



Perpetuating Entrepreneurship through Dialogue

- A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST VIEW -

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Chapter two

Guideline. This chapter explores social constructionism as a conceptual framework for studying the organizing process of entrepreneurship in general and for approaching our problem formulation concerning the continuation of collective creativity in particular. Social constructionism is an emerging theoretical perspective within psychology (Gergen, 1985, 1994), organization studies (Morgan, 1986; Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992), and the social sciences in general (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Holstein & Miller, 1993). How this perspective can be both used and further developed within the field of entrepreneurship, is a general challenge of this study.

The aim of this chapter is to develop a conceptual framework which can guide us in addressing our problem formulation into more precise and demarcated research questions in line with a social constructionist discourse. As the aim of our research is to develop theoretical statements on the organizing process of perpetuated entrepreneurship, an exploration of the relationship between a conceptual framework and theory development is first necessary. *Fragment 5* develops such an argument on the status and possibility of theory development.

A conceptual framework in social constructionist terms is explored in three movements. In a first movement, fragments from the biography and bibliography of social constructionism will be bracketed in order to focus on questions such as: Where does social constructionism come from? What is its intertextual anchorage? What does it stand for? and, How can we circumscribe its main persuasions? In *fragment 6*, we shall try to recognize the social constructionist voice by retracing earlier and related theoretical perspectives and texts, and by listening to different constructivist and constructionist tones.

A second movement in *fragment 7* elaborates one of the persuasions which sees the social construction of reality as a form of narrative sensemaking. This account of the role of narratives in social interaction is at the same time an attempt to ground the narrative dimension of meaning in relation to other ways of 'reading meaning'.

A third movement orients our exploration of social constructionism in *fragment 8* towards the organizational domain where we shall formulate a process theory of organizing and elucidate in particular the centrality of social processes in the dynamics of organizing.

By aligning these three movements, we shall formulate, in *fragment 9*, four social constructionist persuasions and directions which can orient us in studying perpetuated entrepreneurship as a collective endeavor, and we shall reformulate our research questions into a process language, using Weick's social theory of organizing, in order to move to a discussion of our research methodology.

Constructing a Conceptual Framework and Developing Theory

Towards a Pragmatic Account of Theory Development

In chapter two, I shall outline the social constructionist approach, to answer the need for a conceptual framework for studying the entrepreneurship process,¹ and with the intention of arriving at a theory development which addresses collective entrepreneurship. Before developing such a conceptual framework, which can help us to formulate a theoretical reading of case studies, we must first explore the relationship between a conceptual framework and theory formation, and look more generally at the status of theory (formation). This fragment is intended as a form of theory development about theory development.

As there is no way of observing the world independent of theory, understanding the theorizing process is no longer a luxurious problem for philosophers of epistemology. Accepting the researcher as an active agent, who constructs accounts of the world through the ideas and themes incorporated in forms of knowledge (Hughes, 1990), does not so much imply the typical complaints of the danger of (total) relativism, but requires self-reflection on theory construction and the generation of tactics which might be fruitful in acting out theories. It is a matter of doing justice to the idea that the essence of re-search is creating knowledge more than verifying it, and acknowledging the work of the researcher, who is more 'truth-maker' than 'theory-tester' or 'fortune-teller'. Research is a creative act in itself. The creation (generation) of theoretical concepts is a necessary part of the researcher's professional and personal development. Furthermore, the researcher's knowledge and that of the average earthling should not differ, but should be in accord with each other. The sense inherent in common sense knowledge and scientific knowledge is discovered through their interaction, not through their segregation. Theory then ceases to be the researcher's privileged domain. In the following insight, Harré champions a similar broadening in the development of every individual: "*If to be a person is to have a grasp of theory, an important part of personal psychology will overlap with the philosophy of science. The study of how theoretical concepts come to have meaning will be a matter of common interest*" (Harré, 1983, p.24; de Laet, 1990). Knowing who I am demands reflection on how I know things and how I speak about myself; this could be called a question of 'common sense epistemology'.

¹ The role of a conceptual framework in the research process will be situated in the chapter dealing with methodology (see fragment 10).

At a moment when skepticism about theory as a form of 'grand narrative' or 'authoritarian discourse' is on the rise, the whole project even having been written off - 'theory is dead' is the claim made by sociology (Seidman, 1991) and social psychology (Stainton Rogers, Stenner, Gleeson & Stainton Rogers, 1995) - it would seem, on the basis of the above outline, that we are in danger of throwing out the baby with the bathwater. It would be more prudent to determine which sort of theory is useful and necessary, and to provide an account of how theory can be developed pragmatically. I shall present three elements that could help to realize such a pragmatic account of theory development. In the first place, I shall approach the role of the conceptual framework and how, in my opinion, it is essential to theory formation. It will be argued that theory development is a construction process which runs parallel with the research circle. Secondly, I shall present four principles which can make the process of theory development more accessible. A first principle is based on a critical discussion of the grounded theory approach which has as its clear point of departure the advancement of theory generation within social scientific research. A second, somewhat forgotten principle, next to deduction and induction, is abduction, which has recently been rehabilitated by epistemology. A third principle deals with the possibility of local theories parallel with general knowledge. A final principle considers the use of metaphors, mini-theories, and stories as concrete but in part alternative pretexts for theory formation. Thirdly, a transition will be made from the generation of theories towards the development of a generative theory, a theory that will create new possibilities for management. In summary, these principles should serve to indicate how to get down to work, as we generate theory applicable to the organizational process of collective creativity in high tech firms.

The Necessity of a Conceptual Framework That Can Move

As frameworks are the very 'stuff' of social science,² constructing a conceptual framework which guides the researcher in formulating research questions, going to the field, analyzing data, and accounting for insights and propositions, cannot be undervalued. Such a framework is an important guide which accompanies the researcher during the course of the research cycle.³ A conceptual framework contains the researcher's preconceptions, the theoretical literature as it is enacted and interpreted by the researcher and his professional environment, and a more explicit and elaborate set of conceptions on which the researcher wants to focus.

² See Geertz (1983, p. 4) "As frameworks are the very stuff of cultural anthropology".

³ We will present the research cycle as a research circle in fragment 10.

Three visions can be distinguished in the status of theory as one prepares to do research work. First, and most accepted, is the idea that the researcher summarizes the main theoretical visions of the research problem, and tries to inscribe the problem formulation and the research question of his/her study in the so-called state of the art of the research literature and to show the gaps one is aspiring to fill in. A second approach, espoused by scholars of the grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1992), suggests that researchers enter the field with as little theoretical baggage as possible, as this could contaminate, constrain, inhibit, stifle, or impede the effort to generate concepts: "*The dictum in grounded theory is, there is a need not to review any of the literature in the substantive area under study*" (Glaser, 1992, p.31). Thirdly, some scholars (Denzin, 1989) advise researchers to start by deconstructing and critically analyzing the existing literature and its prior conceptions of the phenomenon.

For pragmatic reasons we would like to reject all three of these 'procedures'. The first view assumes that theory is static and can be thrown together, and that research is linear and cumulative. This is difficult to maintain according to a social constructionist epistemology (see below). Knowledge would appear to lie behind us, needing to be filled up. It is certainly necessary for a researcher to get his or her bearings in the literature, but such situating is an active and dynamic searching process that takes place throughout the whole research project. It should however be retained that theory plays a part right from the 'In the beginning...'. The second view starts from the in fact naïve suggestion that a person can do research in the absence of theory, and rejects the role of pre-conceptions. The point here being made is that in generating (preferably) new grounded concepts, a researcher attempts to limit the 'baggage' of 'publicly made' theoretical notions. It is worthwhile to note that Glaser's research does in fact recommend a great deal of reading, albeit it texts from so-called 'unrelated literature'. As researcher it is unclear to me how it can be said (before the fact) when literature is or is not related. Furthermore, Glaser describes this elsewhere as 'reading for ideas, style and support'. It is 'allowed' that other texts make a researcher alert to ideas, style, and his or her own place in the larger field. We might indeed ask why a researcher ought to be immune to literature when it comes to content and theory while form and style are allowed to have a strong influence: "*How to think sociologically for the style the researcher may write is best found by reading the kind of piece that he will write. The researcher should read [...] dissertations when writing a dissertation*" (Glaser, 1992, p. 36). First and foremost, Glaser thus advises researchers to write in a style true to their genre, and rather than developing a personal style, to imitate that of others. In fact, it seems Glaser believes content and form to be independent of one another.⁴ Glaser is thus another participant in the quest for research in spite of the researcher. The third view is

⁴ The relationship between content and form will be considered more closely in fragment 14.

probably the most realistic strategy for gaining distance - as outlined in the second view - from theoretical knowledge as developed according to the first principle; but at the same time it is probably the least pragmatic, since it is not always easy for neophyte researchers to begin with a 'deconstructive' reading of the theoretical interpretations of the research subject - interpretations which themselves have barely been established.

As an alternative, it is argued that theory is not a matter of 'before or after', but that it needs to be embedded in the complete research process. Therefore, I shall draw a circle from the initial conceptual framework to the generation of theoretical accounts. The conceptual framework evolves from an active construction of a more or less pre-conceptual, unvalidated, independent theoretical framework into a theoretical, interpretive grounded account, a result of the interaction between researcher and research field, between researcher and professional field. The conceptual framework thus accompanies the researcher(s) until the establishment of a theoretical account that relativizes earlier pre-conceptions, questions or by-passes the 'existing' theory, or makes the research field that much more insightful, inspiring it to further action - or all three of these together. The question becomes then how the procession through this circle with the aim of theory development can be made more easy. Four principles or 'operational notions' are suggested which can support theory development in a pragmatic way: the principles of interpretive grounded theory, abduction, local theory and the use of metaphors.

Pragmatic Principles in Theory Formation

A critical view of the grounded theory approach⁵

Grounded theory should be seen relative to the observation that most researchers never develop independently theoretical accounts. In grounded theory the focus is on theory development or 'discovery', in contrast to theory testing which is usual within the verification-paradigm. The grounded theory approach thus gives emphatic preference to theory development as a consequence of scientific research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), and appears to have been a useful approach for the generation of grounded organizational theory (Turner, 1983; Martin & Turner, 1986) which here is applied for generating a theory of entrepreneurship in high tech firms. As I have already suggested above, an objection needs to be registered. I am proposing an adapted version which consists of taking account of the interpretative flank of grounded theory development, which Addison (1992), amongst others,

has in the literature identified by the name of 'interpretive grounded theory'. The adaptation is based on three mutually related arguments. In the first place, the inductive principle held by Glaser and Strauss is no longer tenable, as demonstrated by Popper's critique of inductivism (Goossens, 1991). As an alternative, I am suggesting the abductive principle, which I shall expand on in a separate point below. Secondly, we can only with difficulty assume that the researcher discovers a reality - as implied by the use of the word 'discovery' in their title - as if theoretical concepts without the intervention of the researcher emerge out of the empirical material. A grounded theory approach should thus be supplemented by an interpretive rider, so that justice can be done to the interpretive necessity of a social study and to the researcher's interpretive possibilities. At least Strauss (and Corbin, 1994, p. 277) admits, it should be noted, that "Glaser and Strauss overplayed the inductive aspects. Correspondingly, they greatly underplayed both the potential role of extant (grounded) theories and the unquestionable fact (and advantage) that trained researchers are theoretically sensitized. Researchers carry into their research the sensitizing possibilities of their training, reading, and research experience, as well as explicit theories that might be useful if played against systematically gathered data." It remains striking how they minimize this excessive belief in induction promulgating an argument about experienced researchers, as if the rookie researchers plunged naïvely into reality, without expectations, with an empty gaze, undisturbed by prior understanding. In the third place, there are a number of epistemological and ontological problems with the way Glaser and Strauss approach and formulate issues. However, neither Glaser nor Strauss have been very productive in relating grounded theory methodology to paradigmatic discussions or to expose its epistemological and ontological assumptions. Although Smaling and Van Zuuren (1992) mention that grounded theory research has been developed as a qualitative research strategy that is appropriate for symbolic interactionism, one gets the impression from the writings of Glaser and Strauss (1967) that grounded theory fits into the correspondence paradigm, and conceives its grounded concepts as representing some outer reality. This is confirmed by Addison (1989) who remarks that "grounded theory seems to hold the naïve realist assumption of inductively discovering some 'basic social process' that 'emerges' to accurately describe, at a theoretical level, something that corresponds with 'reality'." Czarniawska-Joerges (1992), too, remarks that although Glaser and Strauss contributed to the critique of positivism, they can be suspected of a 'postpositivist mirage', treating grounded theory in the end much too generally (and much too seriously). How else could she have interpreted Glaser's comment (1978, p. 4) that "a theory should be to explain what happened, predict what will happen and interpret what is happening in an area of substantive or formal inquiry?" More recently, Strauss and Corbin (1994, p. 279) have rejected a positivist application of grounded theory: "A theory is not the formulation of some discovered aspect of a pre-existing reality

⁵ A description of the grounded theory principle as a methodological approach can be found in fragment 13.

'out there', which is based on an authoritarian argument: "To think otherwise is to take a positivistic position, that [...] we reject, as do most other qualitative researchers." However, Strauss and Corbin go on to provide only a rough outline of what a theory actually is on an epistemological and ontological level, stating briefly that "truth is enacted."

I would like, then, to conclude that grounded theory is evolving as qualitative and anthropological methods are being developed into a more varied palette of grounded theory 'practices'; that it can be fruitfully integrated into a more interpretive tradition, as illustrated by the work of Addison (1989, 1992) and Czarniawska-Joerges (1992), and that it can be compatible with a social constructionist viewpoint, if one considers grounded theory more in a dialogical than in a technical mode.

Abduction and the usable hypothesis

A second principle implies a form of abductive understanding, which departs from the idea that theory formation goes further than induction, and even further than interpretive induction. Theory formation as 'research by abduction' was largely thought out by Peirce (see also fragment 6). Peirce works out a triadic perspective in the ontological (Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness) and epistemological areas and on the level of sign definition (symbol, index, icon; each of these is further conceived of triadically). Epistemologically seen, Peirce fits abduction in between induction and deduction. Abduction is a way of thinking that is recognizable in Popper's more widely known conception of 'conjectures and refutations' (Schuyt, 1993). Among its dictionary definitions is the following: 'a not strictly logical manner of reasoning by means of which one can arrive at a usable hypothesis'.⁶ Abduction goes further than induction, which belongs to the empiricist perspective. There, the hope was "to develop a theory of rational induction, one which would allow the scientist to move logically from careful observation to the level of theoretical description and explanation" (Gergen, 1991b, p. 14). Popper (1968, Goossens, 1991) thoroughly criticized this view by stating that in the context of discovery, room had to be made for creative intuition. Theory can thus not be postulated *a posteriori* solely on the basis of data. Data only receive meaning from the theoretical conceptions of a researcher who does not remain passive. This is Peirce's basic insight. He describes abduction as "the process of forming an explanatory hypothesis. It is the only logical operation which introduces any new ideas; for induction does nothing but determine a value" (cited by Derksen, 1993, p. 70). Abduction allows a hypothesis to be adapted and improved, as opposed to the correction of a judgment about the measure of truth in a hypothesis: such an adaptation demands a new idea, which induction cannot supply (Derksen, 1993). Abduction

⁶ Translation of the definition from the standard Dutch dictionary, Van Dale.

is thus also a suitable principle for theory development: "Abduction [...] seeks a theory. Induction seeks for the facts" (Peirce, cited by Derksen, 1993, p. 102). The addition of a new idea becomes then a question of the researcher's creativity and will to understand: "Understanding implies feeling, tact and good taste, sensitivity, and imagination. Abduction draws on a reasonableness that possesses all these qualities. Peirce's conception of abduction can be included in an epistemological tradition which attaches great importance to a 'broadened reasonableness' into which may be fit the notions of intuition, conjecture, habit, and feeling" (Parret, 1993, p. 236).⁷ A researcher is thus simultaneously critical and constructive, by alternating between 'data' and 'distractions', between 'findings' and 'assumptions'. A hypothesis takes you down a road that you yourself consider to be plausible, you integrate up to a point what others have contributed, and you try to steer clear of what others have seen as possible explanations. In this process, abduction is developed through the asking of questions: "Abduction demands a 'coming-and-going' strategy within a reasoning that is essentially dialogic: the reasoning language-user/thinker splits in two in an internal game of question and answer" (Parret, 1993, p. 241).⁸ According to Parret,⁹ (1993, p. 236) abduction needs not be limited to the theory of knowledge: "All the same, it seems to me that its area of application can be broadened to theories of meaning and understanding in their widest extent. Abduction then becomes an operational notion, not only of the theory of scientific discovery but as well of the theory of understanding meaning, at which point it concerns all types of discourse and cultural production."¹⁰

Local theories

Theories have traditionally been seen as meaning structures aimed at generality. However, an awareness of these meaning structures as locally circumscribed as well, has grown recently in important ways. One of its first advocates was Clifford Geertz¹¹ whose vision was initially oriented to ethnography, but has expanded to include the social sciences (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). He argues that "to an ethnographer, sorting through the machinery of distant ideas, the shapes of knowledge are always ineluctably local, indivisible from their instruments and their encasements. One may

⁷ "Verstaan impliceert feeling, tact en goede smaak, gevoeligheid en verbeelding. De abductie doet beroep op een redelijkheid die al deze hoedanigheden bezit. De Peirceaanse abductie kan worden ingeschreven in een kenniswetenschappelijke traditie die groot belang hecht aan een 'verbrede redelijkheid' waar de noties van intuïtie, vermoeden, gevoorte en gevoel kunnen worden ingepast."

⁸ "De abductie vereist een 'geen-en-komen' strategie binnen een redenering die wezenlijk dialogisch is: de redenerende taalgebruiker/denker ontdubbelt zich in een innendag spel van vraag en antwoord."

⁹ I shall here deal with only a limited part of the abductive strategy in the context of the theory of understanding, as developed by Parret.

¹⁰ "Toch lijkt het dat het toepassingsgebied ervan kan worden uitgebreid tot de betekenis- en verstaanswetorie in haar grootste omvang. De abductie wordt dan een operationele nootie niet alleen van de theorie van de wetenschappelijke ontdekking maar tevens van de theorie van het verstaan van betekenis, en dan zou dit alle types van discours en culturele productie betreffen."

¹¹ Geertz (1983, p. 215) elaborated on the idea of local knowledge for the discipline of law, leading to a kind of 'hermeneutics of legal pluralism': "Law, I have been saying, somewhat against the pretensions enoded in woolsack rhetoric, is local knowledge; local not just as to place, time, class, and variety of issue, but as to accent - vernacular characterizations of what happens connected to vernacular imagining of what can".

veil this fact with esametical rhetoric or blur it with strenuous theory, but one cannot really make it go away" (1983, p. 4). As the corpus of local knowledge coalesces into a local culture, interpretive practice reflects local circumstances and resources (Holstein & Gubrium, 1994, p. 268). All knowledge is always local, situated in a local culture and embedded in organizational sites. Generalizability is precisely a form of context-independence, or in an even stricter sense, of a contextuality. Scientific knowledge of the principle of 'local knowledge' is thus contextual, localizable, and public, without in the process being general. A local theory can take several forms: besides the metaphor and the mini-theory (see next point), the story is also a good illustration of a typical form for a local theory, since it is bound to context and audience, without preventing us from re-telling such story/theories elsewhere.¹² The principle here at work is that there is no acceptance of "a social reality which can be discovered in each society independently of the vocabulary of that society, or indeed any vocabulary, as [if] the heavens could exist whether men theorized about them or not" (Taylor, 1978, p. 174; quoted in Hughes, 1990). 'Knowledge in context' means in the first place that the linguisticity of language is appreciated, without first having to assume a universal language (Bouwen & Steyaert, 1995). The consequences of a local-knowledge view are threefold, according to Geertz (1983, p. 215-216): first, concrete differences need not be reduced to general abstractions; second, identical phenomena are not located masquerading under different names; and third, conclusions are linked to the management of difference, not to the abolition of it. Knowledge development then becomes a matter of differentiation, in which we do not treat the differences between bodies of knowledge as to be avoided at all costs, but rather as an expression of the 'place-bound' nature of knowledge production. The exception becomes the rule. Geertz is in fact far from pessimistic about the generative effect of this principle, which favors variety over generalizability, if only we can first succeed in teaching ourselves how to accept and apply so much perspectivism and discretion: "It is from the far more difficult achievement of seeing ourselves amongst others, as a local example of the forms human life has locally taken, a case among cases, a world among worlds, that the largeness of mind, without which objectivity is self-congratulation and tolerance a sham, comes. If interpretive anthropology has any general office in the world it is to keep reteaching this fugitive truth" (p. 216). In this way, the theory of generalizability becomes almost a reductionist principle, through which the world is not enriched with greater knowledge, but is in fact reduced to more minimalist proportions.

Of metaphors and mini-theories

A fourth and most concrete principle considers the tactics recommended by Weick (1979) for theorizing about organizations, which consist of the use and mutation of metaphors and the formulation of mini-theories. Both tactics breed a certain diversity in the work of the researcher, who is able to think using a number of different metaphors and can come up with various theories instead of one general theory.¹³ Within the organizational domain, metaphors are increasingly seen as adequate forms to organize and generate knowledge (Morgan, 1986; Mangham & Overington, 1987; Tsoukas, 1993; Alvesson, 1993b). The place of the metaphor in theory development can be accounted for in two ways. On the one hand, the various theories of organization can be conceived of according to the researcher's metaphorical perspective: "Schools of thought in social science, those communities of theorists subscribing to relatively coherent perspectives, are based upon the acceptance and use of different kinds of metaphor as a foundation for inquiry" (Morgan, 1980, p. 607). In this way, Morgan (1986) arrives at a re-grouping of the organizational literature around eight basic metaphors, without being absolutely exhaustive (see fragment 3; Steyaert, 1992b). On the other hand, organizational researchers employ metaphors as a form of theory development, as a synthetic and powerful manner of generating theory. Here, language is used figuratively rather than literally. An analogy between two systems of meaning is laid down, so that an attempt can be made to transfer the central characteristics of one phenomenon to a second. In this way, numerous organizational phenomena can be approached through other, often more familiar fields. To see organizations as machines makes it possible to use one's knowledge of engineering to look at the functioning and management of a company as a form of engineering. The aim is not always to describe and understand a phenomenon better, but also to learn how to view a phenomenon in new ways. To say that renewing large organizations is the same as 'when giants learn to dance', as Kanter (1989) has, may seem a fanciful statement at first glance, but it actually spares us long-winded arguments and, by drawing on our fantasies of the ways giants would dance, teaches us in a pithy way that (1) organizations display the characteristics of giants: they are big and clumsy, (2) the job of innovating is no picnic, and is as difficult as a dancing lesson for giants, with all the trampling of feet, constant instability, and danger of falling that that entails; and (3) innovation can be festive and athletic, with a lightly artistic quality, since dancing is done at parties, demands a certain physical exertion, and is also an art. Metaphors are thus not arcane literary figures of speech, but rather, our language is drenched in them (Camp & Erens, 1991; Morgan, 1993; Tsoukas, 1991; Van Aken & Germans, 1993). At the same time, it does not go without saying that metaphors, still in one way more at home in the world of poetry and

¹³ I shall consider metaphors in particular.

¹² ... an essentialist form will be discussed in fragment 7.

rhetoric, may be considered suitable for scientific language use which attempts to be rigorous and veracious. Criticism of the use of metaphors in theory development can come from two quarters (Tsoukas, 1993). One group concentrates on the idea that metaphors belong to literary and not to scientific language use. Metaphors cannot be considered equal to theory; at best they can function as 'precursors to theories' (Bacharach, 1989). Why? "To be of use in the development of theory in organizational behavior, a metaphor must go beyond description and be a useful heuristic device" (Bacharach, 1989, p. 497). The next step in research is to arrive at specific propositions and hypotheses. Opponents of metaphors are however of the opinion that figurative language is not suitable for this task and that only non-figurative language can help to formulate propositions and hypotheses in a clear and unequivocal way (Bourgeois & Pinder, 1983; Pinder & Bourgeois, 1982). They claim that it would hardly be prudent to encourage an over-development of metaphors, but insist rather that "a conscious effort must be made to dispense with metaphorical language, especially in the more mature phases of a scientific inquiry" (Tsoukas, 1993, p. 326). A second group concentrates on the plethora of metaphors - there is in fact a seemingly endless quantity - that can be imagined, all of which have no precise value and would appear to be equally valid. Metaphors can easily be potential ideological distortions, when they reflect the view of the dominant coalition, and when they are not able to recognize 'social inequality and domination', nor show 'political opportunities for liberation and emancipation' (Tinker, 1986, quoted in Tsoukas, 1993). The underlying idea is that knowledge creation never takes place in a social vacuum, with the result that metaphors reflect the perspective of a person or a party.

From Theory Generation to Generative Theory

The purpose of research is not only to generate theory, but also to generate what Gergen calls 'generative theory'. Gergen (1978, p. 1346) defines the generative capacity of a theoretical account as "the capacity to challenge the guiding assumptions of the culture, to raise fundamental questions regarding contemporary social life, to foster reconsideration of that which is 'taken for granted', and thereby to furnish new alternatives for social action." Developing a generative theory goes against the positivist assumptions that give pre-eminence to 'the fact' - assumptions that demand theoretical verification, deny the relevance of temporality, and avoid a valuational positioning of the detached researcher. The criterion shifts to that adjustable portion of traditional habits in a particular place, to any new actions that may become accessible, and to the way the researcher equipped with theory generation learns how to participate in the

process of interaction. Osbeck (1993) contrasts a generative approach with a psychology that is modulative in orientation and not explicitly concerned with social change. The generative power of theorizing has a double working, i.e., emancipatory and creative. On the one hand, there can be a generative effect regarding manners of representation and actions which fix reality and ultimately reify it. On the other hand, the generative effect can consist of creating possible worlds and possible actions which do not serve to describe the past but are inspirational for the present and the near future. The generative potential of an enterprise consists not only of maintaining control on the current path, but also of keeping permanently in touch with the field of possibilities, and being able to question and replace these current visions and habits. A researcher strolling about in a company not only points out what is happening there but also what is *not* happening or what *could* happen. It is not a question of determining reality but of opening it to new constructions. Within the organizational domain the idea of 'generative theory' has already been studied in depth and applied in the form of 'appreciative inquiry' (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987)¹⁴ and methods for organizational change which make use of context variation and de-reification (Van Dijk, 1989; Voogt, 1990). A third form of generative theory, which is a combination with the fourth principle, uses 'generative metaphors' in which Schön (1979) particularly emphasizes the process dimension of metaphors. This generativity emerges when the metaphor is approached as "a process by which new perspectives on the world come into existence" (p. 254). Metaphors have an important creative and generative power, which lead to new insights and images: "One way of developing social science and organization theory might be to take new looks at established metaphors and create new metaphors for these" (Alvesson, 1993b, p. 128).

Besides the need for generative theoretical accounts, it should be asked if social constructionism can be seen as a generative conceptual framework in general, and approached as an entrepreneurial phenomenon in particular. Osbeck (1993) concludes that the concept of generativity is compatible with a social constructionist agenda, but she has some reservations. In her opinion, generativity as a pragmatic standard is not applicable in an approach which promotes a kind of relativism not compatible with pragmatism itself. Generativity is linked to social utility. A distinction is made between extreme and more moderate versions of social constructionism, represented respectively by Gergen and partly by Shotter on the one hand, and by Harré and Bruner on the other hand.¹⁵ However, the objection of moral or conceptual relativism can be carefully balanced (Gergen, 1994, p. 76-84). Furthermore, it is hard to see how to delineate external standards by which cultural practices can be evaluated, as Osbeck suggests, and in the using of which one is still pursuing a social constructionist view.

¹⁴ To be dealt with in chapter six.

¹⁵ For a situation of these different versions of social constructionism see fragments 6, 20, and 23.

Her point that there cannot be a loose, decontextualized generation of alternatives, but that alternatives will all too soon belong to some actor, with some interests, values and network, should indeed be acknowledged. However, it will be the social process, through conversation, negotiation, or power games, which will value assign value to the 'social utility' of the newly created alternatives.

We will base our approach on the above principles to generate theory about the collective perpetuation of entrepreneurial endeavors. The idea of the research circle, connected to the process of theory development, will be elaborated in fragment 10. How the idea of interpretive grounded theory is applied in this study is described in fragment 13 and its result in chapter four. An illustration and a further argument for the abductive principle is to be found in fragments 16, 17, and 18 where three usable hypotheses or propositions will be documented - read abducted - through case illustrations, interpretive grounded concepts and appropriate theoretical fragments from the literature. The principle of local theory and differentiation demands less argumentation within the context of research into entrepreneurship since it will be generally agreed that difference and unicity, far from being a form of interference, are at the heart of the phenomenon. An illustration of the use of metaphors can be found in fragments 2 and 3, concerning the organization and construction of organizational knowledge, and in fragment 6, concerning our presentation of a social constructionist approach. The issue of generating generative theory and the role of the social process will be further developed in the chapter on methodology, where the evaluation and legitimation of a research project will be viewed in a dialogical way (see fragment 15).

The Birth, Biography, and Bibliography of Social Constructionism: a 'Blurred' Review

Visiting the Family Library: a Bibliographical Introduction to Social Constructionism

Social constructionism is becoming a widespread theoretical framework, attracting a growing interest across a wide range of disciplines, including sociology, psychology and social psychology, communication studies, anthropology, linguistics, literature, history, and historical geography. At this stage, it is applied using an interdisciplinary approach to a diversity of themes: central psychological concepts such as person (Gergen & Davis, 1984), identity (Shotter & Gergen, 1989; Zeegers, 1988), self (Jansz, 1991), emotion (Harré, 1986), memory (Middleton & Edwards, 1990), intelligence (Andersen, 1994), and mind (Coulter, 1979), are considered, but also more varied themes and sometimes slightly surprising phenomena, ranging from technology (Bijke, Hughes & Pinch, 1987), media (Adoni & Mane, 1984), and therapy (Leppington, 1991; McNamee & Gergen, 1992), to gender (Lorber & Farrell, 1990), sexuality (Stein, 1990), lesbianism (Kizinger, 1987), or homosexuality (Dollimore, 1991). Social constructionism tries to deal with the core issue within science, namely knowledge production (Nencel & Pels, 1991), and the generation of both scientific (Astley, 1985; Latour & Woolgar, 1986; Steier, 1991) and everyday knowledge (Semin & Gergen, 1990). Specific subjects from social psychology are approached in a social constructionist manner: envy (Silver & Sabini, 1978), despair (Kahn, Coyne & Margolin, 1985), teasing (Pawluk, 1989), or sincerity (Derksen, 1991). As well, in the domain of organizational studies and management, a social constructionist approach is increasingly practiced (Morgan, 1986; Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992; Sims, Fineman & Gabriel, 1993). Our attempt to approach entrepreneurship from a social constructionist perspective (Bouwten & Steyaert, 1990a; Bouwten & Steyaert, 1990b; Steyaert, 1992; Bouwten & Steyaert, 1992) is embedded in a broader research program on the social construction of organizing which reconsiders conceptually and empirically organizational themes such as innovation (Bouwten, 1993; Bouwten, De Visch & Steyaert, 1992), conflict (Bouwten & Salipante, 1990; Salipante & Bouwten, 1990), leadership (Bouwten & Steyaert, 1991), organizational change (Bouwten, 1994), and global change (Bouwten & Steyaert, 1995), and joins other (social) constructionist endeavors to entrepreneurship by Brytting (1991), Johansson (1991), de La Ville (1996).

Re-presenting Social Constructionism: a Search for Appropriate Metaphors?

A key to the library

The question is now how can we benefit from this library in order to develop a conceptual framework for approaching our research questions. The aim of this fragment is to embed our research questions within a social constructionist 'tradition' and to explore its main assumptions which can direct us in studying innovative entrepreneurship as a collective endeavor. The difficulty is, however, to find an appropriate way to explore and re-present its library: which *key* can we use to 'open' the social constructionist library?

Within the scientific design of reviews, a number of specific narrative and rhetorical practices are followed. Typically reviewers try to make their reviews as clear and as coherent as possible and are in search of internal inconsistencies and unresolved discrepancies based on a highly valued critical logic – at the risk of tearing knowledge out of its social context. The fact that they make their reviews more coherent than the actual course of knowledge production within academic life is much less a problem than the denial of the social construction of this and other criteria and of writing in general. In one of the most recent and best expositions of social constructionism in psychology and the social sciences, Gergen (1994, p. 69) remarks: "*In the present analysis, I have paid my dues to traditional analytic demands, striving to achieve an internal coherence in the case of constructionism and showing where it is both similar to and different from other perspectives.*" The question is whether he has not here unnecessarily forced social constructionism off to its own little island, clearly identifying but more than ever isolating it.

When I look at the story of my own conceptual evolution and at other research practices, they seem to me like stories of eclecticism and *bricolage* in which researchers regularly crawl over the walls of their own approaches and play the neighbour who borrows frameworks that do not in fact fit, thereby practicing the art of what Geertz has called 'blurred genres'.¹

How can I then present and represent social constructionism, such a diverse and pluriform approach which is at the same time somewhat allergic to coherent reviews of certain bodies of knowledge? Referring to the metaphorical tactic for theory development (see fragment 5), we think we need to search for an encompassing metaphor which does justice to the soul of social constructionism. Reviewing social constructionism requires then first finding an appropriate metaphor.

¹ As an (alternative) example, I can refer to *Exploring Complex Organizations* by Czarniawska-Joerges, a very impressive review of the literature dealing with the anthropological approach to complex organizations; it sounds to me very much like a *narration* about the way she reads and experiences a collage of texts (Seylaert, 1994c).

In search of metaphors

Can I represent social constructionism by comparing it to an exposition of paintings? This would imply summing up a few 'major works' of social constructionism and hanging them up like pictures at an exhibition. What should then be the appropriate examples? Berger and Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality*? Gergen's *Realities and Relationships*? Shorter's *Conversational Realities*? While looking at a so-called retrospective exhibition of the work of the Dutch cubist and neo-plasticist, Piet Mondrian, at The Hague, marking the fiftieth anniversary of his death, I realized that designing an exhibition is a little more complex than my initial simple idea of 'exhibiting the work of a painter through his paintings'. The curators make a particular choice, suggesting a particular evolution in his work, and as visitor, one follows by headphones a guide's commentary which is no less than an interpretative framework for the work at hand. As I left the exhibition I found myself by chance in a side gallery of the Gemeente Museum where amongst others were the works of one Piet Mondrian. It seemed as what did not fit into the designers' construction was left outside and hung there slightly lost. And rightly so: I see no other way than a sensibly put-together reconstruction – as was here the case – which is more interested in the artist's socio-cultural context than in his private life. There are very likely many other ways to show how Mondrian developed as a painter, but no one knows how it 'really' happened. Mondrian's own version, in the form of an autobiography,² would definitely differ from the exhibition's, but who exactly has a corner on the truth here?

Perhaps it is more appropriate to review social constructionism as an entrepreneurial endeavor itself, a creative initiative in science which breaks with customary theoretical options, tries to change crucial boundaries and find a niche of its own in the scientific market. Maybe it is not a coincidence that one studies new phenomena using new approaches, and that our study of collective entrepreneurial activities is undertaken from a theoretical perspective that itself in many ways resembles a case of collective renewal and the reality of entrepreneurship and intrapreneurship. The emergence of social constructionism can thus be compared with the innovative processes of social organizations (Bouwens & Fry, 1991), in which a new logic and new core competencies are developed somewhat at odds with the dominant logic of scientific psychological research.

As social constructionism is not of recent origin, a more biographical metaphor might be useful to understand its rise and to capture the quintessence of this perspective. Where does social constructionism come from and where can we find its roots and contextual seeds? Which earlier texts bear traces of current social constructionist practices? Where can we find

² Since Barthes wrote his autobiography in 1974 (see Barthes, 1991) by systematically breaking the rules of the game, we know that a biography too is a language and literary artifact.

earlier and/or related theoretical perspectives? Such a historical evolution can be narrated as a biography, looking for the genealogy of social constructionism. It could sketch the birth of social constructionism through the portrait of the 'ancestors and relatives' of social constructionism, of its parents and godfather, and by reading its confusing birth-certificate with seemingly too many names for one so newly born. It could teach us how this infant learned to speak and how it developed its language repertoires. Such a biographical metaphor should not be read in a too biological or deterministic way, as I do not want to suggest any univocal source and as we will never really know who the 'natural' parents are.

A blurred review

The following review of social constructionism will be 'blurred', enabling us to use the implications of diverse metaphors. Seeing this review as an *exhibition* makes us alert for certain conventions of this genre: we must determine how appropriate we find them for a review of social constructionism. As a consequence, some of its main works will be exposed. Looking at social constructionism as an *entrepreneurial endeavor* creates the opportunity to focus on the genesis and the development of this framework which is historically and socio-culturally embedded, and to try to bring to light some of these contextual anchors. As a consequence, we will indicate its main difference from other theoretical approaches. Structuring this review as a *biography* can breathe a little life into these texts, suggest a form of genetic and cultural development, while doing justice to the relational character of development. As a consequence, the review will be told like a sort of life story of the social constructionist family. Not an epic, but rather a humble family chronicle. To be a family entails both an irrevocable alliance and at the same time the primary experience of difference and distancing: this we learn from all family stories and dramas. These streams of thinking are 'familiar', being at the same time strangers to each other, as we learn from the story of Cain and Abel.

A blurred presentation is compatible with our basic metaphor of the *organizational library* (see fragment 2). The fact that we cannot display every book, nor show comparisons to all other frameworks, nor hang out all portraits of family members, means that we cannot review all the books from the social constructionist library. The choice we make will depend partly on the extent to which it throws light on the socio-culturally situated evolution of social constructionism, on developing its main directions for studying our research questions. Picturing social constructionism is very much like organizing a meeting between texts. The task is then to describe the intertextual properties of social constructionism; that is, to which texts does social constructionism refer, and which texts refer to social constructionism? I am of the belief that intertextuality does not take account of the walls often arbitrarily

erected between disciplines, approaches, schools, perspectives, and so on. For example, social constructionism is based on phenomenology without actually concurring with it. Rather than citing similarities and differences at this point, thereby both fixing them and tearing them from their context and development, it is important, for example, to quote Schurz's phenomenological work - preferably specific parts of it - in order to understand the development of social constructionism, and to read one of its texts thoroughly.

The Birth of Social Constructionism

Social constructionism is thus no new phenomenon and the last reproach one could assign this movement would be that it is just one more fashion trend. There is probably no single perspective in psychology which has been drawn upon by such a widely divergent philosophical body of thought and by parallel developments in the social sciences. As a result, it offers opportunities to beat new paths without eradicating the old ones. I am not interested in finding 'the origins' of social constructionism, or in suggesting that it is a re-write of something written some time ago (Gergen, 1994), but rather I mean to point out a section of the path which others have trod 'before' us. Social constructionism is bordered on the one side by texts from pragmatism, phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, and ethnomethodology, and on the other by related approaches like constructionism and social constructionism.

Ancestors and relatives

Gergen (1985) situates the rise of social constructionism historically against a background of the exogenic-endogenic antinomy which played a major role in the philosophy of science and in psychology in particular. An exogenic view finds the source of knowledge in the outer 'real' world while an endogenic sees internal processes within the individual as the origins of knowledge. According to Gergen (1985), social constructionism sets out to transcend this antinomy and go beyond the subject-object dichotomy. Instead of the study of the inner dynamics of the individual (as in subjectivism), or the determination of the external world (as in objectivism), social constructionism takes the contingent flow of continuous communicative interaction between persons as the central focus of concern (Shotter, 1993b). Voogt (1990) arrives in this way at three views on the formation of knowledge, by means of which knowledge about 'organizing' can become insightful³: an objective, a subjective, and an interactive vision of reality.

³ Note that the dimension objective/subjective is basic to the way Burrell and Morgan (1979) have 'organized' organizational theories (see fragment 2).

This does not preclude social constructionism's being indebted to the endogenous group and in particular to phenomenology. Pragmatism, phenomenology, ethnomethodology, and symbolic interactionism may be cited as sources of inspiration. Phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, and, to a certain degree, ethnomethodology can be grouped together as 'interpretivist approaches' (Holstein & Gubrium, 1994; Schwandt, 1994). Pragmatism stands outside this group somewhat as a fully fledged and mainly American philosophical movement (James, Dewey, Peirce, Mead, Rorty...), but it maintains nonetheless a connection via Mead to symbolic interactionism.

Pragmatism is one of the first movements concerned with the process by which reality is construed. It is based on a process-view of reality, as may be seen in James' description (1987, p. 115): "*Reality, we naturally think, stands ready-made and complete, and our intellects supervene with the one simple duty of describing it as it is already. But [...] we add, both to the subject and to the predicate part of reality. [...] The essential contrast is that for rationalism reality is ready-made and complete for all eternity, while for pragmatism it is still in the making, and awaiting of its completion from the future.*" Knowledge about the world and oneself is made rather than discovered: "*Pragmatism changes the question from what to how and is content to describe how the self becomes itself as a process of growth without defining exactly what it is that undergoes the process. The self is not discovered but made, a descriptive process in which knowing can be nothing more than becoming, adapting, and fashioning*" (Diggins, 1994, p. 370). In this process of becoming, time acquires content: "*Instead of searching for timeless essences, the pragmatic philosopher investigates events and developments as part of the changing character of reality*" (Diggins, 1994, p. 13). Knowledge can be seen neither as absolute nor as separate from some manner of application. The user's intention and the context within which knowledge is applied are both essential when truly speaking of 'knowledge'. Knowledge expresses itself in practical values and their applicability. Science is of little moment when theories are not tested in practice. Although pragmatists exhibit important differences in accent in the degree of centrality to be accorded to 'problem solving', they still seem to prefer practical problems thrown up by history and society, over the theoretical issues of truth and knowledge (Diggins, 1994). Lived experience and the issues which are there at stake are more important than rigid dedication to questions of truth and method.

Phenomenology, as developed by German thinkers such as Husserl, Schütz, Jaspers, and Heidegger, and French philosophers including Merleau-Ponty, Marcel, Sartre, Ricoeur, and Levinas, has spread richly into sociology. The work of Husserl and Schütz is particularly influential for the interpretative paradigm within sociology and organizational studies and is distinguished respectively as transcendental phenomenology and existential phenomenology

(Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Existential phenomenology may be seen as a combination of existentialism and phenomenology, initiated respectively by Kierkegaard and Husserl, and, since Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*, further developed chiefly by the above-mentioned French philosophers. This philosophical movement attempts to overcome the dualism between consciousness and a reality which is independent of it (Kuypers, 1990). De Boer (1993, p. 29-30) characterizes existential phenomenology as anti-idealistic and anti-intellectual: "*This means that consciousness is not to be conceived a basis for reality and furthermore that it is not the intellect - perception, representation, and judgment - that is fundamental but rather the effective and affective relations that a person has with the world and other people.*" It is aimed at the phenomenon from everyday experience: "*Phenomena are appearances of being, the self-referential, the open existence. The thematic research field of existential phenomenology is subjective awareness with its intentional experiences, laid bare by a hermeneutical-phenomenological method of description*" (Kuypers, 1990, p. 34). A phenomenological analysis is concerned with 'the life world' (*Lebenswelt*) of the individual, whom Husserl credits with an intersubjective ground-structure. Schütz applied Husserl's phenomenology in the direction of a phenomenology of scientific research by treating the theme of intersubjectivity within the social sciences. For Schütz (1982, p. 10)⁴ the everyday world of living is intersubjective "*because we live in it as people among other people, connected to them by societal influences and work, understanding others and being understood by them. It is a cultural world because, seen from the outside, the everyday world of living has universal significance for us. This means that it is a field of meanings which must be interpreted in order to discover meanings.*"

Ethnomethodology, which derives largely from the phenomenology of Schütz and the symbolic interactionism of Mead, and of which Garfinkel is considered the founder, "is concerned to learn about the ways in which people order and make sense of their everyday activities and the ways in which they make them 'accountable' to others, in the sense of being 'observable and reportable'." *Interactions between people in everyday life can be regarded as ongoing accomplishments, in which those involved draw upon various assumptions, conventions, practices and other types of resources available within their situation to sustain and shape their encounters in various ways*" (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 247). Two characteristics are central: the subjectivity of social reality and a microscopic analysis of it. Giddens⁵ offers an interesting description of ethnomethodology's situation as it departs from phenomenology and shifts towards a more linguistic conception of reality: Garfinkel "*is concerned with how the 'natural attitude' is realized as a phenomenon by actors in day to day life... This leads him away from phenomenology, with its Cartesian emphasis upon the (essential or existential) primacy of subjective experience, towards the study of 'situated actions' as 'publicly' interpreted forms. It is not hard to see that the direction of movement is toward Austin and toward the later*

⁴ Quoted by Kuypers (1990, p. 113).

⁵ Quoted by Burrell and Morgan (1979, p. 249).

Wittgenstein. For the notion of illocutionary acts, or as Wittgenstein says, 'that the words are also deeds', although serving descriptive rather than philosophical ends, fits fairly closely with Gaffinkel's preoccupations" (Giddens, 1976, p. 36). Gaffinkel's colleague Cicourel (1974) has made further contributions, in particular concerning the role of language and meaning as the heart of social interaction. Cicourel, who is labeled a linguistic ethnomethodologist, also emphasizes the subjective character of social reality, and illustrates this in his studies in microscopic detail. His most important work is *Cognitive Sociology*, which, in contrast to cognitive psychology, conceives of cognition in the first place as a social process in which language and meaning occupy a central place and attention is focused especially on communication processes between people.

Symbolic interactionism has a longer history than ethnomethodology and has been used and interpreted in very different manners, from a behavioral to a phenomenological version (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Its most important source of inspiration is Mead's work, which places the social dimension first and foremost in the conception of knowledge, the person, and society: "Mind arises through communication by a conversation of gestures in a social process or context of experience" (p. 50). People define their realities by a web of communication in which language both maintains the social process and is a part of it. Anyone who uses language lives the life of language and lives the social process it expresses: "A person learns a new language, and as we say, gets a new soul. He puts himself into the attitude of those that make use of that language. He cannot read its literature, cannot converse with those that belong to that community, without taking on its peculiar attitudes. He becomes in that sense a different individual. You cannot convey a language as a pure abstraction; you inevitably in some degree convey also the life that lies behind it. And this result builds itself into relationship with the organized attitudes of the individual who gets this language and inevitably brings about a readjustment of views" (Mead, 1934, p. 289). Mead's ideas have provided direction for many, from Blumer's symbolic interactionism (1969) to the social constructionism of Shotter, who remarks "how much also I have been influenced in my own work by Mead" (Shotter, 1993b, p. 57).⁶

Denzin⁷ nicely situates the relationship between ethnomethodology and symbolic interactionism, although not everyone is in agreement with the emphasis on the social basis: "Symbolic interactionism encompasses a large number of the problems and peculiarities now taken as the special province of ethnomethodology - namely, that the study of human conduct, within any type of social order, demands consideration of how interacting selves cooperate in the construction of a routine, and for the moment a taken-for-granted set of meanings necessary for joint action. For the interactionist any social

order emerges through the process of interaction in a situation where selves take the point of view of one another. [...] Meaning arises out of interaction, and not the other way around. The task of the interactionist is to discover how interacting selves come to agree upon certain meanings and definitions for co-ordinated action" (Denzin, 1970, p. 295).

This limited and generalized survey⁸ must suffice as a sketch of the contours of social constructionism within which we shall be working. Social constructionism cites mainly texts from the interpretative paradigm (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). This survey may also serve generally to situate more specific discussions which will be developed in other fragments, including those on phenomenology in the consideration of the phenomenological interview (fragment 12), and on pragmatism in the exploration of the relationship between the creative and the social (fragment 20). The situation of symbolic interactionism is immediately useful as an introduction to the work of Berger and Luckmann, who in their emphasis on social interaction lean heavily on a 'Meadian social psychology': "Our social-psychological presuppositions of social reality, are greatly influenced by George Herbert Mead and some developments of his work by the so-called symbolic-interactionist school of American sociology" (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 29); this will be taken up again in the discussion of Mead's view of innovation (see fragment 20).

Who are the parents?

While it is not so difficult to retrace the grandparents and more distant family of social constructionism and to cite some of their influential texts, it is less obvious to identify its parents. Most people would accept Berger and Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality* as a serious candidate, although Fineman (1994) also sees this philosophy reflected in the writings of Manis and Melzer (1972), Bittner (1965), and Goffman (1959, 1967). Gergen (1994, p. 67) calls Berger and Luckmann's work a 'constructionist icon' that sets the tone for a social constructionist vision of "the relativity of perspectives, the linking of individual perspectives to social process, and refutation through language." This seminal work, a treatise in the sociology of knowledge, also demonstrates why social constructionism has initially had a stronger influence on sociology than on psychology.

Berger and Luckmann take as their starting point the three elements which have here already been presented: (1) the importance of a study of everyday life and of knowledge that

⁸ For a discussion of these four streams of thought placed side by side, see Maas (1988). For pragmatism, see Diggins (1994). For a comparison with phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty) with symbolic interactionism (Mead), see Rosenthal and Bourgeois (1991). For a discussion of ethnomethodology, see Heritage (1984). For a discussion of phenomenology, see Luyten (1976). For symbolic interactionism, see Charon (1985). The influence of pragmatism, phenomenology, ethnomethodology, and symbolic interactionism in organization studies using concrete research cases can be found in Czarniawska-Joerges (1992). A general discussion, except for pragmatism, is to be found in Burrell and Morgan (1979), who devote chapters to each stream of thought and its implications and use for organization studies.

⁶ Shotter also enumerates certain lacunae in Mead's writing: "The lack of a sense of the historical nature of cultural development; the lack of a sense of the normative nature of social action, the requirement that an actor be not just intelligible, but accountable to others; as well as the assumption that communication is tantamount to cooperation, and thus his communities lack conflict" (p. 58).

⁷ Quoted by Burrell and Morgan (1979, p. 251-252).

guides everyday life conduct, (2) the role of social interaction, the prototype of which is the face-to-face situation, the recurrent patterns of which establish a social structure, and (3), the centrality of language, being the most important sign system in human society. Berger and Luckmann conceive of the social as the prime mover in the social construction of reality: "It should be clear [...] that the statement that man produces himself in no way implies some sort of Promethean vision of the solitary individual. Man's self-production is always, and of necessity, a social enterprise. Men together produce a human environment, with the totality of its sociocultural and psychological formations. [...] As soon as one observes phenomena that are specifically human, one enters the realm of the social. Man's specific humanity and his sociality are inextricably intertwined. Homo sapiens is always, and in the same measure, homo socius" (Gergen, 1994, p. 69). Within social interaction people build a reality - their reality - where the meeting between worlds represents the heart of the process, on both personal and societal levels: "A society in which discrepant worlds are generally available on a market basis entails specific constellations of subjective reality and identity. There will be an increasingly general consciousness of the relativity of all worlds, including one's own, which is now subjectively apprehended as 'a world', rather than 'the world'. It follows that one's own institutionalized conduct may be apprehended as 'a role' from which one may detach oneself in one's own consciousness, and which one may 'act out' with manipulative control" (p. 192). The role of science then fundamentally changes as well, since it is no longer about establishing one objective version of reality: "Again, what is rejected is the 'one story', the 'one reality-one description' conception as an adequate rendering of the objective of science" (Hughes, 1990, p. 157).

The child's godfather

Parallel with the question asked by Kvale (1992; see also Neimeyer et al., 1994) as to whether postmodernist thinking entails a radical undermining and transformation of scholarly psychology, one can wonder to what degree social constructionism is a useful supplement for the prevailing neo-behaviorist, cognitive, and data-processing models, as opposed to being a radical negation of these models and grounds for a full-scale revolution: are we going away from psychology or are we paving a new way for psychology when we take a social constructionist stance? There is no answer to this question other than a pragmatic and anti-ideological one: it is clearly another possible way which in many respects implies distancing ourselves from familiar habits of conceptualizing and researching but not abandoning our interest in human (inter)action: it is as much continuation as it is rupture. This rupture should not be seen as a negation, but as a search for and exploration of alternatives which can lead psychology into a multi-perspectivistic epistemology. My preoccupation with the social constructionist voice in psychology will nonetheless make its presence regularly felt throughout

this dissertation, and a differentiation between a cognitive and a social constructionist psychology becomes unavoidable as a result (see fragments 20 and 21). I do not see this sort of *contretemps* with cognitive psychology as at all costs to be avoided, but rather as a necessary dialogue by which both perspectives may further develop.

Introducing Gergen's work

In order to situate social constructionism within psychology, the work of Kenneth Gergen, both a doctor of psychology and Professor of Psychology at Swarthmore College, seems to me an appropriate case⁹: I see his evolution and position on scholarly psychology as a prototypical story for the fortunes of social constructionism there. Furthermore, if we are to situate the parents within sociology, then it is only normal to choose the godfather from the realm of psychology. And if we may be permitted a whim,¹⁰ we may name his wife, Mary Gergen the godmother. Mary Gergen has worked chiefly on a feminist epistemology within psychology and the social sciences (Gergen, 1988).

Kenneth Gergen started his scientific work in social psychology but has since then exceeded the boundaries of his original scientific discipline. As editor of the series *Inquiries in Social Construction*¹¹ by Sage,¹² he has ventured into such diverse domains as anthropology, communication studies, history, therapy and management. He has played the role of broker in linking scholars from these very diverse disciplines and in setting up cross-disciplinary publications and conferences. Gergen has tackled very fundamental discussions, for instance in *Toward the Transformation in Social Knowledge*,¹³ where he was one of the first to address new ways for psychology by stressing the historicity of both human action and psychological research,¹⁴ however, he has also tried to interest a broader public with his 'essay', *The Saturated Self*, which offers an impressive number of examples of the relational embeddedness of a person. Despite this journey through very different landscapes of the social field and this *tour d'horizon* far outside the psychological domain Gergen has by no means abandoned psychology. In the recent *Realities and Relationships*, which attempts to be an overview of the social constructionist approach, he deals with the way 'social constructionist soundings' resonate most clearly within psychology itself.

⁹ Other cases are possible: see Bruner (fragment 7), Harré (fragments 20 and 23), and Shotter (fragments 20 and 23).
¹⁰ Actually the Gergens have suggested such a professional partnership in a 'duography' telling or 'pretending' a story of their life in Lee (1994).

¹¹ Reviewed by Neimeyer, Neimeyer, Lyddon and Hoshmand, 1994.

¹² Together with Shotter, one of the other social constructionist pioneers.

¹³ Published in 1982, and re-edited in 1994.

¹⁴ "None of these findings should be viewed as trans-historically reliable. Each depended to a major extent upon the investigator's knowledge of what conceptual shifts were subject to alteration within a given historical context" (Gergen, 1982, p. 18).

Social constructionism in psychology: comparing two versions

To discuss the presence of social constructionism in psychology, I will compare two articles by Gergen, one published in 1985 in the *American Psychologist*, where he framed for the first time explicitly the potential significance and the possibilities of social constructionism for psychology, and the other published in 1991 in the first edition of a new journal, *Theory and Psychology*, where a broader view is taken and emerging challenges for psychology are suggested. Although both are largely re-integrated in *Realities and Relationships*, a discussion of both articles can best illustrate the social constructionist approach in the making.

Two main differences are immediately noticeable. First, the publication in a newly created journal, in contrast to the mainstream *American Psychologist*, indicates that the social constructionist 'movement' is developing its identity independently of traditional forums. New journals, a series of books from a social constructionist approach, new conferences and symposia - are all examples of the *mise en scene* for creative interaction which makes its further development possible. Second, and more important, in both articles, psychology, science, and society in general have become caught up in making sense and nonsense around another, much larger 'movement', called postmodernism. The so-called postmodern turn is an important contextual change to understand the social constructionist position in psychology. There is no place here to discuss postmodernist thought and practice in psychology (Kvale, 1992), organization science, and in society (Steyaert, 1994c), but I can refer here to a side-text which Gergen prepared as an invited address to the International Congress of Psychology which readdresses psychology toward a post-modern psychology (Gergen, 1988). Thus, the 1985 article formulates challenges from a social constructionist perspective towards psychology, while the 1991 one elucidates broader challenges to psychology which can partially be met by a social constructionist approach.

Social constructionism (as dealt with in the 1985 address), is presented as a challenger to psychology, as a movement with a 'challenging implication', and with 'implications of substantial significance'. This challenge, culminates in one basic principle, the central position of social processes in the construction of psychological knowledge: "*The study of social process could become generic for understanding the nature of knowledge itself*" (Gergen, 1985, p. 266). As a result, psychology must relinquish a deeply ingrained tendency to individualize the concepts it employs and the questions that it asks as psychological models of elucidation, and must go out in search of a way of elucidating which does justice to persons-in-relation and to the social practices within which people speak and act: "*Each concept (emotion, motive, etc.) is cut away from an ontological base within the head and is made a constituent of social process*" (p. 271). This sort of proposal giving priority to the process of social interchange is deep-seated, since 'all

psychological theorizing and the full range of concepts that form the grounds for research become problematic." Every scholar in the discipline of psychology must learn how to keep the context in his or her research sights. Gergen does not expect great and immediate enthusiasm, but rather resistance, as "*few are prepared for such a wrenching, conceptual dislocation. However, for the innovative, adventurous and resilient, the horizons are exciting indeed*" (p. 271). This thorough shift in the conception of psychological knowledge cannot be achieved overnight, according to Gergen: "*With regard to psychology the implications are far reaching, and many years will be required before they are fully explored*" (p. 271). Furthermore, this venture concerns not only psychology, but heralds a dialogue with scholars from sociology, anthropology, history, philosophy, and literary studies. The challenge is at this point only partially visible: "*Should such dialogue occur, we might reasonably anticipate the development of new theoretical departures, metatheory for a new conception of science, and a general refurbishment of intellectual resources*" (p. 273). How far have we come in six years? And has there been anything like a dialogue which mirrors this ambitious aura?

In the 1991 article,¹⁵ Gergen is more optimistic about the social constructionist chances than he was the first time around: in 1985 he states that "*the possibility of an alternative theory of knowledge can hardly demand broad appeal*" (1985), while in 1991 it is said that "*a substantial body of scholarship has now accumulated within a constructionist framework*." The author again begins by stating that in many quarters of psychology reflection on the nature of theory is reaching extinction. The theoretical and conceptual impoverishment is in violent contrast with an empirical (but fragmented) scrutiny¹⁶ and a methodological sophistication. "*The field slowly replaced the intellectual with the technical*", it is concluded laconically. Gergen finds that this tendency has stopped and that a general enrichment of psychological theory is both desirable and becoming feasible, reflecting this post-empiricist consciousness. Among the successors of the empiricist tradition, social constructionism is a serious candidate, next to historically marginalized traditions like phenomenology, hermeneutics, realism, and newly emerging projects such as feminism, critical theory, contextualism, constructivism, materialism, and humanism. The main element social constructionism suggests for the development of psychology is an increase in the attention paid to theory building (in contrast to empirical efforts). This is not seen in minimal terms, but 'a new intellectual space' is at stake, a promised land that had already appeared at the end of the 1985 article. Neither the theoretical desert within psychology nor the lack of interest for the process of theorizing is tolerable any longer.

¹⁵ This article is at the same time the introductory text for a new journal *Theory and Psychology*. New journals mostly indicate that an emerging field has made a breakthrough. Other journals with the ambition to renew the field are *New Ideas in Psychology*, *Journal for Theory of Social Behavior*, and in the organization field *Journal of Management Inquiry* and *Organization*.

¹⁶ Scholars never seem not to tire from concluding their articles by stating that 'more research is needed' (as opposed to 'more theory is needed').

as a result of two arguments: the rejection of the primacy of data within the model of rational induction – a naïve process of induction does not exist¹⁷ – and the neutrality of the researcher – the researcher belongs to the culture which he or she gives shape to through the research. Furthermore, “if theoretical assumptions create the domain of meaningful facts, then rigorous observation can no longer stand as the chief criterion for evaluating theoretical presuppositions” (p. 15). Theory and the attention paid to how we develop theories take that place over: “the door is opened to a full-scale reconsideration of the nature, function, and potential of theory within psychology and society more generally” (p. 16). The tone of such a re-evaluation is difficult to anticipate, according to Gergen, except that he speaks categorically of a ‘historical juncture’. He presents five directions which can lead to restoring psychology’s relation to theory; these are already mentioned in the 1985 article, albeit more in the form of a non-illustrated statement. Breaking through the empiricist hegemony is the work of different successors at the same time and asks for the exploration of their specific approach, method, and professional practice. How can the practice of theory development then become enriched within psychology? First, the context for theory development should be explored, as theory construction does not take place in a vacuum but is embedded in a socio-cultural context. A second element concerning the future of theory development in psychology concerns the use of reflexive critique on an ideological, conceptual and rhetorical level. In particular, the rhetorical level of analysis emerges as a new point of interest as it is linked to the ‘wake of much post-structuralist and postmodern debate’, and looks promising in showing how psychological theory is construed and ‘written’ (see Billig, 1987; Potter and Wetherell, 1987). But the impact of ‘the postmodern turn’ goes further: “Postmodern writings may be of enormous consequence to the future of psychology, not only because of their implications for traditional views of knowledge, but because they suggest abandoning the view of individuals as rational centers of their own actions” (Gergen, 1981, p. 23). Social constructionism, which had begun as a plea for a relational view of persons, here suddenly finds itself involved with an extreme view of persons which pervades and thus relativizes its own view. The rise of postmodernism places the position of social constructionism within psychology in another light.¹⁸ However, criticism is not sufficient: there is, thirdly, a need for a creative impulse which can make new forms of theoretical intelligibility and an enrichment of the conceptual repertoire possible. Such theoretical innovations cannot be plucked out of thin air, but must be closely allied with practical pursuits; they are not neutral, but value possible alternatives, and add to the major intellectual debates during which psychology has remained largely on the side-lines because of its doctrine of

¹⁷ See also fragment 5.

¹⁸ See also Gergen (1988). *Toward a Post-Modern Psychology*, invited address to the International Congress of Psychology, Sydney, Australia.

neutrality and because the discussion did not offer enough unalloyed ‘data baggage’. Fourthly, a giant step could be taken towards enriching psychological intelligibilities by comparing contemporary views with those in other historical or cultural contexts. Since it can be applied to many important psychological themes from mind to emotion, such a historical and cultural reconstruction has taken off slowly but is receiving increasing attention and appreciation¹⁹ (Misra & Gergen, 1993; Wertsch, 1991). Finally, if a theoretically sophisticated psychology is to be taken seriously, Gergen suggests viewing psychological theory “as a literary rendering, and with the tools of literary theory and critique the literary dimension of such writings may be elucidated” (p. 28). This demands an acknowledgment of the literary capabilities of the theorist experimentation with new forms (e.g. narratives), and a search for their implications for the process of theorizing, as they provide both constraints and potential for ‘the way we put things’.

The child's names

Pearce (1992) has suggested that as a researcher one gradually realizes that a guide is necessary in order to determine where one has set up camp and how one ought to handle oneself there: we may call the place constructionism, social constructionism, radical constructionism, social constructionism, or constructionism *tout court*. These are many names which do not simplify the accessibility for outsiders, explorers, visitors, and neophytes to this domain. For researchers who are used to these approaches it is often a fatiguing task to unravel their differences, to draw borders between them, and to patrol those borders (Gergen, 1985; Gergen, 1994; Leppington, 1991; Pearce, 1992; Schwandt, 1994).²⁰ From a social constructionist standpoint, the multi-voicedness resulting from the negotiation of all these various names of the research approaches is quite plausible. As there is no one reality claimed by social constructionists, they will not head for one single kind of social constructionism. The challenge is to allow for complexity and differences without becoming disagreeable or pedantic. In the same way, parents confer long and hard behind closed doors over the name they will choose for their child, in the belief that it must ‘mean something’, be recognizable, sound nice, and above all exude singularity. The time when the name of one of the forefathers was automatically taken is long gone. However, once the name has been chosen, then comes the shortened form, the nickname, or even another name altogether by which everyone can cast aside again at their discretion the consensus over the official name.

¹⁹ A more concrete illustration will be given in the discussion of cultural psychology (see fragment 7).

²⁰ Schwandt (1994, p. 119) takes the option of making a distinction although he is “mindful of the risk of drawing too fine a distinction between interpretivist and constructionist perspectives that share a common intellectual heritage.”

How do they play this game with names? In the different ways of ordering variations hierarchically we already find preferences and weightings. Schwandt (1994) uses constructivism as an overarching term and calls Gergen's social constructionism a form of constructivism, while Gergen himself (1994) places social constructionism on the same level with various other forms of constructivism. By using the name 'constructionism' rather than 'constructivism', Gergen (1994) means to avoid Piaget's approach as well as a major twentieth-century art movement, while referring consistently to the work of Berger and Luckmann. Zeegers and Jansz (1988) claim to speak of a broad social-constructivist movement, in which Moscovici's representation-approach takes its place next to social constructionism à la Gergen.

Constructivism, in contrast to objectivism and in common with social constructionism, concentrates on the way people experience and name – in short, actively construct – the world, since the world per se does not lend itself to be understood independently from the observer's perspective. Knowledge of the world is made rather than discovered. Bruner (1986, p. 95), who refers to Goodman's constructivist philosophy, describes the central thesis of constructivism as the view "that contrary to common sense there is no unique 'real world' that preexists and is independent of human mental activity and human symbolic language; that what we call the world is a product of some mind whose symbolic procedures construct the world." Persons construct different realities with different intentions and use different ways of worldmaking. Variations (Gergen, 1994; Schwandt, 1994; Zeegers & Jansz, 1988) in the way in which constructivism is conceived may be found in radical constructivism (von Glasersfeld, 1991), Piaget's constructivism,²¹ and constructive alternativism (Kelly, 1955).

Social constructivism recognizes the social basis of mental processes and gives priority to the social over the personal. Zeegers and Jansz refer among others to the French school around 'social representations' under the direction of Moscovici (Farr & Moscovici, 1984; Jodelet, 1989). Having sprung from Durkheim's ideas over 'collective representations' and the relationship between individual and society, social representation deals with "a form of knowledge, which is socially elaborated and shared, with a practical goal and contributing to the construction of a common reality for a social group."²² (Jodelet, 1989, p. 36). Social representations are social not only because they are concerned with social phenomena, but because they come into being through a social process. The discussion however is far from over concerning the degree to which social interpretations may for this reason be labeled as such and not interpreted as cognitive and given. Gergen (1994) sees both tendencies as present in the admittedly broad field of researchers into social representations. His interpretation that

²¹ Named "genetic constructivism" in J. Montangero and Anastasia Tryphon (1991) (Ed.) *Psychologie Génétique et Sciences Cognitives*. Genève, Fondation Archives Jean Piaget.

²² "Une forme de connaissance, socialement élaborée et partagée, ayant une visée pratique et concourant à la construction d'une réalité commune à un ensemble social."

Moscovici adopts "a distinctly cognitive orientation; social representations are considered forms of mental makeup and community representations simply a summation of many individual actions" would seem to me slightly exaggerated. Jodelet's (1989, p. 82) reference to the work of Berger and Luckmann, Schütz, and Cicourel on the one hand, and Moscovici's justification for changing over to 'social representations' (because for him it comes down to "understanding not tradition, but innovation, not a ready-made social life, but a social life that is being made"²³) on the other, suggest to me an entirely different indication. Shotter's critique (1986), that social representations are regarded too much as 'given', can also be countered: "What matter are the interactions, not the substrata" (Moscovici, 1989).²⁴ The lively interaction between cognitive and social processes, with nevertheless a strong emphasis on the cognitive content of social representations, accounts for Zeegers and Jansz's decision to label this approach as social constructivist. They find the similarities to social constructionism to be more salient than the differences: both place the source of mental structures in the public sphere; both accord to sensemaking a character that is social and independent of the individual (Zeegers & Jansz, 1988, p. 129).

I shall now expand on the particular attributes of social constructionism as against these other variants – especially the priority granted to the microsocial process in the relationship between the mental and social realms, to language as a narrative and rhetorical medium, and to the relational at the expense of the individual.

The Child's Voice: First Cries and Other Grown-up Talk

What has social constructionism got to for itself? How does it speak about itself? And how does its own discourse evolve? If I wish to take process knowledge as my point of departure, how can I suggest a 'self-image-in-evolution'? Instead of summing up 'the' assumptions of social constructionism, I shall compare two descriptions of social constructionist points of departure which may be viewed as two 'momentary solidifications'. These assumptions are set out in the table below, just as they are dealt with respectively in Gergen's 1985 article, which spoke to psychology in the *American Psychologist* and in *Realities and Relationships* (1994). How do we speak of social constructionism a short ten years later?

²³ "...comprendre, non plus la tradition mais l'innovation, non plus une vie sociale déjà faite mais une vie sociale en train de se faire."

²⁴ "Ce ne sont pas les substrats, mais les interactions qui comptent."

Figure 6.1 Comparing social constructionist assumptions from 1985 and 1994

ASSUMPTIONS IN 1985 (Gergen, 1985, p. 266-269)	ASSUMPTIONS IN 1994 (Gergen, 1994, p. 48-54)
1. What we take to be experience of the world does not in itself dictate the terms by which the world is understood. Constructionism asks one to suspend belief that commonly accepted categories of understandings receive their warrant through observation.	1. The terms by which we account for the world and ourselves are not dictated by the stipulated objects of such accounts.
2. The terms in which the world is understood are social artifacts, products of historically situated interchanges among people.	2. The terms and forms by which we achieve understanding of the world and ourselves are social artifacts, products of historically and culturally situated interchanges among people.
3. The degree to which a given form of understanding prevails or is sustained across time is not fundamentally dependent on the empirical validity of the perspective in question, but on the vicissitudes of social processes.	3. The degree to which a given account of world or self is sustained across time is not dependent on the objective validity of the account but on the vicissitudes of social process.
4. Forms of negotiated understandings are of critical significance in social life, as they are integrally connected with many other activities in which people engage.	4. Language derives its significance in human affairs from the way in which it functions within patterns of relationship.
	5. To appraise existing forms of discourse is to evaluate patterns of cultural life; such evaluations give voice to other cultural enclaves.

A comparison of the two versions reveals a few shifts. The first assumption, formulated negatively, has remained the same, but a part of Gergen's 1985 argumentation, dealing with the linguistic nature of reality, takes a detour towards a separate fourth assumption about language. We should not be surprised by this new route, considering the ever-increasing attention accorded the role of language in the construction of reality, which has come to be known under the general heading of 'linguistic turn' in all branches of the social sciences (Steyaert & Janssens, under review). The second assumption has been revised slightly and concentrates attention on not only the historical but also the cultural context of social artifacts. This sort of cultural accentuation is in keeping with the rise of cultural psychology as outlined in fragment 7, in the discussion of narrative sensemaking. The third assumption over the social essence of constructed reality has remained the same. The fourth assumption in the 1994 version is, as I have noted, a new addition, proceeding in part from the first assumption in the 1985 version. The fourth assumption from the 1985 version appears to have disappeared from the 1994 version, while a fifth assumption on the function of evaluation has been added.

The first assumption articulates the constructionist first principle, which lays into objectivism, denying that there is a reality out there that we can know and articulate on the basis of induction and a correspondence view of language. This first assumption receives a negative formulation and questions radically the 'taken-for-granted-world'. In the 1985 version, Gergen bases his argument (solely) on Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, while in the 1994 account he refers to Saussure, semiotic analysis, and literary theory. With this first assumption as an invitation 'to challenge the objective basis of conventional knowledge', he summarizes the general orientation of the historical precedents of social constructionism as they have been outlined in this fragment. Over against the rejection of objectivism is the constructivist belief that reality is constantly being made and that people construct their own social reality. This means that "there are no universal truths or principles, nor are there any global models of justice or order that can be applied in all settings, at all times, with all people. There are rather specific communities that espouse their own unique ways of knowing" (Bergquist, 1993, p. 18). For the sphere of research this implies that "we must construct models of social reality and social value that are fluid, or at least flexible, and open to new data and to social conditions that change in rapid and unpredictable fashion" (Bergquist, 1993, p. 20). This vision applies equally to scientific and day-to-day knowledge, which here are considered as two differing - albeit general - domains of knowledge. Thus is the scientific world plucked from its ivory tower and planted firmly on the earth, as easily located as a science park, a fishing village, or a group of Berber nomads. The so bitterly contested demarcation between scientific and common sense knowledge is forthwith left behind as a mirage: "Scientific research is a practical activity, which is embedded, as is any practical activity, in a context of implicit commonsense knowledge and is carried on by members of a particular scientific community for the purpose of developing descriptions that serve as the bases for eventual theoretical understanding" (Wilson, 1971; cited in Hughes, 1990); or as Latour and Woolgar (1986, p. 31), who use an ethnographic method to show how scholars construct 'scientific facts' in a social network, claim, "scientific activity is just one arena in which knowledge is constructed." The fact that realities and knowledge of realities are dependent on specific communities presents the question of what this context-dependence precisely entails. The second assumption deals with this question.

The second assumption gives priority to social processes in the construction of reality. This interactive process is always situated within a historical and cultural context. This assumption, too, has a bearing on the way people daily create meaning together and on the way scholars create knowledge. Anthropology and ethnography have for some time now acquainted us with this insight concerning the historically and culturally situatedness of the social process and it has recently received much attention in cultural psychology. This link between meaning and

knowledge creation on the one hand and the historical-cultural process on the other – from folk-psychological categories and traditions to cultural practices – has been acknowledged in my discussion of narrativity (see fragment 7). Knowledge production is specific to the cultural place where it has been generated. The destination of knowledge made by a particular public is first and foremost that public itself. The implication is double. On the one hand, a social constructionist study is contextualist, which means that it is as interested in the cultural context as in the phenomenon under consideration. On the other, the applicability of knowledge to another community is not possible if no involvement and relationship has been built with the researcher (or consultant). That is, “to the extent that *prediction or applications are formulated in language and shared within a community, theories may be essential*”, while “*to convey abstract, decontextualized theories in journals, books, speeches, and the like is of limited practical consequence in terms of prediction or application*” (Gergen, 1994, p. 50-51).

The third assumption is probably the most central insight to which social constructionism attempts to give form: it is the idea that reality and the many forms of accounting for it are a product of a continual process of interaction.²⁵ The key question here is how this social process can be made more concrete. Gergen mentions ‘communication, negotiation, conflict and rhetoric’ in the 1985 version, but in my estimation has published little on this subject in the course of his further work. Social constructionism as developed by Harré and Shotter provide a good supplement here. Harré places a strong emphasis on conversation as central object in research into the development of knowledge: “*The hypothesis that most of the features and properties of the mind are derived from and sometimes actually reducible to features of public conversation, is one of the fundamentals of what I shall call social constructionism*” (Harré, 1986, p. 92). The social construction of reality is in the first place a question of conversation: “*Conversation is to be thought of as creating a social world just as causality generates a physical one*” (Harré, 1983, p. 65). In his book, *Conversational Realities* (1993), among other places, Shotter also approaches social process in terms of conversation, dialogue, and rhetoric, hereby making use of authors – besides Harré – such as Vico, Wittgenstein, Bakhtin, and Vygotsky. We shall encounter their work in chapter five in our attempt to make social processes more concrete in their relationship to the creation of meaning. I believe that organizational theory, in which Harré’s statement (1983, p. 58) that “*the primary human reality is persons in conversation*” is most directly visible, can make an important contribution to social constructionism and help to clarify this social process.

As we have seen, the *fourth assumption* from the 1994 version raises objections to the correspondence view of language and is based solely on Wittgenstein’s (second) description of

language as ‘a derivative of social use’. Wittgenstein’s vision, which sees meaning as the result of microsocial exchanges (mediated by ‘language games’) assumed into broader forms of cultural life (the so-called ‘forms of life’), is for Gergen an ideal inspiration for the way social constructionism regards social interactions as exchanges mediated by language within larger cultural contexts. This is also an attractive approach for organizational contexts, since an organization can be seen as a sequence of social exchanges within specific cultural patterns which it itself partly creates. This assumption supports the third, social assumption since through language, that most typical human activity, sensemaking is brought into the public arena. Furthermore, this assumption is a ‘logical’ supplement to the second one, because people use language to build permanent constructions so that they acquire a local meaning, bound to place, time, and culture. Zwart (1988) has brilliantly documented the way social constructionism, by using Wittgenstein’s vision, can succeed in making up for the shortcomings of both behaviorist reductionism and cognitive psychology, becoming in the process a third approach. Psychology – which as we know was strongly criticized, if not totally finished off by Wittgenstein – and in fact every epistemological system, cannot exist without a view of language. Within psychology language has for too long been seen as a natural element which we may exploit in order to give form to our thought. Here language reflects internally stored mental contents, and reification allows us to give our personal constructs a *raison d’être*, an ontological status: motivation ‘exists’ and the word ‘motivation’ is its reflection. In Wittgenstein the order is reversed: motivation belongs to a particular language game which does not reflect the coherence present in reality but rather imposes one onto a (provisional) reality (Zwart, 1988, p. 135). In order to know what ‘motivation’ means, we should not go looking for what it reflects, but for how it is used within a language game that is played by a linguistic community. The communities of knowledge we were speaking of earlier are Wittgenstein’s linguistic communities. By speaking and writing we follow linguistic conventions and grammatical practices which are accessible to a certain linguistic community. In order to speak (with one another) we adhere to certain rules, which are not fixed, but which we also change and convert according to new conventions. As a result “*attention is fixed on the relationships between people and especially on the manner in which these relationships are understood*” (Zeegers & Jansz, 1988, p. 121). Motivation then becomes less the description of an internal state, and more a relational pattern between individuals. Motivation (a concept so bitterly fought over within behaviorism that its very existence was denied), now learns from a totally new quarter that as a possible reification it is a suspect notion. Zwart mentions Fodor’s reply that attempted to refute these criticisms and which indeed referred to the ‘triumph’ of cognitivism over behaviorism, allowing the former to escape from the latter’s straitjacket and

²⁵ Gergen calls this latter process ‘vicissitudes’, aware that a social process is always full of surprises and must always be approached anew, making it unpredictable as a result.

A Sense of Meaning is Like a Sense of Humor

Meaning assumes a central place in my approach to entrepreneurship as a social construction. It is a keyword in my interpretation of a Weickian approach to social organizing and therefore we must first plunge into the crucible of the meanings of 'meaning' before paddling around in Weick's theory. Furthermore, meaning is a codename for characterizing a social constructionist perspective and is an ideal springboard to a wholesale social constructionist soaking (if I may be allowed some extravagance). The meaning - or rather the stream of meanings - that entrepreneurs and employees daily express in their actions and ideas is the focus by which we attempt to understand entrepreneurship. If we are of a mind to begin the search for the meanings of their ideas, we must first address the idea of meanings.

A study which considers meaning thus demands a study of meaning: '*Un rite de passage*', by which I mean to develop a 'sense of meaning' and a 'sense of the process of sensemaking', qualities often seemingly absent in the world of 'bits and bytes', 'facts and figures', and 'information and cognition', and which is often denied there.¹ It is as if some people had a sense of meaning and others did not, just as we say that people go through life with or without a sense of humor. At the same time we know that it is not so much a question of a lack of a sense of humor as it is of a receptivity which can take very different forms, from naïve to ironic, from childlike to cynical. Because of the strong variation in the way meaning is manifested, a feel for meaning is much like a feel for humor, for if by way of introduction we were to examine the questions surrounding the meaning of these meanings - questions constantly raised throughout the history of philosophy and the social sciences - the beginning of an answer would very quickly lead us on a long journey through literary, philosophical, and social disciplines with the understanding that meaning is read in a narrative, creative, rhetorical, semiotic, and deconstructionist context. In the table below I have presented a few basic references regarding each of these perspectives, with a few examples of applications within organization studies. In this way the narrative vision explored in this fragment may be situated within a number of complementary approaches to meaning. For the notion of meaning based on creative imagination, Polanyi's work is an important point of orientation. The *creative dimension* will

¹ See argumentation of Bruner (1990) below, as well as Winograd & Flores (1987).

have access to a certain theoretical vocabulary: mentalism is the only price that psychology has had to pay for this recently acquired theoretical space (Zwart, 1988, p. 137). Language 'must' however be a part of a psychological theory, as emphasized in Gergen's fourth assumption, a view that is also clearly present in the social constructionism of Harré (1986) and Shotter (1986, 1993a, 1993b) that will be dealt with in chapter five.

In the *fifth assumption* Gergen considers the necessity of evaluating the knowledge of specific 'communities of intelligibility'. Although they can make evaluations within their own community, it is difficult for them to evaluate themselves in a more reflexive manner. This more reflexive approach means that they can evaluate their own constructions of the world and the relationship of these to the broader and more extended forms of cultural life (Gergen, 1994, p. 53). Understanding the influences of each other's world views is crucial for Gergen: it means that one understands the impact of one's own assumptions on life in other communities, that one can assess the consequences on cultural life as the vocabularies and practices of a specific community²⁶ develop or expand. The idea is to come 'to a fuller interweaving of the disparate communities of meaning', difficult as it may be to get this sort of dialogue going. This assumption further makes explicit something that is presented in the fourth assumption of the 1985 version; namely, that a certain way of understanding is always advantageous to some actions while precluding others. Although he has not yet dealt with the necessity of evaluation within a larger cultural context, he notes a concern for the underlying metaphors (rather than world constructions) of our existence, and the limits for action that they imply: "*It is in this vein that many investigators have been concerned with the prevailing images or metaphors of human action employed with the field of psychology*" (Gergen, 1985, p. 268).

²⁶ Gergen refers to the worldview of the economist, the military strategist, the ecologist, the psychologist, the feminist...

further be dealt with in the discussion of the role of research reporting, drawing on the work of Kristeva (fragment 14), among others, and of dialogue in the context of Bakhtin's work, fragment 23. I shall refer to Simons and Shotter in connection with the *rhetorical* content of meaning, appearing here as a dimension of research reporting in fragment 14, and as a dimension of meaning configurations in fragment 20. The question, What is the meaning of meaning?, is most directly studied in *semiotics* (or the study of signs), a field occupied by among others de Saussure and Peirce, and more recently by Eco and Greimas. It is applied in organizational contexts by Fiol and Barley. A *deconstructionist* approach, largely developed by Derrida, has been applied within organization studies by a number of writers, including Calás and Smircich, Linstead, and Kilduff.

Figure 7.1
Meaning within a narrative, creative, rhetoric, semiotic and deconstructionist perspective

MEANING WITHIN A ... PERSPECTIVE	BASIC REFERENCES (LITERARY, PHILOSOPHY, RHETORIC...)	SOCIAL STUDIES	ORGANIZATION STUDIES	IN THIS TEXT, FRAGMENT
NARRATIVE	Ricoeur van Peursen Marin	Anderson & Marinus (1990) Polkinghorne (1988) Scherin (1986)	Boyce (1993), 'Collective Centring and Collective Sensemaking in the Stories and Storytelling of One Organization' Brown & Kieps (1993), 'Narrative Analysis and OD' Banta, M. (1993), 'Teylored Lives: Narrative Production in the Age of Taylor, Veblen & Ford'	fragments 7, 12, and 14
CREATIVE	Polanyi Kristeva Vico	Winnicott (1971)	Cooperrider & Srivastva (1987), 'Appreciative Inquiry'	fragments 14 and 23
RHETORIC	Aristotle	Billig (1987) Shotter (1993) Simons (1989)	Alvesson (1993), 'Organizations as Rhetoric: Knowledge-Intensive Firms and the Struggle with Ambiguity'	fragments 14 and 20
SEMIOTIC	de Saussure Peirce, Eco, Greimas	Parker & Shotter (1990)	Barley (1983), 'Semiotics and the Study of Occupational and Organizational Cultures' Fiol (1990), 'Narrative Semiotics'	fragment 20
DECONSTRUCTIONIST	Derrida de Man Culler	van Zee (1978)	Calás & Smircich (1991), 'Voicing Seduction Silence Leadership' Kilduff (1993), 'Deconstructing Organizations' Marin (1990), 'Deconstructing Organizational Taboos' Linstead (1993), 'Deconstruction in the Study of Organizations'	fragments 11 and 13

This is not the place for launching out on that sort of tantalizing journey - almost an around-the-world trip. For now, I shall limit myself to further consideration of the narrative dimension of sense making. This will allow us not only to think out a conceptual framework by exploring the narrative character of entrepreneurship, but also to situate our methodology and crystallize it as a form of 'story-telling'.² In this fragment I intend to enter the world of stories in order to be able to describe and illuminate the stories of the world - in this case those of a few high tech companies - by means of the stories that those involved tell about their own situations.³ That is the route I shall now take: inscribing meaning in a narrative reality. In the first section, narrative sense making is situated within cultural psychology and its meaning for a cultural study of organizations. In the second section, an attempt will be made to specify the process of narrative meaning creation as a preparation for a narrative look at entrepreneurship.

Narrativity and Cultural Psychology

Cultural psychology and organizations

Before tackling Bruner's vision of narrativity, which he links inextricably to a cultural psychology, let us situate the recent rise of cultural psychology. Cultural psychology interprets the idea that the human condition is always socioculturally specific. Chiefly as a result of interdisciplinary collaboration, a growing interest in this view has led to its application to countless human phenomena, from emotion to mind, and from self-image to child development (Berry, 1985; Bruner, 1990; Cole, 1992; Kitayama & Markus, 1994; Price-Williams, 1980; Shweder & Levine, 1984; Shweder, 1990; Stigler, Shweder & Herdt, 1990). This form of cultural psychology, born from developments in psychological anthropology and ethnopsychology (Roosens, 1992), begins from the assumption that "cultural traditions and social practices regulate, express, transform, and permute the human psyche, resulting less in psychic unity for humankind than in ethnic divergences in mind, self, and emotion" (Shweder, 1990, p.1). According to Wertsch (1991, p. 7), it is a question of choosing between two different research agendas which are directed respectively towards 'universals' and 'sociocultural situatedness'. The person and the environment, or better, personal functioning and sociocultural context, are mutually involved, not as in the interaction between two variables, but in an evolving process. Cultural psychology thus makes a clear choice for difference and for local realities rather than for

² The story-telling interview is dealt with in chapter three, fragment 12.

³ Bruner's approach is nonetheless intriguing enough to merit a place here. For a discussion of the place of his work see footnote 7.

generalization. The objective of cultural psychology is to conceive of 'others' in different ways (Roosens, 1992): firstly, one expands one's awareness by recognizing the intentionality and the self-awareness of another culture, group, or person; secondly, one shows the plausibility of manners of representation, value judgments, and realities which others have constructed; thirdly, the incompleteness of one particular reality is suggested by juxtaposing it with another, in the sense of the absent - as in deconstruction; and fourthly, one's own world is mapped out subsequent to context-specific experiences in another world.

Of itself, the notion of 'culture', let alone 'cultural psychology', is in no way a simple term to deal with. It is in fact striking that psychology concerns itself so little with the study of culture and cultural processes (Mitra & Gergen, 1993⁴) with the exception of one of its applied fields, organizational psychology, in which 'organizational climate' and especially 'organizational culture' were important topics in the 1980s. In cross-cultural psychology, culture has been studied in a reductionist manner, providing just a few parameters to explicate local variations of universal laws. A little too easily, the study of culture has been accorded to the sister discipline of anthropology, by which numerous problems entailed by a psychological study of culture have been avoided - for example, the problem that culture is not readily susceptible to experimentation or individualization.

In opting to approach entrepreneurship as a socio-culturally situated process we are attempting to show how the development of a high tech firm ought to be viewed within a particular context of intertwined relations and values which the company partly creates itself. The identity that the company develops and the competencies it generates, are embedded in a social and cultural history which cannot be ignored and which in fact is the company. The importance of such an undertaking must here be underlined since it can give the fresh impulse directly needed by research into organizational culture which, after overwhelming attention in the eighties, has maintained very little of that élan in the nineties, (Steyaert, 1995). A cultural-psychological approach to enterprises could once again bring the study of organizational culture closer to one of its most important sources - anthropology - and fit it into other recent attempts to accomplish the same thing (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992). This type of analysis would also answer the pressing need to learn how to deal with diversity rather than striving for similarity (Bouwen & Fry, 1991) and does justice to the former approach through the fragmentation perspective increasingly adopted in the study of organizational culture. (Martin, 1992; Steyaert & Janssens, under revision, see fragment 26). In the final analysis it is less a question of the study of organizational culture than of a cultural study of organizations, as Calais and Smirich (1987) suggest.

⁴ They review the place of culture in psychology, which is commented on by Triandis and Poortinga in the *International Journal of Psychology*.

Bruner's vision of narrative psychology⁵

Bruner's vision of narrative psychology takes its lead from what he calls the derailling of the cognitive revolution within psychology, as it becomes more and more one-sided because of the disappearance of meaning as a concept for forming a psychological theory of human action.⁶ This sort of criticism emanates from a somewhat unexpected quarter, since Jerome Bruner⁷ is considered to be one of the pillars of the cognitive movement. However, Bruner evolved towards a meaning-oriented cultural psychology and towards a narrative psychology, an evolution he managed by extending the constricting limits of his discipline - in this case, psychology - and by making appropriate use of insights from 'other' disciplines. And he by no means spares cognitive psychology his blunt objections. According to Bruner, the intention of cognitive psychology was to reclaim 'mind' - from thought to consciousness - for the psychological domain and thus to study human action in terms of sense making. Quite quickly, however, attention shifted from meaning to information, and sense making became information processing, resulting in technologized models along the lines of the computer metaphor. Bruner nonetheless insists that psychology stick to the big questions and stop dealing with an endless series of 'neat little studies'. He sees these big questions as centered on the study of the 'meaning-making process' and the way in which meanings are created and negotiated within a community. This is for him a renewed 'cognitive revolution' - "a more interpretive approach to cognition concerned with 'meaning-making', one that has been proliferating these last several years in anthropology, linguistics, philosophy, literary theory, psychology, and, it would almost seem, wherever one looks these days" (Bruner, 1990, p. 2).

Bruner shifts meaning to the center of psychology which thereby of necessity becomes a cultural psychology. Human action is always culturally based. This reorients psychology in a three-fold sense. Firstly, the individual and the culture cannot be uncoupled one from another, as if a person could act independently of a cultural context, in a vacuum. Bruner here refers to Kluckhohn who stubbornly emphasized that a person's skin is not his or her limit.

⁵ The role of narrativity is here discussed in relation to organizational processes. It should be noted that narrativity receives attention in such fields as the study of identity (Gergen, 1994), therapy (White & Epston, 1990), and the careers of teachers (Kleichermaas, 1993). For a general survey within philosophy, see van Peusen (1992), and within the human sciences, see Polkinghorne (1988) and Ankersmit & Marinus (1990). Starting from a narrative epistemology and a narrative theory of literature (Martin, 1986), the terms narrative psychology (Lee, 1994; Sarbin, 1986) and narrative ethics (Ellis, 1994) have gained increasing currency.

⁶ Here I recapitulate the theme of the derailling of the cognitive revolution within psychology, developed in fragment 20. There I characterize the cognitive perspective as having missed the social boat.

⁷ My account of Bruner's concept of meaning is based on *Acts of Meaning*, a term that he but once explicitly accounts for, in the foreword: "acts of meaning" refer to "the nature and cultural shaping of meaning-making, and the central place it plays in human action." I assign to 'acts of meaning' a double meaning. Acts of meaning are acts which demand meaning: acts are embedded in a meaning-structure. Meanings direct our acts, and vice-versa, in a continuous cycle of sense making and acting. Secondly, acts of meaning - i.e. acts that provide meaning - are acts in themselves, to be brought together under the general label of 'interpretation'. I have made secondary use of *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*, in which Bruner already explores the narrative dimension, albeit more in the relationship between science and literature (see fragment 26), where there is a tension he had already hinted at in his 1962 book *On Knowing*.

Secondly, the attention of a psychological study of culture is focused on public and shared meanings, since they form the link between subjective sense making and culture. Meanings are not subjective only, in the sense of 'private' and 'inward', but always in need of a public counterpart. A meaning acquires meaning in relation to the shared meanings that a particular group or community has constructed: "*our culturally adapted way of life depends upon shared meanings and shared concepts and depends as well upon shared modes of discourse for negotiating differences in meaning and interpretation*" (Bruner, 1990, p.13). Thirdly, this implies a focus on 'folk psychology' or 'ethnopsychology' and the way these folk-psychological categories - 'common sense' to you and me - evolve, since a cultural approach often comes down to a focus on cultural history. The first two implications have already been considered in the discussion of social constructionism (see fragment 6); the third point requires further explanation, the more so as 'folk psychology' often carries with it pejorative undertones.

In order to arrive at a narrative psychology, Bruner takes 'folk psychology' as his point of departure, considering it 'an instrument of culture' since it is one of the crucial parts of a cultural psychology. The first examples of 'folk psychology' are found in anthropology before the prefix 'ethno-' started to be used; in sociology, with Garfinkel's development of 'ethnomethodology', which concentrates on the way individuals construct a day-to-day social and political reality; and also in psychology, in which Heider, among others, worked on 'naïve' theories - a term not without its opponents - by means of which people assign meaning to their experiences. A folk psychology deals with "*a set of more or less connected, more or less normative descriptions, about how human beings 'tick', what our own and other minds are like, what one can expect situated action to be like, what are possible modes of life, how one commits oneself to them, and so on. We learn our culture's folk psychology early, learn it as we learn to use the very language we acquire and to conduct the interpersonal transactions required in communal life*" (1990, p. 35). It is about basic beliefs, desires, and preoccupations with the way things are and ought to be. In the private sphere it treats of the premises by which we judge a father to be good, a mother loving, and a friend true. Organizations use the same sorts of premises in determining a good leader, a trustworthy employee, and a loyal customer. This 'common sense' is the common essence, the sense of what brings and holds us together. In companies, general beliefs of a community, a region, or a nation interfere with locally constructed beliefs.

When considering the entrepreneurship process, we are chiefly interested in the way space is created in which new beliefs may be constructed, against the background of a general line of thinking of a community which has previously been 'cut off' from these beliefs. We often notice, for instance, that small high tech firms often direct themselves towards technological segments which have been dismissed by 'established' and often larger technologically-oriented

companies. Bruner is aware of the question of how existing beliefs are reformulated or how new beliefs arise, and more fundamentally, how individuals can 'escape' from folk-psychological sense making: "*When anybody is seen to believe or desire or act in a way that fails to take the state of the world into account, to commit a truly gratuitous act, he is judged to be folk-psychologically insane unless he as an agent can be narratively reconstructed as being in the grip of a mitigating quandary or of crushing circumstances.*" Entrepreneurs' meanings often lie outside the order of a particular community, be it an established technological group or a commercial market, and the question is how this relationship between the old belief and the new vision can be made to be meaningful and credible as a narrative. I am further interested in the idea that new beliefs evolve towards a vision of a steadily expanding network of individuals who will stand behind these new meanings and thus transform them into a form of 'common sense'. In this way it becomes meaningful to orient a study of entrepreneurship folk psychologically: the creation of a new enterprise, especially when a new technology is paired with it, may be seen as a questioning of a particular folk psychology and a process of change for existing wisdom. The third industrial revolution and the rise of informatics, biotics, genetics, etc. demands a reframing of often deeply-rooted habits of getting along, coming into contact with one another, and collaborating, along with the adoption of new realities and new vocabularies for these realities. But in an even narrower sense the extension of an entrepreneurial organization is a question of folk psychology if its intention is to create its own form of 'society' with its own language and norms of what goes and what doesn't, what is desired and what is permitted. This last point squares with my experience when I have spent time in this sort of company: I often have the impression of having landed in a closed world where despite its relatively young age there are already strongly rooted habits, language use, and rituals at work. It is the same feeling you get when visiting a certain family for a few days or just for dinner and you gradually realize how different this family is from your own and in fact from your whole folk psychological background. I hope in this way to shed new light on the question of how innovation relates to 'common sense', without for the moment being able to provide a conclusive theoretical answer.

We can, then, include the following three implications in our social constructionist approach to entrepreneurship: (1) entrepreneurs and other actors appear not as isolated individuals in the entrepreneurship process, but rather act in a cultural context which they have to a large extent constructed themselves; (2) entrepreneurship as a social construction demands a clarification of the relation between individual meanings and shared meanings which are constructed in the young enterprise; we shall limit ourselves mainly to the internally shared models, but enterprises also construct shared meanings together with their enacted

environment; 3) the social construction of entrepreneurship is mediated by narrative interpretation and by the relationship between 'common' and 'uncommon' sense. How such narrative interpretations come into being will be examined in the following section.

Characterizing Narrative Sensemaking

Understanding narrative reality construction

Narrativity is a specific form of reality construction, the process of which can be described more precisely as a manner of framing, feeling and identity formation, interactive actualization, and language use.

In the first place, narrativity organizes our experiences and interactions by framing them (Bruner, 1990, p.56). "*Framing provides a means of 'constructing' a world, of characterizing its flow, of segmenting events within that world.*" This process of framing is a central activity in sense making, which not only takes place through stories, but has received a great deal of attention in a number of fields, including cognitive psychology, in which framing has been centered around the notion of 'scheme' (Bartunek, 1988) and, since Bartlett (1932), has been linked to the way memory works; in sociology, as, for instance, in Goffman's work (1959, 1976); in social psychology, by Moscovici (Farr & Moscovici, 1984; Jodelet, 1989), among others, in studies into social representations (see also fragment 21). The role of framing in the sense-making process will be more broadly situated in our comparison of cognitive psychology and social constructionism in chapter five, and of 'cognitive maps' and 'meaning configurations' (see fragment 21). For the moment it must suffice to emphasize that the story is a typical form for structuring and remembering our experience such that the story and the knowledge contained in it coincide: "*One can better understand thoughts if one does not consider them as successive or co-existent properties per se, a permanent mental substance, but rather as moments in a narrative of which the author is himself the subject*"⁸ (Harré, 1989, p. 137). The story provides unity to a person's experiences, and experiences which are not organized narratively have little chance of being remembered (Mandler, 1984). Stories are constitutive for the memory and not merely derived from it: "*It is not that these reflexive narrations in themselves reflect a mentally pre-existent organization: their structure is the organization of the mind*"⁹ (Harré, p. 138). If stories are a re-presentation of an event experienced in the past, then we are here dealing not with a re-production, a reflection, a story that corresponds with and about this event, but with a production, a perfor-

⁸ "On comprend mieux les pensées si on ne les considère pas comme des propriétés successives ou coexistantes du soi, substance mentale permanente, mais comme des moments d'une narration dont l'auteur est le sujet lui-même."

⁹ "Non que ces narrations réflexives de soi reflètent une organisation mentale préexistente : leur structure est l'organisation de l'esprit."

mance in the theatrical sense, by which the story is conjured up so that we may save it for later and perform it again in other contexts and in other performances. The story that is told by framing is not only a form of experience and memory organization, it leads, in the second place, also to 'affect regulation' (Bruner, 1990¹⁰) and 'identity construction' (Gergen, 1994, chp. 8; Harré, 1989). Bruner makes a direct link between the activity of framing and the way stories incorporate emotional experiences and are in fact crucial for memory (once again invoking Bartlett). There is here then no question of a split between cognitive and affective processes. Often it is the emotional state that offers the key to reconstructing a particular set of circumstances in terms of a scheme. One recalls a certain feeling ("that was a nasty customer") around which the story is further recounted as it takes on the form of an account.¹¹ We tell the story in such a way that it can convince the listener about our feelings around the event ("Now do you see what a nasty customer that was?"). Through stories we show and account for our feelings and can also regulate and partially control those feelings by the same token: as people tell their stories, they 'come around' and can 'cool off', they can get a little distance and through making an account respect their feelings. When someone says "Was I ever angry!", that person can master the feeling and do justice to it at the same time. Furthermore, this story, that links event and feeling, is told to someone¹² and is thus a part of a consequent social event with its own feelings around which 'new' stories can be told. The 'narratives' that we exchange with one another account not only for a person's emotional world, but more broadly for their self-image, self-definition, and identity (Bruner, 1990; Gergen & Davis, 1984; Gergen, 1994, ch. 9). The stories that we tell about ourselves and that others tell about us give meaning to my actions and to my existence. My life is ultimately my life-story, that grants an identity to myself and those whom I include or exclude from my stories. Herein lies an especially interesting point of departure which leads to a major revision of what we usually understand under 'the person', which can provide a new impulse to psychological research more or less at the crossroads of the psychologies of personality, motivation and development; it can above all offer new inspiration for looking at the entrepreneur as individual in terms different from the usual 'traits'. This is not the moment for a review¹³ of this literature, but I would like to make particular use of the essence of this idea for a consideration of the way organizations develop their identities.

¹⁰ Gergen (1994) also sees an important mediating role for 'narratives' in the way emotions can be dealt with in relationships: "*emotions are not possessions of individual minds but constituents of relational patterns or lived narratives*" (see also chapter nine).

¹¹ Bartlett writes: "*The recall is then a construction made largely on the basis of this attitude (read affect), and its general effect is that of a justification of the attitude*" (Bartlett, 1932; Bruner, 1990, p. 58).

¹² It is usually easier to tell a story to a third person than to the other person involved with the emotional experience.
¹³ The application to entrepreneurship will be dealt with in fragment 23. For a social constructionist view of person and identity, see Gergen & Davis (1984) or Zeegers & Jansz (1988).

Narrative sense making, which entails a form of experience, memory, feeling, and identity organization, demands thirdly an interactive process of actualization. In communities, in families, and in high tech firms individuals agree upon or negotiate meanings by mediating narrative interpretations. One story is followed by another which partly mimics the first one and partly develops it. By 'narrating', meanings are actualized, which means that they become public and community property and thus negotiable. In this way a culture creates meanings which in turn actualize that culture and further give it shape. Culture is a process that exists in the present between previously negotiated meanings and future-directed intentions. Sense making never gets dull, because people do not simply 'repeat' the past, nor do they invent the future out of thin air. They are involved in their present sense making, in the tension between 'what has been' and 'what it all must become'. Individuals become involved with one another through the stories that they tell one another – in fact, they together write a local story in which each takes the other's story a step further, to be taken up by yet another person, and so on, and so on... In this way life is full of consecutive stories, from the great family-stories in which the lives of grandfather, father, and grandson are coupled together, to the little shop-stories over the customers who pass through the scene throughout the day.

This interactive character of narratives can be made clear with a metaphor from the theater. Just as we enter a drama at the moment that we are born, when we move to a new city, or get a new job – in fact, every time we find ourselves in a new situation, and begin to play our new role opposite the other players, all the while trying to figure out what the play or the scene is actually about but in the process shaping it and even changing it – so too do we end up in other people's stories and they in ours: "*When we enter human life, it is as if we walk on stage into a play whose enactment is already in progress – a play whose somewhat open plot determines what parts we may play and toward what denouements we may be heading. Others on stage already have a sense of what the play is about, enough of a sense to make negotiation with a newcomer possible*" (Bruner, 1990, p. 34). A company is nothing but a quest for the point of the play that at the same time you are in the process of writing, and that you try to streamline through (the exchange of) stories. Having just made an exit, there is no longer any other way to play a meaningful part than by conferring about the course of the action which has just taken place. The alternative is to start your own play, as may often be seen in companies where apparently differing scenarios cross one another, or in ruined relationships, heart-rending family dramas, or foundering friendships, where each person starts to go their own way without much further regard for anyone else.

Narrative actualization assumes that individuals can (further) interpret the meaning of these stories. This is possible through their participation in the symbolic systems within a culture by

which people take language, forms of discourse, and ways of making experiences explicit through narrative, and make them their 'own'. This brings us to a fourth characteristic; namely, that narrative sense making employs a specific form of language use. The strength of a story for the sense-making process lies in a specific use of language. A story is a literary form, and whether one is recounting a 'true story' or fiction, there is a great deal riding on the language one employs, on the literary qualities of the narrator, and on the narrative genre itself. Narrative language use¹⁴ is concrete, metaphorical, allusive, and context sensitive (Bruner, 1990). A story does not deal with abstraction, as is often the case with scientific language use, but seeks to be concrete, detailed, specific. It transcends the abstract further by using metaphors and other tropes.¹⁵ It thus seeks comparison with other concrete worlds and is as a result suggestive, allusive, open to the reader's meaning. Finally, the story surpasses abstraction because the meanings it creates are extremely context sensitive and meaningful only within the contours that it delineates itself. Furthermore, there is in my opinion no universal (narrative) language use: communities, as well as businesses, develop their own way of storytelling and employ their own story forms which are part of their own language games and different language repertoires.

How do we tell stories?: constructing narratives

According to Bruner, narrative sense making may be characterized in four dimensions: sequential,¹⁶ 'indifferent' to facts, canonical, and dramatic. Inherent in a narrative is, firstly, its sequential character: "*a narrative is composed of a unique sequence of events, mental states, happenings involving human beings or actors*" (1990, p. 43). We are dealing here with more than just chronology, however. The meaning of partial units such as 'events' is formed as part of the larger configuration to which they belong; that is, the plot or *fabula*. Here we can see the double task of every interpretation¹⁷: meaning arises from the tension between part and whole. In order to grasp the meaning of a section it must be seen in terms of the whole, and it is only through the parts that one can track down the whole. The point here is thus not pure sequentiality, but also how the progression of events fits into a broader configuration. The idea of a temporal ordering – "*an event chain operating through time*" (Chatman, 1981, p. 808) – is only a minimal condition for being able to speak of a story. There is also a non-chronological

¹⁴ To explore the specificities of language use, Bruner has observed the way young children enter into a system of meaning and how they learn by speaking in stories. Developing this skill is for Bruner not so much a mental achievement as "*an achievement of social practice that lends stability to the child's social life*" (Bruner, 1990, p. 68).

¹⁵ Tropes includes such figurative expressions as simile, metaphor, and metonymy.

¹⁶ A more elaborated vision on how somebody tells and structures a well-formed story, based on theories from such diverse disciplines as literary theory, semiotics, historiography, and certain sectors of social science, can be found in Gergen (1994, p. 189-193). Besides the ordering and sequencing of events, he discusses the following characteristics: establishing a valued endpoint, using stable identities, providing explanations and suggesting causal linkages, and employing demarcation signs as beginnings, endings, and so on.

¹⁷ See also chapter three, on the interpretation of texts (fragment 13).

dimension which in general terms accords with the configuration of the story, according to Ricoeur¹⁸ (1981, p. 278-279): "Any narrative combines, in varying proportions, two dimensions: a chronological dimension and a non-chronological dimension... the activity of narrating does not consist simply in adding episodes to one another; it also constructs meaningful totalities out of scattered events. The art of narrating, as well as the corresponding art of following a story, therefore require that we are able to extract a configuration from a succession.... This complex structure implies that the most humble narrative is always more than a chronological series of events."

Secondly, a story is indifferent to facts. Sequentiality, mentioned above, exists *per se*, and not on the basis of a true or a false representation of an extra-linguistic truth. A story can be both real or imaginary; its strength as story lies in its own chronology and internal structure, with the result that it is a form suitable to both fact and fiction and that there can be no difference claimed between the ways of recounting a historical story and a fictional story, ultimately no difference between 'history' and 'story'. The explanation for this 'co-incidence' has in the course of history been the source of many suppositions - stories, you could say - but Ricoeur's idea, that "*the form of life to which narrative discourse belongs is our historical condition itself*",¹⁹ would seem to me quite plausible. Our involvement in history makes us tend towards a historical form, allowing us to begin a story 'Once upon a time...'. The same is true of the 'story' in a scientific report which reads like a piece of fiction. It seems to me unlikely that pieces of fiction should be of a different order from the stories told by interviewees, or that these should be different again from the interviewer's story which re-tells them.

Thirdly, a story is canonical²⁰, aimed at the expected and the habitual, while at the same time calculated to surpass these limits. Or better still, it attempts to make a connection between the ordinary and the extraordinary, between the canonical and the exceptional. Stories can make differences within a culture explicit, deal with conflicts, and re-examine community meanings. Here we get an answer to the question of how a 'folk psychology' can escape from the trivial and incorporate the new. Bruner believes that stories are capable of allowing for deviations from the norm, managing to accommodate impossible logic in an acceptable way. Many actions and meanings are self-explanatory and require no further comment, like a kiss from your mother or a handshake from your colleague. Unusual actions and meanings, like refusing to kiss your mother but bussing your colleague, can become transparent through stories, since the story provides the reasons for a particular action, thus giving it meaning. In this way you can get the action and its accompanying story 'across', and they become credible. All the same, this remains for us an insufficient explanation, since new

¹⁸ For a general overview on Ricoeur's thinking on narrativity, see De Visscher (1994).

¹⁹ Ricoeur (1981) on 'the narrative function'. Also cited by Bruner (1990).

²⁰ 'Canonical' means 'that what has become the norm, the point of reference'.

meaning and change always generally involve an adjustment to the existing framework, and it is not (yet) clear how new frameworks arise out of cultural developments.

Finally, narrativity is dramatic. The story is dramatic because the event and the person involved in it can move, transport, or sweep along the listener or the reader. In this process the audience is drawn in its breath or is touched in its deepest feelings and morally humbled or, conversely, inspired to a renewed integrity. Bruner introduces Burke's 'pentad' (1962) in order to systematize the dramatic character of a story. For Burke, more or less the founder of dramaturgical sociology,²¹ every dramatic event consists of an actor, an action, an goal, a scene, and an instrument, and of how these five elements relate to one another (Steyaert, 1992b). Using this pentad, one can undertake a dramatic analysis of motivated action: "In any rounded statement about motives, you must have some word that names the act (*names what took place, in thought or deed*), and another that names the scene (*the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred*); also, you must indicate what person or kind of person (*agent*) performed the act, what means or instruments he used (*agency*), and the purpose" (Burke, 1962; Mangham & Overington, 1983). A situation becomes dramatic when the pentad becomes unbalanced, for example when an instrument cannot or may not reach its goal, when the actor performs an action which does not fit the scene, or when there are multiple goals in play. The dramatic plays precisely on the balance between the conventional and the deviant, between the canonical and the new, between the known and the unknown. A story, played or told, makes use of this lack of balance, provides a commentary, considers the consequences on the level of values, norms and responsibilities, and possibly offers a new balance, by which values and norms are 're-thought': they are brought back into memory, are applied to themselves, and become reframed, morally charged, and emotionally celebrated.

Using these four characteristics, we have been able to indicate how the form of a story relates to the construction of reality: the story proceeds sequentially, as events are brought together in a chronological and non-chronological (part/whole relation) order, always linked to the point of view of the narrator rather than that of an external reality, in tension with the normal world it attempts to surpass, and dramatically born by the actions of actors who use various means to achieve their goal in a specific scene.

²¹ Burke had his successors (Mangham & Overington, 1987). On the one hand he was a strong inspiration for one of his students, Duncan (1968), who equally puts the accent on interactionism and sees society as 'communication of significant symbols'. He developed and redeveloped completely Burke's dramatic impulses into a dramatic method, "*meant to serve as a methodological guide for investigators undertaking a substantive study of the enactment of social orders*" (Mangham & Overington, 1987). He studied 'role playing' in various contexts where social order exists: family, religion, economy, art. On the other hand, many traces of Burke may be found in Goffman (1969), the most popular author of the dramatic school who has had the most further influence (on Harre, and also on others; see Zeegers & Jansz (1988)). For an example of how Burke's pentad is used in a literary analysis of employee involvement, see O'Connor (1995).

Towards a narrative view of entrepreneurship

A narrative analysis of organizational processes in entrepreneurship can teach us how sense making leads to a 'structuring' of experiences, how the experiences are kept track of, how the company develops an identity, how feelings are incorporated into the company's story, how the company uses interaction to actualize itself, and finally how it develops its own discourse. In this study I have included the story of a number of high tech firms: members of an organization have told me their stories and narratives. These are not existing stories that they have freshened up for me. An interview is the prototypical narrative situation²² which allows a person to tell the story 'further', both in the sense of 'repeating' it to make someone else a part of it, and in the sense of writing further and providing a sequel. This implies that the stories should be seen in a research context, aimed at a particular researcher: we know that a person will tell a 'different' story to a researcher than for example to a customer, although we need not then assume that we must scrap the stories we as researchers are told, as if they offered no insight into the narrative construction process that is at work in a particular company.

In this way a narrative study of entrepreneurship comes onto the horizon. Entrepreneurship has seldom been conceived of as 'narrative sense making', yet a number of links with earlier research can be made. On the one hand we may refer to the use of the biographical method (Chell, Haworth & Brearley, 1991) and the biographical perspective (Hornaday, 1982). A more narratively-oriented approach can enrich the (auto)biographical perspective and be applied in studies into the self-concept of entrepreneurs. On the other hand, a narrative perspective can be appropriate to a more popular approach in which stories, and biographies of entrepreneurs are registered as founders' stories, life stories, autobiographies, success stories, quasi-hagiographies, or as painful accounts of failure, loss, and bankruptcy. Such entrepreneurs' stories often show a strong resemblance to fiction in which the heroine skims the highest peaks or the hero plumbs the depths, or they form the basis of characters in films or plays. Tsoukas (1994, p. 768) points out that such publications are so popular because they are more easily accessible to practitioners: "*Narratives, being loose flexible frameworks, are close to the activities of practitioners, are richer in content, and have a higher mnemonic value.*" The story allows the experiences of others to be linked to one's own story, or to view the latter in a new light. In this sense, stories as useful outcomes of qualitative research are directly accessible fragments, open for the sense making of the user of the study. We shall be concentrating less on individual entrepreneurs' stories, and more on the way stories constitute a form of collective sense making (Boyce, 1995).

In summary, the narrative production of organization in a high tech firm comes down to (1) the organization of experience, memory, feeling, and identity, (2) interactive actualization, and (3) the development of a specific language use. This is what I shall describe thickly, with the help of a few case studies. Answering our research question thus demands a story about how actors were or were not prepared to launch into their initial stories - which are actually stories about the end, or more precisely the goal ("That's where we'd like to be headed") - to carry them through, to attach their actions and events to them, to rethink the stories and thus rechristen the company. It is a story in which a company is continually being invented, where sub-stories live a life of their own or can be joined together in the nick of time and brought into dialogue with one another, and in which the past with all its sensibilities and ambiguities can be framed without compromising or making impossible the vague future that lies ahead - it is a story, in short, that makes the continuation of collective creativity possible.

²² See also chapter three, fragment 12.

Fragment Eight
Karl Weick and the Process of Sensemaking

The foregoing fragments, from that dealing with the relation between a conceptual framework and the development of theory, to that addressing the meaning of meaning, may be seen as a prelude, an intensive initiation affording an acquaintance with the characteristics of a social constructionist approach. This leads us to Weick. First, his vision of the organizational process as sensemaking will be clarified. This will be followed by a deeper consideration of the social dimension of the organizational process.

The Social Psychology of Organizing by Karl Weick

Karl Weick's thought on 'organizing'¹ is here applied in order to develop the organizing process in social constructionist terms. This should come as no surprise, as Weick emphasizes 'process', 'interaction', and 'meaning', and the title of his work also attests to the social essence of the organizing process, and draws attention to the specific contribution that (social) psychology can make to organizational theory. The title of his book is a reference to Katz and Kahn (1966), taken up in a variant by Hosking and Morley (1991).² All three books point to the idea that social processes constitute the dynamic of organizations, regardless of whether one is speaking of political, cultural, or learning processes.³ One cannot conceive of power, culture, or learning as separate phenomena from social interaction. This is in turn not social reductionism. Weick's thought on organization has also been applied in a more cognitive psychological sense, peeling away social layers (Huff, 1990). One of our chief concerns will be to clarify the differences from a social constructionist interpretation of his process theory.⁴ These differences should not be seen as absolute, but they may teach us something about the singularities of each interpretation.

¹ Presented in fragment 3 as an important attempt to study organizations in process terms.

² See *The Social Psychology of Organizations* by Katz & Kahn, and *A Social Psychology of Organizing* by Hosking & Morley. Here the importance of social psychology for organization studies becomes prominent (see Kahn (1993) and Murnighan (1993)). In many cases, social psychology has been too much a study of psychology in social contexts instead of a study of the social itself, with further separation from organizational psychology the consequence (see Levine, Resnick & Higgins (1993); see also Gergen's chapter on "Social Psychology and the Wrong Revolution" in *Realities and Relationships* (1994)).

³ For the relation between social interaction and learning processes (Argyris & Schön, 1978) political processes (Hosking & Morley, 1991), and cultural processes (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992).

⁴ See also the discussion on cognitive psychology and social constructionism in fragment 20, on cognition and meaning in fragment 21. In chapter five, fragment 21, this boundary will be further explored.

Weick initially published *The Social Psychology of Organizing* in 1969, in a very compromised and abstract form. The 1979 version bears the same title, but is otherwise a completely reworked edition. It is a unicorn in the organizational library. In a refreshingly convincing way, the complexity of process thinking is literally laid out before the reader - by subtle suggestion, revelation, and exploration - and is then further examined and explained. Weick's work forms a school, a direction in thinking all on its own, which has served as a turning point for many organizational scholars, although this fact is not always equally visible and explicit. An illustration of such a turning point may be found in Colville's consideration of Weick's book, written in 1994, fifteen years after the work's appearance. The apparent tardiness of Colville's review should not give the impression that the book remained too difficult to review, demanding a number of years to come to light. The review is tied up with a small misunderstanding, as Colville had been asked to review a third edition. As it happened, no third edition was forthcoming.⁵ Colville eventually decided to review the second edition. In practice the result was most fortunate, since we rarely have the chance to read how someone grows to appreciate a book and use it for research and teaching over a number of years. Reviews that immediately follow the appearance of a book tend to offer a principled and intellectualized reaction, rather than an idea of the particular form the book takes for the reviewer/user once he or she has read it. For Colville, Weick's book has remained a must, so 'seminal' that he names it as the only book for his desert island library. The book that at its appearance had already been seen by Wicker as a brilliant example of generative theory,⁶ retained its generative power in theory and practice fifteen years later. The resonance of Weick's book emanates from his ability to describe an organizational process with a rarely equaled profundity, sometimes bordering on the jargonistic, while nonetheless maintaining vivid imagery and a lively tone, and remaining in direct dialogue with the reader. Digestible complexity. After which Weick, in the book's final line, manages to bring himself and his readers back to the organization with a small 'o': "*Organizations keep people busy, occasionally entertain them, give them a variety of experiences, keep them off the streets, provide pretexts for storytelling, and allow socializing. They haven't anything else to give*" (p. 264).

The Social Psychology of Organizing offers a double 'helping' for our theoretic development. In the first place, Weick charts a new course for the construction of a process-oriented theory of organization in general. Secondly, he provides us with a refined and subtle language for the conceptualization of organizational processes.

⁵ However, this perhaps indicates the degree to which the revised edition was keenly anticipated by some. In 1995, Weick published a new book with the title, *Sensemaking in Organizations* (see also Weick, 1993b).

⁶ See discussion in fragment 5 of this chapter.

The way towards an organizational theory

Weick has little direct criticism of the usual forms and language of organizational theory, but he departs from them, by eclectically carving his own way. In essence he suggests how we can write our own organizational theory, rather than prescribing his. "*Our joint interest in the activity of theorizing as well as the product of theorizing, coupled with our belief that the products of theorizing age quickly and have a short half-life (Koestler, 1970), should be sufficient to explain why this is a book about organizational theorizing rather than about theory*" (p. 26). How does Weick help us along the way to the construction of our own theory of organization?

In the first place, he assumes an appreciative and imaginative attitude towards the word 'organization', a term which often comes across as dull, cool - not as in 'cool jazz' - and uninspired. The theorist (and pragmatist) in organizational theory may invent, experiment, and free associate, in the sense of "*speculating, striving for interest, utilizing incongruity as a perspective, anthropomorphizing, reifying, inserting hyperbole, wazing discursive, glossing, improvising examining alternatives to positivism, reframing, intuiting, and any other tricks that help counteract sluggish imaginations*" (p. 26). Weick takes this to the limit: "*Generating ideas about organizations borders on madness*" (p. 27), although acknowledgment of the tenuous border between genius and madness has already become something of a commonplace. According to this same logic, Weick makes a sortie outside the field of organizations to shore up his argument, drawing particularly on literature and art, for him also a false border: "*Organizational theorists bite off too little too precisely and we've tried to encourage them to tackle bigger slices of reality. And if poetry, appreciation, and the artistry of inquiry need to be coupled with science to produce those bigger bites, so be it*" (p. 234). In a cartoon on page 28 he presents one Professor Bleent who, at the moment that he discovers his beloved research object, the 'Floon Beetle', after a long desert expedition, kills the insect with his research instrument. The moral of the story, with a wink to Oscar Wilde, is clear: 'we kill what we study'. Through one-sided research methods, and by walking around with a magnifying glass, figuratively speaking, we can fail to see precisely what we were looking for. Rather than concentrating exclusively on organizations, we can learn a great deal about organizations outside the world of organizations. Weick, for example, used artistic settings to study organizational processes. One of the most direct applications of his theory of 'organizing' may be found in studies of jazz orchestras (Gillilan, 1977; Bougon, Weick & Binkhorst, 1977).

Secondly, Weick makes use of 'tactics' to teach us a lesson on 'how to theorize'. 'Tactics' is a word which fell into disuse with the arrival of the big word - and bombastic reification - 'strategy'. Tactics, in contrast (as de Certeau (1984) employs it in 'tactics of everyday practice'), is a word which speaks to me because it connects with the experience of every

person, including the researcher/theoretician, who uses it daily to make transitions and pursue meaning. Survival is not a question of a Grand Strategy, but of daily finding one's way and exploring how one finds one's way. The secret is tactics, this knot in your handkerchief, this creative but earthy rule, with which one blazes trails. Weick offers tactics for thinking about organizations (p. 27-64), but also for those who in practice steer the organization towards the right channels (p. 243-263). I make particular use of the tactics of 'mutate metaphors' and 'evoke minitheories'; the ideas of 'metaphors and minitheories' make an appearance in my account of theory development (fragment 5) while the 'thinking' tactics concerning the use of process language has been adopted as one of our points of departure (fragments 3 and 4).⁷

In this dissertation we shall take Weick's double route indication as our guide through the highways and byways of organizational theory. Firstly, a theory of organization based on creativity demands above all a creative approach to theorizing. Secondly, I shall use the idea of 'tactics' in the sense that the research process directed to theory development will be treated in terms of the tactics of daily research, rather than in a large research strategy.

The organizational process as enactment/selection/retention

Weick (1979, p. 3) defines 'organizing' as "a consensually validated grammar for reducing equivocality by means of sensible interlocked behaviors." Organizing is thus a mutually validated grammar for the reduction of ambiguity through meaningful interlocked behaviors. This definition is a slightly revised version of that found in the 1969 edition (Maas, 1988), in which organization is summarized as "resolving equivocality in an enacted environment by means of interlocked behaviors embedded in conditionally related processes" (1969, p. 91). It is a matter of pushing back of ambiguity rather than solving it, whereby ambiguity receives a central place in the organizational process, nudging out the concept of variation which was clearly expounded in the 1969 conception (Maas, 1988). Furthermore, Weick specifies that he is dealing with a grammar which, just as in language, consists of agreed upon rules by which ambiguities can be cleared up as users test them out with each other by means of coupled or circular behavior.⁸ Organizing is thus a social process, based on double interactions, in which we are in search of unequivocalty within a broad spectrum of meanings.

Weick conceives of this process of assigning meaning as a cyclical process of 'enactment/selection/retention', building on Campbell's socio-cultural model of evolution.⁹ This model is a translation in social terms of a biological, Darwin-inspired model of natural selection that Weick in turn rewrites for the context of organizations. Through *enactment* we create episodes

⁷ Besides these three tactics, Weick formulates three others: 'know what you're doing', 'acknowledge tradeoffs', and 'cultivate interest', which make suggestions respectively concerning object, method, and theory of study.

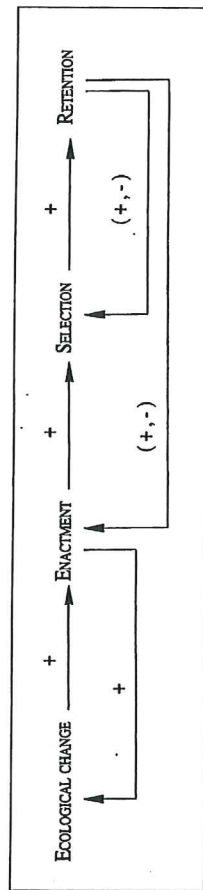
⁸ These terms will be explained in the course of the text.

⁹ For an outline of this model and for references, see Weick (1979, ch. 5).

which through their ambiguity ask for further interpretation. Enacted episodes come into being either by bracketing a significant change in the environment, or by generating changes ourselves. Through *selection* an attempt is made to reduce equivocality by imposing certain interpretive schemes or structures on enacted ambiguous episodes. Through *retention* the products of successful sensemaking are stored in the form of enacted environments or 'causal maps'. The result is a meaningful version of the ambiguous situation, reduced through action and communication. Prior to enactment we may speak of 'ecological change', according to Weick a necessary variation in and of the environment in order to achieve sensemaking. Without discontinuity, difference, or any other form of variation, there is no 'enactable' environment, the 'raw material' for sensemaking.

Weick represents the whole process of sensemaking, consisting of these four organizational processes, in a schematic diagram (see figure 8.1).

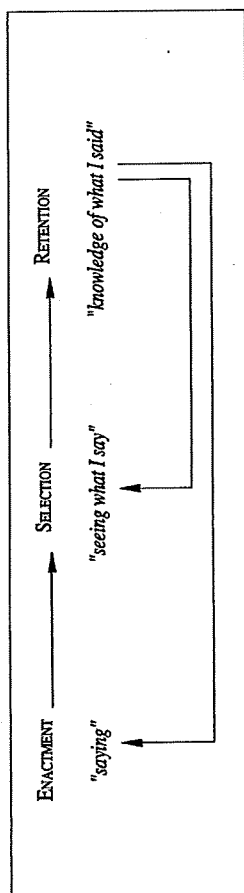
Figure 8.1 Organizing as a process of sensemaking



At first glance these four processes seem to follow each other sequentially, even though we may assume that they occur simultaneously. The arrangement of the diagram particularly emphasizes the mutual influences (Weick, 1979, p. 132; Voegt, 1990, p. 70-71): (1) ecological changes and 'enactment' are linked causally and strengthen one another positively: the more changes observed, the greater the change as a result; (2) 'enactment' is positively linked with selection in a directly causal relation: the more 'enactment', the more selection-activity becomes necessary; (3) a similarly positive relation is established between selection and retention; and finally, (4) retention influences both selection and 'enactment' - which can be either positive or negative - in function of the situation in which use is made of previous interpretations or the present ones are called into question. Weick speaks in this case of 'crediting' and 'discrediting' respectively.

Weick provides a second way to summarize the process of sensemaking in one pithy, almost mnemotechnical sentence, 'a recipe for sensemaking': "How can I know what I think until I see what I say?" (see figure 8.2).

Figure 8.2 Organizing through a recipe for sensemaking



The act of saying or uttering includes the 'enactment' process, and leads to an ambiguous episode, still unclear prattle. Seeing what is said, the representation of this prattle, is the bulk of the selection process, in which a retrospective meaning is given to what has been said. This meaning is stored as knowledge in the retention process, and subsequently influences new forms of 'enactment' and 'selection'. In the process of organization there is an alternation between actions, interpretations, and retentions by which an organization hums along as a continuous stream of experiences, and keeps on humming. Here it is remarkable how Weick's approach is able simultaneously to connect a complex and abstract whole of social, cultural, interpretative, and memory processes, and to situate it at the concrete level of human interaction, close to daily experience.¹⁰

We shall now further examine each of the organizational processes, by linking each in turn to a basic mechanism; respectively, 'bracketing' for the process of 'enactment', 'retrospective sense-making' for the process of selection, and '(dis)crediting' for the process of retention.

Enactment by 'bracketing'

'Enactment' is the process by which we create and structure reality. An environment may not be passively and objectively observed, but is actively constructed. 'Bracketing' plays a central role in this active construction. A person takes in only a part of reality. The (total) reality is not a reality. A person isolates a portion of the environment, which then becomes his or her environment. "Once something has been isolated, then that is the environment momentarily for the organization and that environment has been put into place by the very actions of the employees themselves" (Weick, 1979, p. 154). We are thus dealing with more than the perceived environment, a principle that is already known to us from cognitive psychology. This last case would imply rather a question of 'enthinkment', a term which does not completely fit the bill.

¹⁰ However, I do have one criticism of this material, which I shall address later: the reduction from the level of the organization to the minimal social situation. As it stands, it is impossible to understand how social interaction is included in the larger story and cultural context of the organization. Giddens' (1984) theory of structuration seems to me a useful supplement here.

In speaking and dealing with one another, people make their own and others' environments which they then observe, name, and take action upon. A company battles the competition which it first names as the competition; a team does overtime to make deadlines which the team members themselves have set or negotiated; the leader of a training session organizes a series on coping with stress for salespeople who try to outdo each others' quotas, and so on... "It is that initial implanting of reality that is preserved by the word enactment" (Weick, 1979, p. 165); and again, "people in organizations need to find out what they have done" (Weick, 1979, p. 152).

The enactment process,¹¹ and the close correspondence with ecological changes, provides a considerably different view of the relationship between organization and environment. Both have been long seen as clearly separable entities, with the organization obliged to attune itself to the changing environment.¹² Now it becomes clear how an organization actively chooses its environment; shapes its content, and interprets it, and it does this in the same way that it creates its 'internal environment', even though the players are different and the process of negotiation with other organizations precedes less directly.

However, Weick's vision of 'enacted environment' leaves an ambiguous impression. On the one hand, he shows convincingly how an organization creates its own environment as a linking of temporary and stable fields of attention and action, and how organization and environment overlap and meld with one another. Weick (1979, p. 176) states: "The enacted environment is artificial rather than natural in the sense that it is laced with preferences, purposes, idiosyncratic punctuations, desires, selective perceptions, and designs." On the other hand, the process of enactment arises out of ecological changes which, he argues, offer 'raw' materials for sensemaking and which, he further suggests, occur independently of the person. One might question whether such assuming of 'raw materials' and 'natural environment' (p. 177) remains necessary, and whether Weick here is not overreaching a little, translating a theory of natural selection. In my opinion, ecological changes are also enacted;¹³ there is no point making a distinction between the two processes. Moreover, Maturana and Varela's (1980) theory of self-producing systems¹⁴ leads to the vision of 'enactment' as a form of narcissism. According to an interpretation of their theory, organizations construct their environments as projections of their

¹¹ 'Enactment' as an active relationship to the environment is a concept that can be found in several schools of thought. de Laat (1988) refers to the similarity to the phenomenological notion of 'intentionality'. Here, it is emphasized to what extent consciousness is characterized by a directedness: we are always aware of something or someone. The same applies to the observation which orients us to something. Morgan (1986) sees a similarity with 'accomplishment', a term used by Garfinkel (1967) in his ethnomethodology, whereby that which is considered a fact by someone should, according to Garfinkel, be seen as the result of a socially organized and practical negotiation. Weick himself makes the rather obvious connection with 'the social construction of reality' school (Berger & Luckmann, 1967).

¹² See open system approach (Morgan, 1986). For a review of different views on the environment and their impact in strategic management, see Smircich & Stubbart (1985).

¹³ See amongst others the studies on innovation in which it is shown that the innovation task is the subject of (sometimes long) periods of meaning construction. See also Van Dijk (1989), who formulates a similar amendment to Weick's theory. See also Mangham's criticisms (1987) of Weick for being too mechanistic.

¹⁴ See also fragment 3.

own identities or self images (Morgan, 1986). This idea is already implicit in Weick's conception of enactment, since bracketing can occur on the basis of existing images and interpretations. This 'we see what we believe' is here further thought through. When companies look at the environment, it is as if they are looking in a mirror, and they will tend to describe the environment in function of their own concerns and problems. In the end, the enacting of an environment becomes a form of self-production. On the basis of Maturana and Varela's work, organizations can thus be seen as closed systems in a circular relationship with their environments.

Selection via 'retrospective sensemaking'

The enactment process results not in one reality, but in many often ambiguous realities, which demand a further reduction of ambiguity. People attempt 'to see what they say or do' and come up with an answer to the question, 'what is going on here?'. In the selection process ambiguity is reduced by making possible interpretations from isolated fragments, be they utterances, events, reports, or actions, and by conferring and coming to an agreement over a particular definition (read interpretation) of reality. On what basis is a selection made? How does such a selection come into being?

The interpretations which one tests refer to previous interpretations, stored in 'cognitive maps', or are implicitly present in the 'enactments' themselves. In the first case, influence proceeds from retention to selection, through which new events or utterances are fitted into older and apparently successful interpretations. In this case, selection consists of the search for a possible concordance with existing frameworks and information. If this is not successful, that is, "if retention is discredited, then people, events, and actions that differ from previously enacted environments will be given greater attention, fresher labels, newer connections, and will have more likelihood of being stored where they will then assimilate and accommodate to whatever content remains in retention" (Weick, 1979, p. 187). In the second case, categorized episodes serve as a sort of pre-interpretation, ready for further interpretations. The difference between enactment and selection is often rather small, since both imply a form of sensemaking and ambiguity reduction. The more the episode catches the attention, deviates, seems strange, instigates contradiction and tension, exudes hypocrisy - all of which Weick collects under the label of 'loosely structured enactment' - the greater the chance that new and adapted interpretations will be selected. Weick, however, reminds us that people have the tendency to treat as ordered even the most wildly deviant events.

Weick approaches selection as a form of retrospective sensemaking. Crucial to this is the assumption of ambiguity and equivocality. In the process of enactment it is possible that

equivocality is reduced, but usually it is in fact retained and augmented. In this world, in organizations, and especially in new situations, ambiguity and variation are the rule and not the exception. Whatever we see, understand, hear, and feel rather than being simultaneously defined, is susceptible to interpretation. Communications which reach us are open messages. I am not speaking here of the so-called noise which causes information to be received unclearly, but of the fact that a communication is comparable with the figure-ground image, as we know it from Gestalt psychology. There are numerous meanings which cannot be reduced to equality with one another. Organizations are undefined spaces (Maas, 1988) in which members of the organization work themselves to the bone in order to get their own situations named and interpreted. The process of organization is, however, loaded with equivocality, and many actions which are meant to reduce this - through a desire to put the shop in order once and for all - such as meetings, memos, and reports, are the occasion of new and different ambiguities. Informing someone is not about conveying unambiguous messages, to be taken or left, but rather it is a question of providing an ecological change which the reader or listener must interpret by bracketing and retrospective sensemaking. What does the latter entail?

Sensemaking is retrospective because it follows actions and because organization members step 'out of the stream' to reflect on what they were doing. For Weick, this reflection assumes the form of "*writing plausible accounts, histories, and sequences for enactments*" (p. 195). Here he takes a position that is comparable to the view of the narrative nature or meanings which we looked at in fragment 7. Again, storytelling is a necessity rather than a luxury, since we must agree what an action, a decision, a project, or a career has been in the past and thus what it is in the process of becoming.¹⁵ Organization, which to such a large degree is directed towards the future, as its many planning and strategic activities show, is here seen as a past directed, historicizing activity.¹⁶ This demonstrates the importance of the retention process.

Retention through 'discrediting'

The discussion of 'retention' puts us square in the middle of the theme of 'organizational memory' (Walsh, 1989), and the role played by memory processes in the functioning of organizations. The memory is paradoxical. In this connection, Weick cites McGlashan¹⁷: "*Man must remember if he is not to become meaningless, and must forget if he is not to go mad*" (p. 205). On the one hand, the memory is indispensable for creating meaning, and to indicate

¹⁵ Action thus precedes cognition. Weick is here diametrically opposed to cognitive psychology, in which actions follow cognitions (Steyaert, 1989). Personally, I see the two as inseparable. See also Weick (1979), who speaks of 'acting thoughtfully' and 'thinking actingly'.

¹⁶ Weick even makes the point that future directed activities can better be understood as past actions, since the past tense lends itself better to telling stories than does the future.

¹⁷ From *The Savage and Beautiful Country*.

'what's going on'. One could say that people look for new scenarios in order to say later that they are similar to scenarios that they had previously experienced. On the other hand, forgetting is crucial, in our case perhaps less to keep from going mad than to create the necessary space for new actions and interpretations. The question then becomes how an enterprise stores, applies, and destroys its retained interpretations; in short, how the organizational memory is 'organized'. I shall not delve any deeper into this question or into possible models for the memory.¹⁸ We should not forget that retention is only found where something is 'retrieved' and made explicit, a situation that William James described well (1950, p. 65-4): "*The retention of an experience is, in short, but another name for the possibility of thinking it again, or the tendency to think it again, with its past surroundings.*" I shall, however, examine the part played by retention in the organization process, a role that we can understand through the phenomena of 'discrediting' and 'crediting'.

Through retention the organizational process is partially held within the construction of an organization, an enacted environment, as recorded, for example, in cognitive maps: "*An enacted environment is a historical document, stored in the retention process, usually in the form of a cause map, that can be superimposed on subsequent activities*" (p. 229). As a result, the ambiguity and uncertainty is to a large degree cleared up. The question then arises, what do organizations do with this self knowledge? Through discrediting, members of the organization can determine whether this knowledge, this stock form of interpretation, can remain unaltered. 'Discrediting' remains in the first place a verb, a tangible and interactive form belonging to people who "*oppose, argue, contradict, disbelieve, doubt, act hypothetically, improvise, counter, distrust, differ, challenge, vacillate, question, puncture, disprove and expose*" (p. 229). This brings ambivalence and equivalence into the organizational process once again. Discrediting means both delaying retention for as long as possible and questioning previous retentions. The retention shows clearly how much lack of clarity, openness, and undescribed space a company allows itself. Weick situates 'discrediting' in the tension between flexibility and stability, between multiplicity and uniformity. The need for flexibility and open space is indeed very important for organizations which resemble those under study here,¹⁹ for such firms, the question becomes pressing as to how the organization process, through discrediting, can help them to take advantage of this situation. If "*chronic flexibility destroys identity*", how then can an open identity be maintained? This is the question which Weick's approach forces us to deal with in our case studies.

With discrediting, a company is caught up in an interplay of doubting what it knows and knowing what it doubts: doubt becomes the motor of organizational change. This is unusual

¹⁸ See fragment 20, for a social constructionist view of memory.

¹⁹ The tension between flexibility and stability is described in chapter four as a central dilemma with which a young, innovative organization is confronted, while for Weick it is seen as a dilemma for every organization.

in most organizations and organizational theories, where the certainty principle is the basis of interventions made by executives and managers. Weick, however, is most explicit and normative in another of his tactics: "*When things are clear, doubt; when there is doubt, treat things as if they are clear*" (p. 221). The ultimate goal of discrediting is not to call into question something which has achieved its value, but rather to provide for variation and learn to operate as if there were multiple interpretations possible. Without any form at all of self-insinuation and doubt, identity development is not possible; put more strongly, discrediting makes renewal from the inside out possible. Through discrediting, one can acquire a fuller meaning and a variation in the interpretations which each experience brings with it. The result is the possibility of new action.

Organizing As a Social Process

Processes of enactment, selection, and retention make up the organizing process which takes place in the interactions implicit in acting, interpreting, and understanding. The process by which organizations arrive at action, interpretation, and knowledge does not occur in a vacuum, but is a social act in which individuals clarify their perspectives, come to agreements about these perspectives, and together put them into force. The activities of an organization come into being through a flow of interactions between individuals, groups, departments, cultures, and organizations. In this sense, organization is a social construction. Organizing is the process whereby people continuously make their organization, call it into question, rediscover it, confirm it, blow it out of proportion, present it, establish it, break it open - in short, *invent* it, on the basis of interactions between individuals and groups of individuals. I shall first present Weick's conceptualization of this process of interaction which is concentrated around the phenomenon of interdependence, double interaction, collective structure, minimal social situation, partial and multiple inclusions, and interlocked behaviors. After this we shall turn our attention to Weick's theory as it has been further developed in The Netherlands in empirical, theoretical, methodical, and practical areas.

Weick's vision of the social dimension of organizing

The point of departure of Weick's theory of organizing is interdependence and the concept of double interaction that goes with it. Weick introduces a relational language, with words such as 'connection', 'relation', 'link', 'network', 'reciprocity', 'interaction', and 'interdependence'. Such language is necessary since "*most 'things' in organizations are actually*

relationships" (p. 88). We are here dealing with relationships between events, variables, and above all with social relationships, which are characterized by interdependence. Weick uses this term to move beyond linear and causal thinking and to emphasize the circular nature of interaction, which always takes place through double interacts and interlocked behavior cycles.

Weick describes the organizational flow in terms of everyday interactions, which can be characterized by interdependence in the form of double interacts and interlocked behavior cycles. The basic unit for looking at organizations is thus expressed as 'double interacts' and 'interlocked behavior cycles' (see definition). A double interact is the minimal form of a social process; namely, when a person acts in relation to another person, who is responsive to the first person, who is again responsive to the second person. Although the double interact can become 'decoupled' in three steps, namely act, interact, and double interact (de Laat, 1988), it should be stressed that this is more a matter of 'being didactic': the double interact is the minimal form in which equivocality can become reduced; it is the unit wherein the actions of persons become mutually meaningful. de Laat (1988) stresses that with the concept of 'double interacts', the boundary of 'the social' can be indicated; this is referred to as the 'minimal social situation' or a form of pure organizing (Weick, 1979, p. 103). According to de Laat, the double interact is the minimal condition to be able to speak of a social situation. Here, 'minimal social situation' refers less to a concrete situation than to an ideal form through which a paradoxical situation can be named: the minimal social situation is characterized by the absence of the social. When there is no double interact possible (and thus only an interact), as in the situation of authoritative power or bureaucratic activity, there is no open responsiveness and no redefinition possible, and the social process becomes reified: organizing becomes organization.

In a specific context, double interacts can be seen as repetitive cycles of double interactions, which Weick calls a cycle of interlocked behaviors. Double interacts become cycles of interlocked behaviors as they assume the notions of 'assembly rules' and 'grammar'. Through criteria, (assembly) rules, and rules of thumb, the separate double interacts are repeated consecutively within an integrative and relatively stable frame, which can be called 'a cycle of interlocked behaviors'.

From this consecution of double interacts and cycles of interlocked behaviors, Weick tries to explain how longer sequences of organizing (around events) can become intelligibly understood: he assumes that collective structures evolve from the repetition of cycles of interlocked behaviors and double interacts. He here makes a transition from interactions between individuals to the development of groups. Weick seems to patiently construct the rise of organizations out of minimal social situations (double interacts - cycles of interlocked

behaviors - collective structures),²⁰ which is a useful approach to take in a thesis that attempts to show how new organizations come into being out of the interactions of one or two entrepreneurs and a handful of co-actors. The concept of *collective structure* was first used by Allport (1962). Whenever there is "a pluralistic situation in which in order for an individual (or class of individuals) to perform some act (or have some experience) that he 'desires' to perform (or for which he is 'set') it is necessary that another person (or persons) perform certain acts (either similar or different and complementary to his own), we have what can be called a fact of collective structure. It is either collectively actualized or potential" (Allport, 1962, p. 17). Allport, bracketed and interpreted by Weick, here answers the question of why people come together, work together, live together. Weick develops this further as a four-fold model of group development, but we may also apply it to the young organization. The image of individuals who together start up a company is here close at hand. It is in fact significant to realize that his inspiration for a theory of primary organizing processes is drawn from models of group development. People meet each other initially not around social goals, which are strongly individualistic, but around social means: "Partners in a collective structure share space, time, and energy, but they need not share visions, aspirations, or intentions" (Weick, 1979, p. 91). Interdependence is more readily found in the area of means than in the area of intentions. As we look at young enterprises in their initial phases, we can see that partnerships arise because two or more people have often worked together for a time in another company and discover that, without ever having spoken of shared visions and objectives, their combined competencies and sheer presence together could form the basis for their own company. The relationship comes before the love, if you will. Weick, too, sees social structures as coming into being in this way: "Perhaps the most important consequence of treating the developmental sequence as starting with diverse means (towards) common means is that it preserves the crucial point that people create social structure" (Weick, 1979, p.92). Only later do such structures begin to evolve towards social objectives, the first of which is the preservation of the group, if only to provide the context for realizing individual goals. It is important here to differentiate between means and to strive as much as possible for their diversity. As a result of this process, differences in intentions will again come to the fore. This completes the cycle. Organizing consists of the alternation between collectivity and diversity, as well of ends as of means. At the same time, it has been suggested - in strong opposition to the notion that entrepreneurs begin from shared dreams of what the future will look like - that there is much more shared meaning concerning means than ends. As for the latter, Weick insinuates that "sharing comes much later, if it ever comes at all" (p. 91).²¹

²⁰ See Weick (1979, chapter four).

²¹ The notion of shared meaning will be reviewed in chapter five, fragment 19.

In order to do justice to the complexity of the average organizational situation, it should be pointed out that various different collective structures develop simultaneously. Individuals in organizations all form parts of others groups, and thus apply only part of their capabilities and action repertoire to the group in question. One can speak of respectively *multiple* and *partial inclusions* (Voogt, 1990, see also below; Weick, 1979). By being 'interlocked' in a certain group, an actor will take responsibility within that framework, and probably not within other collective structures, even if part of 'the organization'. As a consequence, the intersubjective character of the organizing process can be concretized by looking at the different inclusions of the organizational actors and by the diversity of collective structures. The question is, which inclusions are open or 'allowed', and which are inaccessible for some actors, implying they will not use nor know this action repertoire of the organization. In the development of an entrepreneurial organization, one can expect a gradual enlargement of collective structures and multiple inclusions, while the degree of partial inclusion will decrease; for instance, an entrepreneur, confronted with more and more inclusions, experiences that his initial complete involvement in some structures has changed.

With this social conceptualization of the organizing process, Weick goes beyond the individualized conception of organizing on a micro level with which we are familiar from Organizational Behavior, and he also avoids the strongly abstract vision on a macro level which we see at work in sociology and some sectors of organization theory (e.g. population ecology). Weick restores organization to the visible, daily recognizable meso-level - where it is also most likely to be susceptible to influence. This is the level on which people make agreements, show leadership, negotiate, and communicate. In the process he also restores organization research to the study of interactions and patterns on this same level.

Further developments in organizing as a social process: the theory of social integration

In the Dutch-speaking sphere, the implications of Weick's thinking has been most thoroughly developed in Rotterdam (under Van Dongen) in research into organizational change (Voogt, Maas), in methodical development (Van Dijk, Maas, Voogt), and in theory development (de Laat). Especially striking here is in-depth exploration of the social dimension of the organizing process. The efforts in this direction have been concentrated around a theory of organizing as 'social integration'.²²

There are, in my opinion, three important adjustments to Weick's thought development to be found in these authors' theory of 'Social Integration'. In the first place, they have brought

the relation between the social and the cognitive back into a sense of balance which is sometimes lacking in Weick's work. This is evident in the way Voogt reformulates Weick's definition of 'organizing' as "*reducing equivocality by means of a consensually validated grammar and sensible interlocked behaviors, whereby grammar and behavior are interdependent*" (1990, p. 52): knowledge and action, the cognitive and the social levels of an interaction, are inseparably bound up with one another. In this way, these authors approach the interactive standpoint in which concepts (such as 'the organization' or 'the group') are transformed into continuing interactions and redefined as social processes ('organizing', 'grouping'). According to this theory, cognitions cannot develop outside of social interactions: "*The making of 'the' reality is a social event, a continuing process, which is always in movement*" (Voogt, 1990, p. 61).

Secondly, the idea of multiple inclusion is emphasized over that of partial inclusion. Individuals are involved in many contexts, leading to the possibility of often conflicting meaning constructions. These inclusions are not static, but rather, starting from a plurality of inclusions (and the changes they entail), actors constantly reorder their involvement and meanings. In this way we may understand how individuals with a partial inclusion can still be completely involved - people are in such cases not fractured creatures - even though the situation may speak to only a portion of their action repertoire. The organizing process within a particular context can then not simply be conceived of as "*social organizing of a multiplicity of realities in social contexts*" (Voogt, 1990, p. 62). The emphasis thus falls chiefly on the synchronous character of organizing, while Weick would suggest a more sequential process (e.g. the sequence of events in double interacts).

The third, and probably most important, expansion on Weick's thought involves the proposition that organizing is actually a process of change, in which one dereifies fixations (and learns how to do so). The various developments of Weick's theory (Maas, de Laat, Van Dijk, Voogt) can be seen as attempts to radicalize process thinking and to study the way organizational change can be understood methodically, conceptually, and empirically as the guarantee of a multiplicity of definitions of reality on the basis of continuous interaction (i.e. completed double interacts). Dereification is referred to as the way to reanimate a stagnated organizing process. To accomplish this, Van Dijk (1989) has developed a methodical strategy consisting of applying context variation, so that dereified interpretations can be freed up and a form of reframing can be made possible. In the description of preconditions which can aid the continuation of processes of development and change, these authors make use of a negative criterion: how can obstacles to ongoing interaction be identified and removed? Rather than formulating how and where the interaction between various realities can be 'designed', it is more useful (e.g. for an organization advisor) to suggest what should *not* be

²² I am basing this discussion on Voogt's contribution (1990), which largely incorporates the ideas of de Laat (1988) and Van Dijk (1989).

done and what should be avoided, and to intervene when something goes wrong. Through this 'negative steering', an attempt is thus made to remove dysfunctional 'disturbances', rather than to give positive directions, as in the case of 'shared meanings', for instance.

Even with these supplements to Weick's theory, a number of questions remain open, in my opinion. Firstly, Weick, together with the so-called Rotterdam School, accords too little attention to the role of language in social interaction. This deficiency can be seen on two levels. On a first level it appears that despite the many attempts to embrace a process language, Weick's eclectic nature leads him to embrace other languages, including a biological language (with references to his Darwinian sources of inspiration), as well as a mechanistic language. The latter has drawn heavy fire from Mangham (1987, p. 5): "*Despite assertions that his concern is primarily with people rather than reifications such as 'organizations' and 'systems', Weick consistently uses the language of mechanics to describe that which he takes to be behavior in organizations. His texts are replete with notions of scanning, feedback, links, loops, coupling and decoupling, flows, sequences, controls, regulators and the like.*" The Rotterdam School, too, in its adoption of a typically Weickian vocabulary (e.g. the assemblage of interactants), does not completely escape such criticism. The question thus remains whether a less mechanistic vision of interaction, that better does justice to the holistic character of interactions, can be developed. On a second and more crucial level - this can also be a solution for the first level problem - we can ask how the linguistic character of the construction of social reality can be inscribed in Weick's theory. For example, in reaching consensus on actions and interpretations, or in the activating of retentions, actors make use of various discourses and language games.

Secondly, I have characterized Weick's conceptions as a meso-theory of organizing with a strong orientation towards interactions and groups. We may here ask how the interaction between groups can be understood and taken further, and how we may conceive of the coming into being of collective structures larger than groups. I anticipate that through the process of social organizing, companies will develop their own particular identities - call it 'the new organization': constant entities, albeit with a temporary stability and ephemeral boundaries, embedded in a societal, cultural, social, and economic context. I would suggest that a meso-theory that attempts to surpass the traditional levels of micro, meso, and macro by providing one integrated (meso-)level - thus in fact attempting to be a true social psychology - must succeed in anchoring both of the former levels. It seems to me that Weick's theory has especially been able to include the micro-level. This would imply that it can be shown how cultural ideologies, political systems, and social structures, or (in less refined language) how cultural, political, and social language systems, relate to actors involved in multiple social interactions.

Fragment Nine

The Research Question Revisited: a Social Constructionist Conceptualization

Throughout the three movements of fragments 6, 7, and 8, a social constructionist framework has been elaborated, the main stream of whose thoughts has been described. In this fragment, these three movements will be integrated in a conceptual framework. For this study of entrepreneurship seen from a social constructionist perspective, I can best characterize such a framework as an orientation rather than a model, as a recipe rather than a blueprint, as a persuasion which guides me to look in a certain direction rather than a description of what I am supposed to be seeing (Blumer, 1969; Schwandt, 1994; Stake, 1994; Weick, 1979). We are dealing with a set of directions and persuasions which guide the researcher while traveling along the research circle (see fragment 10). Doing research from a social constructionist orientation thus involves 'particular commitments, purviews, and concerns'.¹ In which direction does social constructionism orient us? Which social constructionist persuasions will be our vantage point for looking at the organizational task of perpetuating entrepreneurship? In this fragment, based on the foregoing exploration of a number of social constructionist texts (fragment 6), the in-depth study of narrative sensemaking (fragment 7), and the exposition of Weick's theory of organizing (fragment 8), I shall select the most important directions which can guide us in conceiving and reframing the research questions, in analyzing and interpreting data, and in describing and reporting insights, interpretations and hypothetical theoretical accounts. Firstly, the core views of the three movements will be summarized and selected into four persuasions and directions which are retained as the core of the conceptual framework, placed as it is in the 'center' of the circle of research (see fragment 10 of chapter three; see also fragment 5). Secondly, we will revisit the research questions (see fragment 1), and reformulate these into a process language, using Weick's social theory of organizing.

A Social Constructionist Approach within this Research Project: Selecting and Formulating Directions and Persuasions

Summarizing three readings of the social construction of reality

Visiting the library of social constructionism

Our visit to the social constructionist library contained a meeting with its ancestors and relatives, including in particular texts from pragmatism, phenomenology, ethnomethodology, and symbolic interactionism, with appearances by family members from sociology and psychology, respectively, under the names of Berger and Luckmann, and Gergen. After reading different accounts of the essence of social constructionism, Gergen's quintessence of social constructionism was retained as a recent and appropriate set of assumptions:

1. The terms by which we account for and understand the world and ourselves are not dictated by the stipulated objects of such accounts; rather they are to be seen as
2. Social artifacts, products of historically and culturally situated interchanges among people;
3. and dependent on the vicissitudes of social process.
4. Language derives its significance from the way in which it functions within patterns of relationship.
5. There is a need to embrace different views by appraising existing forms of discourse as a pattern of cultural life and through enacting a dialogue between these different views or metaphors.

A narrative construction of reality

Exploring Bruner's account of narrative psychology and characterizing narrative sensemaking guided us in conceiving a narrative view of entrepreneurship through four statements:

1. Entrepreneurs and other actors appear not as isolated individuals in the entrepreneurship process, but rather act in a cultural context which to a large extent they have constructed themselves.
2. Entrepreneurship as a social construction demands a clarification of the relation between individual meanings and shared meanings which are constructed in the young enterprise.
3. The social construction of perpetuated entrepreneurship is mediated by narrative interpretation and by the relationship between 'common' and 'uncommon' sense.

4. This narrative interpreting and producing of the organization comes down to the organizing of experience, memory, feeling and identity; interactive actualization; and the developing of a specific language use.

The outcome of this exploration of a narrative construction of reality can be regarded as a more refined account of the five assumptions emerging from Gergen's formulations:

- The second and third assumptions regarding the social essence of reality construction can be concretized by linking them to the second and third statements on narrativity: a social focus implies considering the balance between individual and shared meanings, and between common and uncommon meanings.
- The fourth assumption on the embeddedness of language and meanings in relationships between actors becomes specified when linked to the first and fourth statements on narrativity: language use seen from a narrative view directs us to focus on how interaction is mediated by narration, being a specific form of language use, and embedded in cultural contexts.
- A narrative view elaborates especially on the cultural embeddedness of interactions, relations and language (see statement 1), as formulated generally in Gergen's second and fifth assumptions.

A social psychology of organizing

While a narrative view focuses on the cultural context of interaction, Weick's theory of organizing gives us a close reading of the social processes, as announced in the above assumptions and assertions, which are stated in more general terms. This process theory clarifies that

1. The dynamics of a process need to be approached in relational terms.
2. Actions, interpretations, and retentions are alternated in the sensemaking of events in the organizing stream.
3. The organizing process is characterized by intersubjectivity, focused upon double interacts as the minimal social situation.
4. The organizing process can be conceived of as taking place on a meso-level, where repeated double interacts evolve into cycles of interlocked behaviors and collective structures.
5. Collective structures imply actors with multiple partial inclusions.

While Weick's theory presents a more precise conceptualization of the social essence of sensemaking as mentioned in the above assumptions and statements, some elements from these assumptions and statements get lost in this theory:

- There is minimal attention paid to the role of language in Weick's view on the sociality of organizing. A discourse-oriented reading of this theory would be appropriate, as it would clarify how double interacts are performed through language, how the evolution towards cycles of interlocked behaviors and collective structures are also dependent on language rules, and that multiple, partial inclusions come down to actors being 'interlocked' in different discourses and language games.
- The actors present in double interacts, seem to be isolated again from their cultural contexts. In our view, there is no such a thing 'as an isolated double interact'; actors perform and speak using historically and culturally situated discourses, values, and rules.

Guided by four persuasions

Bringing together the insights of these three movements, four persuasions and directions can be retained as recurrent themes in each of these accounts: a relational conception of the person, a focus on language and discourse, a contextualized view on knowledge and a social dynamic view on human life and action.

A first direction guides us towards a relational conception of entrepreneurial actors. In the three accounts, relationships are seen as the primary focus in the dynamics of the flow of (organizational) reality. The option is then to focus on the relationships in the flow of entrepreneurial events and to characterize the relationships which perpetuate innovative entrepreneurship and which sustain the transition to a collective entrepreneurial endeavor. Secondly, this study will be directed by a discursive construction of entrepreneurial reality. This persuasion was emphasized in the (general) social constructionist and narrative account, in contrast to the Weickian perspective on organizing. The option is then to look at the meaning construction process as a discourse. This requires that we can 'complement' Weick's social theory of organizing with a theory of language and communication. Entrepreneurship is then not constructed in the 'heads' of the entrepreneur and the entrepreneurial co-actors but in everyday communicative practices. A third direction brings us towards a contextualized knowledge of entrepreneurship. All three accounts have accentuated that interaction between actors is historically and culturally embedded. The high tech firms we study are to be seen as specific communities of reality with their own way of knowing and with a cultural context of their own. The option is then to present our answer to the research question such that it safeguards the firms' contexts, and to abduct theoretical accounts which receive their proper

meaning by making the contextual background as explicit as possible. These three directions point towards a fourth and more general direction; leading us to an understanding of the 'social dynamics' of entrepreneurship. This direction emerges as an important one in all three accounts, and can be considered as 'basic' to the other three directions as well, since a relational, linguistic, and contextual view on entrepreneurship all point at the *social* construction of (entrepreneurial) reality. The option here is to describe the development of the high tech firms in terms of their social dynamics, and to pursue a theoretical account which can offer a *thick* view on innovative entrepreneurship as a social process. Weick's approach, which was said to be the most concrete conceptualization of this approach, will be our guide here, although we must take into account the need to complement the aforementioned shortcomings concerning the narrative and cultural embeddedness of interaction.

These four persuasions, which are inscribed in our conceptual framework (see fragment 10), can guide us in conducting the study and will be used to understand entrepreneurship as the continuity of newness as a collective activity. Both research questions - (1) through which organizing forms does continuous innovation become possible and sustainable? and (2) how does one organize the transition from an individual initiative to an activity of collective innovation? - will be answered making use of these directions. These research questions will now be reformulated into a process language, using the above conceptual insights and Weick's social theory of organizing.

Research Questions Revisited through 'Process Language'

Paraphrasing Weick (1979), we will rename the entrepreneurial process 'entrepreneurship'.² In focusing on entrepreneurship as a process, we are interested in 'entrepreneurship' as a social construction process. Entrepreneurship can be seen as the context *par excellence* where new meanings are created or where meanings concerning 'known' realities are reframed and retained as original. Furthermore, entrepreneurs do not create these meanings in a vacuum. Anchored in a network of internal and external co-actors, these 'entrepreneurial meanings' can be seen as social constructions. Entrepreneurship as a social construction evolves from the collective sensemaking within which the entrepreneurial reality is constantly renegotiated. In our study, we will focus on the process of meaning construction within the management

² As already suggested in fragment 4.

teams. Such a team can be regarded as a 'minimal' social context wherein this process of social construction is embedded. The roles of other organizational members and external partners will be integrated as they are conceived of by team members. In studying the transition from an individual innovative initiative towards collective entrepreneurship, we will look to the multiplicity of meanings created by different team members.

Taking Weick's theory as a point of departure (see fragment 3), entrepreneurship can be conceived as enactment-selection-retention. Entrepreneurship as the construction of new organizational realities is in the first place a process of 'enactment'. The organization that an entrepreneur constructs comes into existence through the enactment of an environment. The entrepreneur does not simply react to a ripe or promising market, but rather, through the act of entrepreneurship and organizing he or she creates an opportunity in the marketplace or constructs a niche. By constructing an organization, the entrepreneur creates his or her own environment; by enacting an environment, the entrepreneur himself or herself constructs an organization. Organization and environment are inseparably bound together, and in order to understand the evolution of a young enterprise it is crucial to see how these frontiers are established and shifted, and how they open and close. Moreover, it becomes clear that the constructed organization, and the enacted environment to which it is linked, is not a starting point, but rather, as object of the enterprise, is constantly being made. Beforehand it is absolutely unclear what the organization will become, even on the pages of a business plan. Entrepreneurship is thus not about a vision of genius which has only to be put into operation. In the process of enactment a market is bracketed (as, for example, in the informatics (r)evolution in the early eighties) or a change is created (for example, a technological development), but this is more an ambiguous episode which demands more explanation through selection. It is however worth noting that enactment cannot be thought of as a first step in development, but is a constant process of 'stage-managing', or creating situations around which further sensemaking can take place. *Thus we must also ask how this process of stage-managing proceeds, such that a young enterprise can create an environment for itself within which it can sensibly exist and hopefully survive, stabilize, or grow.* In the enactment process an attempt is made to streamline this process. This is perhaps less easily done than said in a 'new' situation, since interpretive schemes are usually hard to come by at this stage. This implies that such interpretive structures must be constructed simultaneously. The discovery - literally, the 'uncovering' - of what one is really up to is one of the most difficult organizational tasks in entrepreneurship. *This leads to our second question: how does the interpretive process proceed, such that a young enterprise develops structures of meaning that can reduce the ambiguity around its own development.* Meaning schemes which have appeared useful, and around which there is

consensus as to their usefulness, are retained (the retention process). At this point the 'organization' begins to take shape as a direct result and a reflection of the organizing process; in the context of a new enterprise this leads to the question of what should be retained and what should be let go. This too is a difficult organizational task, since the young enterprise will begin to stabilize through the retention process, as the necessary creativity and flexibility inherent in enacting begins to slow. *This leads to a third question: how does a young enterprise construct a set of stable interpretive schemes for itself such that the identity construction of the organization is realized?*

Thus, we want to know how entrepreneurship arises as a complex cyclical process of enactment/selection/retention, in which the manner of equilibration between these process can more clearly explain why an enterprise continues to renew itself or not. This equilibration is also a social process, which means that we need to clarify how social interactions make up the heart of the organizing process of young innovative organizations. Keeping Weick's recipe in mind, we can paraphrase the challenge of the process of entrepreneurship as follows: 'how can we know what we are (becoming), until we see what we are doing?' The construction of an identity in a young enterprise thus proceeds according to the actions that it carries out and the sensemaking that goes with these actions. This identity both results from and is the object of the organizing process, and the question is, *how can this identity be kept open for creativity, development, and innovation, and how can we characterize the social interaction that this entails.*