applications, and, yeah, that we are application oriented, that we actually develop types which we're sure we need. Sometimes that means that there's a crunch, because when it becomes clear that I need something, I need it immediately. We can't say, we're going to develop all sorts of things and then say, 'yeah, we'll need that one of these days'. We have a limited capacity for development, and therefore we can't permit ourselves to let a few guys work for six months or a year on something and then say, 'yeah, it was interesting, but ultimately we can't do much with it'. Research projects were agreed upon with research institutes who could make preparatory studies and help create a long term context. Gistal: "That way you can work a little more long term. One part of the research at this moment isn't actually current in our applications. So in the short term you don't need that. But maybe five years from now... and still, you have to think that what we're doing now, everybody's doing that, and therefore we need to go explore that other stuff too, and familiarize ourselves with the technology. The research projects that we negotiate with external institutes can give us a big boost."*

In addition, a technical coordinator - Carlson - was appointed for the new project without formal responsibilities. A matrix approach was instituted, which gave him direct access to R&D, marketing and production. *"I call that intrapreneurship, even in a small context like ours. Somebody who regards this product as his own child. He has access everywhere."*

The technological logic, which formed the basis for the expansion of the task domain, needed to be complemented by a commercial and a financial logic. For the entrepreneur, it continued to be difficult to make it clear that they were dealing with a context of renewal, with risks to be taken and opportunities to be seized despite their unpredictable outcomes, while research costs needed to be closely watched making it impossible to utilize unlimited

resources and researchers: "A lot of technical people have a line of reasoning about other departments, and the reasoning makes perfect sense to an engineer, but it's still so far from the reality. A lot of engineers think that the whole world can be analyzed, that fixed values and truths exist, like in their job; but in the commercial world, you can't know what a customer is going to do. There's a lot of uncertainty in that world, you live differently there. But if you go analyze it from the technical world, you come up with completely wrong conclusions. I once heard a technician say 'our commercial man is really bad - just look at how many visits he has to make before he actually makes a sale.' Of course that's exactly the perspective of the engineer: you should only go somewhere where you're going to be able to sell something." A technical logic simplifies the commercial and the financial logics: "The most important thing is development; once that's done, you only have to sell." That's how they reason; technical people reason from their own horizon, their reality." Next to this reasoning, a financial perspective is necessary, which the entrepreneur embodies: "The only quotient that I use to direct the company, and which I need to keep an eye on, is R&D costs versus turnover. If that's good, then it's good for the whole company. If it's bad, then we're in trouble." A development effort is therefore based on a patiently built-up investment policy, in which any abrupt movement is out of the question: each new recruitment implied an investment by which people were raised to a certain technological level: "Technicians still have the tendency to overestimate the technical side of things, to view it as the hub around which everything else turns." Gistal added: "If I come with a new development, the technicians often say that I let myself be suckered by the customer. That's partially true: we can't say yes to everything, but we also can't always say no. As long as they haven't been involved in the discussions with the customer, they don't want to hear about it." An attempt made via the project manager system to involve the developers as much as possible in the negotiations with the customer. Furthermore, a number of technicians were brought over to marketing for technical support.

Anten: "As far as marketing is concerned, this project is historic and a big turnaround. In order to accomplish this, people need to constantly innovate. My roll changes constantly. I had to take care of Europe, but I never actually got around to it; I wasn't able to develop things in an acceptable way and set up the organization, because we had to start from scratch as soon as the marketing director left. I had to go to Japan right away and start the job myself and then pass it on. This project is something else again, which will force us to learn something new on the marketing level: a stand-alone product that has to be gotten into a distribution network - the whole problem is new." A partner who was at home in this market was quickly sought out, which would hopefully save much time: "Within a year we have succeeded in developing an acceptable network of high quality people [...] This puts the ball squarely back in the technical court. We have to make sure we can get our product under control technically speaking; that's a question of mechanics, something that is new for us. That's another long road we've got ahead of us."

This expansion of the task domain laid claim to a great deal of the company's creative potential: "In general we're naive and become quickly enthusiastic about a new idea. That's the essence of the company: if we lose that, we might as well sell ourselves to the big one," said Jorges. But this was not the end of the process. After a second niche would come a third. Gistal: "You need to keep doing it; it needs to keep going further. I think about that. I don't say so much about it yet, but we need to get ready for it [the third niche]. We've been working on the second niche for four years already; so if we want to be ready on time in a little while, I need to start on it now." The urge to develop surpassed a commercial orientation, which would have led to optimizing and commercially exploiting existing strengths.

'Our Team'

The expansion of the management team was one of the concrete tools with which Jorges retuned the process of organizing. The composition of the team was changed over the years, positions were rearranged, voices were replaced. Of the original team, three members remained, one had been replaced, and one had dropped out. Where there previously had been two R&D managers, now there was one. The applications manager had also become responsible for a technology with a more fundamental orientation, while the other manager disappeared from the scene. Marketing's voice, long represented by Finzen, who had been present from the beginning, was embodied by a new marketing manager. Production had become more influential, in the absence of a financial director. Furthermore, a more extensive management team ("management plus") came into being, when the managers of the branches in America and Asia were also taken into consideration.

At that time, the team opted for a consensus approach, which was sometimes difficult, and on which the team worked exceptionally hard in the first few years. A great deal of discipline was required from every member of the management team, especially to adhere to the goal of working jointly. By taking their work home and by imposing time-limits, among other techniques, each of the management members tried to adhere strictly to the plans, agreements, and criteria which had been jointly made during the meetings. Through the team approach, they tried to maintain a critical attitude, a feeling of gaining control over what they and the others were doing. In contrast with the very first years, the interactions were more formal and especially more professional. Ideas that could just as easily have been immediately passed on verbally, were put down on paper. Technical proposals were examined using a Socratic question and answer method. Discussions were kept business-like, without personal blame or criticism. Everybody had had ample experience with the time when such interactions were not possible, when everything was more personal and full of conflict. A serious effort was there-

fore made to learn to follow a common path, and to build collectively on the same, and still partially unknown, technological base. An agreement was sought about the means to reach this goal. The hope was to project the unanimity of this management team approach throughout the whole company.

The team tried to carry this consensus approach even further. The further changes in the team can serve to illustrate this, as it was not a coincidence that Finten en Lucas - who, respectively for sales and technology, represented the greatest difference of opinion from the management team - both left the company. Some heavy discussions preceded their departure, in which two versions of development confronted each other: a careful, step-by-step version, and a radical, renewal version. The first version ultimately received the most support in the team. The team was therefore even further homogenized. About this, Jorges said: *"We attracted a number of people, partially unawares, who think the same - or maybe the ones who think the same stayed, and with the passage of time we've become a group of like-minded people, and it's probably also true that we've influenced each other and that after awhile we've become well-attuned to each other."* As a result, Jorges was able to strengthen his position in the team and the company.

A bored CEO or a reborn entrepreneur? Jorges, who had once worked for a big company, presented himself over the years more and more as an entrepreneur. Running a small company was an idea that had started as a challenge, with the idea that it could always be reversed: *"I can always go back to a big company,"* he said a few years after his appointment. But life in a small company is addictive. Personal interests and company interests began to overlap more and more. He defended the interests of the company, but those also became his own interests. He tried to consolidate his thinking. There was no more dissociation between the evolution of the company and his own career. Entrepreneurship begins where thinking in career terms stops: *"I've got it organized now so that personal and company interests coincide. Also financially. I think this is the right way to organize. A manager with a salary - I have more and more problems with that: how long he can stick it out, and how hard is he going to work: after a while you can just put it all on auto-pilot."* Boredom can strike. Time is free and has to be filled. For this, Jorges followed a work pattern which he had practiced during the first months after his arrival: walking around, asking questions, conversing with co-workers... After eight years, he still had not recruited a financial director. *"I was recently asked by the board of directors if I didn't want to hire a financial director; this would free up more time for me, which is definitely true. But the question remains what I do with my time too; I work - as I call it - 'interrupt-driven': the telephone rings and, whoops, you jump on it; or a co-worker comes in - the door's always open - and proposes something, you take a look at it, and if you look back at the end of the day at what you did, you were*

involved in at least forty different issues; each one took a little chunk of your time, and hopefully you made some progress in some of them, or untangled something, or got it back on track. And that kind of life is hard to give up, if you've been used to it for a number of years. I notice that in myself. For example, reading here, that's really difficult, even if you have the time. I can't stay focused on it, I go do all sorts of little jobs, I go 'bother' other people to recreate the lifestyle. The worst thing that can happen here is, well, a day when nothing happens." Jorges opted for the model of entrepreneurship: *"I associate myself very strongly with Vision, it would be hard to go back to a big company; it's as though I just arrived here yesterday, but I've gotten older without knowing it. I've been really involved with this company; but now I see that I'm past the interesting half of my life. I wonder how long I'll keep having enough fuel, creativity, initiative."*

Strategy days. The renewed team continued the course of dialogue and consultation with each other: *"There are no real decisions here until we've reached a consensus; ideas stay only ideas until the moment when in that management team you've actually formally said, yes, now that's something we're going to support; that gets formalized in a memo."* Gistal added to Jorges' comment: *"The idea that we need to go further doesn't only come from the development people, it's really everybody; the direction for our development, that happens in dialogue."* About this, Gidden said: *"Vision's strength is the teamwork between people; and that gets more important as you go higher in the hierarchy - just call it in the team. A decision is made in consultation with the others."* Anten summed it up as follows: *"Vision's strength is that communication: it creates good mutual understanding."* Once consensus was reached, each team member worked it out further for his own division. Each member of the management team, thus, expanded his own group in relative autonomy, albeit in continuous consultation with Jorges: *"We support each other. Everybody tries to find a good balance between defending their group, and - actually this may sound too negative - actually everyone tries to defend their insights: the technicians have their particular point of view, production has theirs, and so on. I think there are healthy discussions, and that they're constructive."* Gidden: *"The production division here doesn't have much weight with respect to R&D, especially in comparison to other companies where that power relation is the opposite. Most people are here for creative work. With us that's different. That can sometimes give rise to conflicts. They've developed something, and come along, and then I have to say, 'you can't produce that - O.K., maybe one time in the workshop, but not in large quantities.' But Gistal and I can work it out. We've decided to formally get together each month, because now that we're farther away from each other with the new building, those kind of things don't happen so quickly."* When it came to hiring, the team would also try to reach a consensus: each team member hired independently and when in doubt, consulted Jorges. Nevertheless, Jorges wanted to see every candidate before any contract was signed, he had a veto and coordinated the salary scale.

Along with the continuation of the consensus model, the context within which the team was working was also changed in two respects, thus strengthening the team's position. First of all, the management team learned a new language - that of 'strategy' - and strategic days were organized with the 'management plus' group. This group met together twice a year for three to four days. A great deal of time was spent on long-range planning, which provided a forum for new ideas. In this way, a consensus was reached during one of these strategic days over the so-called second niche, next to the machine-builders channel, and the decision was made to commit resources to its development. Gistal: *"That was almost academic; we didn't decide quickly, but rather made a decision from a distance: we exchanged lots of ideas, made lots of contacts, held regular conversations with external companies, and on the basis of all that, we organized regular strategy meetings."* The team incorporated the uncertainty in its own ranks, and created a new tension field: the search for a second niche, the exploration of unknown territory. It required people to learn together how to stand up to the tension: it was some time before the project took on concrete form, as many alternatives were explored and kept open as possible options. Within the team, people geared themselves up for the 'second round', albeit not without some doubts: *"Look, if you've worked for Vision from the beginning, and you've gone through a bunch of ... yeah ... misery - you can call it that: a bunch of problems and uncertainties - and before you're going to say, 'come on, let's get back at it again', you sure have a few doubts. I think you get more cautious."* Strategic discussions precluded jumping on wild ideas.

Secondly, the team managed to strengthen itself by means of a 'management buy-out': the management team became an entrepreneurs team. This move also 'strategically' anchored the strategic language; the company chose an independent course. Becoming owner was seen as a natural result of a process of increasingly attributing the success of the company to one's own efforts. The reasoning was that the shareholders invested their money while the members of the organization invested their brains. Jorges said: *"I realize that the human contribution is extremely important, the importance of the group versus the money."* This attitude strengthened the identification with the company: *"If the company is doing well, so are we,"* said Jorges. Furthermore, it also made managers reason more from the company's perspective than from their division's, and share the financial logic; they were interested in the financial events in the company's evolution: *"In 1991, when business was tough, we needed to tighten our belts in some respects; the managers immediately went along with this. It would have been very difficult if they hadn't."* Gistal said about this: *"Because of MBO the risk is now ours."* Giddens thought of it as the consequence of an implicit trend: *"Three out of four members of the management team turned down important positions in large companies in those days; I consciously took that risk; the switch to MBO is a structural indication of that."*

One consequence of the team's rearrangement and its striving for strong cohesion was a diminished diversity of ideas within the team. Furthermore, the new entrepreneur's voice began to carry more and more weight as time went on: *"I'm the one who decides on the course of action and keeps us on track. Sometimes I fear that my influence in the team is too big."* Giddens confirmed this: *"Jorges has a decisive role in decision-making, he presents his ideas very convincingly."* The team became so well-attuned to each other that it needed a difference in visions: *"More and more, I have the suspicion that we need more difference, more perspectives."*

There was, however, a strong group awareness. On this, Jorges commented: *"It's become enjoyable; we achieve results that you can attribute to your own insights, to those of the team, to your own people. If the group's doing well, so are you."* The team also gained variety in the way it staged meetings. Where it previously - almost rigidly - got together every week, now it followed a more flexible pattern: sometimes once every three weeks, sometimes for three days, often with varying composition, also with people who didn't officially belong to the management, there were more and more ad hoc committees. This increased flexibility also applied to the ways of consulting with one another within a division: in the production division, for example, they also chose to meet ad hoc rather than to let the tempo be determined by a pre-determined schedule of meetings.

The outsiders. There were a number of voices which resonated in the background of the team conversations. The result of the fact that a number of people formally occupied management positions is that a number of others were left out of the picture. How do these voices find their way into the story? In the example of the development of the second niche, Lootens, the technical specialist, and Carlson, technical coordinator, were referred to. The entrepreneur linked their skills with the discussions in the team and with the rest of the organization. *"I go talk to Lootens regularly; I realize that I have more contact with him than with the others. You shouldn't formalize his technical expertise. He can also have an impact via the R&D manager."* Because the use of a technical coordinator was new in Vision's way of organizing, Jorges actively supported this role: *"Carlson goes everywhere. I make sure from the top that he gets enough response from the others."* In this way, the management team's discussion was broadened.

To other co-workers, Jorges gave primarily advice. *"How it all gets worked out, I don't interfere with that. Of course I've been in the business for years, so I can predict a number of problems, and give advice about them."* Likewise, he passed on to others the rules which he had learned through his own experience; these rules could help some researchers respond more attentively to new ideas.

But not all outsiders were incorporated in the story as easily. The gap between management and non-management – which grew out of the first developmental period when the managers were appointed (for the first time) – remained. Now and then, this led to a ‘mini-crisis’. The consensus model was directly opposed to the top-down model. This created tensions – “not the kind that would make people leave the company. Often there’s something that’s not going so well with their project; we need to take a look at it, and frequently it does need to be adjusted.” The entrepreneur saw little value in a consensus model for the whole company: “That split is still there. I think it’s really essential. Democracy in a company like ours is fundamentally wrong. You can’t let everybody vote about which project we’re going to work on next. You’d get more than forty answers; that kind of thing quickly gets unmanageable. We strive for consensus, but at a given point, you just need to make a decision. There are certain options you can’t leave open. Everybody needs to know what we’re working for. Even in an early stage, even if it’s still vague, you need to say: guys, that’s what you need to go for. Everybody needs to support it.” Every once in a while, the tension built up again. Gistal: “It remains difficult, even if the company does well, it’s not always easy to spark the flame. For instance, that contract, that was a milestone. But it’s especially tangible for the management. Not everybody is also a hundred percent interested in it; a number of people are interested in a very limited bit of technical development, and assume that it’ll be used sometime, or whatever. It often remains the case that people see themselves on the other side of a barrier. So there’s still that us – them feeling. That’s never really disappeared. We try to make the gap smaller, but it still exists.”

This gap also appeared during the development of the second niche. It could be primarily seen in the tension between the technical-academic and the commercial-financial logic. When outsiders were called upon for development work, and as a result, an internal development project was halted, it was not well received. For technical people, it continued to be difficult to step out of their own world, and the ‘not-invented-here syndrome’ thrived: only the things you develop yourself are good. From the perspective of the company, this appeal to external developers meant that someone within the company was freed up and could do parallel work. When it also turned out that the developmental work which had been contracted out ran into delays, this became another source of tension: “They listen too much to outsiders.” Opening the borders for outsiders required a great deal of adjustment: “People nod in agreement if you say ‘it’s not bad to hear others’ ideas’, but they don’t accept it just like that.”

There were attempts made to lessen the gap with non-management. People realized the importance of informal communication, people were encouraged to catch their breath in the cafeteria or in the office and to talk about something other than work. Everybody had their own timing in this: Jorges, “We absolutely don’t want to interfere with that, then you kill something, and we can’t allow that.” Following up the management buy-out, there was also a shares plan

put together for the other employees. But more was needed, Anten thought; it was urgent that more attention be paid to it. The problem kept raising its head. Gistal: “When things aren’t going well, that’s when these kinds of things make their appearance. Rumors get thrown around then, and you feel that the gap gets even bigger; but in the meantime when business is looking really good, then this problem disappears in the background. When we’re unsure in the management team, then you think, anyway, it’s better to hold your tongue a bit and not scare them, because in a few months we’ll be further along and we’ll have a clearer picture of the situation. But that’s a double-edged sword. Because if you don’t say anything, then people start doing everything to find it out anyway. Actually, people start provoking in order to get to the truth by spreading big stories. And the bigger, the better, because then you get a reaction. So at one moment the story had been spread that I would be leaving the company, and that another R&D manager would be returning. Somebody had seen an organigram on Jorges’ desk and next to a letter G was a question mark; that didn’t have anything to do with my name; but it goes that far.” In the production division, the gap appeared to get smaller; Giddens: “When it isn’t going so good, you feel that people begin to ask more questions. My people can easily see if the company’s doing well; they know pretty quickly if something’s wrong. You try to reassure them, but the questions come back quickly. At such a moment, you feel that people really do sympathize with the company.”

The world (according to Vision) we live in

The context within which Vision carried out its developmental work was characterized by freedom, but also by uncertainty. In opposition to this is a world which Vision saw as conservative, where creativity was hindered rather than encouraged, where certainty was chosen over anxiety. If one desires to create, there is no other way than the way of uncertainty. Control of this process is impossible: the best one can hope for is to remain calm and to minimize anxiety.

Freedom, fright, and uncertainty. Vision was in the process of laying a technological foundation that would take years of developmental work, without the prospect of results over the course of all those years. There was a large degree of freedom, but at the same time, there was only one chance to take advantage of this freedom. “The world of Vision is unique,” said Jorges. “We are in a world that offers many degrees of freedom, and I think that our situation here is unique: decisions have to be right the first time; it’s always a risk-oriented company. The degrees of freedom have to do with the fact that our technology changes very quickly, and that this technology also entails new markets. So we find ourselves with new technologies and with markets that are quite new. This all translates into many many changes that we have to keep up with, and there is little time to make decisions, let alone to make the right ones.” Vision was playing a high-stakes game, for one can

only make a given decision once. There is the constant tension and worry that one is wide of the mark. The only solution is to seek to remain calm and uncertain at the same time.

The uniqueness of the world of Vision meant that the actors were dealing with a very specific activity, a development that was difficult to put into words. *"It's hard to talk about it with your friends and acquaintances."* Despite the difficult times, the dust began to settle after ten years: *"We have become calmer. That is a big difference from a few years ago. Calmness is a sign that we understand the business we're doing, that we can reason things out, and have established a particular position. We don't automatically look up to others the way we used to when we hadn't found our own way yet - not that we had any idea at the time that we were searching: you only realize that afterwards. Within our world, we know the players, the force of our products; we know our competition, their relative strengths; and we know the clients, we're known for our clients: this allows for a degree of calm, even if the world around you is changing rapidly."* This is in contrast with the long years previous, during which the firm tried to proceed in too many directions at once, with too little security. And yet, the sense of calm was relative. Anten: *"What will things be like in three years? I don't know. Uncertainty is intrinsic to the high tech world and to this company: uncertainty is our fate."*

However, the quality of the uncertainty changed with the years. Whereas for years the question had been whether their technology could mean anything for a market that was barely visible, now it was whether this technology could maintain its unique character, without as a result losing that character. Gistal: *"The danger is that the technology evolves so much that it becomes a kind of commodity at a certain point. The danger is that our technology is no longer so high tech, that it is now just part of the machine. That danger exists. The most enterprising clients often figure this out, or try to achieve the same results themselves. And that means that over the long term - more than five years or so - there is definitely the risk that such a trend will start to develop."* The uncertainty must not disappear. They could however rest assured that the period of that other, original uncertainty would last for some time yet: *"At this moment, it doesn't look like we've quite reached that point. We still have to do cartwheels to make sure we're doing the right things."*

Creating certainty in times of uncertainty and ignorance. The team approach was seen as the way to strive for certainty. Coming up with a strategy can be considered as a form of uncertainty-reduction, by which an image is created and filled in as much as possible and then held in isolation. Jorges put it this way: *"Now and then you have to think over your strategy, as it is called - not just think it over, but confer about it. [...] Once you've got a strategy, you shouldn't reconsider it for the first two years; you should just consider tactics: how you are going to implement and follow up your plan - but that is everyday work. We actually must not think over our strategy - it might sound a bit extreme, and yet once you have set a course, the blinders go on and you can't stop at the first*

setback, you have to keep going straight ahead until it's clear that you're not going to get there, or that you are going to get there; only then should you consider other means. This requires you to keep in consultation with one other, to keep your eyes open, and to stay in contact with the outside world as you prepare to make an important decision. But if this decision is very formal, you have to close yourself off from too much outside influence for awhile. What forms is an ideal image, as you think to yourself that you have arrived but know that all the real work still lies ahead." Such a strategy can minimize the uncertainty for a time, as long as everyone sets out in the agreed upon direction. The writing of a fictitious scenario offers control above all. But this strategy was not a substantive plan which revealed exactly what was coming: *"This ideal image remains incomplete in some important ways, that is implicit; I can suggest a few of its elements, but only in superficial terms."* For example, content and detail for the second-niche strategy was provided chiefly by comparison with the first niche: *"For instance, we say that it should generate as much sales as the first approach, and that it should yield at least the same added value as the first approach. We have a transitional phase during which we put the external distribution channel into operation; well, if that goes well, you have to try to bring in more and more, so that we have more control over it. So, those are just some of the elements involved in the way things could be played out. Exactly what the details will be is something we can't know at this moment: we're discovering it every day."* With the development of a second niche, the actors adopted the same method used in the first niche: all eggs in one basket, blinders on, and stick to your guns.

How to achieve process in a conservative world? In the filling in and implementation of a strategy that leads to an unknown result, one encounters setbacks. Obstructions small and large have to be dealt with both internally and externally. Creating means overcoming a conservative world: *"Setbacks come automatically, because if you want to change something or make something that doesn't exist, the world reacts conservatively, everything works against it. Opposing forces go into action. Something is different, and people get nervous when something is different. You have to overcome them one by one."* In order to develop the second niche, it was necessary to go through some internal repositioning. The fact much of the development would be external represented a major adaptation. Some of the sales and marketing people felt left out of the process when it became evident that the new commercial channels would not be created in-house but would be sought elsewhere. *"Wait a second", a few people said. 'This is the second major pillar of Vision, and it's being organized behind my back.' That's opposition, you get that automatically."* In the collaboration with an Asian partner leading up to the acquisition of a machine technology, it became clear that the prototype was not precise enough. Vision wanted to solve the problem with its own electronic technology, while the partners wanted to handle it in a mechanis-

tic way. "That is a conservative force; negotiating that obstacle was an important step for us." Having dealt with that impediment, the firm came a step closer to its objective, the image came more into focus. In fact, even more control over the situation was achieved, as they were able to draw in expertise from outside the firm while increasing their own know-how.

Looking back: paradise and the sound of modesty

Overcoming this crisis meant that Vision had not only preserved its very existence, but that it had sharply extended its potential for innovation. This process paved the way forward. If we now look back at the sensemaking of this first period and compare it to this story, how do the two meaning configurations relate to one another? What constitutes the continuation of their innovative entrepreneurship? The sharp focus seems to have been enough to give Vision an identity, but was not sufficient to answer the Big Question of Perpetuation. A new preparatory period was required, and others would no doubt follow. However, looking back at all those first days of Vision, when with nothing more than a ticket to paradise in its pocket it set out to market, we may ask how the projected trajectory and the actual trajectory, as we have outlined them here and in fragments 16 and 17, relate to one another. Quite quickly it becomes clear that these would not be the paradise years, but rather years of modesty and patience, and of a careful give and take between the actual reality that did not amount to much and the desire to make something big and beautiful of the firm – to regain that paradise. We are dealing here with years in the life of a small firm with a big vision, exploring the tension between presenting yourself modestly to the world and yet at the same time daring to think that that same world might someday lie at your feet. A lesson in immodest modesty.

Patience on the way to paradise

Vision burst onto the market as a project filled with promise: it could and would conquer the world. But this world was too slow, and called for bicycles, while visions of Rolls-Royces danced in their heads. The young high tech firm had to take a couple of steps back. The first marketing manager went blue in the face trying to make it clear to the researchers that they should take into account the 'slowness' of one client. A commercial reflex is not enough to get the world on one's side, however. A new entrepreneur came along and said that it would be better to leave behind the crucible of ideas, projects, applications, and possibilities in favor of focusing on just a few of these projects. With the years, it became clear that there was (only) one niche developing. The idea was to follow the way of patient construction in collaboration, without making a lot of noise about it. It was a rude awakening: this firm is not a ticket to paradise.

But this did not mean the abandonment of ambition. The postponement of the entrepreneur's dream did not mean its cancellation. The bar was set high. Even if they (only) pursued one segment of their technological area, even if they were under time pressure, the tense and high expectations remained: Vision could still evolve from a small to a middle-sized firm. It could still become a bestseller in the world of high tech business. They remained convinced that 'there were still more than enough challenges' and that 'the whole world was ready for their technology'. This image, this vision, kept everyone in the battle. It was just a matter of shouldering arms on the other side. They began to 'play' with time. Time became the enemy to be defeated. Time pressure was created. Time limits were placed on all levels. The choice to consider clients as partners demanded a quick reaction to their questions. All of this was alternated with a long-term perspective. This offered the chance to focus the lens on the broad horizon, and allowed dreams of grander days: 'Someday, when I grow up...' However, they were also careful not to count their chickens before they hatched. With patient maneuvering they were content to remain 'a small firm in the big world'.

But after ten years, Vision was still a fairly small firm. There were no reasons to change that: they liked being small. They did not see a solution in seeing themselves 'in the very short term' – could ten years be considered 'the very short term'? – becoming attached to a bigger company. If Vision wanted to become larger, it wanted to do this preferably on its own. The strategy was to take over niches that the big electronics companies turned their noses up at. They shrugged off reports of other small firms merging with larger ones or yet another newspaper story about some firm's meteoric rise. The entrepreneur: "I've already told you, this has always been a challenge for me, and it still is." The firm was not going to let itself be taken over; this was a conviction which grew with the years within the management team. They had absolutely no problem with the role of David in the face of those many Goliaths. Anten: "The force of Vision is that it is able to combine all these elements, and can keep coming up with new innovations. That is difficult to keep up if you become too big." Anten continued: "Focus forces us to block off a number of things; things that have not been proven or that are uncertain. The result is that we are not growing spectacularly, but take it easy, tending to slow growth and to proceed cautiously. That is the result of the management team's style, and especially Jorges' style."

Playing with time is a wide-open game. It is impossible to get a grasp on time. The question of whether time was advantageous or disadvantageous to the firm could not be answered. They worked essentially in the now. When it came to the future, they kept things brief. The time horizon was set at between six months and two years; six months could be surveyed easily, while they could just define the outlines of where they would be in two years. Beyond that lay an unforeseeable space, where one could be sure that the technology would have

changed and the players on the market would be different. The rest can be described in general terms as options. Jorges: "Maybe in five to seven years it will make sense to sell the company to a bigger group; maybe we'll be into a market that doesn't exist yet. Maybe." Anten: "Soon we'll have set up two substantial businesses. But what does that mean? That gives you a perspective of two years. The long term here is not very long. Since 1989 we have already been in chapter three or four. I'm talking about the Big Chapters here. It is impossible to say what Vision will be up to in five years."

Focus and ballast

Out of the play of opening and closing emerged a sense of focus which was unforeseeable, and nevertheless not blindly chosen. Vision as a creation and as what it itself had created, was a focus that emerged out of a plurality of ideas, byways, and proposals. The focus was the selection by which surplus value came into existence, and by means of which Vision acquired an identity. Behind this identity lurked countless identities, which were variously left behind, abandoned in midstream, or were no longer needed for the continuation of the project. "All sorts of ideas were given vent to, which did not necessarily lead to a solution. Some things you use, the rest you forget; for a long time you think that you can use everything, but all those other things that turned out to be no good, you forget. Once you have chosen a direction, you mentally throw a whole pile of things away; it's true. Afterwards you think that it all went easily; everything that went wrong and so on - you can't do anything about it anyway; it's just bothersome ballast that you let go." Creation demands a sudden leap when at a given moment you jettison all ballast, and become yourself. For this reason the relationship with the daughter establishment was taut, and little variation was permitted from that quarter. Anten: "Vision keeps a steady hand on the strings, and doesn't give much freedom to its subsidiaries." In order to maintain the same focus and to bridge the distance, an intensive relationship was necessary: "I go regularly to Japan. It's all about communication. It is important that you're regularly in contact with one other from morning till evening, and that those 100,000 unimportant little things can be said: 100,000 stupid little things; that's important for maintaining the cohesion in the group. Yeah, you grow apart if you don't see each other. Out of sight, out of mind - call it what you will. There's no two ways about it, you've just got to be there."

And yet the ballast is just as crucial, since it forms the background out of which something can 'come to the fore'. Anten felt that they paid their dues in those first years in the US: "We took on people there who we found out later on weren't up to the job. That was a serious lesson for us, and for Vision in general. Recruiting people in the States is far from trivial. It is a lesson that tells us how we let ourselves be pushed around." Jorges too took time to build up this background patiently: "I read an awful lot, practically everything; if there's a document that comes out, I read it. And nine out of ten times I don't react to what I read, but it gets added to the background." This attitude applies

to the whole team: "Everyone knows everything here: telephone calls, reports we issue together with others, they all get circulated. The best example is Gidden in production, who also sees many commercial contacts who he actually doesn't really need for carrying out his job; but over time they become a source of strength." The development of a background is in the interest of the whole company, as Anten pointed out: "I encourage people to talk to everyone as much as possible. If we want to establish a bridge between R&D and the client, then we have to begin by establishing good communication ourselves." Marketing built up a background by asking around in R&D, and vice-versa, technological work found meaning against the background that it could find in marketing. There was a person in the marketing department who explicitly dealt with the development of a background from the vantage point of a middle position. Anten: *This product specialist is the man who constantly infiltrates - if I may call it that - the R&D department. He hangs around there all the time, asking for all sorts of information. He's also the guy who has a great deal of extensive knowledge stored up. He's one of the people who knows the most about everything - not the most about one thing, but the best view of the big picture. On any given topic there is probably someone who knows much more than he does, but he integrates things; and that also makes him the point from which information can be spread further within the marketing department, and also beyond to Japan and the States."*

As the focus became sharper, the need to develop a broad background diminished. This can be illustrated by the contrast between the way the first niche was carried further and the second was developed. In the first case, there was little question of sounding things out and creating alternatives. Gistal: "For the first channel, it's not so terribly difficult to see where you have to be headed, since we are constantly in contact with our clients, including a pair of bigger, progressive clients who tell you to a large degree which way you should be going. And ultimately, since we have been doing this for so many years now, and we can pretty well see what everyone in this business, in this field, is doing, we can anticipate pretty well what is going to be necessary in the future. So you know fairly well what you have to do. But you have to be aware that there are very many options as to how you should do it." In the second channel, not only did the options remain open, but a field of experience still had to be developed within which choices could be made: experience with the client's questions, with the keenness of the competition, with the firm's own possibilities; there were as yet no partnerships to rely on. The analogy with the first developmental phase of the first niche is glaring: "Back then five phone calls came in a week: we could go in all sorts of directions. Marketing attempted to catalogue this. We went to take a look to see what we could make of it all and find out what fit our bill." They gained experience with this process, with the feeling of evolving from an unknown territory to a more or less recognizable one, but this did not preclude the possibility that a divergent search process would be undertaken, in which the 'ultimate' option followed came into view out of a field of many ideas that first had to be established. For the first niche,

a double sales system was set up: one which was directed directly at the machine builders, and one which went via a network of so-called 'system houses'. At a certain moment, the second system, which had been worked on painstakingly for a number of years, was pared down again. In the first case it was possible to build up a form of 'partnership' through which choices could be made. It was especially when one large client appeared to 'cooperate' that the focus became much clearer. Furthermore, it was possible to develop a large measure of the know-how in-house, thereby putting the client in a somewhat more dependent position. In the case of the system houses, the effect was rather that the number of possibilities kept on growing, while the interaction was perceived to be unbalanced: "*We had to solve everything and do everything ourselves. They only created more problems, while we had to offer all kinds of support in return,*" said Gistal. But it took some time before it became clear as to whether the parallel system should be maintained or dismantled; both options were at that moment of bitter financial consequence. The much more complex system was set aside when they gained the experience of a contract with a machine builder: "*As long as there was no alternative, you hold on to what you have; but everything is accelerated as soon as you have an alternative. We put all our hopes on it. But it quickly became obvious that it was a much better approach.*" After a few years of working with system houses, an important change of course was made, and they were thrown overboard as ballast. Anten: "*Actually, we learned a whole lot from such an experience. That's how we explored the American market. That was our first acquaintance of how people think there, how people work, what is fundamentally different. Secondly, in terms of strategy: we had a partner that thought completely differently; we learned a whole lot from that contrast. We started to realize that we had to build up a long-term relationship with our clients step by step. We found out how we should or should not tackle the OEMs.*" Furthermore, in the development of the second channel, a third sales system had to be set up.

Self-presentation

The tension between the firm's own identity and the one hoped for was driven by the way in which it presented itself. In order to grasp this world of options that it created itself through interaction with diverse partners, Vision attempted to set up the signposts itself. It developed 'prototypes', transitional objects, whereby it entered into discussions with clients, and by which in particular the firm tried to determine the direction of the discussion on its own terms as much as possible. The prototype offered a chance to demonstrate the firm's capabilities, as clients held a mirror up to Vision, as it were, letting it know what it was (as yet) incapable of doing. In particular, in the conquest of the Asian market, the creation of a transitional context was crucial; they did not yet have a branch there, and attempted to entice potential clients to come to demonstrations. Anten: "*Once we got the chance to give a demonstration and a presentation,*

things started to go quickly. The difficult part was getting companies to show up." In this way, Vision had to strike a balance, in its self-presentation, between what it could already do and what it could not yet do.

The development had its origins in the quality of the relationship with the client. The choice for direct contact with machine builders instead of the indirect approach via system houses may be understood in light of this criterion. Anten saw it this way: "*The success of our choice has to do with the fact that we are in direct contact with the clients, and that the technical contact is very important. It's all about the direct contact between your clients' engineers and you yourself; in fact, this link must remain quite direct: it's all about the efficiency of the communication.*" The further progression of the contact with clients was dependent on paying close attention to the relationship with those clients. Anten: "*It is important to visit our clients directly from our head office; in Japan especially, this is considered to be very important.*" The relationship with clients was born out of the relationships within Vision itself, as Anten explained: "*Our marketing department has many contacts with R&D - with everyone, each in his own way and on a certain level, and all of it informal as well. This sort of good communication, it's a source of strength. If we set our sights on a client, we can work very efficiently, and really, well, impress them that, hey, we know a thing or two, and we can react quickly, and we understand what you're talking about.*"

Development was played out in the gray area between on the one hand what clients wanted and what they thought Vision could do and on the other, what Vision in fact was capable of and suggested it was capable of. Gistal saw it this way: "*Many things happen in a gray area. The question is then, who is going to do what, and who can do what. We can sometimes be a little over-opportunistic in this department; at a certain moment you want to land a new client, but you also have to consider the competition, so we give a little. But then someone says, why don't those guys do it themselves, that would make our job a lot easier. And that's how tensions arise.*" Through the relationship with the client their own self-image became clearer. Landing a new client called for immaturity, but at the same time the tone had to be kept as modest as possible, so that they did not slit their own throat: a promise that might turn out to be unfeasible, the identity that could not be circumscribed. For the bigger clients, Gistal and Jorges dealt with the contacts themselves, but that soon proved to be difficult to maintain. It was, however, difficult to loosen again ties that had historically been strongly bound, and to take themselves out of the picture in favor of some other go-between. Relationships that are too tight rob other activities of room to operate, and at a certain point immaturity started to work against them.

The subtle balance in this gray area in which the partners were interdependent had to be continually adjusted. At a given moment, one of the most important clients noticed just how dependent it had become on this little firm, since Vision had at its disposal a good deal of the

knowledge concerning the production system, even though this multi-national had not actually given it out. Goliath was being laid low by David: "We offered them some more security at that point; we extended reproduction rights to them, in case we might not be able to deliver any longer. On top of that, someone from their firm came and learned our system," said Gistal. This dependence had another advantage, according to Giddens, offering financial security, since "the technology that the clients have implemented in their machines would almost be forced to play a part should Vision ever find itself in big financial problems." The relationship with clients thus offered a buffer zone for its further existence, although it also greatly increased the danger that it might be gobbled up by such a big firm. However, dependence tends to work in the other direction. For the production process, Vision decided to opt as much as possible to work with supply companies. More than once it happened that such small companies disappeared from Vision's network, sometimes from one day to the next. Giddens: "We have learned how to anticipate this, by keeping the network broad enough." In the development of a market in Japan, they were not only not prepared for the big demand, but above all for the intensity with which Japanese firms approached them. Anten: "These were very demanding clients. We were talking to the giants in the world there; they all had a hundred important questions, they made many demands, also in the area of R&D. In no time at all we found ourselves there with the problem of not knowing where to begin." But the advantages of such intensity were of the same order, as Anten told us: "We gave priority to this. All those questions and their many demands helped to advance our product tremendously. The Japanese are streets ahead. A question that someone else hasn't asked yet, but has imagined... a Japanese person will say, this is important and must be solved. Ultimately this is an advantage."

Engaging oneself too much in one relationship can lead to a loss of creativity. Too much ballast is then cast off, with the possibility of ensuing problems, since one may be simultaneously casting off the options needed for the continuation of creativity: "You tie up too many resources trying to land one client, and then you're actually not free anymore. You can't do what you want to anymore, you can't work on new cases. That is a constant area of tension." As soon as they realized they had invested too much in one client, Vision's vulnerability became apparent: things started to go badly for the client and thus for Vision. The measure of freedom proper to the gray area was diminished, the narrow focus cut off the logic of possibilities and options.

Vision presented itself both modestly and immodestly in its attitude to others. To both clients and to the press, it painted a modest picture of itself. The difficult breakthrough on the American market was also tied up with the strong image-building of the competition there, and the investment that firms have to put into this task, which Vision had to do without. However, a big reputation can cut both ways: too little might put Vision in a difficult position in relation to the competition, a situation which could lose it orders; too much might put

Vision in a difficult position relative to itself, as it might not be able to fill all the orders. They wanted to break free from the narrow Belgian context - Belgium is not a reference point for clients, thus neither is it one for Vision - but at the same time they realized that they were ensconced in their own context, in the form of local social and financial rules. The shareholder-plan for employees was a modest attempt to escape the Belgian situation, and to bring the firm's own system of remuneration up to international standards. Anten: "The whole financial situation within Belgium does not allow for a great deal of growth. The banks are conservative. The fact that we are located here is a handicap. The location is a weakness, that is absolutely clear."

They were also not impressed by the press, and the stories they published on the successes of other companies. Vision tended to present itself modestly to the press as well: "All those gossip rags like Trends and so forth... we try to steer clear of those. Positive messages about companies quickly take on an arrogant air." At the same time, they would compare themselves to these success stories, imagining themselves someday in the same position. But the road they were choosing was very different. Anten: *Vision approaches things differently than most high tech firms. They make spectacular gains and losses. We are creating our own opportunities, but in a careful way.* They adopted a modest attitude, but after awhile there arose a gnawing desire to realize some of this creative work. As Gistal said, "Actually, you find yourself sitting here with a ton of over-boldness, and you have to stay right where you are. 'Over-boldness' is perhaps the wrong word, but I can't think of any other." In the meantime, the underdog position was not such a bad one: "If we can snag a client from our American competition, then there's a lot of joy around here." The way Vision would daily present itself to others and to itself, the relation that it entered into with the world, was a difficult balancing act between 'too much and too little'. It was a tension that indicated the rhythm of the development, and it became more difficult as the years went by, for 'this is too little, this is too much' pointed to the underlying question that characterized Vision over all those years, the question of 'all or nothing'. Would anything ever come of it?

Ticket to paradise? - reprise

Vision found its second wind. Better yet, the deep-valley experience gave way to undreamed-of high points later. The slow growth of the first decade was followed by an exponential trend in the subsequent years: patience was rewarded. Vision became a market leader, the turnover doubled in one year along with the number of employees. An interesting detail is that they finally acquired a financial manager. The expansion to the east did not do them any harm. They were free to operate differently now in the technology market, investing in other technology firms and even setting up a new company together with the research institute from which Vision had originally sprung. Vision strengthened its own network, thereby safeguard-

ing its own potential for innovation for the coming years, and paving the way for a possible third niche. The challenge was now to organize the internal growth, and to write a new organizing script for it, a new phase in the identity development of Vision. Vision was in fact already a 'bestseller', but now it was being read by even more people. What some had given up hoping for had come true: Vision could reap the harvest. Jorges expressed himself cautiously on the subject: "*It's a question of picking cherries.*" Perpetuating entrepreneurship demands delicate harvesting.

The Story of Quartet:

From Four to One - Quartet Goes Solo

The story so far

At the time we concluded the first part of our study of Quartet, we described the social process as a game of musical chairs by means of which it was possible to balance the tension between creation and integration. At the same time, it became more difficult to maintain the creative potential, not so much because the opportunistic logic had been exhausted, but primarily because difficulties in developing an integrative logic had been experienced. We accentuated the question of the extent to which the social process, as reflected in the conversations within the Quartet, could guarantee the fragile relationship between creation and integration in the long run (fragment 17).

When this question was formulated, all four team members were still present. Very shortly afterwards, however, the whole configuration changed. One by one, the four team members left the firm: Philler was the first one to go, followed by Marcken, and then the starting entrepreneur Yvenoff; finally even Stevens left. When we revisited the firm, all four were gone, and we encountered the strong voice of a new 'entrepreneur', Ricken, as general manager of Quartet. The sequel of the story of Quartet will be told by putting the voice of the new entrepreneur in the foreground, and by complementing it with the voices of two of the former entrepreneurs and by two of Ricken's staff members: Jansen - who entered the firm in 1986 and who experienced both periods of development, one under the direction of Yvenoff and the other under the direction of Ricken - and Francken, manager of the technical staff. This conversation will be mediated by the voice of the *inquiring* researcher. First we shall present the new meaning configuration as it was enacted by the arrival of the new entrepreneur, then we shall clarify the relation with the meaning configuration as it was presented in the first developmental stage of Quartet.

A new entrepreneur... A new start... A new meaning configuration...

In the middle of the network: a new actor

Early in 1988 the company landed in financial difficulties. In the meantime, Philler had already departed because he could not accept the company's path of continual expansion. An attractive external offer, whereby he could develop himself in a more secure context, was enough incentive for a quick decision. Marcken, who had withdrawn from the position of general coordinator again - to Yvenoff's advantage - saw more future for himself in his accountancy practice, a practice which he had managed to develop all those years, despite his continually growing involvement in Quartet. Marcken became an external advisor for Quartet again. In 1988, therefore, only Yvenoff and Stevens were left, as a duo they would try to give the company a definite élan. There was plenty of personal dynamism, but the financial support was inadequate, and the company ended up teetering on the brink of bankruptcy. A financial restructuring by a foreign shareholder also entailed the departure of Yvenoff, who ended up in a managerial position in another small company in Quartet's shareholders group. Only Stevens was left when Ricken, at the end of 1988, applied for the position of sales and marketing director. His task was to reorganize and expand sales, in a market in which spontaneous growth had become increasingly difficult.

The first results were encouraging. The annual turnover had been more than doubled in one year, partially by means of opening two new branches. The following year, in 1990, there were two more sales offices opened, but despite an even further increase in turnover, they still showed no profit. This trend continued in the following years, while the company was annually 're-organized'. In 1990 two more companies from the former holding needed to be taken over, but the costs turned out to be too high. The shareholders called in a consultancy firm to draw up an inventory of the company's problems. As a result, the last man from the original Quartet - Stevens - left the company, and Ricken assumed the position of general manager. In 1991 the capital was increased and, despite the difficulties in the market, for the first time, they showed a profit. The following year, they managed to increase the turnover ten-fold for the preceding four year period. The company seemed to have made a new start, and to have become a success story for the second time.

In four years, the complete network and financial configuration had changed, with, instead of a four person team at the core, a soloist general manager, who had drastically transformed the organizing process, with the consequent emergence of a new meaning configuration. This new meaning configuration will be depicted and contrasted on three levels. Firstly, on the level of the task domain, integration and focus replaced opportunism and development.

Secondly, on the level of the social network, there was a shift to 'professionalism' instead of a more 'playful' culture. Finally, on the relational level, the new configuration was one of a moderate diversity of voices centered around one authoritative voice.

The voice of integration: focusing the task domain

Ricken, initially still as sales manager and then later as general director, opted firmly for the integrative logic, running counter to the dominant, opportunistic logic about which he could say little good: "This company - and I've also said that explicitly - was a student club, totally unorganized, where everybody enjoyed being, but where nobody thought about profit or company philosophy - there also wasn't a goal, there was essentially nothing." Jansen expanded on this: "From my position, I could see very easily what they were doing here. They were a little out of control; they did all sorts of things, but it wasn't really strategically well thought out." Along with Ricken came strategic logic: the idea of establishing a plan on which the entire organization was focused and which changed in response to signals from the environment. Ricken opted for reduction and concentrating all activities on the one hand while expanding the number of sales branches on the other hand. Jansen said that "a purge was necessary, back to the core business." In terms of Ricken's logic, this was obvious: "The figures speak for themselves; the situation was totally askew for some of the activities, while in another sphere there were profits and turnover - I kept only that."

His actions followed a double pattern: activating the strong points and permanently removing the links that were considered weak. The client approach was one of this company's strongest assets. This client orientation, with its roots in the original concept of commercial customer relations - clients received an integrated solution and service - was framed by a new market approach. This consisted of, on the one hand, differentiating precisely described target groups and, on the other hand, developing an extensive sales plan - because 'salesmen must have a goal' - supported by a new marketing strategy. This market logic went hand-in-hand with the introduction of a strict financial logic: from then on, everyone spoke the language of figures, as all the actors, first and foremost salesmen, needed to learn how to speak in figures and analyses. It was not merely a question of turnover, but also profitability of and productivity.

The new entrepreneur opted not only for concentration; all other activities - related to education and software-were jettisoned: "No more courses, no development of software." A period of 'saying good-bye' made its appearance: good-bye to spin-off enterprises, to activities, to personnel. "We could no longer have our cake and eat it too - run with the hare and hunt with the hounds and spread the resources, we had to become a specialist - that's what people missed earlier, introducing a specialization". An example was the spin-off firm where Jansen worked in his first years: "When I arrived there as a technically trained salesman, there were no products. The product line with

which they'd first had success was outdated. We had developed our own standards, but they didn't fit the dominant market approach. Afterwards, that story was cleaned up quickly. Period." Another example was a project related to software development which had produced a unique package on the market, and on which a whole team of developers was working. This was more of less the foursome's show-piece, in which Yvenoff, Marcken, Steffens, and also Philler had invested themselves, and which they backed one hundred percent. Considered in terms of financial logic, however, this was an unfeasible project, according to Jansen: "I've never understood how it could take them so long to realize that they could keep developing [it], while at the same time endangering the whole company. It was unique, but unique because no one is going to take such a risk. [...] They kept defending it right up to the end. This project was a disaster, and thwarted us in becoming a specialized company [...] It killed us." With this, all open projects that the previous entrepreneurs had initiated were wiped out in one fell swoop. These projects represented Quartet's creative pool, since these were development activities by means of which the men wanted to fully profile themselves on the market. In such a trend-sensitive market, however, it is vital to keep one's ear to the ground - according to Ricken - and one's figures close at hand. One shouldn't try to conquer the market via development. With this perspective, the company's developmental logic was laid aside and the company became a specialized distribution company. "Earlier they were dreamers: if we can make this today, sometime in the future we'll make money."

In contrast to the developmental logic, the technical logic was retained. This technical competence formed the heart of the service that could be offered to clients and the added value that one as a supplier could offer. This insight went back to the initial competencies and the core approach as enacted during Quartet's first years of development. "This is this company's know-how pool," according to Francken. In contrast to the competition, Quartet was able to offer very high technical skills, which formed a part of the company's core competency achieved through experience and training. The technical logic, built up by well-educated engineers, was translated, however, to a great extent in commercial terms: "As much as possible, we need to bring this technical competence to the market [...] A technical mind-set is a sales argument." When sales started to make a turnaround, the two logics began to clash. A confrontation between the logics was unavoidable.

Finally, professionalism instead of friendship

Focusing the task domain required two conditions to be met. The first condition was that nothing be left to chance: in other words, professionalism. The second condition concerned centralization of the management level. The voice of professionalization was not a new voice, as previously this perspective had been frequently emphasized by Philler. But the search for

professionalism suffered continually from the attempt to keep a large number of opportunities open; through the desire to juggle too many balls, the quality of the client service diminished and the internal misunderstandings piled up. Time loss and pressure on the relationships were the results. This time, they wanted to develop professionalism on all levels. This could be seen in the professional language game concerning the new branches: *"This branch has four full-time persons present, each with their own target market, their own visibility, and a good-looking showroom. Completely different from the earlier kind of branch - a handful of people, and totally unstructured."* The professionalism was equally obvious in the way Ricken presented the further tale of Quartet with graphics, tables and figures which were up-dated daily.

The relations were also professionalized, internally as well as externally. Regarding the clients, the relations were approached according to the target group to which the client belonged: in other words, the approach varied according to the size of the client - large, medium, or small. During the 'pioneering period', all clients were equal and everything was done for them. Jansen: *"Years later, many of these clients were still coddled, and were even personally followed up by the general director. It had to be perfect then."* Relations could no longer be approached by such friendship-like norms, but required professional criteria. Internally as well, relations were redefined. Co-workers had been used to the fact that Yvenoff and Steffens were hardly available: *"Actually, you needed to have an appointment, or follow the cumbersome hierarchy."* With the streamlined hierarchy, it had to be possible to stay on top of things and be able to react quickly. Business could not lie idle because of 'unavailability'. It needed to be possible to have a meeting at any moment: *"If I say, I want a meeting, now, this evening or Saturday, that should be possible."* Jansen adds, *"When he left the shareholders meeting at 11 p.m. and knew that he would become general director, he rang seven people up from his car who he knew supported him, and asked them to come to a hotel, and at midnight everyone was there. Twelve people were fired that night."*

At the same time, the relations between co-workers remained amicable: *"We still help each other out here, like in the early years. [...]. Once, when I wanted to leave, and, after a proposal from Ricken decided to stay on anyway, eighty percent [of the employees] came to congratulate me. They were happy. Sort of, as if a friend had decided not to move away. As far as philosophy, that must have been the same thing; the neighbor I grew up with, stays - it must have been that kind of feeling. For me, that was also the feeling, yeah, of not switching my group of friends."* There was a give-and-take between professionalism and friendship - Ricken: *"There's little or no heavy hierarchy here, you know. Everybody here is called by their first name, everybody knows everybody. I don't have the slightest problem with the fact that we go have a beer together after work, and that we talk about God knows what. But the next morning it's back to the point and steel-hard business. But if it comes right down to it, the hierarchy counts."*

Parallel to the delineation of the task domain, the organization was also regularly reorganized. This had been a problem area earlier: *"They didn't dare make any decisions. There were nice reorganizations on paper, but when it came down to it, they didn't carry them out; especially concerning the personnel, they didn't dare bear the consequences."* It was distinctive in the new restructurings that the number of levels was reduced and that the management level was centralized: branches were no longer locally run, but run from the head office; managers were no longer responsible for sites but for target groups, developed via market analysis. But the most important characteristic of these restructurings was flexibility: *"Working for Ricken, that was a dream, he had a strategy, and even better, he changed it if it didn't work. I'd never seen that before: a manager who stood there, full of conviction, announcing, that's our product; but if there were poor results, with just as much conviction, could get rid of it and say, I don't want to ever hear about it again. That's impressive, you know. This illustration is typical: [...] not trying just a little, but forcefully pushing on, and if it turns out to be wrong, adjusting without any problem."*

Furthermore, professionalism meant that a number of rules were followed and that accountability was expected. This change of face had already been instituted in 1988 when new foreign capital was brought into the company: *"When this holding came here, this became a company with management, with structure, with rules; it became a company. Until then, it was their company; their SME. Yvenoff and Steffens didn't fit there."*

Authority and diversity

The new entrepreneur at Quartet therefore reached two important milestones in the company's development: the delineation of activities and meanings on the one hand, and the redefinition of interactions and relations in terms of professionalism on the other hand. The company came under the control of one man, there was one authority. Variation was sought only within the new boundaries. Ricken was surrounded by three assistants who collaborated on the implementation of the stated plan and offered him a sounding board and a devil's advocate: *"They are the three guys who he listens to."* Ricken adds: *"I think they understood my message."* When it was difficult for the technical division to steer in the new, commercial direction, someone from the commercial group became the head: *"That was my salvation: we could really pull together then to get [the division] back on their feet again."* Furthermore, Ricken recruited a number of people who he knew from his earlier work experience; they often replaced people who could no longer thrive in the 'new' Quartet. Another example concerns the composition of the new sales team, which consisted not only of commercial engineers, and economists, but also included a psychologist, a sex therapist, a sociologist, and a criminologist. But equally important was their common characteristic, namely their 'commercial perspective'. Ricken hired everybody himself, and

had every candidate's personality tested by a selection firm with which he was well acquainted. His profile was clear: "I'm looking for people who are extroverted - ultimately - very much so, who stick up for their rights, open, open for renewal, ... and ambitious. I've fired people, therefore, who are caught up in themselves. I want people who are eager to collaborate and to work in a group, who reach out, who are good with people." There was, therefore, only a limited diversity in a strongly homogeneous climate: "We stick together well; I mean Quartet, one bloc," said Jansen.

The rupture with the 'old' configuration

With the arrival of Ricken, the meaning configuration was thoroughly changed. Meanings and actions were specified and clearly delineated. Employees had much less latitude in their actions. Quartet wanted to display a professional identity in all regards without much creative ambition. Creativity was possible as long as it fit the efficiency logic. We shall now look at how this transition can be typified. We see the new entrepreneur engaged in a discussion with two voices from Quartet's first development period. Firstly, I shall present the 'discussion' with Steffens, who was general director when Ricken joined the company. Secondly, we can venture a discussion with the initiator of Quartet, Yvenoff, whose voice was still present at the time of the research, although this entrepreneur had physically disappeared from the company.

A tension-filled transition

The transition to a specialized and professionalized company, which thinks according to the laws of the figures, was, for most of the employees, not so obvious: "Most of them wondered what was happening. There was a certain mind-set here, which was strongly rooted in them." The tension began with the arrival of the new shareholder in 1988, who immediately imposed a management structure: a general director, a director for sales, and one for distribution. The recruitment of an external sales director was too much for one of the employees at Quartet who had envisioned himself in this position because of having the longest internal experience in sales: he left. "It must have been an enormous emotional blow for the man, because he had totally identified himself with Quartet," said Jansen, who was himself ready to fly the coop. The change in course split the company in two: people such as Jansen who saw the sinking ship's salvation in the arrival of the professionals, and decided to stay, and those who suddenly felt alienated from a place that up to that point in time had been so familiar, and decided to leave. Two or three of the best salesmen, such as Jansen, shortly handed in their resignations. Ricken, only a month with the company, tried to turn the tide: "Ricken didn't respond emotionally but professionally. He checked what I did. He came to me, and explained his market strategy, and said I'll offer you that part. I know that you have other options, and that you can also get a great position there, but look,

I think that there are options with us. Then I thought to myself, well, it only took me one night to be able and go the next day and say, 'I'm staying'. If the ship is going to sink anyway, then I can start somewhere else next week. I'll grab this chance."

The tension was clearest in the confrontation between Ricken - the new sales director - and Steffens - the new general manager. Ricken fought against this mindset: "I went straight ahead, and I constantly referred them to the figures we'd attained. I told Steffens that the sales turnover had risen, but that the decrease of the costs was delayed." Steffens and Ricken were polar opposites; their styles were different: technical versus commercial, development versus action, soft versus hard, thinking versus doing. "He never got to the point. They were miserable meetings; we had endless discussions, while we needed action. They were theoretical meetings, those guys wrote books but didn't make any decisions - that's not my style." Steffens continued to support the developmental activities, while Ricken, by means of the successes which had been achieved, brought sales activities into the 'mainstream' of the company. Jansen said, "For me it had been obvious for a long time that these activities couldn't be sustained, but the company's management stood firm. But who was I to say that they were wrong?" With Ricken's results, and the overwhelming support from the sales division, Steffens was confronted more and more with a *fait accompli*. The tensions mounted. At a certain moment, two groups came into being: a technically-oriented clan around Steffens and a group with commercial feeling around Ricken. The two languages, the technical and the commercial, were no longer able to understand each other: "We were talking at cross purposes. Sometimes we didn't understand each other. At a certain moment we had lost virtually all contact with each other." Steffens' and Ricken's offices were a stone's throw from each other, but distance can be relative: "We were so far from each other; the company had become two companies." When a consulting firm, appointed by the chief shareholder, spent two months looking around the company, two plans arose, one which placed the focus on sales, whereby Ricken would become director, and a second with an emphasis on developing knowledge, whereby Steffens would stay in charge. The first plan - 'going commercial' - turned out to be the only feasible one. A reorganization was attached to this plan, whereby seventeen people were fired by Steffens, his last act at Quartet. There was a general company meeting, where the news was announced: Steffens was leaving, and Ricken would fill his place.

After Steffens' departure from the company, it did not turn out to be easy to incorporate the 'technical logic' in the 'new Quartet': "The commercial train had departed, those people had targets, a goal, a story, but all the others had stayed behind." Getting the other part of the company rolling required a long year, during which many people left who no longer knew how they fit into the story, and others who refused to accept the new story: "I've had a lot of problems with the technical service, Steffens' bastion. Look, if someone comes from sales who's going to run the show, and

also ends up at the head of a technical group, then the guys will be automatically opposed to him." The story as it was written in Quartet's first period was not so easy to erase or to rewrite: "I met with a lot of opposition, personnel turnover, shifts, etcetera, just because I was the enemy." The company contained two cultures, with a power struggle between them: salesmen versus technicians. The technicians had the feeling of psychologically having lost, seeing that Ricken had ended up in charge of both divisions. But the technical voice could be saved with the appointment of Franken: "This guy sings off the same sheet as Ricken, but he can still clarify the standpoint of the technicians. And Ricken listens to Franken, because Ricken doesn't understand at all what that technical stuff consists of, like Steffen did." It took a lot of time, but eventually the technical service also grasped this commercial perspective. Franken was a bridge figure, with his technical background, but having previously worked for the sales division. The commercialization of the technical logic even began to work adversely, counter to the interests of the sales group. A new difference arose, when the technicians wanted all their services to be charged, while the salespeople believed that a number of issues should fall under the title 'service', without compensation.

The soul or the ghost of the entrepreneur

The results were plainly successful, except in the sphere that we are concerned with in this study, the preservation of creative potential. Ricken made no pretenses to individual entrepreneurship. When I asked him why he did this work, he answered laconically, "It's what we're paid for." With this, has the boss become a cool manager? Has the spark with which the Quartet, and especially Yvenoff, stimulated the company disappeared for good?

The voice which Ricken also brought into the company was the voice of an economist with experience in sales and marketing acquired in large, international, computer companies - a voice which, until then, Quartet had had to do without. If Ricken didn't label himself as an entrepreneur, as someone who highly values creation, how could his voice be typified? Ricken was a man with a great deal of vision concerning the company and its context and on life itself. But he kept the two strictly separate: "Look, the weekend is sacred as far as I'm concerned. I don't want to be stuck here at the company. Sometimes we get together here on a Saturday morning to meet with the main players, but that's it. It's not that I can block out the company completely on the weekend, no way. I actually think about it more intensely, from a different perspective. On Saturday afternoon I'm usually alone. My wife has her own business and is usually working then. I get in my car and just drive around. A good long drive. Usually to the seaside, where I can get some fresh air, leaning against my car and thinking about the company, going over the past week and thinking ahead..." The weekend was therefore for gaining perspective. He went further: "By preference I don't see anybody in my free time who has to do with the company or even with the business. Look, I'm in a

group where we get together monthly, along with our wives. You get all sorts of people there, but no company heads." In contrast to Yvenoff, he did not connect his work with his personal life. Ricken wanted to play the role which was allotted to him by the head shareholder as perfectly as possible, but in the long run he wouldn't let the role determine the course of his career and his life. "The challenge for me is that I could build something up here in a young company where there were still plenty of possibilities, and where I wasn't tied down. I consulted with the man in the consultancy firm, who's a good friend of mine, and it seemed to be a good step along my career path, even if it was only for a year or two. [...] I don't know how long I'll stay here, but it's limited." The contrast with Yvenoff, who linked the establishment of this company with the development of his personal network, could not be more striking.

Nonetheless, Yvenoff's voice managed to continue to be heard in the company, even though he himself had (physically) disappeared. This voice played partially the role of a haunting spirit, which some people resisted, and partially the role of the soul of the company, to which others looked up and, in part, glorified. For Ricken, who preached professionalism, Yvenoff represented something that should be avoided at all costs: a pioneer's mindset. Ricken felt strengthened in his view by the next installment of Yvenoff's story: "I'll give you an example, when Yvenoff had taken over another company; but that was the same thing again - they took in 101 activities, they wanted to do a little bit of everything again, and forgot the idea of sticking to what you're good at; and it went totally awry." For Jansen, on the other hand, Yvenoff was no ghost, but remained rather the soul of Quartet - the tone, as it was set in the company's first success years by the first informal group of co-workers: "Being Quartet-minded - this feeling of 'we are the best' - that ambiance has always been there and, despite all the struggles and troubles, is still there today. You can't get around that, saying that that is Quartet; despite all the changes." Actually, this was no surprise, as the majority of the employees from the first development period had stayed. The soul was something unique: "I hear the others say it, and then it's only what they say, and then I think, still, through all those years, the ambiance at Quartet really is unique. There are exceptions; there are some companies that make me think, yeah, that looks like it, I recognize that, but ... come on, not like here. It's always been like that, even during the times when it threatened to turn out wrong." Once the essence, always the essence: "that 'mindedness' means feeling good there, liking it there. [...] That doesn't mean that Quartet was infallible." Some people were not prepared to understand that... Entrepreneurship belonged to this essence, but needed to be complemented. Whereas Steffen and Yvenoff symbolized this entrepreneurship, Ricken represented the other voice: "Look, Steffen and Yvenoff are good guys, smart people, well, everything you need, and certainly not bad entrepreneurs, because they'd damn well made a good company out of Quartet. But once they were there, well, they just weren't the right people for it - you need other people for that." Quartet got

that other voice; the question is only if they can do without the creative entrepreneur's voice in the long run...

Conclusion: Quartet - A solo play?

Monologue and rhetoric

The new language at Quartet was the language of figures. Figures speak for themselves. Market strategies, personnel shuffling and technical margin were all adapted to the results as expressed in figures. Jansen put the language of figures in perspective a little bit: "*Figures always come too late, it always takes a little while before you've processed them, a few weeks. You also don't have all the data available, so you don't ever really know how your company's doing. Besides, you can manipulate figures; [...] and last year's profits can mean next year's losses.*" The diversity in language, the development, of technicalness, of customer relations - was melted into one language, the language of commerciality. Gradually, the company started to speak with one voice.

The transition described here from one meaning configuration, not strongly pronounced and equivocal, to an unequivocal meaning configuration occurred via a play of events, decisions, and actions which succeeded each other in different conversation moments: "*I see Ricken do very different things once he has outlined a strategy, to get people to back it, or at least to see that they're not against it.*" One of these techniques was a plant meeting, where all the people from the company were brought together. At the changing of the guard in 1989 one of these meetings was held: "*That was a very difficult speech for me. You could feel the different moods in the audience: the salesmen were relaxed, but the technicians were aggressive, restless and pessimistic, while the administrative people were somewhere in the middle.*" Sometimes he held such a meeting almost unannounced: "*Recently I felt tension in the halls. Three days later we all got together. I didn't prepare that: I test the waters, see how people are doing, and I take off, I talk to them with all the fire I possess.*" Jansen talked about this: "*Even if it's a crowd, lots of people, he manages to hook everybody.*" Quartet's play from then on could be called solo-theater. Even when there were difficult decisions, a reorganization, or when people were fired, the news was passed down the line quickly. It was clear: the show had to go on.

The monologue was backed up by a dialogue between the three assistants, who consulted with each other and explored how the technical and the commercial, the developmental and the commercial visions could be reconciled with each other. But sometimes the monologues were provocative and sparks would fly; what would start as a difference of opinion suddenly turned into a conflict: "*Recently there have been a number of decisions which have just arrived, without discussion, and which I couldn't support. I see my position like this: I interpret what's happening with my people, and I defend that at the top, and the other way around, I try to convince my people about*

what the top has decided. But now this doesn't work any more. I can understand all the decisions, but I can't manage to explain them to my people." The financial logic ended up in opposition to the commercial logic, whereas they had previously supported each other. The core of the company - the client service - was even further corroded away.

Recession: us against the world

In four years, Quartet grew under the leadership of Ricken to become one of the top three in its market segment. Ricken turned Quartet's relationship with its surroundings around: from an opportunistic logic with which the company kept its boundaries open and flexible, to a logic where the interaction with the market was dictated from within. At the end of 1992 and beginning of 1993, the economic recession played some nasty tricks on the company; the contrast with the growth years was enormous: "*In those days you knew exactly what you were facing, where you wanted to go - you were sure of yourself. In those days you were invincible. Now it's something completely different; now you're fighting against the world, and you can't control that [...]* Now I need to let myself be led." A new reorganization beckoned. The financial logic was further honed; Ricken retreated and studied graphics, analyzed the link between turnover, expenses, and profits. The marketing strategy took the form of 'negative selling': clients were thanked for their services because the sales profits couldn't offset the overhead necessary to generate the profits. It turned into a period of weighing the pros and cons, but there was little latitude for implementing any of the hundreds of plans. The company was further streamlined, the personnel was reduced by half, and the growth of the four previous years shrank along with the shrinking market. The future was unforeseeable, new uncertainty loomed on the horizon, the figures offered little to go by. Jansen said: "*I have a theory that says that if you use it three times in a story, you can't make it a forecast. It's our future. But this month the figures were good [...]* Everything considered, it's going good here." Ricken and Jansen assessed the situation differently; the emergency scenarios were lying on Ricken's desk. In the meantime, the company could no longer offer any resistance from within: the development pool was cut off, entrepreneurship was lost.

Epilogue

The two cases tell us very different stories about the perpetuation of their collective creative endeavors. In the Vision case, the development was perpetuated gradually - with calmness and patience - supported by its carefully nurtured creative potential. In the Quartet case, the vulnerable creative potential, emerging from the diversity of the four partners, got lost in

the transition to a professionally managed firm. If we may compare the cases, ultimately the Vision firm was able to regain paradise, while in the Quartet case paradise was clearly lost. While there are many possible explanations for these courses of events - finances, market conditions, technological developments - we shall develop a hypothesis in terms of organizing processes, and try to clarify how the loss or recovery of creative potential can be linked to the way the social process was enacted and the conversations were held. This is the step we shall make in fragment 23, where the social process will be reviewed.

The two narratives provide us with a thicker and more extensive storyline than we had in the initial presentation of the propositions in chapter four. At the same time, the intensity of conceptualization has decreased. Although the two ways of presenting qualitatively collected data to the reader are not mutually exclusive, I think that the narrative form, as applied in this fragment, has the advantage of leaving more room for the reader in the construction of knowledge. A story in particular offers more to hold on to. The danger of a presentation in the form of interpretive charts is that it can be turned into an absolutism or reified as a model, without taking the context into consideration. Such a model, just as with many other organizational theoretical models, is then passed on without the reader or listener having any perspective on how the development of knowledge took place, not to mention being able to have his or her own voice heard in this process. In chapter four, fragment 17, we saw that the meaning of an interpretive chart can only become clear against the background of the story of each of the four companies. In this fragment, the reasoning has been turned around, as the narrative has played the lead role so that more interpretations can be made, and more insights can develop. This will primarily depend on the perspective that the reader assumes, varying from someone who writes analogous stories as an entrepreneur, as a policy-maker, as a journalist, as an evaluator, as an interested layperson.... We shall view both narratives from a part of our research question; specifically, how are the different perspectives on perpetuating creative potential related to each other, and how can the conversation between these 'voices' be typified? During the implementation of the follow-up at Quartet and Vision and the research intervention at Coat, we ended up with a theoretical approach concerning 'dialoguing' which makes it possible to typify the conversation between what we called logics and meaning configurations as a possible self-generative process.

Fragment Twenty-three The Dialogue: A Social Constructionist Key

In this fragment I mean to arrive at a hypothetical theoretical vision of innovative entrepreneurship as social construction, on the basis of a confrontation between the case narratives and a stream of theoretical notions from various quarters, which seem to converge around the notion of 'dialogue' and the more general term, 'conversation'. Our description of continuous entrepreneurship as essentially a socially driven phenomenon, and of the construction of knowledge about entrepreneurship as the development of a social epistemology consists of a three-step trajectory. In a first step, we encountered Weick and his vision of the social dimension of organizing. The organization process is a social process on the basis of double interacts between individuals with multiple inclusions. In the second step, in the discussion of meaning configurations, an argument was developed around the so-called 'social foundation of cognitions', through a review of a few basic texts by social constructionist 'forerunners', and by looking at current tendencies in social psychology.

Now that we have been able to document the extent to which sensemaking and knowledge construction may be approached as processes of social construction, we may ask how sensemaking and knowledge construction as central to the organizational task of entrepreneurship can be framed as a form of continuous creative development. In other words: To what extent is the process of sensemaking in a position to be renewed creatively from within? With this third step, I would like to develop the position that the possibilities for innovation in the sensemaking process are not only dependent on a form of 'derefication' (Voegt, 1990) but also on the development of 'multivoicedness'. The inspiration for this third step comes from an unexpected source: we shall draw on the Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin, who conceives of sensemaking as a dialogic process. This dialogic view of meaning creation will allow us to approach the social process of organizing as a form of conversation.

Firstly we shall examine the insights concerning the essential role of 'dialogicality', as developed by Bakhtin, and taken further in more recent philosophical discussions of meaning. In a second step, Bakhtin's approach will be compared with a number of visions of dialogue and communication in organization theory. After this I shall develop a dialogic approach to entrepreneurship, illustrating how the continuation of collective creativity demands a dialogic process.

Dialogue and Conversation

The dialogue in Bakhtin

Wertsch (1991) calls 'dialogicality' the most central construct in Bakhtin's approach to meaning. This is also apparent from the title of one of his most telling works, *The Dialogic Imagination*. For Bakhtin, every utterance¹ "is filled with dialogic overtones".² An utterance is directed towards another person, who makes it his or hers. "To understand another person's utterance means to orient oneself with respect to it, to find the proper place for it in the context. For each word of the utterance that we are in the process of understanding, we, as it were, lay down a set of our own answering words. The greater their number and weight, the deeper and more substantial our understanding will be. Any true understanding is dialogic in nature. Understanding is to utterance as one line of dialogue is to the next" (Wertsch, 1991, p. 54).³ A word or a sentence uttered by someone calls up new words and new sentences in someone else. Understanding what someone says to you is a relational event, in which utterances follow one another, lines alternate, and ripostes collide. By dialogue, we understand in the first place the conversation, daily face-to-face meetings, but also the inner conversation⁴ or the parody.⁵

The primordial character of the dialogue is then further explored in Bakhtin's concept of meaning. For Bakhtin, meaning is multivoiced, and thus in the hands of more than one person. In this way he takes a position between those who hold that no one can stake a claim to meaning – as in the relativism of the deconstructionists, where meaning is ever changing, thus creating new meaning – and those who attribute meaning to individuals. Wertsch characterizes Bakhtin's approach to meaning in four ways: (1) a literal meaning does not constitute a point of departure for a theory of meaning, (2) meaning is socio-culturally situated, (3) a text is both monologue and dialogue, and (4) discourse is both bound to authority and internally persuasive.

Literary meaning does not constitute a point of departure for a theory of meaning.

The idea of a literal meaning, which Wertsch (1991) sees as uncontested but also seldom defined, suggests that an isolated word – the word *tout court* – has a certain basic meaning.

In Bakhtin, this idea of a *priori* meaning takes a serious beating.⁶ It is not the word which forms the unit of spoken conversation, but the *utterance*, such as it is 'found' amongst other utterances in the course of a dialogue or text, and such as it always refers to the voice of a speaker. Meaning comes into being in conversation, and not before. Further, an utterance generates meaning, according to Bakhtin, because it comes from one person and goes to another. *A priori* meanings need no speaker and no listener who speaks back. For Bakhtin, an utterance must be addressed. 'Addressivity' is the quality of directing oneself to another person. Without addressivity, an utterance can never arise, and according to Bakhtin, there can simply be no question of an utterance. In this way, an utterance distinguishes itself from language as it is often analyzed by linguists.⁷ It is a necessary condition of addressivity, claims Bakhtin, which entails that an utterance always demands at least two voices, with the result that the dialogue assumes a central place in his conception of meaning.

Parallels may be drawn with Wittgenstein in regard to Bakhtin's qualification of the neutral dictionary meaning: "Philosophers very often talk about investigating, analyzing, the meaning of words. But let's not forget that a word hasn't got a meaning given to it, as it were, by a power independent of us, so that there could be a sort of scientific investigation into what the word really means. A word has the meaning someone or has given to it" (Wittgenstein, 1958, p. 27-28). In order to get at the meaning of a word, a constantly specific context must show where and how it may be used. Wittgenstein uses the term 'form of life' in order to indicate that words are always embedded in particular practices, and cannot be understood apart from them.

This parallel is not coincidental and can be extended into a general parallel, as remarked by Toulmin (1980),⁸ Wertsch (1991),⁹ and Krajewski (1992). According to the latter, a professor of English literature, Bakhtin and Wittgenstein, despite their sharply different and seemingly unrelated worlds, are closely related in their shared consideration of dialogue – the kind of 'dialogue that drives daily life, giving it shape and direction. Both Bakhtin and Wittgenstein realize how language mediates the interplay of giving and taking between people, bringing us together or isolating us from one another. Clarifying the way language and dialogue mediate social interaction is by no means simple. It presupposes that we dare to acknowledge the problematic character of language. This is exactly what Bakhtin and Wittgenstein – each in his own way – have done. They do not agree with those who attempt to validate knowledge by postulating language as clear and unambiguous. Language is not an instrument with which the

⁶ Nevertheless, the idea of literal meaning is not completely rejected, but is put in its place and seen as "a kind of meaning generated by a particular semiotic activity and a particular social language, namely the social language that concerns itself with the kinds of reflective activity found in modern, rational, literate discourse" (Wertsch, 1991, p. 85).

⁷ Bakhtin (1981, p. 292) himself declares that "to study the word as such, ignoring the impulse that reaches out beyond it, is just as senseless as to study psychological experience outside the context of that real life toward which it was directed and by which it was determined".

⁸ See Toulmin (1980).

⁹ "There are several interesting theoretical, and even historical, links between Wittgenstein and Bakhtin" (Wertsch, 1991, p. 105).

¹ Bakhtin considers the utterance to be the 'true' unit of communication (Wertsch, 1991).

² Bakhtin (1986, p. 102). In this connection see Wertsch (1991, p. 54).

³ Wertsch here quotes Voloshinov (1973, p. 102). The question of whether Bakhtin's texts are by him alone or the result of a collaboration is by no means a closed one. In this connection, I refer the reader to Wertsch's explication and standpoint (1991, p. 48-50). It is probably best to assume a form of 'multiple authorship': Bakhtin certainly had a hand in the text appearing under Voloshinov's name, but it is not completely clear to what extent Bakhtin himself actually held the pen.

⁴ According to Bakhtin, one can recognize in the inner conversation – besides passages of monologue – passages which sound very similar to the alternating replies of a dialogue (Wertsch, 1991, p. 54).

⁵ Parody, too, is dialogic: it is a process in which one voice takes over what they other has said, but with a shifting of accent (Wertsch, 1991, p. 55).

burden of knowledge and meaning is weighed; it is not a controllable system of signs. "Wittgenstein and Bakhtin delve into the wild world of language and criticize those who try to keep themselves and language from spinning out of control" (Krajewski, 1992, p. 74). For both, language and the dialogic and interactive forms it entails are simply open: "...there will always be more to say, some way to go on talking" (p. 73). Supporting the openness inherent in an interactive context implies the acceptance of multiplicity and ambiguity, over clarity and order. This is why Bloor (1983) calls Wittgenstein's conception of knowledge a social theory of knowledge. There are in fact various elements in Wittgenstein's writings which point to a social understanding of language. In the first place, we may cite his concept of meaning as use, as found in the *Philosophical Investigations*: "Every sign by itself seems dead. What gives life? In use it is alive" (*Philosophical Investigations*, p. 432); or as the variant of the *Brown Book* states (p. 4), "If we had to name anything which is the life of the sign, we should have to say that it was its use." As noted, Wittgenstein rejects the *a priori* meaning of a sign, seeing the meaning rather in the sign's use; that is, in terms of a social practice.¹⁰ Secondly, and in connection with this contextualized understanding of meaning, Wittgenstein rejects the possibility of a private language (Trigg, 1985). The meaning of a word can only reside in a public language, in which words and their accompanying rules – it is in the use of rules that Wittgenstein presented the now famous idea of 'language games' – spring forth from public practices. These practices receive their meaning through the context in which they are used, or on the basis of shared public criteria. Thus words cannot be understood separately from the practices in which they are embedded – practices which are themselves social institutions. Trigg (1985, p. 25) concludes: "His quest for public criteria as a basis for meaningfulness leads him to stress the social origins of thought and experience. We are what we are largely because of the practices and institutions in which we are immersed. Knowledge does not come from the atomistic experience of individuals but is the product of rule-governed activities, which must be public and social." Thirdly, let us look a little closer at three more specific sections of the *Philosophical Investigations* (p. 240–242), in which it is generally assumed that Wittgenstein is pursuing the social nature of meaning: "If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (quer as this may sound) in judgments."¹¹ Shared meaning – and the role of shared meaning for communication – is not an *a priori* consensus on unchanging agreements, but rather consensus and fine-tuning, *in vivo*, in action, and on the basis of rules and regularity. A fourth point is the idea of language games, which Wittgenstein conceives as a system of communication: "They are more or less akin to what in ordi-

nary language we call games. [...] We are not, however, regarding the language games which we describe as incomplete parts of a language, but as languages complete in themselves, as complete systems of human communication." (Wittgenstein, 1958, p. 81). The various forms of language games afford Wittgenstein an account of the multiplicity of meanings. The social character of language games becomes apparent when compared with Bakhtin's 'social languages', which Wertsch (1991) calls an essential point of comparison between the two. According to Wittgenstein, it is not easy to distinguish one language game from another. In this connection, Wittgenstein includes a reference to a toolbox in which all the tools have a separate function. With words, the situation is the same, despite their seeming uniformity. However, language is applied and used in many different ways. Thus a national language appears to be homogeneous, as do the various social languages and genres associated with them, while in fact they serve quite different functions. Bakhtin here adds the idea that language is socially stratified.¹² Moreover, communication proceeds in accordance with the changes between speaking subjects, and thus according to the succession of the 'real units of speech communication'. However, this alteration changes depending on the social language being spoken, as its borders continually shift, the speaker concludes differently, and another genre is taken up. This is an interactive rather than an individual phenomenon. Besides the semantic and expressive roles of the speaker, an utterance must be related to the other participants in the conversation. A conversation exists somewhere between one person's utterances and another's possible response. Every utterance assumes such a state of affairs either directly or indirectly. Bakhtin uses this element of dialogue in his division of the genres of social languages (Simons, 1990; Wertsch, 1991).

Meaning is socio-culturally situated

Meaning is not atomistically but rather socio-culturally situated. Wertsch associated this idea with the concept that people are relationally oriented. He rejects the notion that isolated individuals create utterances and meanings. People cannot be cut off from their social context. There are no monologues. No snippets. Even in a monologue, the speaker is never alone, never completely responsible for the text: my words are partly the words of others. In this fragment I shall not delve any further into how the person is conceived,¹³ and how this often leads to the study of atomistic meanings.¹⁴ However, as an answer to the question, 'Who's doing the talking?', we know that Bakhtin cannot accept the idea of the self-sufficient human being. One person may speak through another, as Bakhtin illustrates in the processes of

¹² See *The Dialogic Imagination* (p. 290): "In any given historical moment of verbal-ideological life, each generation at each social level has its own language; moreover, every age group has as a matter of fact its own language, its own vocabulary, its own particular axiomatic system that, in their turn, vary depending on social level, academic institution [...] and other stratifying factors."

¹³ See also fragment 9.

¹⁴ I have developed an argument in support of this in my discussion of cultural psychology and narrative psychology (see fragment 7, chapter two).

¹⁰ Not everyone agrees with this interpretation of Wittgenstein. McGinn (1984) in particular has contested the conception of the social nature of meaning as advanced by Winch (1958) and Bloor (1983).

¹¹ Wittgenstein takes this utterance up again in *Remarks on the Foundation of Mathematics*: "We say that, in order to communicate, people must agree with one another about the meanings of words. But the criterion for this agreement is not just agreement with reference to definitions, e.g. ostensive definitions – but also an agreement in judgments. It is essential for communication that we agree in a large number of judgments" (1978, p. 343).

'ventriloquation' and 'multiple authorship'. By ventriloquation, he means the process whereby one voice speaks through another voice or voice-type in a social language. This is a specific form of 'multivoicedness' in which real utterances issue from others' utterances and are born along by a particular social language which we continually make use of when we speak or write. One person's words are always connected to another's: "For any individual consciousness living in it, language is not an abstract system of normative forms but rather a concrete heteroglot conception of the world. All words have the 'taste' of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially changed life" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 293).

By situating the individual speaker within spoken genres and social languages through the principles of dialogue, multivoicedness, ventriloquation, and multiple authorship, Bakhtin makes an important contribution to the development of this principle of socio-cultural situatedness – a principle which, as I have already noted, has also been developed by others (fragment 7). The following two characteristics of meaning also display this principle, and further flesh it out.

The text is both univocal and dialogic

If interaction and communication can be understood as an exchange of texts, then the question is how meaning relates to these texts. Bakhtin makes a distinction between univocal and dialogic functions. Both functions can be put in the context of conceptions of communication within organizational theory. The idea of the univocal text fits the sender/receiver model of communication. Here the information is sent in the form of signals between an encoding sender and a decoding receiver, making use of one or more channels. An underlying assumption is that the receiver can receive the 'intact' message as it was intended, provided the transmission is efficient. Communication is one-way traffic in which the receiver is able to remain more or less passive. He or she receives. Nothing more. The listener and the reader play a trivial role in the process of communication, which becomes a kind of monologue. The accent is on the speaker and the writer and the technology of the transmission. One voice sounds.

In his model, Bakhtin sees a very different dynamic at work in communication and interaction. Firstly, the receiver is active, since meaning is not merely extracted from the decoding. The reader not only receives; he or she also contributes a whole range of words to every utterance, serving as answers. The reader writes and the listener speaks, if you will. Secondly, for Bakhtin a meaning may be polysemic and in motion. The meaning does not exist independently of the interaction, to be packaged, sent, and unpacked, remaining unchanged through-

out the whole procedure. Thirdly, the meaning of an utterance always exists within a specific context, between previous and future utterances and depending on how these have been and will be received. Communication is thus an active and dynamic process in which several voices are simultaneously at work. A heterogeneity of meanings is constantly being created.

Lotman (1988) remarks that these two models do not necessarily have to preclude one another. An utterance or a text can fulfill various functions. Lotman speaks of a functional dualism of texts within a cultural system. A text exists on the one hand to transmit meanings adequately. This fits the transmission model of communication. On the other hand, a text exists in order to create new meanings, a function which fits Bakhtin's dialogic conception of communication. Wertsch (1991) considers both functions to be in a dynamic relationship. There are always multiple meanings at play in an utterance: my words, my message, your understanding, your decoding; between these factors lies a critical difference which actuates dialogue. These differences are not there to be bridged, but rather to be used in exchanges in which we strive to understand one another. I can probe both the effect my words have on my interlocutor, and his or her contributions, and then re-interpret and receive these new additions. We live not to inform one another, but make contact with one another, to get involved, influence, and meet one another, without precluding or underestimating the need to inform. Information processing is in fact only part of the stuff of real life. It remains constantly in balance with what the listener does with it, with the new words which emerge from his or her understanding or desire.

Discourse can be both authoritative and internally persuasive

Bakhtin draws a distinction between authoritative and internally persuasive discourse. In both forms of discourse, he builds further upon the difference between the univocal and multivoiced functions of the text. Here he specifies how voices come into contact with one another and who has the authority to initiate the conversation.

Authoritative discourse, according to Bakhtin, is based on the assumption that utterances and their meanings are fixed. Contact with other speakers, other voices does not yield any additional meaning: it is an empty meeting. In authoritarian discourse there is no counter-word; the listener is required "to acknowledge it (*the utterance*), that we make it *our own*, [...] *our unconditional allegiance*." Examples of authoritarian discourse include religious, political, or moral texts, and the admonitions of parents, guardians, 'grown-ups'. Their words may be taken or left, accepted or disputed, but it is not possible to adopt only a part of them, since utterance and authority are completely melded together. The margin for interpretation and extrapolation of such utterances is minimal; there is no reply possible, no room for further

improvisation: "No play with its borders, no gradual and flexible transitions, no spontaneously creative stylizing variants on it." Such room for improvisation is however offered by the internally persuasive text: "The internally persuasive word is half-ours, and half-someone else's; it allows dialogic interanimation [...] its creativity and productiveness consist precisely in the fact that such a word awakens new and independent words that it organizes masses of our words from within, and does not remain in an isolated and static condition [...]. The semantic structure of an internally persuasive discourse is not finite, it is open; in each of the next contexts that dialogize it, this discourse is able to reveal ever new ways to mean" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 345-346). The imparting of meaning is here an endless sequence, in which the dialogue never falls silent.¹⁵

The idea of conversation in 'other' Bakhtins: De Dijn and Oakeshott

The double model of communication – univocal versus dialogic, authoritative versus internally persuasive – described above, may also be found in an analogous distinction made by De Dijn (1994) in connection with our ability to understand others in the process of communication and dialogue. The Flemish philosopher, De Dijn, sees two models at work, and proposes a third which to my mind recalls Bakhtin without actually referring to him. However, the analogy is not all that surprising, as De Dijn too is primarily inspired by Wittgenstein. His first approach is relativistic, and suggests that we cannot understand the other, since the other is fundamentally inaccessible. I always understand the other in terms of my own background, which necessarily precludes a true encounter or confrontation with him or her. The other is doomed to remain foreign to me. People meet each other in isolation.¹⁶ The second approach cited by De Dijn is the possibility of communication which approaches perfection. Here, people do not live in isolation, and the foreign can become the known. In order to come to such an understanding of others, two possible roads lie open. One road follows the model of 'erklären' and objective understanding, and the other follows the model of 'verstehen' and the empathizing understanding. In fact, however, both roads proceed from the same premise; that is, that the other is for me accessible, transparent, and appropriate. The power of the foreign and its ability to arouse a conversation with the 'other' ebbs away. Do we find ourselves here between Scylla and Charybdis? Between the impossible understanding of relativism and the highly-defined communication of realism?

According to De Dijn, there is a possibility beyond these two (in fact, three) models. Understanding is possible: with this statement he flies in the face of relativism, but in a way

¹⁵ Note the parallel with the distinction made in section three between the univocal and a dialogic functions of communication. It is clear that an authoritarian text can only function within a transmission model of communication, while an internally convincing text assumes a dialogic model of communication.

¹⁶ I shall below further argue for the necessity of the 'foreign' (and 'the creative') based on the ideas of the ideas of Kristeva. Note also that Simons (1990) brings Bakhtin into dialogue with the Bulgarian philosopher. See also Bouwen & Steyaert (1995).

different from that suggested by realism. What are the characteristics of this third form of understanding? Understanding is not completely transparent, it is asymmetrical, antagonistic, and radically limited. To understand 'understanding' at all, we must continually refer to the limits of understanding.

In the first place, understanding is not completely transparent, as is claimed in the *erklären* and *verstehen* models. In the explanatory (*erklären*) approach, the other is objectified, and transparency exists in the ability to predict what the other is going to do or say. However, similar explanations or predictions must be situated in human interaction: "Normal intersubjective contact assumes precisely that we in general do not see the other as a collection of more or less stable and systematic determined reactions to stimuli, which we do our best to keep track of in making plans. [...] The idea of a relentlessly objective relation to others, supported by a scientific-technical foundation, is, far from being an ideal, a nightmare. Such an objective relation can not be generalized; it can at best be sustained in relation to a particular group that is both completely submissive and considered to consist of non-persons" (De Dijn, 1994, p. 89). In the interpretive (*verstehen*) approach, one attempts to imagine the other's point of view. Although such empathy is possible up to a certain point, I can never completely become the other. What the other tells and shows me never appears as a completely transparent totality. And yet, I find empathy necessary, but for reasons other than assuming the other's point of view. It is however possible for the other to come to his or her point of view through my listening, stimulated to expression, in the space he or she receives, interpreting and discovering his or her own voice.

The second characteristic of the way we can understand others dovetails nicely with this idea of incomplete transparency. The other's point of view can never completely become mine, and in fact may not do so. A conversation or an interaction proceeds from an asymmetrical relationship between the parties. A difference is required in order to achieve an exchange. The other must partially elude me. Normally, a lack of understanding is seen as an inconvenient form of interference, an exception that can be remedied. Here, the necessary difference is not something to be neutralized: "The opposite, the attempt to achieve perfect openness and reciprocity, that would be a sign of misunderstanding" (De Dijn, 1994, p. 95). Rather than reciprocity, it is asymmetry which typifies our relations, since my point of view is never yours, and equally, yours is never mine. When these points of view meld, the discovery of the other stops, the conversation runs out, the other ceases to exist.

Understanding the other is in the third place characterized by antagonism, or the possibility of antagonism. Roughly translated, this means that understanding between people can in fact be non-understanding, that understanding has its limits due to fundamental differences and oppositions. De Dijn cites the example of enmity, which suggests not so much a lack of

Beyond an instrumental vision of communication in organization theory

Models of conversation and communication in general are scattered over various areas within organization studies and management theory, and are difficult to unite into a common province that could be called 'organizational communication'. An instrumental vision of communication and language is often employed in these models (Steyaert & Janssens, forthcoming), despite attempts to reorient communication in a different, more interpretative (Putnam & Pacanowsky, 1983) or system-theoretical direction (Watzlawick, Beavin & Jackson, 1967). Organizational communication is increasingly evolving into a strongly interdisciplinary field, with contributions from linguistics, semiotics, cognitive studies, literature, translation, and other disciplines (Putnam, forthcoming). The visions of communication in the organizing process are thus changing quickly. This process was initiated through system-theoretical, interpretive, and social constructionist impulses.

A first important impulse to allow language to evolve beyond an instrumental approach came from the system-theory of communication as first hinted at by Bateson and further worked out by Watzlawick. These two authors met one another in Palo Alto¹⁸ and there developed a new vision of communication which was applied chiefly in therapeutic and clinical settings. The essential adjustment formulated in their theory of communication embraces the idea that communication and communication problems should be considered in terms of the relations and social interactions which occur when people deal with one another, speak, chat, telephone, and write. Communication, relations, and interactions form a dynamic unity of analysis. Communication is no longer the functionalist jamming station in human affairs, but occupies the center, the matrix of human encounters and actions, to be approached in their social coherence. Research into communication should take into account levels of complexity, multiple contexts, and circular systems (Winkin, 1981). Communication cannot be described as the action of an isolated individual, but as a continuous process of successive interactions. These authors thus reject the so-called 'sender-receiver' or 'telegraphic' (Winkin, 1981)

¹⁸ For a review of the development of the 'school' of Palo Alto, see E. Marc & D. Picard (1984). *L'Ecole de Palo Alto*. Paris: Ruz, and also J.J. Winzeale & T. Garcia (1992). *La Rethorique de l'Ecole de Palo Alto*. Paris: Editions du Seuil. Bateson, originally educated as a biologist at Cambridge, reached Palo Alto by way of a detour into anthropology which took him and his wife Margaret Mead to Bali, among other places. In Palo Alto he has produced an impressive series of studies into psychiatry, cybernetics, linguistic philosophy, epistemology, and pedagogical theory. The Austrian Watzlawick studied philosophy in Venice and spent a year in Philadelphia to work on a study of the relation between therapist and patient based on filmed material. He subsequently established himself in Palo Alto in 1961 and there concentrated on communication, developing its theory in the direction of family and system therapy, while at the same time further elaborating it into an epistemology of constructivism. Bateson left Palo Alto the year after Watzlawick arrived there. The book that Bateson wrote together with Ruesch in 1951, *Communication: The Social Matrix of Psychiatry*, is, as Winkin (1981) has remarked, the predecessor of *Pragmatics of Human Communication* by Watzlawick together with Beavin & Jackson, and presents their central proposition: "The essence of our message to the reader is that communication is the matrix within which all human activity is framed" (*"L'essence de notre message au lecteur est que la communication est la matrice dans laquelle sont enchaînées toutes les activités humaines"*) (cited in Winkin, 1981, p. 36).

understanding as it does a tragic incompatibility. This third model thus allows antagonistic relations, such as enmity, hate, confrontation, competition, violence, and opposition to be included in a theory of understanding, and not seen as unfortunate exceptions within a theory where only understanding can exist.

Finally, understanding the other is radically limited. De Dijn speaks of 'the-foreign-in-the-familiar', to describe the unavoidable asymmetry and antagonism that lurks in every conversation, going even further to see the foreign as an intrinsic part of the self. The limits of understanding the other refer back to the boundaries of self-understanding, zones one largely explores through others.

It is through these characteristics of asymmetry, antagonism, and radical limitation that De Dijn (1994, p. 97) rejects the possibility of transparent communication: "Not only is that ideal a chimera, its realization would have to be a bugbear: it would mean the radical uncoupling of the most fundamental distinctions which are deeply linked to the most personal understanding of the self and thus with the very possibility of understanding another self." The foreign is a necessity.¹⁷ The goal is not to assimilate or integrate the foreign, but rather, patiently and tolerantly to keep it involved in the conversation.

In order to illustrate this third model, De Dijn refers to the conversation as elaborated by Michael Oakeshott, and in so doing comes close to the conception of 'open dialogue' described above: "In a conversation, the participants are not involved in an investigation or a debate; there is no 'truth' to be got at, no thesis to be proved, or conclusion to be sought. The participants do not set out to inform one another, or to convince, or to refute. As in the conversation, so in play: the meaning resides not in winning or losing, but in the playing itself, the putting at stake." Such a conception of conversation, not oriented towards knowledge and control, brings us close to the generative function of communication, based on open dialogue. Moreover, in a passing remark De Dijn refers to a theater metaphor to elucidate the idea of conversation: "Individuals participate in a culture as if taking part in a collective drama of which they themselves cannot get an overview, and from which they cannot truly extricate themselves, but in which they do find their happiness or misfortune." In this way, people do not so much interpret previously ordained roles - this they also do - but 'write' their roles in conversation with others, which allows the roles to change, skip ahead, get stuck, become stereotyped. Scripts and scenarios are not written ahead of time by a divine author, but through interaction are thought-out, tried-out, per-formed. At the same time, the cultural context adds its voice in the form of rules of speech and values. It is now high time to put these ideas in the context of organizations.

¹⁷ See also J. Kristeva (1991).

model of communication, the same conclusion we have here reached on the basis of Bakhtin's vision.

Both approaches thus place sensemaking through communication in a relational framework, and yet Bakhtin's approach demands a critical remark to be made on the communication theory of the Palo Alto school. The latter's first axiom, that it is impossible not to communicate, and thus that every action is a form of communication, need not be rejected, but should be supplemented with the opposing axiom that 'communicating is never possible',¹⁹ in Bakhtin's sense that the listener makes the difference, and that for creative communication this difference is necessary. In this sense, the stream of communication can never stop.

A second impulse originating in an interpretive vision of communication also emphasizes the social dimension by pointing up the linguistic character of communication (Putnam & Pacanowsky, 1983). The interpretive 'school' sees organization communication as meaning creation in which social reality is constructed through 'language use'. Here too, the sender-receiver model, based on a functionalist view of organization and communication, is taken to task, since, "meanings, then, do not reside in messages, channels, or perceptual filters. Rather, they evolve from interaction processes and the ways that individuals make sense of their talk. Process is not movement or transmission of messages. Instead, it refers to the ongoing, everchanging sets of interlocked behaviors that create as well as change organizational events" (Putnam & Pacanowsky, 1983, p. 40). Research is here oriented towards language use and in particular towards the way forms such as stories, accounts, and constitute organizing processes.²⁰

A third, social constructionist approach has in particular strongly accentuated the role of 'conversation' in the coming into being of reality and meaning (Harré, Shotter, Zeegers & Jansz). Conversation is at the heart of the interaction process. Harré was one of the first social constructionists to accord to conversation a central place in the construction of reality, in his statement that conversation is the primary human reality. He documented the way people follow the rules and conventions that show up in the conversations they carry on with one another, and how they act by publicly engaging with one another through 'accounts': "It is when the interpersonal flow of activity between them breaks down and they must account for that is, justifiably, their conduct to one another, that the 'situation' of such interpersonal exchanges in a larger social scheme of things become apparent. It is through the necessity for accountability [...] that the social gets into the personal. For it is at a point when 'repairs' are necessary, that a publicly agreed form of order can determine the nature of the repairs made. And it is this which ensures that personal affairs retain a 'rooting' or 'anchoring' in a public order of things" (Shotter, 1993b, on Harré's work (1983)).

¹⁹ From a postmodernist viewpoint of meaning, a more radical version of this axiom is presented, which is, greatly simplified, 'the impossibility of communication', since sensemaking suggests an unending sequence of difference and shifting, without a primary meaning.

²⁰ This idea is elaborated in fragment 20, chapter three.

The conversation is the place where accounts are exchanged and commitments are confirmed. Shotter (1993a, 1993b) is in the process of systematically exploring this idea of 'conversational realities': "central to the social constructionist ontology [...] is the view [...] that the primary human reality is conversation, that one's primary dimension of being exists within a whole *mêlée* of 'self-other relationships'" (1993b, p. 12). In this he takes Harré's work as one of his most important basic texts in his quest for 'the nature of the conversational context' and further draws on Wittgenstein and Bakhtin, Vico and Vyotsky (fragment 20). Shotter has drawn the implications of these texts for the context of, among others, interpersonal relations, therapy, and the civil society. He has applied these lines of thought, in the context of organizations, in a vision of the manager as 'a practical author' (1993a), recently integrated by Weick (1995) in his review of the theory of sensemaking processes. Let us pursue this third, social constructionist view on conversations into the field of organization and in particular into the field of collective entrepreneurial activities.

By leaving behind an instrumental (read univocal) vision of communication in favor of a contextualized, relational, and linguistic approach, an innovative approach to the role of conversation within the management of organizations is made possible. Bakhtin's approach allows us to confront several visions of dialogue and conversation within organization studies.

Towards an organization theory of multivoicedness

Organizing as the 'staging' of conversations is a notion that is gaining ground.²¹ The inscribing of 'conversation' in an organization theory was attempted by Winograd and Flores (1987) who did research into the integration of computers and new technologies and how these can be designed so that they facilitate human work and interaction. Their general proposition is that "there is a role for computer technology in support of managers and as aids in coping with the complex conversational structures generated within an organization" (1987, p. 12); their focus, summarized, is that "we are concerned with the design of new computer-based tools, and this leads us to asking what people do in a domain of linguistic action, [...] in their work, taking the office as the prototypical workplace" (p. 143). On the basis of considerations resulting from a synthesis of the hermeneutical work of Gadamer and Heidegger, from Maturana and Varela's biological theory, and from the speech act theory of Austin and Searle, they arrive at a new vision of language and discourse, which shows how individuals and organizations create themselves in language, and which can guide them in the design of computer systems. Conversation plays a central role here, since "every manager is primarily concerned with generating and maintaining a network of

²¹ A similar tendency may also be noticed in philosophy, especially in Martin Buber's work on the dialogic principle, although Veen (1994) has more recently suggested the possibility of 'philosophy as conversation' - albeit in a more general connection - drawing on Buber as well as Plato, Strasser, Bubner, Levinas, and Marcel.

conversations of action - conversations in which requests and commitments lead to successful completion of work" (p. 144). In opposition to what was generally thought in the field of decision-making and systems analysis, the important thing is to pay attention to communication: "If we look carefully at the process of resolution [...], we see that the key elements are the conversation among the affected parties and the commitment to action that results from reaching resolution. Success cannot be attributed to a decision made by a particular actor, but only to the collective performance" (p. 151). Their description of the managerial work is down-to-earth: "To be open, to listen, and to be the authority regarding what activities and commitments the network will deal with" (p. 151). In this approach as well, we encounter what they call 'conversation for possibilities', opening new backgrounds for the 'conversations for action'. Their response to the question 'what is it possible to do?', "requires a continuing reinterpretation of past activity, seen not as a collection of past requests, promises and deeds in action conversations, but as interpretations of the whole situation - interpretations that carry a pre-orientation to new possibilities for the future. [...] The manager needs to be continually open to opportunities that go beyond the previous horizon" (p. 151-152).

How can this sort of generative conversation be conducted, according to the organization literature? Visions over the role of conversation and dialogue in the functioning of organizations are usually more oriented towards the process of organizational learning (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Isaacs, 1993; Senge, 1990; Schein, 1993) than towards that of creative development. Argyris and Schön (1978), in their theory of organizational learning, make the distinction between model I and model II communication, better known as the models of closed and open communication. In closed communication, the speaker attempts to determine the understanding of the listener. It is authoritative language, leaving the listener/reader no room for a story in reply. On the other hand, in open communication, the speaker wants to provoke answers that are not necessarily contained in the question: the conversation is fundamentally open. The possibilities for an organization to engage in 'double-loop learning' - this means that an organization is ready to contemplate changing the norms that it employs in the organization process - are, according to Argyris and Schön, dependent on the degree to which the interaction process may be characterized by open communication. It consists of removing 'defensive routines' so that valid communication can emerge. Senge (1990) as well starts from the central role of conversations in punctuating 'events' in the ongoing organizing process: "Conversations in organizations are dominated by concern with events; last month's sales, the new budget cuts, last quarter's earnings, who just got promoted or fired, the new product or competitors just announced, the delay that just was announced in our new product, and so on" (Senge, 1990, p. 21). In this series of conversations, Senge makes the distinction between dialogue and debate for the effective functioning of learning teams. "The discipline of team learning involves mastering the practices of dia-

logue and discussion, the two distinct ways that teams converse. In dialogue, there is the free and creative exploration of complex and subtle issues, a deep 'listening' to one another and suspending of one's own views. By contrast, in discussion different views are presented and defended and there is a search for the best view to support decisions that must be made at this time." (Senge, 1990, p. 237). According to Senge, dialogue and discussion complement one another, but teams are not prepared to make a distinction between them or to apply each one differently. Schein (1993) makes a similar distinction between a dialogic and a dialectical manner of conversing. According to Schein (1993), dialogue becomes "a central element of any model of organizational transformation", especially in the context of cultural understanding and organizational learning. Dialogue can be characterized by a suspension of reactions - one is letting the matter go, as perceptions, feelings, judgments and impulses rest for a while - by avoiding false consensus as in discussions, by a parallel process of 'building the group'; and by containment, the building of a climate of trust and openness.

The above reading of these few organization authors' texts dealing with dialogue illustrates how the social dimension of the organizing process can be centered on the description of the dialogue and more generally of the conversations being carried on in the organization. These authors emphasize chiefly the possibilities of 'the' dialogue for organizational learning and creative problem-solving. The generative possibilities which we discerned in Bakhtin's reading of dialogue here receive little attention. Secondly, these organization authors see 'dialoguing' as a question to be worked at by individuals in teams (Schein, 1993; Senge, 1990): "If we did not need to communicate in groups, then we would need not to work on dialogue"²² (Schein, 1993, p. 41). The team meeting may indeed be likened in many ways to the group interplay of a troupe of actors, in which a variety of voices tries to get onto the same wavelength. However, together with Bakhtin I would suggest that every attempt at communication can in principle be conceived of as dialogic, whether it is an interview, a team meeting, the reading of a report, or a monologue. Thirdly, their modeling of dialogue conceives of it as a pragmatic tool that can be applied for training, programs of organizational change, and exercises or group dynamics: it operates as "a sustained collective inquiry into the processes, assumptions, and certainties that compose everyday experience" (Isaacs, 1993, p. 25). Their approach, however, lacks any form of language theory which can explain how flows of meaning move in conversations. Both Senge and Schein are based on Isaacs, who in turn refers to Buber and Bohm among others; but Isaacs realizes that "the development of a theory of dialogue remains in an embryonic stage" (p. 31). Although Schein (p. 43) says that "in dialogue [...], we explore the complexities of thinking and language", there is no consequent exploration of these complexities in their own thinking

²² Or: "Dialogue is, by definition, a process that has meaning only in a group" (p. 48).

and language use. Bakhtin's vision of dialogue can here provide an adequate complement, based on linguistic theory. Finally, the dialogue is strongly slanted towards the possibilities it offers for reaching 'shared meanings': "*An important goal of dialogue is to enable the group to reach a higher level of consciousness and creativity through the gradual creation of a shared set of meanings and a 'common' thinking process.*" (p. 43). Although the distinction is made between dialogue and consensus (Isaacs, 1993), the implicit assumption seems to remain that people ultimately need to reach unequivocalty: "*If it is not valid, in the sense that different members are using words differently or have different mental models without realizing it, the possibilities of solving problems or making effective decisions are markedly reduced*" (Schein, 1993, p. 42). If one assumes, together with Bakhtin, that it is precisely meaning differences that advance dialogue, then a dialogic model of creative development cannot be modeled along the same lines as problem-solving or decision-making. The difference needs to be acknowledged as a necessary feature of a dialogic theory of perpetuated entrepreneurial activity.

Entrepreneurship as a Dialogic Process

Entrepreneurship as dialogic: a reinterpretation of case narratives

Does entrepreneurship have a dialogic basis? In what way can dialogues be generative for the experiencing of innovation? How is the conversation conducted and kept going, and how can one inject into the conversation the new, the foreign, that which is not yet one's own and does not yet belong to the identity of the new enterprise? This is a Bakhtinian manner of translating our research question.

The distinction that Bakhtin makes between a univocal and a multivoiced text is interesting because it allows us to make a re-interpretation of the distinction which we made in our discussion of the coming into being and continuation of entrepreneurship. There we assigned to the organization process a double 'function'; namely, integrative and creative. Concerning the first function, Lotman (1988) says that "*the mechanism of identification, the elimination of differences and the raising of a text to the status of a standard, does not just serve as a principle guaranteeing that a message will be adequately received in a system of communication. No less important is its function of providing a common memory for the group, of transforming it from an unstructured crowd into 'une personne morale', to use Rousseau's expression.*" On the basis of Lotman we can describe the integrative function as a process by which the enterprise builds an identity for itself by making a choice from the multiplicity of meanings available to it. A language that is common, and thus as unambiguous as possible, comes into being and dispenses with differences and variation:

a standard to serve as a point of reference and an opposite pole to creative sensemaking. Through the integrative function an enterprise can build up its memory, keep track of choices, and remember what it was collectively trying to do. Furthermore, the idea of a transition from a motley crew into a moral person (*une personne morale*) is an adequate description of the way a young enterprise transforms itself from collective looseness into a group with a common moral - moral here in the broad sense of cultural norms. This process should be seen neither as unidirectional nor as normative - as if the second stage were preferable, as if one always moved from wilderness to civilization. The collective looseness equally assumes an organizing form, a complex etiquette that is unspoken, largely intuitive, but also resting on previous experiences that have been stored up both collectively and separately. It is impossible for a young enterprise to arise out of nothingness, or for there to be no integrative function in the first phases. It is clear from our case studies that previous work experiences and previous events serve as examples and as new standards. Furthermore, old relations are often transplanted directly to the new business situation. That individuals can quickly and imperceptibly get onto the same wavelength, often without realizing how this has actually come about, or how it works - an awareness of which sometimes arises only when its 'power' seems to be played out - is not only a result of the fact that in the initial years players are forced to practice disciplined teamwork: it also takes place because many past experiences gain present relevance. Secondly, the idea of 'moral persons' is in any case a notion open to relative interpretation, and not a solitary ideal to strive for. This indicates that companies construct moral codes for themselves in the form of cultural norms and also that the group unanimously throws in its lot behind such codes. I have my questions on this point, in the sense that it does not hold true to represent a group as a collective unit, a whole, but rather - with the intention of keeping innovation possible - as a 'loose collective'. In this way the integrative function proceeds with a univocal text.

What does Lotman have to say about the second function, called by Wertsch the dialogic function? We have already noted that new meanings are created by means of this function. When information exchange is seen no longer as a passive event, but as an open dialogue, differences emerge between the person who speaks and the person who listens, who speaks back. This difference is not an 'error', as in the first function, but crucial for generating new meaning. The dialogue is an interplay of words and counterwords. The text that brings with it a dialogue displays an inner heterogeneity, a reflection of the various languages, social and national, which people use. The result is a texture, rich in patterns which allow many voices to be heard together and through one another. The text generates. Here, rather than just being the succession of initiation and reply, as may be observed in direct communications, there is an interaction between language systems, an 'interanimation of voices'. A dialogue is

more than an event involving two localized voices. A text is never simply derived from the individual voices: their interaction with one another is generative: "*Their interaction in the closed world of a text becomes an active cultural factor as a working semiotic system [...] A text is a semiotic space in which languages interact, interfere, and organize themselves hierarchically*" (Lotman, 1988, p. 37). Our interest is equally focused on this second function, through which an enterprise creates new meanings. This assumes that a text is written on a dialogic basis which allows difference and internal heterogeneity to seethe and brew. The creative function that we have provided for can be read here as a dialogic function, recognizable by its multivoiced nature. Creativity is essentially driven by polyphony.

We shall now explore further the question of how the advancement of creative logic consists of the 'writings of a multivoiced text'. The latter is, in my opinion, the process whereby several interpretive repertoires (language games) can develop through one another on the basis of a connecting text. We shall first clarify the notion of an 'interpretive repertoire' and compare it theoretically with Wittgenstein's 'language games' and empirically with 'meaning configurations'. Then we shall go in search of possible complements to the notion of a 'connecting text', using the metaphor of 'polyphony'.

Polyphony as a means of perpetuating creativity

Meaning configurations: interpretive repertoires, language games, and social languages

We made the distinction between meaning configurations and cognitive maps, characterizing the former as contextualized constructions within everyday sensemaking and the latter as consistently mental, intrapsychical representations. We can more precisely situate meaning configurations and describe them by viewing them from a more discursive approach to reality, and by linking this to 'interpretive repertoires' (Marshall, 1994).

Marshall (1994) uses so-called 'interpretive repertoires' as the central feature in the analysis of discourse as derived from Potter and Wetherell (1987) and Wetherell and Potter (1988, 1992) and which accords a constructive role to language in the making of reality. Interpretive repertoires are defined as "*clusters of terms, descriptions and figures of speech and can be understood as the building blocks used to make constructions or versions of cognitive processes, actions, policies and other phenomena*" (Marshall, 1994, p. 93). Within an analysis of discourse, the starting point is the idea that "*any person, policy or event can be described in many different ways and that speakers draw on varying characterizations of 'reality' according to what they are doing*" (p. 92). This manner of speaking and writing can, then, be described as a 'repertoire', the 'linguistic resources' which a speaker uses in order to articulate a particular perspective. A repertoire is the linguistic

framework within which people can represent themselves, just as a theater troupe puts together its performances by drawing on a demarcated totality of plays that it has 'rehearsed' and staged.²³ The similarity with meaning configurations becomes clear when Marshall claims that "*repertoires are conceptualized not as originating from the individual but as culturally and historically embedded and socially communicated*" (p. 93). Repertoire research is oriented not so much towards individuals, but towards the social process through which people make specific constructions and descriptions with and through one another in specific social contexts. A study of the terms of 'interpretive repertoires' sets out "*to examine the constructions and meanings of phenomena in society that are available and drawn on by people as they make sense of various aspects of their lives*" (p. 93). An important point here is to discover what degree of variation in repertoires exists within a particular social constellation. This brings up the question of multivoicedness; that is, what is the repertoire of repertoires by which an organization has learned how to speak?

Interpretive repertoires thus establish the linguistic parameters by which people may or may not be able to get things said (or written), and they draw attention to the variation and richness of modes of expression here available. This thought can be transposed to meaning configurations which we can conceive of as either a univocal or a multivoiced text, in which several interpretive repertoires or - in Bakhtin's terms - voices can be distinguished. Looking at the evolution of young high tech firms through the change in meaning configurations entails being able to convey the succession and alternation of 'voices' that the organization has been able to develop and which simultaneously create its identity. Interpretive repertoires, which can be compared to the 'language games' (Wittgenstein) and 'social languages' (Bakhtin) dealt with above, also suggest that meaning configurations are not isolated maps, but are embedded in sociocultural practices and forms of life. Meaning configurations can then be represented as an interanimation of voices. I shall presently illustrate this in the stories of the high tech firms that were presented in fragment 22. Firstly we still need to ask the question of how these different repertoires can be aligned and how the different voices can interact. In this way we can arrive at an *intersubjective theory of creative organizing*.

Polyphony: a linking text?

We must now ask, How do meaning configurations interact with one another? How can this 'interanimation of voices' be understood? How can a multivoiced text be written? For answers we need to look for ways in which what we in the most general sense could call 'texts' are connected to one another. We understand this connecting as the 'writing' of a

²³ Remark that 'repertoire' fits very well the dramaturgical version of social constructionism.

'connecting text' between texts which are always simultaneously present. Furthermore, as has become evident from the idea of interpretive repertoires and language games, we are dealing with a contextualized communication in which voices are culturally embedded. I mean to give substance to such a connecting text by using the metaphor of polyphony.

We shall turn here to polyphony, a metaphor from music, and explore its sound for multivoiced organizing. Bakhtin himself refers to 'polyphony' in his interpretation of Dostoevski, whose novels he calls "*a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices*" (1984, p. 6).

Polyphony is a metaphor from music where it is one of the oldest musical techniques. While the Flemish Primitives were creating a *furor* throughout Europe with their paintings in the fifteenth and sixteenth century, a form of musical composition was developed which was initially performed in the Low Countries, stimulated by the Burgundian court, but which later via Italy and France became a medium for artistic production throughout all of Europe. This new composition technique was called 'polyphony', which means literally 'multivoicedness'. Two or more independent but organically related voice parts sound against one another. "Traditional" compositions consist of a melodic line and an accompanying line. In a polyphonic score we find multiple melodic lines every line of which in theory could be performed separately. However, by performing all these lines simultaneously, they become a rich and complex musical 'totality'. Next to the independent horizontal lines, vertical lines emerge which form in their turn a totality. In this way, a network of horizontal and vertical lines is created, in which every voice is meaningful on its own, but at the same time gains meaning in relation to the other voices. Characteristic, especially to Flemish polyphony, is the equivalence of all parts: there is no soloist part with accompanying chorus parts. The different voices are created simultaneously.

How then can we think of polyphonic organizing? Polyphony, as a image of totality - read wholeness - being a combination of horizontality and verticality, suggests an organizing process which sustains the development of multiple (horizontal) voices instead of a dominant voice which creates the rest of the organization to its own likeness. Every voice has its own 'melody' and 'rhythm'. But the vertical dimension suggests that these voices are neither completely separate nor loosely coupled, as if meanings were isolated and uncoupled. The development of one voice (or interpretive repertoire) is only possible through the development of another one. Every voice 'needs' the other voices for its own identity. These voices are not in competition with each other, but difference and contrast between voices is necessarily required and stimulated; if not, the play becomes univocal. Bakhtin is also aware of this kind of 'relational autonomy': "*My voice can mean, but only with others: at times in chorus, but at the best of times in a*

dialogue." It is a polyphonic performance which starts from the autonomy of every voice and is built up through the interaction process from within the group. Every voice is confident in the independence of the other voices, so that each voice can resound with its full potential through and against the complex web of other simultaneously created voices. In line with this principle, polyphonic music was and is generally performed without conductor, but with a chorus of 'independent' voices, where every voice is owner of his/her own performance and where a '*maestro di cappella*' indicates the tactus from within the choir.

Approaching the creating (and creative) enterprise from this polyphonic metaphor asks for the awareness of a so-called 'voice-development' or what Bakhtin calls the creation of "*the speaking personality, the speaking consciousness*." The main aim of organizing an entrepreneurial activity collectively asks that every voice concentrate on and be owner of its own 'part' and be able to 'find' and to create its voice through interaction with other voices. The musical metaphor of voice gives us an indication of how such an undertaking can be delicate and equivocal. Typical for a voice is its directness, and its need for presence. A voice wants, needs to be directly audible, again and again. But this makes a voice also vulnerable and dependent on the tone of the day, the night. Never the same, because a voice is always in the process of finding out what it is inventing, singing out, expressing, rounding off. A voice contains the world in itself, and expresses this world by breathing life into words. Development of the young enterprise through voice-development means creating space so that every 'part' learns to reveal itself to others and to itself.

Illustrations²⁴

A look at the different stories of Quartet and Vision reveals how the multivoiced character of the organizing process can take very different shapes. From the start, an attempt was made to tell the *Quartet story* as a multivoiced story in which the four friends tried to develop and to steer the firm collectively. The Quartet story shows the difficulty of such a task: it took them many years to become a team with complementary and different visions and skills. Especially in the first years, they managed to act as a polyvalent team, as each of them developed a complementary profile and took on responsibilities spontaneously. However, as the need for integration became obvious, the relationships in the team were subjected to a heavy burden and the coherence between the different voices was lost. Both the complementarity of the voices and their differences became disadvantages. When a new entrepreneur took over,

²⁴ Another illustration can be found in fragment 25. It concerns the Coat-case, where the intervention from the entrepreneur can be seen as a way to install a polyphonic logic, as he gave every person of the firm the responsibility of a project, which he or she needs to steer themselves. This allowed the specificities of every project to be 'voiced', while previously it had been the entrepreneur himself who installed priorities between the different projects, and authored the script of each of these projects.

the potentially multivoiced structure of Quartet disappeared; one strong voice resounded with little space for different voices. However, the initial voice of Quartet, which had emerged from an entrepreneurial endeavor, remained at the core of the firm, albeit in a much weaker form, after the addition of a badly needed complementary voice emanating from the professional world.

In the *Vision story*, a polyphonic competence was acquired gradually. The different voices of R&D, sales, and production entered one at a time. Each voice continued to develop through interaction with the other voices. It should be noted that after the rapid departure of the first financial director, the entrepreneur, himself an engineer, decided to integrate this financial aspect into his role, with the advantage that he himself would first master the core issues inherent in these activities. It took many years before the financial voice was passed on to a financial director. It was as if this entrepreneur had rehearsed this voice himself quite intensively. The interaction between voices was enacted through the daily conversations inside and outside the management team. Although the coherence between voices was rehearsed in the management team, it was difficult to balance between 'too little difference and too much difference'. There was a long evolution in the way this management team was performing and dealing patiently with the tension between diversity and homogeneity. Through the use of strategic days, the team was able to create a transitional zone where new diversity could be allowed, while uncertainty could be held through mutual support. The tendency was to reduce diversity and to reach a point of homogeneous talking, with little space for a 'counter-voice'. In the relationships with the larger firm too, it proved difficult to build a constructive difference between the perspectives of the management and non-management levels. The development of every separate voice, with the other voices as background, was often difficult because of this gap. For instance, the development of the academic voice was at a certain moment threatened as there was neither space for creative developmental work, nor a chance for more (formal) responsibilities. It seemed that there was not always space for the non-management level to talk back, and to be responsive to the ideas, actions, and proposals of the management team. Both points were fundamentally questioned. On the management level, a return to greater diversity was seen to be appropriate, while at the non-management level, the urge to revoice the dialogue was considered a highly important issue to be dealt with, for the further development of the firm.