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Management

APPRECIATING THE POWER OF WORDS AND IMAGINATIVE  
ORGANIZING: A TRIADIC MODEL OF ETHICS PRACTICED IN  
EVERYDAY CONVERSATIONS

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## **ABSTRACT**

**Title:** Appreciating the power of words and imaginative organizing: A triadic model of ethics practiced in everyday conversations

This thesis provides an alternative framework to analyze power and ethics practiced in everyday conversations, which constitute processes of organizing. Drawing upon narrative frameworks, the analyses of messages posted on an online message board demonstrate people's imaginative capacity to create relevant stories, in respect of their precise grasp of factual understandings, contextual relevance and evaluative/moral appropriateness, by appropriating others' words. Based on the empirical analyses, the thesis indicates that studies on power and ethics in organizations can be re-oriented towards appreciating irremediable power imbalances by offering alternative ways of member's denoting experiences of power.

**Keywords:** power, ethics, narrative analysis

## **CERTIFICATE**

I certify that this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not being submitted as part of candidature for any other degree.

I also certify that this thesis has been written by me and that any help I have received in preparing this thesis, and the sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

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## **CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Empirical background**

The thesis is grounded in empirical data collected from an online discussion forum, which is also referred to as a message board. The case online forum was an informal discursive space participated in mostly by frontline retail workers of the same company with more than 2,000 stores distributed all over the US.

The participants in the forum experienced problems at their respective workplaces. Many of them attributed the company's bankruptcy to these problems. The forum was saturated with criticisms of management's failure, concerns about the company's business continuity, job security, other related problems, as well as negative psychological experiences, such as stress and frustration. Despite such a negative atmosphere, I observed from the message board that for those visiting the forum, reading and posting messages appeared to bring about subtle but worthwhile positive effects. Similar effects have been observed during difficult times in terms of informal discursive practices, such as fantasy (Brown and Humphreys 2006, Gabriel 1995), cynical distance (Fleming and Spicer 2003), dis-identification or self-alienation (Costas and Fleming 2009), and catharsis (da Cunha and Orlikowski 2008). These studies point to intricate and reflexive relationships between actors' attempts at establishing and re-establishing positive identities and unintended results of the maintenance of existing organizational structures (Clarke, Brown and Hailey 2009). In other words, informal discursive practices constitute processes of organizing, not necessarily in ways that bring about tangible material consequences but in ways that establish and re-establish positive identities through certain interaction settings.

In these postings there is a research puzzle: are actors consciously seeking to actualize positive identities or are they merely affirming their inability to be engaged with the organization's strategy in any other way, because of their relatively powerless positions in the failing enterprise? Talk is cheap and sharing their powerlessness and frustration with others by sharing similar experiences may function as a kind of 'support group'. If the latter were the case, they would be concerned not so much with creating more positive identities nor with the firm's failings serving to reinforce their weak position in existing power relations; instead, they might simply inscribe values or moral sentiments which they hold dear.

There are ambivalent relationships of informal discursive practices in their effects on formal organizations and on individual actors' wellbeing, and their motivations towards and consciousness of such effects. It appears that the relevance of mundane discursive practices for processes of organizing, especially those with material consequences, may be minimal. Mundane utterances often appear fragmented in comparison to generic literary narratives, which are devised with particular beginnings, middles, and endings (Whittle, Mueller and Mangan 2009, see also Boje 2001). Besides, even if mundane conversations appear to be organized in one way or another, to the extent that they collectively weave certain discourses, the implications of such organized conversations for formal organizations vary from context to context. Such ambivalence is potentially confusing for researchers confronted with the empirical messiness of mundane discursive practices compared to the conjectural simplicity of discursive views on processes of organizing, such as 'organizing is talking' or 'talking is organizing' (Boden 1994, Weick 2004).

In order to address such ambivalent relationships between mundane discursive practices and processes of organizing, this study focuses on how mundane utterances are exchanged. More specifically, since in order for mundane utterances to bring about any material consequences they need to be read and responded to form a chain of utterances, of varying lengths, frequencies and number of participants, this study looks closely at the alternate successions of acts of reading and issuing utterances. By so doing, it delves into micro processes of mundane discursive practices in ways that unravel skills and knowledge that are supposed to be enacted by each individual actor. The point is emergence of particular rules, norms and other institutions which are pertinent to rather broader contexts from actors' simple skills and knowledge that enable mundane discursive practices. The next section will explain how I approached the investigation into the micro processes by which utterances were read and issued.

## **1.2 Processes of organizing and discursive practices as a constitutive element**

Discursive practices are known to involve a capacity to organize participants' ways of sensemaking and acting (Weick 2004). As they talk to each other, discourses take shape and particular ways of doing things emerge in ways that accord with meanings pertinent to these discourses (Alvesson and Karreman 2000). For some scholars, discursive practices are a sphere in which organizing is taking place, rather than an instrument with which people plan and accomplish relevant tasks to formulate and maintain organizations (Boden 1994, McPhee and Zaig 2009, Taylor and van Every 2000).

Strands of discourse analyses, including conversation analysis, as well as studies adopting social practice theory, have revealed that organizational actors are capable of influencing, even if without knowing, a variety of structuring properties as they are

engaged in organizationally defined tasks and obligations. The actor's subjectivity is implicated in such relational and emergent ways of understanding relationships between actors and organizations. Reasons for actions can be attributed, if only implicitly. Simply, for discursive approaches to organizational phenomena, actions considered without recourse to actors' reasons or intentions are of little meaning in establishing explanations about organizational events and phenomena.

Reasons or intentions of actors are usually interpreted and attributed from observable actions, including verbally issued utterances and those inscribed in texts. A report on a seemingly objective fact can be related to certain relevant actors and/or entities; the fact's being considered thus and possible subsequent events can be attributed to attributions of the actors' reasons and/or intentions, as well as their roles and positions. It is, in other words, conventionally assumed that certain reasons precede actions.

The thesis will question if reasons or intentions necessarily precedes actions, while admitting the necessity for analyses of organizational events and phenomena, which are comprised of diverse actors' diverse actions, to account for their reasons and intentions for actions (Czarniawska 2013, 2010). Theoretically, it has been argued by Weick (1979) that meanings are retrospective constructions by reference to what has already elapsed. Empirically, several studies adopting practice theory reveal that even phenomena conventionally believed to be occurring in the human mind and to be a precondition for particular ways of practicing, such as interests and sincerity, were instead cumulative consequences of particular ways of practicing (Bjørkeng, Clegg and Pitsis 2009, Taylor and van Every 2000). Together these seem to indicate that acting precedes meanings, reasons or more generally the consciousness of actors. When people

act, more intricate processes are operating other than reasons constructed in retrospect can explain. This thesis offers an alternative explanation about what enables actors to act by focusing on people's capacity of imagination that anticipates the existence of others. Acting is, without exception, directed toward some other actors or actants (cf., Tsoukas [2005] for the public aspects of thinking); thus morality is necessarily implicated in action. Such actors as are anticipated are not necessarily composed of clearly definable identities or material physical attributes but rather, fairly ambiguous images or a vague sense of anticipation, insofar as such images or a sense can be captured by human consciousness.

To explain the power of discursive practices to organize people's thoughts and actions in one way or another, this thesis assumes that a sense of morality, or simple distinction between good and bad, is already implicated in the act of issuing utterances and reading/hearing others' utterances. However, assuming that acting precedes reasons, meanings and even consciousness of actors, motivations, goals and reasons for acting cannot be attributed to morality. Morality is also an abstract concept that is a consequence of particular ways of acting. In other words, this thesis intends to address a seemingly subtle but actually critical problem in respect of morality arising from the conventional assumption that reasons precede actions.

More specifically, this thesis sees any account of reason or forms of representation of reality as usually over- or under-specifying the world as it is. Regardless of variable degrees of reflexivity or creativity it is not possible for human beings to see the world as other than what appears to be already denoted in discursively particular ways. Furthermore, both the ways of denoting reality and the ways of interpreting that reality

denoted as such are inevitably partial in respect of descriptive precision. There is always a considerable surplus of possible description beyond any given meaning. Therefore, attributing a certain event to certain reasons inevitably involves someone's arbitrary judgment, regardless of it being either broadly or narrowly agreed to by a plurality. Nonetheless, insofar as any reason is inevitably partial, so is this thesis. Hence, rather than attack the conventional assumption that reasons precede actions, this thesis addresses as precisely as possible the processes by which actors denote reality. By so doing, it aims to appreciate each actor's capacity to make connections between discrete and fragmentary events, phenomena, things, abstract concepts and actors.

### **1.3 Reason, rationality, relevance**

In everyday organizational settings, decisions are continually made based on certain reasons so that decisions are to be approved or disapproved according to their rationality or irrationality; however, reasons either over- or under-specify facts. They rarely denote reality precisely. Reasons are more like stories than causal propositions in that they support decisions by verisimilitude rather than by falsification (Bruner 1991). Reasons also share with stories such properties as relevant actions sequenced into particular orders and accounts of actors who are supposed to commit to these actions. There are more important but less recognized properties shared between reasons for everyday decision processes and stories. Implicit principles and assumptions on which actors act, mostly without noticing, are as revealing as actors going through action sequences in particular orders. Similar transitions are experienced on the part of readers (Barry 1997, Boje 2001, Ricoeur 1984/1990). The narrative mode of reasoning can thus better explain the rationality which is pursued in the decision processes in everyday

organizational settings, by taking into account the relational aspect of the processes by which rationality is assessed and agreed or disagreed.

Reality denoted in reasons or in other forms of representation of the grounds of action rarely makes us notice the fact that the represented reality is denoted in particular ways. Nor, do we notice the important potential of transitions in meaning or renewed understandings of principles and assumptions on which we act. Put differently, people appear quick to assess the relevancy of the reality presented to them, such that why and how the reality was denoted and by whom and for or against whom is rarely systematically examined. Simply, facts are dealt with as facts, once they are found to be relevant. In effect, whatever transitions must have been experienced by way of going through certain ways of reasoning or representations of reality appear to be appreciated only minimally and spontaneously. The senses most likely to be obtained are concordance or discordance, acceptance or resistance. Overall, it is difficult to imagine transitions in time from presentations that are given fixed forms, especially when these continue to be supplied rather quickly and abundantly. It seems that while people are competent in assessing relevancy of the increasing number of discrete reality and making sense of it, their consciousness is directed more at definitive attributes than at the important potential of transitions in meaning. It is further assumed that people tend to preclude the processes through which they come to terms with reality over time. In effect, the world may appear to them increasingly fragmentary circumscribed by definitive boundaries (Gabriel 2008).

This thesis addresses the following questions: first, how fragments of reality that are denoted in particular ways and thus circumscribed by definitive boundaries can be

understood in an associative manner, bringing them into the flow of time; second, in what ways mundane discursive practices can contribute to awareness of the implicit principles and assumptions on which we act, in order to redirect our ways of seeing the world from the currently dominant ways of reasoning that focus on identification and classification of things by substitutable attributes represented as the logico-scientific mode of reasoning to ways of reasoning that make associations between seemingly discrete things, actors, events, phenomena, more abstract principles and assumptions represented as the narrative mode of reasoning (Czarniawska 1999)?

In this thesis, it is assumed that connections between discrete fragments of reality are made within the narrative mode of reasoning. Such connections are, in fact, being made continuously. Otherwise, we would not be able to go about everyday life making practically rational decisions. Nonetheless, in the process of making practically rational decisions actors appear to discern reality relevant to them rather quickly and the assessment of relevancy affects subsequent reasoning and ways of seeing reality in significant ways. What is key is how people assess the relevancy of discrete fragments of reality that they encounter on a day-to-day or moment-by-moment basis.

While rationality is known to be an inconclusive construct bounded by limited cognitive capacity and depending on contexts, relevancy is even more so in as much as, if something is assessed as being rational, it can still be either relevant or irrelevant at different times and places to different actors. Relevancy thus appears to involve more primitive and less definitive feelings and intuition. In order to analyze such ambivalent relevancy and processes by which to assess it, this thesis draws on Weick's (1987) processual view of theorizing organizational communication. Specifically, from the



model that is grounded in action-research procedures, this thesis derives the following processual understandings of practices of theorizing which can be applied analogically to analyses of mundane discursive practices: (1) theories are not necessarily aimed at describing reality precisely but denote reality in particular ways to catalyze subsequent refinement of existing contextually specific but relatively implicit knowledge systems, (2) five criteria of relevance: descriptive relevance, goal relevance, operational relevance, non-obviousness and timeliness, serve to explain what makes theories useful in practical settings. They do so in ways that make visible the processes by which theories may or may not be found relevant, be understood better and be refined over time. (3) Both the denotation of reality and assessment of the relevance of it are creative and social activities in the sense that they both anticipate renewed understandings of reality and the existence of others for whom these theories are assumed to be of relevance.

By referring to these three understandings, discursive practices can be regarded as a sphere in which mutually independent utterances are connected by each actor's imagination of relevancy. More specifically, utterances are seen to be denotations of reality that do not necessarily entail precise descriptions. Utterances as denoted reality are in principle mutually independent. Hence, the taken-for-granted successive occurrence of utterances in mundane discursive practices needs to be seen as being constructed by each utterer's creative imagination about what is relevant or irrelevant with respect to content and context. Moreover, imaginative connections are constructed by each actor anticipating knowing better what s/he has been encountering.

A critical assumption is that mundane utterances do not necessarily re-present actors' reality as they experience it. Rather, mundane utterances represent how actors assess relevancy of their own reality in terms of content, ways of denotation and possible contribution to the world: the reality they denote is premised on believing that the consequences of any interventions they make on this basis turn out to be positive. Hence, the processes by which relevance in these terms is assessed are supposedly accounted for by interpreting mundane utterances. In doing so, any interpretation of mundane utterances needs to address the utterers' capacities to make connections between a variety of things, actors and other contextual and abstract properties surrounding them. Interpretation needs to address how actors did what they do, rather than how precisely facts or subjective experiences of actors are represented; no one, including the actors themselves, can prove which interpretation is the most precise.

#### **1.4 Structure of thesis**

In order to demonstrate how actors assess the relevance of a variety of encounters through mundane discursive practices, framed as above, empirical data analyses were conducted. In Chapter 2, Weick's (1987) model for practically relevant theorizing of organizational communication that offer the five criteria of relevance was elaborated. It explains how these criteria were applied to the analyses of the messages posted to the case online forum to reveal that communication was enabled by each actor's assessing relevance in terms of the five criteria by creating connections between mutually independent discrete messages.

In Chapter 3, a thread of messages posted to an Internet discussion forum, a message board, was analyzed to demonstrate discursive practices as successively occurring

discrete utterances. Thus, this analysis explicates that while each participant must have reasons for and purposes in posting messages to the forum, such reasons and purposes cannot be limited to communicative ones, such as conveying and seeking for certain information, but also involve each participant's pursuit of interests and concerns, such as consistent and coherent identity and inscription of particular values, which may or may not be expected to be shared with others. The participants in conversations might reciprocate each other by exchanging information but the processes of reciprocation are more intricate than symmetrical collaborative interactions. Each participant's utterances need to be examined in accordance with the five criteria of relevance in order to understand why and how the participants who had respective interests and concerns managed to post messages in ways that satisfied relevancy, both in terms of content and context, also in terms of their respective sense of meaningfulness. The analysis reveals that the processes of sensemaking resonate with the participants' assessment of relevance in terms of the five criteria. The messages posted to the forum can be understood as processes by which the messages were by and large assessed to be useful to the extent that they evoked many participants to take actions in the form of posting messages. In other words, the analysis makes clear that mundane utterances are not so much representational device as means of pursuing meaningfulness, which is what appeared to enable the participants to post messages.

In respect of the seemingly crucial but ambivalent meaningfulness, a clue is offered by the non-obviousness of the five criteria of relevance in Weick's (1987) model. A sense of non-obviousness is referred to as a sense that a certain denoted reality adds 'supplements that are not redundant with context-specific knowledge' (Weick 1987: 106). This indicates that in order for one to establish a sense of non-obviousness, s/he

must be capable of managing intricate relationship between sameness and otherness. Put differently, non-obviousness, as one of the five criteria of relevance requires actors to discern either subtle or significant distinctiveness of reality denoted in others' utterances by reference to reality in which they are operating. Different from the rest of the criteria of relevance, non-obviousness thus entails imaginative transposition between subjective 'I' and objective others. This intricate transposition can be analyzed by focusing on creative as well as social aspects entailed in mundane discursive practices comprised of denoted reality and responses to it. The key is the actors' capacity of imagination because both the creative and social aspects are enabled by actors' anticipation of the existence of things, actors and a variety of abstract properties, which are not necessarily present, yet to come into being, or even what might not be materialized. By accounting for the intervention of each actor's creative and imaginative transposition between subjective 'I' and objective others, the analysis demonstrates that mundane discursive practices can be understood as a micro-foundation of social orderliness in the sense that each actor is predisposed to be social, rather than rationally self-interested, going about their everyday life by enacting competencies to assess the five different relevancies, and, more importantly, mutually independent discrete denotations of each other's reality are connected by each actor's imagination.

In Chapter 4, the analysis moves on to unravel how the participants' assessment of relevance, which involves invisible processes of imagination, can be interpreted from their messages. To do so, drawing upon narrative frameworks, particularly Ricoeur's (1984/1990) theory of emplotment, a framework of analysis was developed, which I refer to as the triad of mimetic processes. The framework is capable of explicating processes by which the participants assessed relevance by reference to the five criteria

in ways that take into account not only synchronic but also diachronic ways of referencing these. In other words, the imaginative capacities with which participants obtained a sense of non-obviousness were captured by assuming that the intricate transpositions between subjective 'I' and objective others should be taking place in ways that make connections between heterogeneous properties in terms of both synchronic timeless causal relations and diachronic sequential orders, and mediate these into particular meaningful wholes.

Based on the framework developed as above, the analysis focuses on what the participants accomplished by posting messages to the forum. Considering the fact that messages appear to have been posted not only to exchange information but also to satisfy each participant's concerns and interests, the messages posted to the forum are classified into three distinct plots which represent the participants' capacities to denote reality in particular ways: (1) presenting reality by identifying and classifying a variety of things, actors and abstract concepts, (2) defining contexts, and (3) mediating substantive and contextual information into meaningful wholes. With these three distinct plots, utterances produce three distinct meanings: (1) identities of things, actors and a variety of abstract quasi-objects which can be classified into appropriate categories, (2) behavioral norms, definitions of relationships between concerned human and/or non-human actors and other interaction order (Goffman 1959/1990), and (3) subjective meaningfulness unique for each actor at a specific point in time and space.

The analysis reveals that the triadic model is capable of accounting for not only the participants' three distinct but interrelated competencies to make better sense of reality but also the power/rule constitution along the meaning-interpretation nexus (Clegg

1989). In other words, mundane discursive practices can be seen as the micro-foundation of a variety of institutions and social orderliness to the extent that each actor's rather simple skills and knowledge to make connections between heterogeneous properties, which are necessary to use symbolic resources, such as words, stories and discourses, already entail each actor's sense of moral appropriateness as well as correctness in terms of pragmatic rules of use of language. It did so by elaborating skills and competencies of the participants in the case online forum with which to plot a variety of properties along the triad of mimetic processes.

Through this analysis, it was confirmed that mundane discursive practices were a sphere where mutually discrete utterances were associated with one another by each actor who was capable of playing both actor's (author's) and observer's (reader's) roles by imagination. Put differently, interactions can better be understood as diegetic successions of acting (issuing utterances) and understanding the acting (utterances). In addition, the triad of mimetic processes exemplify the role that takes advantage of an asymmetrical relationship between an actor (an author) and observers (readers), in which the former cannot control how the latter understands (reads) its denotations. Because of the tripartite roles borne by each actor, insofar as the messages posted to the forum are concerned, the issuers of the messages might be concerned not so much with distinction between their identities and others' identities, or their definitive subjectivity as with appropriateness in terms of the successful conclusion of interaction with others in the forum. This, however, does not mean that the participants were indifferent to the meaningfulness of their acts in posting messages to the forum. Rather, while the sense of meaningfulness or non-obviousness is a criteria of relevance crucial as to whether or not they decided to post messages, linear causation from the sense of non-obviousness

to a certain action cannot be assumed. The creative imaginative aspect of the transposition between subject and object and the distinction between self and others entailed in the assessment of non-obviousness and how this translates into actions, operates on a relational assumption or in anticipation of interactions with others. This finding reminds one that each participant was concerned with being good in relation to others as well as displaying self-interested desires.

Combined with the preceding findings that the participants were capable of issuing utterances by assessing the five different relevance, the skills and knowledge to make synchronic and diachronic connections and to mediate these into particular meaningful wholes as accounted for by the triad of mimetic processes can be analyzed as stories or story fragments (Boje 2001). By analyzing mundane utterances as both synchronic and diachronic connections, social reality is imagined to be negotiated at the micro level between actors as well as to be represented in ways that transcend the different levels of analysis, such as micro-macro and individual-group-organization, thus, constituting power and rules in particular ways. In order to account for the intricate relationship between the seemingly inflating denotations enabled by the rather flexible criteria of relevance and each actor's voluntarily imposing limits on denotations, the triad of mimetic processes will next be put into the diegetic successions of acting (narrating/uttering) and understanding (reading) acting. By so doing, 'ethics as practice' (Clegg, Kornberger and Rhodes 2007), which should overcome 'an unwavering moralistic model' (108) of ethics, is substantiated by the messages posted to the case online forum.

In Chapter 5, the empirical analysis shifts its focus to how each actor pursues both moral appropriateness and the maximum extension of her/his interpretation of reality without any absolutely foundational evidence, rule or principle. Based on the foregoing analyses and continuing to draw upon Ricoeur's (1984/1990) triadic model of emplotment, the processes by which to assess relevancy are re-established as relational diegetic processes. Specifically, the process is framed as diegetic successions of acting (narrating/uttering) and understanding (reading) acting. It does so in order to examine mundane utterances as a micro-foundation of a variety of institutions and dominant discourses that in turn structure individual actors' actions and thoughts across different contexts.

What is key to the empirical analyses is that interactions are seen as alternate successions of actions, in which each actor acts as both an actor and an observer and certain institutional orders emerge as each actor acts on a hypothetical and inferential basis by taking advantage of the asymmetrical relationship between an actor and an observer. Through the alternate successions of actions in which each actor is capable of intervening both as an actor and an observer, discrete actions are connected with each other by each actor's imagining certain meaningful wholes at particular points in time and space. Moreover, the diegetic successions of the triads account for the intricate linkage between the imaginative aspect of interactions and material reality by elaborating how each actor sets the limits of denotation/interpretation of reality. Words can denote reality in virtually infinite ways to an extent that is fallible, but they are incapable of denoting what is non-existent or absolute nothingness (Eco 1999); thus, we can identify something meaningful in material real world even from words which seem completely irrational and irrelevant by following the triad of mimetic processes.



After depicting the triadic model, adapting it as that which consists of 'intention for happiness', 'power' and 'norm' and the diegetic successions of the triads, through which interactions are constructed by each actor's imagination, two episodes were analyzed to explain how morality is being acted out in mundane conversations, drawing on the concept of ethics as practice (Clegg, Kornberger and Rhodes 2007). One of the two episodes is about the establishment of particular behavioral norms pertinent to the forum and the other concerns demotion of an employee who worked on the development of a database for effective communication between stores and the headquarters. The analyses, in particular, emphasize that morality is defined through the diegetic and asymmetrical succession of reading/observing and acting (issuing utterances). Rather than presuming the existence of universally applicable categories about good and bad, these analyses explain how morality is defined through appropriation of others' actions (utterances) to which readers/observers attach their sense about good or bad, creating additional meanings normally recognized as morality. In other words, while actors are sensitive to morality and their conducts appear to be guided by it, morality is a consequence of acting that is enabled by each one's anticipation of doing or being good. Moreover, the analyses demonstrate that the sense of meaningfulness, involving the belief of doing good rather than bad, translates into relevant ways of acting in terms of the maximum extension of interpretation of reality and the consensual validation of interpretation with others, or simply, content and context.

These analyses together exemplify the fact that each actor's 'intention for happiness' is evoked receptively by paying attention to a variety of things and thus should be fulfilled by pursuing the maximum extension of interpretation of reality ('power') and the sense

of moral appropriateness, which can be obtained through consensual validation about interpretation with others ('norm'). Put differently, even each one's desires, which are prevalently believed to be accounted for at least retrospectively by rational reasoning, are actually rather receptively evoked and defined in relation to other actors. Everyone knows finitude, including one's own, but can never be sure about when and how, due to the infinite nature of possibilities (Ricoeur 1990/1992). Hence, it can be understood that both substitutive (paradigmatic, synchronic, reversible) and associative (syntagmatic, diachronic, irreversible) reasoning as depicted by the triadic model represent efforts by fragile humans longing for certainty that they are doing good, invoking definitive identities in the face of infinite possibilities, and permanent consistency and continuity in the face of obvious finitude.

Chapter 6 concludes the thesis by proposing a framework with which to enrich varieties of plot by focusing on the importance of strengthening the capacities of reading texts as aspects of reality enunciated in words (Ricoeur 1973). As the foregoing analyses exemplify, mundane communications are enabled by the imaginative capacities of each actor to read others' utterances. Despite the lesser visibility of imagination or the act of reading, it was found that the five criteria of relevance in Weick's (1987) model and the triad of mimetic processes built upon Ricoeur's (1984/1990) theory of emplotment were capable of accounting for how imaginative capacities are enacted in mundane discursive practices. These also revealed that even if reading and writing are interrelated activities and the skills and competencies required for them are nearly identical (Czarniawska 1998), there exist critical differences between them.

First, opportunities of reading naturally surpass those of writing. Hence, enriching alternative plots that are supposed to be employed in the act of reading is considered to be important not only for sifting through ever increasing denotations to get to reality but also for enhancing conversations with others in a constructive manner. To enrich alternative ways of denoting reality will bring about a virtuous circle by further inducing others to contribute to the world by denoting reality in ways that enable others' employment. In this way, the world will be experienced in a manner that fully appreciates the associative power each of us is endowed with and which each of us bestows in going about everyday life.

Second, somehow related to the difference in opportunities, strengthening capacities of reading can, even if marginally, address the issue of power imbalances. They will contribute not only to helping actors provide their ambiguous and ineffable thoughts and feelings with somehow intelligible forms/styles by diversified alternative plots but also enhance the application of imagination to realities which, otherwise, might possibly remain untold.

Third, since human ways of knowing proceed with hypothetical or abductive inferences, good theories are likely to be realized by increasing the varieties of hypotheses, including the possible sophistication of theories as they are used (Weick 1987, 1979). To materialize such continuous supply of good theories over time, the capacity of reading needs to be strengthened in ways that assume the existence of truth by reference to aspects of reality denoted in particular ways.

Fourth, drawing upon Czarniawska's (1999) call for writing management and organization as a genre but rather radically shifting the focus on to reading, the

proposed framework can be debated as to whether or not a kind of disciplinary identity of management and organization studies can be established by renewing the conception of language as both an accounting device and data or narrative frameworks for investigating and reporting organizational events and phenomena. As this thesis emphasizes, denotations of reality in words represent only aspects of reality. So do researchers' denotations about organizations. If it is the case, is it not necessary that theories denoted in words or researchers' narratives should more explicitly aim at diversifying their plots in ways that induce both academic and business audiences to accordingly diversify their plots?

To make this seemingly absurd question somehow debatable, I suggest in the concluding chapter that there are peculiar relationships between human beings, time and words. In other words, I argue, we can start by acknowledging the fact that words, typically written texts, are the result of human beings' being as speaking, writing, reading subjects, whose texts might have just been elapsed or perhaps they date from long ago. Human beings, who pursue sufficient degrees of substantive interest, segment texts by discerning those capable of 'speaking to' their being. More importantly, such a conception about human beings and words need not be drawn into conventional scientific fields, including linguistics. On the contrary, it should stick to language as being practiced by a majority of people. Thus, the task of management and organization studies is to translate any kind of denotation in ways that contribute a diversification of plots for the target audiences. I assume that management and organization studies occupy the most appropriate position to exploit the power of words, which are devised with the virtually identical agencies of human beings, in ways that realize better organizing in terms of material and psychological wellbeing at both individual and

societal levels simply because the discipline deals exclusively with people's everyday practices in organizations where a variety of institutions is variably but intensively intersecting.

## **CHAPTER 2 ASSESSMENT OF RELEVANCY IN MUNDANE DISCURSIVE PRACTICES**

### **2.1 Introduction**

In this chapter the framework with which to analyze mundane discursive practices will be elaborated. It will lay out several important theoretical grounds for the analyses of empirical data collected from an Internet discussion forum (or a message board) in the subsequent chapters (Chapter 3 to 5). Since this thesis aims to account for organizing properties entailed in mundane discursive practices in ways that do not presume *a priori* reasons or goals of actors, it focuses on each actor's skills and knowledge with which to accomplish mundane discursive practices. Mundane discursive practices are seen to consist of mutually independent utterances such that these are assumed to be associated with one another by each actor's enacting certain skills and knowledge.

In this chapter the focus is placed on the process of assessing relevancy through which actors become able to take actions without waiting for particular reasons to be validated in rational scientific terms. In other words, mundane discursive practices are possible without each actor's establishing particular reasons, goals or motivations for participation. Rather, as actors read/hear others' utterances and issue utterances, they possibly acquire more or less renewed understandings of reality. By establishing mundane discursive practices as alternate successions of mutually independent utterances, the subtle but critical renewal of understandings of reality can be taken into account. The analyses of the process of assessing relevancy entailed in mundane discursive practices will exemplify the relationships between the process of assessing

relevancy, transitions in meaning in this process, and what actually enables actors to take actions (issuing utterances).

## **2.2 Weick's theory of theorizing organizational communication**

The framework for analyzing the process of assessing relevancy is derived from Weick's (1987) processual model for theorizing organizational communication. Weick (1987) explains practices of theorizing organizational communication in a strongly processual manner. Drawing upon an action research methodology he frames the act of theorizing as a continuous process in which: (1) theories denote particular aspects of reality in particular ways rather than describe reality as precisely as possible; (2) theories become useful when the denotation is found to be relevant. Relevant theories will help actors understand better their reality by revealing their implicit and context-specific principles and assumptions. (3) Theories will be improved, renewed or replaced in accordance with the improved understandings of reality.

According to this recursive circular model, theories are catalysts that enhance understandings of and insights into a diversity of experiences, rather than precise descriptions of a variety of material objects, events and phenomena, or more abstract principles and assumptions. Hence, it is assumed that when theories are seen to be relevant enough to draw people's attention to phenomena they become useful for interpreting 'what might be happening' (106). Such theories as are deemed relevant contribute to the refinement and renewal of understandings of reality by virtue of their application onto practical fields of experience.

Based on this assumption, Weick (1987) proposed five criteria of relevance: descriptive relevance, goal relevance, operational relevance, non-obviousness and timeliness. These attributes are expected to increase the relevance of theories, strengthening the whole processes of theorizing in respect of better understandings of organizational communication. The model, in other words, suggests that there are many theories which are valid but not utilized in practice in full, as well as those whose validity is yet to be confirmed but which are utilized to refine understandings of reality as people confirm the (in)validity of such theories in practice.

What is important is how theories become relevant enough to be projected onto people's practical fields of experience. Theories need to be internally coherent and consistent to enable practitioners to examine particular causal relations and thus be confined within particular boundaries. In addition, mutually independent theories also need to be connected with each other through practitioners' capacities to imagine relevancy. When this occurs practices of theorizing, as a whole, contribute enhanced understandings of reality. Hence, Weick's processual model can be understood to take into account transitions in the meanings of theories through the flow of time (temporal contingencies). Theories may or may not be assessed as being relevant and be better understood as they are put into practices. Temporally contingent processes imply creative invention of meanings both on the side of theorists and on the side of practitioners. In short, the five criteria of relevance suggest a mode of reasoning similar to narrative as well as logico-scientific ways of judging the relevancy of theories. The processes by which theories might be found to be relevant, be applied in practice and be better understood are assumed to be connected by inventing meanings creatively rather than by establishing linear causation between certain properties of theories and these



criteria. In practice, not a few theories might possibly be assessed in ways understood to be provisionally relevant (Kaplan and Orlikowski 2013).

### **2.3 Five criteria of relevance**

Among the five criteria, descriptive relevance and timeliness of theories can be evaluated almost intuitively by identifying attributes of events, phenomena, subject matter, constituent things, actors and institutions that the theories describe, doing so without regard to transitions in meanings in time. By contrast, goal relevance, operational relevance and non-obviousness serve to explain how theories in use are assessed in ways that take into account transitions in the meanings of theories. Without considering temporal contingencies those theories in use would appear to be self-contained and discrete.

That which it intends to address (goal relevance) is a fundamental property of a theory; however, this property does not define whether a theory will evoke actors' interest. In order for actors to pay sufficient attention to theories, operational relevance is sometimes more critical than goal relevance because it assesses the feasibility of theories by reference to contexts in which the theory is supposed to be applied, such as implementing entities and relationships. Theories deemed less feasible are rarely taken seriously even if the subject matter they intend to address is worthwhile and reasonable. Once deemed feasible in terms of operationalizability it is possible that a theory will be understood better as it is projected onto a practical field of experiences.

Non-obviousness holds a critical stake in the inconclusive and context-dependent process by which the relevance of theories is assessed. As Weick defines it, non-

obviousness acknowledges that a certain theory adds ‘supplements that are not redundant with context-specific knowledge’ (106). What is to be noted in this definition is: (1) the assumption that people operate on some implicit but contextually specific knowledge; (2) people are capable of discerning subtle similarities/dissimilarities between what they already know and what is yet to be known. In other words, people are capable of imagining what is not necessarily present in front of them. By imagining what is not present people literally make sense of what *is* in front of them. Non-obviousness thus indicates that people are capable of making connections between discrete things and abstract principles and assumptions by making comparisons identifying how these are similar or dissimilar.

As has already been mentioned above, the processes by which relevance of theories is assessed entail aspects of creative invention and non-obviousness deserves close examination in this regard. Non-redundancy posited in the definition of non-obviousness explains actors’ creative capacities in a continuous rather than discontinuous manner. As Weick pointed out, both denoting reality in particular ways and understanding such denoted reality are creative inventions rather than apprehension of *a priori* defined attributes of a variety of things. Non-redundancy, in short, entails connections or connectedness created by people’s imagination.

People distinguish more or less variable attributes of things, abstract principles and assumptions in order to obtain a sense of connectedness not only to separate one thing from another to obtain definitive attributes. Categorization always ensues from identification of similarity/dissimilarity. Besides the capacity of identification and categorization, people are capable of making connections by imagining a series of

movements. Put differently, successions of discrete events are understood inclusive of the ways these events are sequenced. The connections being produced by imagining a series of movements are, to put it another way, connections in the flow of time from the past to the present and to the possible future. Non-redundancy or the sense of non-obviousness can be established by identification/categorization and imagining a series of movements.

With regard to the acknowledgement of non-redundancy people are ordinarily capable of seeing connections from at least two distinct points of view, for instance implicit and locally specific principles and more general and explicit ones. Without at least two comparable images of the connections produced either by identification/categorization or by imagining a series of movements, it would not be possible to discern degrees of redundancy. By mediating images seen from these distinct points of view, people manage knowing what is redundant or not.

The sense of relevancy in terms of non-obviousness explains the fundamental source of people's imaginative capacities with which they make connections between diverse things, actors, more abstract principles and assumptions, both in terms of substantive attributes and in terms of temporal transitions of events and phenomena. More critically, the story-like character of theories implicated in the whole processes of theorizing organizational communication modeled by Weick is identical with stories as defined by narrative frameworks. These reveal implicit or hidden principles and assumptions on which particular actors act as they encounter events and phenomena sequenced in particular orders (Boje 2001 quoting Ricoeur (1984/1990)). Put differently, a sense of relevancy is created by a 'certain teleology – sense of purpose' (Czarniawska 2004: 13),

an anticipation of an ‘excess of seeing’ (Bakhtin 1990: 22, Jabri, Adrian and Boje 2008), or a faith in the existence of coherence (Weick 1987). The five criteria of relevance, non-obviousness in particular, thus serve to explain the fundamental motivation which enables actors to take actions by drawing our attention to the subtle sense of purpose and anticipation that is entailed in actors’ imagination about what is not necessarily present in front of them as well as to how meanings are being produced and reproduced in the whole practices of theorizing and assessment of theories.

#### **2.4 Appreciative theorizing and mundane discursive practices**

Weick’s (1987) model, thus, addresses the following important but implicit predispositions that guide theorizing:

- (1) Theorizing operates on the multiple foci of meanings that are produced by denoted reality that holds together relevant things, actors, events, phenomena and abstract principles and assumptions in a manner that enables actors to examine relationships between the varieties of properties by denoting reality in particular ways.
- (2) The multiple foci of meanings are that of abstraction, that of deconstruction and re-assemblage, and that of application to the practical field of experience.
- (3) Theorizing is temporally contingent in the same manner as stories reveal implicit principles and assumptions which bind characters’ thoughts and actions together with particular sequential orders.
- (4) Theorizing is motivated and continued by imaginative creativity of actors.

How can this model be applied to mundane discursive practices in order to analyze processes by which actors assess the relevance of each other's utterances in ways that make connections between utterances? The common features shared between the practices of theorizing organizational communication and mundane discursive practices are the connections to be made between discrete denotations of reality and temporal contingencies.

In respect of accuracy, generality and parsimony, the five criteria of relevance conflict (Langley 1999, Weick 1979). Hence, it is predicted that Weick's (1987) model, which sees theories as a catalyst in the sense that they enhance better understandings of reality of both practitioners and theorists (see p. 17), will not solve the problem concerning the proliferation of mutually incoherent theories. According to Weick (1987), that many fragments of theories seem to be mutually conflicting is inevitable, due to the following reasons: (1) the non-existence of a universally applicable theory; (2) the different levels of analysis at which differently delineated hypotheses often predict mutually conflicting outcomes; (3) the limited imaginative capacities of people to interpret a variety of theories in ways that enable one theory to cohere with many others. He suggested that since the practices of theorizing are part of broader social practices, not only individual theories but also the whole practice of theorizing might be considered relevant.

Specifically, it is possible for theorizing to become relevant in a number of ways. First, by methodological sophistication, which enables systematic and precise interpretation of individual theories so as to contain fragmentation to certain manageable degrees. Second, by normatively grounded growth of the entire field of management and organization studies, which nurtures positive social forces in terms of development of

researchers' competency and in terms of development and choice of research questions/agendas. Third, by questioning and revisiting the more fundamental ontological and epistemological grounding of organizational communication, which might possibly result in organizational communication being seen as an irrelevant subject for formal theorizing, due to its utterly inconclusive character, given the extreme context-dependency and the ever-shifting interests and concerns of actors involved, for which only locally specific principles and assumptions held implicitly by particular actors might account.

Despite the somewhat ironic suggestions, Weick emphasizes the embeddedness of theorizing in broader social practices such that theories, even if they denote reality only partially, can be useful not only because of scientific rigor but also by virtue of being practiced during certain periods of time in particular locales (Eisenhardt 1989). The connection with the practical field of experience indicates that Weick's (1987) processual view of theorizing indicates how to go about studying the general communication landscape in which people's denoted reality increasingly looks more fragmented than coherent, as communicative activities exponentially grow (Gabriel 2008).

Specifically, irrespective of content materials, utterances have a capacity to generate additional meanings to offer readers/observers opportunities to consider 'what might be happening'. Also, the act of reading/observing involves readers'/observers' creative deconstruction and re-assemblage of utterances to make sense of them. Experiences in which people encounter and assess utterances that may or may not be revealing in respect of their implicit principles and assumptions involve creative invention as much

as denotation of reality and understandings of the denoted reality found in Weick's model of theorizing. In other words, as his model implies, insofar as actors operate on certain principles and assumptions, even if implicit and context specific, what is key is how such principles and assumptions can be related to one another as well as how the boundaries are defined with clearly specified attributes and definitions.

More importantly, regardless of formal theorizing or banal chatter, it is assumed that people's capacity to make connections between discrete things, events and phenomena can be reduced to that of imagining what is not necessarily present. Hence, it is assumed that even from the point of view of formal theorizing, the process by which to make connections between seemingly discrete self-contained theories might be explained by examining mundane discursive practices in which mutually discrete utterances appear to be communicating with one another in such a natural way that it draws little attention to the discreteness of utterances. In other words, even in practical communication settings, people are engaged in processes to assess relevance and these processes can be analyzed by applying the five criteria of relevance. In fact, in mundane discursive practices, actors are supposed to identify and classify a variety of things, actors, events, phenomena, abstract principles and assumptions, to understand appropriate ways of denoting reality by reference to different contexts, and to be concerned with making a unique contribution to the world they belong to, arrived at through obtaining the sense of non-obviousness.

## **2.5 Summary**

By applying Weick's (1987) model, mundane discursive practices can thus be framed as follows.

- (1) Discrete utterances are connected by each actor's sense of relevance.
- (2) Relevance is assessed not only in terms of paradigmatic, synchronic and reversible correspondence between particular properties/attributes described in utterances and the five criteria of relevance but also in terms of how such properties/attributes are sequenced in particular orders.
- (3) Among the five criteria of relevance, non-obviousness drives the processes of making connections between discrete utterances by creating continuously new meanings with each one's capacity to imagine what is not necessarily present in front of her/him.

In the subsequent chapters (Chapter 3 to 5), these critical properties of mundane utterances will be demonstrated through analyses of empirical data collected from an Internet discussion forum. The next chapter will see in detail processes by which actors read and issue messages by making connection in accordance with their respective sense of relevance. This analysis will exemplify the multiple dimensions of relevance which actors consult in their making sense of reality, the transitions of the meanings in the flow of time through mundane discursive practice comprised of acts of reading and uttering, and the sense of morality entailed in them. The five criteria of relevance offer an alternative framework with which to know processes by which actors are engaged with mundane talks with others in accordance with their respective assumptions and principles. What is important is the fact that actors can act rationally in their own ways without any absolutely foundational evidence, rule or principle. Everyday conversations proceed in a hypothetically inferential manner.



## **CHAPTER 3 CONNECTING DISCRETE REALITIES DENOTED IN UTTERANCES**

### **3.1 Skills and knowledge to make connections**

Mundane discursive practices can be regarded as a successive occurrence of discrete utterances that denote reality in particular ways, in the terms established in the previous chapter. Hence, discrete utterances are not intrinsically connected with each other. Rather, it is each participant's conception of the relevance of other utterances that connects them. When an actor establishes her/his denotation of reality in response to an utterance that s/he encounters then this establishes its relevance, which in turn, becomes an occasion for further utterances. The belief that reality is denoted in particular ways defined as relevant for certain audiences, whose relevancies are shared, serves as an occasion for further utterances. In other words, mundane discursive practices entail actors' relatively implicit and context-specific skills and knowledge with which to establish and maintain communicative relationships with others by making judgments on relevancies of each other's denotation of reality (O'Connor 2000).

In this chapter analysis will explicate the discreteness of utterances posted to an Internet discussion forum. The participants in the forum are skilled and knowledgeable with regard to the matters under discussion. They are able to take into account with whom they are communicating and relate to the intersubjective meaningfulness of participation in the forum. The analysis will show how to access the seemingly implicit and context-specific principles and assumptions held by ordinary people (the participants in the case online forum). The discreteness of utterances and the subtlety implicated in the processes of making connections between them draws our attention to the criticality of

the processes by which each actor connotes a sense of relevancy in establishing and maintaining communicative relationship with others as they make sense of a variety of encounters.

The Internet discussion forum as the setting for the case will be overviewed briefly before the analyses of the empirical data, which focus on the transitions in meaning identified in several discourses drawn from the case online forum by applying Weick's (1987) model. The empirical analyses will demonstrate the discreteness of utterances. As external observers we share with the participants in the case online forum the capacity to make imaginary connections between discrete utterances. As will be elaborated later, the capacity to create imaginary connections between discrete utterances concerns a rather primitive but critical ability to make sense of actions. Since actions take place in the flow of time, this ability to make sense of actions involves diachronic as well as synchronic understandings of a variety of encounters: synchronically, we almost instantaneously apprehend a variety of properties/attributes; diachronically we attend to flow by associating relevant properties with one another into particular sequential orders. We observe that in an online forum these merge to some extent.

The analysis in this chapter emphasizes the diachronic aspect of understandings in explaining the assumptions and principles that people who are engaged in mundane discursive practices bring to bear. In this respect, the five criteria of relevance derived from Weick's (1987) model serve to analyze mundane utterances in terms of both actors' synchronic and diachronic ways of making sense of reality. Typically, while each one's assumptions and principles are less visible in denotations, Weick's model helps us

understand how we can read such non-obvious properties by reference to obvious ones. What is key is to put mundane discursive practices into the flow of time. The five criteria of relevance will do so by offering ‘operational relevance’ as temporally contingent ways of assessing relevance, ‘descriptive relevance’, ‘timeliness’ and ‘goal relevance’ as temporally non-contingent ways of assessing relevance. By applying these temporally distinct criteria of relevance to mundane utterances, we are likely to become aware that obvious similarities/dissimilarities that are normally observed in a collection of data not only serve as resources from which particular principles or causal relations can be derived by abstraction along the substitutive logic but also enable actors to act in more or less relevant ways. As they act based on their assessment of different relevancies, even if only assumptive, they possibly renew understandings, typically, of what they think they already knew but did not know how and on what grounds, i.e., implicit and context-specific assumptions and principles. As such, we will become able to take into account the non-obvious relevance that is supposed to be experienced by actors, thus, account for their experiences without overlooking the critical moments for them at which they obtain renewed understandings and/or ways of understanding reality.

It will, thus, be emphasized that putting discursive practices in the flow of time and looking at the transitions of meaning are of significance for better understanding processes of organizing by means of mundane discursive practices. Each member’s skills and knowledge to make connections between discrete properties are considered to entail sources of social orderliness or collective actions. The analysis applying the five criteria of relevance will indicate that imagination that makes connections between discrete utterances is not a completely unruly action but a social practice that entails particular practical rules. By assessing different relevancies, each actor appears to be

enabled to denote reality on an assumptive basis in anticipation of responses from others who assess relevancies of denoted reality and possibly denote their realities. In other words, actors' assessment of different relevancies can be understood as inherently interactional and social practices which involve particular rules and actors' skills and knowledge to establish and comply with such rules.

With regard to such practical rules embedded in social practices, the analysis will suggest that in assessing relevancies, actors connote their respective sense of evaluative appropriateness. Thus, the skills and knowledge to make connections are understood to be intrinsically orientated towards being good by complying with particular criteria from which certain rules necessarily emanate. Focusing on the intrinsic rule-orientation embedded in mundane discursive practices, the next chapter will develop a framework with which to account for, in a holistic manner, the processes of assessing different relevancies entailed in mundane discursive practices. It will do so by drawing upon narrative frameworks, typically Ricoeur's (1984/1990, 1991) theory of emplotment.

Theory of emplotment or plot is capable of accounting for the non-obvious but critical moment at which actors obtain renewed understandings as they follow particular plots (Boje 2001). It can also explain the transitions of meaning in ways that exemplify the asymmetrical relationship between an author and readers mediated by texts by focusing on actors' mundane skills and knowledge to make connections in both a synchronic and a diachronic manner. Narrative frameworks are of relevance for accounting not only for diachronic progressions of events and phenomena but also for the intertwined relationship between the synchronic and diachronic ways of making sense of reality.

Regardless of whether or not one can reproduce events and phenomena as they actually happened precisely in terms of chronological order, the skills and knowledge to sequence relevant properties into particular orders enable one to understand a variety of encounters in the flow of time, including variable contexts in which those events and phenomena took place. Such additional information is the surplus of denotation, which mundane utterances produce. Moreover, it is readers/observers who read more or less surplus from others' utterances regardless of utterers' awareness of surpluses. Because of alternate successions between the acts of reading and denoting, which give rise to the surplus of denotation, no meaning is actually exchanged in the same way as material objects are handed over from an actor to another. Rather, meaning is renewed at every turn of conversation. As such, narrative frameworks are effective in accounting for mundane discursive practices in everyday practical settings, rather than mere interpretation of texts.

### **3.2 Case context**

The case Internet discussion forum (hereinafter referred to as 'the Forum') was founded by one of the employees working for a nation-wide discount retail department chain in the USA (hereinafter referred to as 'the Company'). (Although he had to leave the Company after it decided to close his store, the Forum remained active after his resignation.) The Forum is a private forum hosted by one of the major Internet service providers (ISPs). While the Forum appears open to the public in terms of viewing, those who wish to participate should first register themselves with the ISP by creating respective identities (user ID) that enable them to post their messages to the Forum. The

founder acts as an administrator of the Forum who has the authority to delete posts and reject participation by filtering the ISP IDs at his discretion.

The Forum operates publicly in terms of accessibility; thus, virtually anybody can subscribe. The majority of the participants are employees or ex-employees of the Company, or those who have specific interests in the Company's performance, such as individual shareholders, experts in and advisors for investment and so forth. The Forum operates informally with respect to the Company's formal structures, with participation being completely voluntary, in the sense that the Company has no direct control over participation.

During the period in which the Forum was active, from May 2001 to October 2002, the Company went through two critical events: filing to the Bankruptcy Court (officially announced on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2002) and closing 284 stores (officially announced on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2002), which made more than 20,000 jobs redundant. The subscription to the Forum rose steeply after the official announcement of the bankruptcy (614 visitors with the ISP ID as at Feb. 18, 2002 compared to 114 as at Jan. 1, 2002). Hence, it appears that most of the participants in the Forum were looking for information concerning these critical events and participants from the Company were likely to be suffering from anxieties and uncertainties, especially about their future. (In this study, hereafter, the participants refer to employees and ex-employees of the Company.)

While the majority of the participants appear to be aware of their company's unfavorable performance before the bankruptcy, probably in part because of the scale of the Company, they are not quite sure about what is going on in the whole Company, what will be happening, what consequences the bankruptcy will have for them, and how

they ought to respond. Their participation in the Forum can thus be regarded as a key part of their efforts at making sense of the bankruptcy and ensuing events, in order to cope with their anxieties and uncertainties. Indeed, as the participants talk in the Forum, they appear to be confirming that their company has been doing badly for the last few years. Their experiences at their respective locales indicate that the Company may need to be drastically reorganized. Infrastructure is deteriorating, information systems, including checkout registers, are outdated, merchandise is not properly supplied to stores, and intensive rationalization measures appear only to be targeting employees' payroll. Even worse, it appears that these measures do not turn out to be effective. Nonetheless, in the Forum, the most dominant opinion is that they had better do what they can do at their respective workplaces. Probably, bankruptcy of a company of over 2,000 stores is such a big issue that practically no other alternative seems to be left to them. The processes through which the participants collectively arrived at such a modest opinion are the focus of the subsequent analyses.

### **3.3 Data**

The number of posts is in total 14,502, posted during a period of 17 months (May 2001 to October 2002) by 806 posters. Through a close reading of the posts open coding was conducted to identify themes from the contents and contexts talked in the posts. 7,206 posts out of 14,502 which were posted between May 2001 and April 2002 were chosen for the subsequent analyses: these are considered to represent the participants' efforts at making sense of the bankruptcy and store-closures.

### **3.4 Themes: Transitions in meaning**

Despite the seeming significance of the bankruptcy and ensuing company-wide reorganization which must have evoked the participants' anxieties about possible job losses, they talk chiefly about their immediate experiences, which are filled with problems they encounter at their respective workplaces. Therefore, themes identified in their messages are mostly those related to store operations, such as understaffing, dysfunctional signage, pricing or inventory management systems, unreliable suppliers designated by the Company's management, and so forth.

Based on the framework derived from Weick's (1987) model of practices of theorizing organizational communication, I focused on the ways in which themes shift from those related to store operations to other topics. The following four patterns were detected in the ways in which their conversations proceeded and developed further themes:

- (1) Talking about store-level problems leads the posters to talk about gaps between what they wish to do for the benefit of the Company and what the Company's management appears to make the most of.
- (2) Talking about store-level problems leads into the posters' awareness of emotional attachment to the Company and to the retail industry.
- (3) Talking about store-level problems leads them to talk about relationships with customers or the general public.
- (4) Talking about store-level problems leads them to discuss normative issues that often ensue in reflections on the usefulness of the Forum.

I saw these patterns as the participants' ways of sensemaking because these shifts or emergence of themes occur as a result of their attaching some meanings to their talk about the initial theme (problems encountered in their day-to-day operations). More



importantly, the shifts of the themes from those concerning store operations to those involving broader contexts, as indicated above, can be considered reflective of the participants' anticipation for knowing better about the bankruptcy, ensuing events and phenomena that they are not quite sure about.

By reading the messages posted to the Forum in terms of these shifts in theme or transitions in meaning, it became evident that the participants demonstrated competencies in establishing and managing communicative relationships with others. Specifically, they make assumptions about relevancy both in terms of the substance of utterances and in terms of their appropriateness in the Forum. In the case of pattern (1) above, the participants managed to express their analytical competencies about how a retail company should be run in ways that it could make profit. In the case of pattern (2), they succeeded in establishing themselves as committed and loyal employees. In the case of pattern (3), their conversations suggested that they were aware of the broader contexts in which they operated, such as relationships between employees of a bankrupted company and customers, media and the general public. All these indicate the participants' abilities to establish understandings about phenomena that they are not quite sure about, in ways that appropriate facts described in others' utterances and keep conversations ongoing in the Forum without serious disruption. In so doing, as appears in pattern (4), the fact that they occasionally mention normative issues and the significance of the Forum indicates that they made judgments of good or bad. Actually, in the other patterns (1) to (3) their value judgments, or at least preferences, were indicated: they display themselves as competent, loyal and broad-minded characters. Hence, as Weick's (1987) model posits, the participants appear to act in accordance with particular principles and assumptions, even if implicit and context-specific.

Otherwise, it would have appeared both to the participants and to external observers that the activities taking place in the Forum were rather more disorganized than organized, in which case the Forum might have ceased to be active sooner than I observed.

The activities in the Forum demonstrate convergence in meanings, as shown in the patterns above, and the participants' collective preferences and intentions for sustaining the activities in the Forum could be assumed. However, in subsequent analyses it will become apparent that the messages posted to the Forum do not communicate with each other. In other words, it is not possible to assume that each actor's intention to communicate with others was materialized simply by posting messages because the messages did not communicate directly with each other. Rather, because the messages do not communicate with each other, each participant had to, or rather was allowed to, establish her/his own understandings of the events in the real world (their respective workplaces), of people participating in the Forum, and their concerns, interests, preferences and even selfhood, by reference to others' postings.

The analysis starts by demonstrating the discreteness of the messages. It then examines processes by which discrete messages are connected with each other by each poster's capacities to discern and create relevant utterances in a particular context (in the Forum). This analysis will indicate the subtle but inevitable normative qualities implicated in their imaginative capacities to create connections between discrete utterances. Also, it will exemplify the fact that their imaginative capacities can be understood as being evoked by their anticipation of better knowing what is going on, a need to know, without specific purposes and motivations.

### **3.5 Discreteness of utterances in conversations**

As an example aimed at showing the discreteness of utterances which denote reality in particular ways in which diverse actors appear to communicate with each other, a thread of messages is taken up as below.

**Table 3.1 An example thread representing the participants' uncertainty and anxiety**

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[Post A]

Subject: I Have To Ask

Date: 17/02/2002

Time: 05:00

Poster Name: ur2blue

*How many folks in here HONESTLY think we will make it as a company?*

*This is all so hard to believe but I think this company has been in trouble for at least the last 6 to 7 yrs. Hope it can be repaired!*

*I would really like to see how other employees are feeling.*

*Do you ever as [...] employees get the feeling no one really cares how you feel or what you think?*

*This is not being negative! Just want to tALk about the real issue. Will we be here talking about [the Company] this time next year?*

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[Res. 1] *[...] I think we have a 50 50 shot, my greatest fear is with our leadership...we have none. If there is anyone at the top that cares about the*

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*company, instead of themselves, then maybe (the 50% positive),if not I am really scared!*

17/2/02 by rph85234 at 05:09

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[Res. 2] *[...] if the corporate honcho's do not focus on customers and insuring they have positive experiences in stores We may not see a turnaround. I [...] see store associates overworked, underpaid, understaffed [...] I wonder how many "Honcho's" actually go into stores???and buy??? unless it is to see the little people and insult their overworked attitudes One thing is for sure if the customers come to stores and have positive experiences they come back but if they don't they don't The store's need raises and help and support from the "elites" Payrolls should be expanding [...] Your thoughts??*

17/2/02 by gadc1989 at 05:13

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[Res. 3] *[...]After this past year it certainly felt like no one cared and nobody was listening, but [...] many of Mark Schwartz's policies are starting to be reversed. Will it be a case of too little being late? I don't think so, because [...] We were proud of our history, its compassion and family feel. We worked hard [...] because we cared for our store, community and fellow associates. [...] You do not INTIMIDATE a WORLD CLASS COMPANY, you build it through trust and rewards for your associates and they perform at WORLD CLASS levels because they care. As I think about all the money we wasted this year on signing, fixtures, wobblers, etc., I can't help but*

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*think how many salary dollars they would have translated into, [...] how many less hours we would have had to cut from people who truly needed them. However, that year is gone, [...] we cannot let that mire us in negativity. [...] You can bash us and we'll show up the next day ready to go get em again. DO NOT UNDER ESTIMATE our tenacity. So to answer your question, put me down as TRULY BELIEVING that we will be here next year. [...]*

17/2/02 by sickoXXX at 05:36

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[Res. 4] *I believe that we will be here. We are getting rid of things that cost this company money. It makes sense to close stores that are not profitable. It makes sense to file chapter 11, in order to be relieved of \$250,000,000 in leases. It makes sense to have the bluelights come from the store level. It makes sense to have the store appear open and customer friendly. It makes sense to have up-to-date computers and registers. I believe that the right decisions are now being made. [...]*

17/2/02 by myblueeyeswideopen at 05:46

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[Res. 5] *Maybe. There will need to be lots of changes. I personally have no faith in leadership. [...] We're merchants. We sell stuff. Sales are what produce the profits, [...]. It's really very simple....put stuff on the shelves, have enough employees to keep it stocked, face it, find it, and ring it up. Keep the aisles uncluttered, the floor swept, and all the lights burning to create a pleasant appearance [...]. Those of us in the stores understand all this. The folks in*

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*Troy do not and that's why we're in the fix we're in. You can't neglect the stores and expect to make up that profit at HQ [...]*

17/2/02 by ecc1521 at 05:46

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[Res. 6] *I think that we're all worried about that. IMO I think that we will IF (A BIG IF!)Chuck and Co. realizes what is wrong with our company. We need to lower expenses and this should NOT be hours in the stores. [...]*

*[The Company] has a lot of loyal customers who want to shop here but would you really blame them if they went to the other side of the street where they can get help? For the most part our prices are competitive [...]*  
*We need help on the floor and checkouts plus we need to get our mdse. in and onto the sales floor. If we can get these done I believe we'll survive. I'm trying not to dwell on the past but rather the future [...]*

*WE CANNOT KEEP MAKING THE MISTAKES THAT WE DID IN 2001!!!!!! Thanks for the vent.*

17/2/02 by cuda17mc at 06:14

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[Post B] *I am loving your answers. It makes me know more than ever that the store employees did not fail. You know I can't help but wonder, WHY our executives did [not] know how much trouble we were in as a company? [...]*  
*What has been said in your answers about [...]*  
*employees is so true. [...]*

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*You know wouldn't it be great if the BOD and executives did put at least part of their earnings back in the company? Saying it could only be used for store salary. So we could better serve the our biggest asset, OUR CUSTOMERS. Can you imagine how that would impress the our customers and the outside world. I know that [...] executives should be honest and straightforward with us this time. Tell us exactly what is going on and ASK FOR OUR HELP! Don't tell us all is well when it isn't! The unknown is the worst thing to deal with.*

17/2/02 by ur2blue at 06:31

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[Res. 7] *I truly believe there at least several people "at the top" who care immensely about the company. By "at the top" I'm speaking of individuals who are in a position to make an impact, to actually succeed in this turn-around effort. I think it's better than 50-50. I can't be [too] sure it's not too late, but I have every reason to be hopeful and positive. I think if some of you were more acquainted with [...] the character and integrity of these people, you would be encouraged.*

17/2/02 by XXXwidow at 13:55

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As a thread of messages, they collaboratively present particular ways of understanding the bankruptcy and sufferings attributable to it, such that the messages embody certain discourses representing collectively shared meanings among the participants. Stores and customers are what the Company is supposed to make the most of, since in the end the Company's earnings must come from stores. Associates working on the ground (in

stores) know how to operate stores and to take care of customers properly. Management must listen to stories from stores rather than enforcing various programs in a top-down manner: failing to do so is having serious consequences, such as losing loyal customers and sales, wasting limited resources on unprofitable programs, cutting hours and salaries of the associates as makeshift measures that are considered to have caused the bankruptcy and necessitated the Company's overall reorganization.

It is useful for understanding sources of social orderliness embedded in mundane discursive practices to find that such utterances actually produced meanings that seemed to be shared by the participants in the Forum. However, the process by which certain collective meanings are generated from mundane discursive practices can be understood better, without discounting what each actor is actually doing, by closely examining the thread of messages as these that consist of mutually discrete utterances.

First, the thread is initiated by a poster who appears anxious about the Company's business continuity as indicated in the question: '*Will we be here talking about [the Company] this time next year?*' In this opening post ([Post A]), the poster also asks if anybody has ever had '*the feeling no one really cares how you feel or what you think?*' Since these questions do not seem to request respondents for specific information or solutions to particular problems, replies might not have to answer the questions in a manner that strictly follows the first poster's line of inquiries (if at all). Hence, the replies shown above ([Res 1 to Res. 7]) also look like self-contained presentations of opinions by which the posters denote reality in particular ways while they appear to have been evoked by the opening post. In other words, while it appears that the posters



conversed with each other over the subject matters raised by the first poster, the messages did not really communicate with one another.

For example, while most of them attended to the issue of the Company's business continuity, their accounts regarding '*care*', or some sense of the lack of it, vary. One of them discussed '*care*' as the issue of whether or not the Company's management cares for its employees ([Res. 3]), others see it as the issue of management's negligence concerning fundamentals of store-level operations ([Res. 1 and 6]). Others see care in terms of relatively low loyalty and/or commitment of the top executives or management in general to the Company ([Res. 2 and 7]) or do not mention it at all ([Res. 4 and 5]). In other words, each message not only replied to the initial post but also can be understood as an attempt by each poster to understand better what s/he was encountering. It is possible for those who read these messages to take the information inscribed to be simple facts concerning some employees of a bankrupted company or socially accepted (or even objective and disinterested) meanings of such facts. Additionally, it appears that each of these messages is meaningful to each of the posters, thus certain meanings were created rather than these simply confirming how others denoted a reality that they assumed they were sharing.

What deserves even more attention is the first poster's response ([Post B]) to those messages seemingly responding to her initial post. While she appears content with these messages and refers to some of the accounts in affirmative terms, such as the importance of customer service ([Res. 2 and 6]), hardworking employees ([Res. 3]) facing the problems caused by serious understaffing ([Res. 5]), her utterance concluded by criticizing management's dishonest manner in disclosing critical information, which

none of the other messages mentions. In other words, her second post ([Post B]) appears to add additional meanings to what she read in the preceding messages. More specifically, it says that *'the store employees did not fail'*, which can be related to *'associates [...] perform at WORLD CLASS levels'* ([Res. 3]), and that *'we could better serve the our [opt. sic.] biggest asset, OUR CUSTOMERS'* and the executives should *'ASK FOR OUR HELP!'* by reference to *'Those of us in the stores understand all this (the fundamentals of retailing). The folks in Troy (headquarters) do not'* ([Res. 5]) and also to the statement that *'[The Company] has a lot of loyal customers'* ([Res. 6]). The message also says that *'executives did [not] know how much trouble we were in as a company'* by reference to others' accounts, such as *'is [there] anyone at the top that cares about the company, instead of themselves'* ([Res. 1]) and *'how many "Honcho's" (headquarters' staffs) actually go into stores'* ([Res. 2]). While clarifying that she also responded to the preceding messages ([Res. 1 to 6]), expressing gratitude that their accounts were of relevance for her, she selectively appropriated aspects of these others' utterances in order to establish her own utterance in ways that appear coherent and consistent.

In other words, this post ([Post B]) can be understood to produce a certain meaningfulness that is unique for the poster and such uniqueness appears to constitute her sense of relevance, supported by the substances appropriated from others' messages and the ways of denotation that expressed her message as responding to preceding messages. Relevancy is actually not mere attributes of things, events, and phenomena to be apprehended from things-in-themselves (Weick 1987) but also potentiality resides in the denotation of that reality in particular ways that may or may not become relevant, depending on each reader's sense of meaningfulness. It is important to understand how

the participants themselves became aware of such subtle uniqueness entailed in their utterances. If they were indifferent to such uniqueness, they would be satisfied with repetitions of reading and posting similar messages, something that it is relatively easy to doubt. Understanding better the process by which actors become aware of uniqueness enables a more nuanced understanding of the fundamental motivations of actors participating in mundane discursive practices.

### **3.6 Awareness of the non-obvious relevance reflected in the ways of denotation**

Different ways of denotation tell us about the participants' awareness of motivations for participating in the Forum. The ways of denoting reality are, put differently, their attitudes toward participating in the Forum. The ways of denotation are distinct from the substances of messages in that they are determined by assumptions about whom one is talking to or in what contexts oneself, and relevant others, are assumed to be operating.

In my observation, the participants generally appreciated the Forum because they became aware that many associates were experiencing similar sentiments of uncertainty and anxiety. Hence, they could post messages assuming that they were talking to others who shared similar experiences and sentiments, such as frustration arising from day-to-day experiences at their respective workplaces and anxieties about job security, as were observed in the example thread. At the same time, they appeared cognizant of the existence of people who might have a negative view of their words, if not the factual quality of the bankruptcy or of their experiences with it.

The participants' recognition of the existence of those who are potentially negative about the activities in the Forum was identified in the same example thread (Table 3.1).

For example, positive speculation on the future of the Company also reflected a positive attitude on the part of participants, which was consistently observed in the Forum. What is notable in respect of the positive attitude reflected in their messages is that the participants were managing tensions between the positives and the negatives. At least part of the reasons for their expressing positive attitudes is their awareness of the possibly negative consequences of making negative utterances. Therefore, it was observed that the posters stated, especially after criticizing management and/or the Company's top executives, that *'This is not being negative'* [Post A], *'we cannot let that (the year full of problems) mire us in negativity'* [Res. 3] and *'I'm trying not to dwell on the past but rather the future [...] WE CANNOT KEEP MAKING THE MISTAKES THAT WE DID IN 2001!!!!!! Thanks for the vent.'* [Res. 6]. These postings reflect the posters' awareness of the existence of those who cast negative images toward them and/or the Company.

It is obvious for them that the global negative events (e.g. the bankruptcy, reorganization, etc.) were real, to the extent that they could talk about such global events, grounding them in their day-to-day experiences (e.g. suffering from lack of merchandise, reduced income, work overload, unrealized ideal customer services). However, criticizing the Company's executives and management might possibly be seen by outsiders or the general public as just complaining about hardships, in varying degrees of severity, possibly experienced by employees in general. Thus, the participants' negative comments on the Company's management might possibly end up confirming or even exacerbating the Company's negative image, as already cast by customers, media and the general public. The participants appeared sensitive to the negativity inevitably entailed in criticizing the Company's management, while the

Forum was appreciated for its contributions chiefly in terms of their making sense of reality in a manner that maintains positive identities.

What is to be noted with regard to ways of denoting reality is that these reflect an intricate management of positives and negatives; moreover, the ways of denotation are visible. The visibility of the ways of denotation is significant, especially when we think of the relative invisibility of each contributor's subjective experiences, such as what and how they actually feel. It is apparent that utterances rarely represent reality in ways that everyone can accept that the denoted reality is real. Regardless of the extent to which we can accurately understand each other's reality from words attributed to them, in practice we make assumptions about each other's reality on the basis of what we can observe. Not only is what is observable 'real' but it also reflects processes by which actors make assumptions in order to denote their reality in particular ways.

Processes of denotation are important particularly because we are predisposed to presume the existence of certain reasons behind others' utterances or actions in general. What this means is that due to our presumption of reasons or motivations of actors for particular utterances and/or actions, such reasons and motivations are accepted without examining the processes by which such actors must have reached these assumptions. Among other things, in such processes whereby actors make assumptions, it is important to observe their different degrees of concern.

The intricate management of positives and negatives observed in the example thread indicates the participants' seriousness in terms of their intention to be seen in positive terms. Had they not been so serious about being positive, they could have focused only on management's failure. Obviously, what is important is not what is good or bad either

in this specific case or in universal and general contexts so much as the fact that the participants appeared to be attempting to present themselves as positive to various others and, more importantly, such attempts were reflected in their ways of denoting reality. It is, therefore, even more important not to attribute the participants' fundamental motivations for their participating in mundane discursive practices to their intention to be seen in 'good' terms, which can only be speculated. Instead, one should look even more closely at the processes by which they made assumptions in ways that reduced the anxiety and uncertainty arising from their day-to-day suffering, as well as the unforeseeability of the future, by making better sense of these uncertain events and presenting themselves to different others in positive terms. The anxiety and uncertainty are managed in the flow of time, rather than by prescribing particular diagnoses.

### **3.7 Making assumptions and transitions in meaning: Imaginative creation**

In the context of the Forum, the majority of the participants appeared to be suffering from uncertainty and anxiety chiefly due to the bankruptcy and possible job losses. One cannot interpret the messages posted to the Forum as a means by which to obtain information with which to reduce uncertainty and anxiety, however. Uncertainty and anxiety are rather ambiguous feelings; moreover, talk in the Forum was unlikely to bring about substantial impacts on the Company's policies and decisions. The meaningfulness of the messages should be understood to lie in the whole processes in which the participants read others' messages and issued their messages concerning the bankruptcy and its impacts on their day-to-day operations. Put differently, the activities observed in the Forum might be undertaken in large part in anticipation of those postings making better sense of what they and other participants had been experiencing.

Hence, their activities in the Forum assume a relatively less specific desire for managing anxiety and uncertainty.

What is key is that the participants did not appear so sure about what they wished to obtain through participation in the Forum. When going back to the initial post of the example thread ([Post A]), it was observed that while the poster appeared anxious about the Company's business continuity, her anxieties did not seem to be exhausted by attributing it to the unclear future of the Company, as she also talked about her relatively vague sense of being neglected. What deserves attention is that, regardless of the ambiguity of her anxiety, she managed to issue her utterance as a practical accomplishment. In other words, she dealt with two distinct dimensions of ambiguity in her participation in the Forum: first, whether or not her anxiety is relevant as a subject matter to be discussed in the Forum and second, whether or not her ways of denotation will be accepted by other participants as being relevant, as observed in her saying that *'This is not being negative'*.

The relatively quick responses (6 responses within 75 minutes) from other posters, together with the substances of their messages, should assuage the first poster that her anxieties were actually relevant in the Forum. In addition, with these replies, she obtained not only information that supported her sense of relevancy but her anxieties were more or less clarified, as observed in her second post ([Post B]). Specifically, she seems to have attributed, if provisionally, her anxiety and uncertainty to management's dishonest attitudes in terms of the disclosure of important information by asserting that *'The unknown is the worst thing to deal with'*. It is, therefore, important to understand that mundane utterances not only transmit information but also induce imagination on

the side of hearers/readers about what is not necessarily inscribed in them. Without considering such a dynamic process involving each actor's imagination, mundane discursive practices might be conceptualized as a fairly static image of synchronic exchange of information between actors.

### **3.8 Applying the five criteria of relevance**

What the analysis thus far presented indicates is that the subject matters expressed in the example thread look similar and the ways of denoting reality appear to be converging but each of the messages appears to involve particular meaningfulness to each of the posters. The analysis especially draws our attention to the significance and the subtlety entailed in the ways of denoting reality that are visible but less obvious in respect of assumptions which actors are making, using their practical skills and knowledge to establish and maintain interactional relationships with others.

One can infer that there are subtle relationships between converging discourses and relatively less obvious unique meaningfulness for each participant and between relatively obvious ways of denotation and relatively less obvious skills and knowledge with which to establish and maintain communicative relationships. Besides, since utterances were found not to be connected with one another intrinsically, either by meanings or by purposive motivations for communication, such implicit knowledge and skills cannot presume any linear linkage between actors' desires and observable outcomes, such as the attempt to be positive and utterances that appear to concord with each other in respect of their attempts at positivity. Put differently, it is not possible to assume that utterances issued for the purpose of exchanging information with others will be automatically connected with other utterances.



Rather, actors with unique concerns and interests assess the relevancy of utterances in terms of three distinct dimensions: substance, ways of denotation and subjective meaningfulness. To the extent that they appear to communicate with each other these three-dimensional assessments of relevance constitute less obvious but recursively employed practices that produce relatively similar outcomes. The messages in the same example thread will be analyzed by applying the five criteria of relevance derived from Weick's (1987) model of practices of theorizing organizational communication, which is capable of accounting for the non-obvious concerns, skills and knowledge of actors and the obvious substances and ways of denotation. Thus, the focus will be on relatively obvious similarities in substances and ways of denotation and less obvious unique meaningfulness for each participant, as well as the implicit skills and knowledge used in making assumptions to establish and maintain interactional relationships.

Despite the substantive similarity regarding the positive but conditional speculation on the turnaround from the bankruptcy, the responding posts ([Res. 1 to 7]) also demonstrate the distinctiveness of each poster's interests and concerns. Specifically, some variance was found in terms of what grounds and in what ways each respondent considered management was responsible for the problems experienced day by day. For instance, some considered the critical condition for successful turnaround from the bankruptcy to be '*leadership that cares about the company, instead of themselves*' ([Res. 1]), '*focus on customers and insuring they have positive experiences in stores*' ([Res. 2]), or '*to lower expenses and this should NOT be hours in the stores*' ([Res. 6]). Others grounded their positive speculations in what they perceived as beneficial changes since the bankruptcy, such as '*many of Mark Schwartz's (a former executive) policies are starting to be reversed*' ([Res. 3]) and '*the right decisions are now being*

*made*' ([Res. 4]). As such, while these posters appear to consider viable policies and decisions at the top to be necessary for successful turnaround from the bankruptcy, it is indicated that they perceived changes in the policies and the decisions differently. It is apparent that people who worked at different places were experiencing the bankruptcy and its impact on their day-to-day operations differently. The point is, thus, that there is uniqueness emerging from the backdrop of overall similarities.

If we apply the transitions in meaning assumed in Weick's (1987) model to this context, the redundancy of similar accounts contributes to making explicit shared aspects of the understandings of the bankruptcy. Then, against redundancy, each of the posters manages to establish non-redundant, thus unique understandings, for their self. Weick's model, thus, leads us to consider that it is possible for any word to carry different meanings every time it is stated. Probably, repetitions of certain words and phrases may be understood also as rhetoric for emphasis or as a sign of consent to or acceptance of substances described in others' messages. However, having observed in the example thread that even when the posters expressed concordance with specific accounts made in others' messages, they managed to create their own accounts, the non-redundancy emerging from seemingly redundant accounts can be understood to be process by which each actor is creating relevance for her/himself by issuing an utterance that denotes reality in a more or less similar way.

The similarities observed in the substances and the ways of denotation can also be explained better by applying the five criteria of relevance of Weick's (1987) model: descriptive relevance, goal relevance, operational relevance, non-obviousness and timeliness. Specifically, the five criteria of relevance enable us to understand that the

similarities/dissimilarities both in the substances and in the ways of denotation are discerned synchronically, thus instantaneously, and created diachronically by putting substances and ways of denotation into the flow of time. More concretely, the participants assess relevance in terms of descriptive particulars and timeliness *in situ*, thus in reference to their concerns and interests at particular points in time and space. At the same time, they assess the relevance of utterances as readers/observers by imagining goal and operational relevance either as synchronic thus relatively consistent correspondence between particular attributes and the criteria of relevance or as particular sequential orders chiefly assessed by reference to operational relevance. Then, each sense of relevance, in terms of non-obviousness, should be emergent from relevance in terms of the other four criteria.

Even though whether or not one may derive non-obvious relevance from other relatively obvious relevancies is not predictable, the point is the fact that one can imagine what is not obvious by reference to what is obvious. Hence, while certain principles or causal relations can be derived from certain patterns or recursively appearing events and phenomena as conventional scientific methods do with the logic of substitution, patterns and repetitions should also be understood as necessary resources for inducing actors' renewed understandings of reality in ways that reveal their implicit and context-specific assumptions and principles. Meanings are thus all the time being renewed in mundane discursive practices as each actor makes judgments on those different relevancies.

Altogether, the activities observed in the Forum are considered to entail processes by which meanings are determined diachronically, in the flow of time. The quasi-conversations in the Forum continuously produced non-redundant understandings of

reality by the participants because of the simple fact that many participants could read one another's reality by virtue of its being denoted in relatively similar ways, a critical point from which to explain how and by what people are motivated to talk and listen to others. When looking at mundane discursive practices as sources of social orderliness, they need to be analyzed not only as synchronic exchanges of information between actors but also as diachronic processes in which mutually independent acts of reading and speaking are being succeeded alternately.

### **3.9 Importance and necessity to delve into the transitions in meaning in the flow of time**

The example thread ends with the last post [Res. 7] as no post followed. Although such an abrupt closing of a thread frequently occurred in the Forum, it is interesting that the posters did not continue to talk in order to reach consensus, especially when looking at the variances in the degrees of trust with which they render the Company's management or executives and in their perceived changes after the bankruptcy. While it is not possible to know exactly why no further discussion was held, these posters must have at least been satisfied with having posted their messages in reply to the initial post and probably more or less satisfied with the ways by which they established the interactional relationship with each other. What is to be noted in respect of the latter is that none of the messages look irrelevant to the extent that their interactions appear to have concluded successfully without any open conflict (Goffman 1959/1990). Actually, the successful completion of interactions is in itself of no less significance for the participants' wellbeing, considering the subtlety with which the participants threaded their skills and knowledge to establish and sustain interactions with others assessing the

multi-dimensional relevance. As was observed, relevance appears to be assessed not only in terms of the subject matters to be talked but also in terms of the ways of denoting reality. Besides, each actor has her/his own particular interests and concerns.

What the analyses demonstrated is that the participants in the example thread, and probably in the Forum in general, appreciate the opportunities to read others' denoted reality and to present each one's understandings in ways that were relevant in terms of substance and context and by reference to expectations for the Forum of managing uncertainty and anxiety. However, what is to be emphasized most from the analyses conducted in this chapter and for the analyses in the subsequent chapters is the indeterminacy attaching to why the participants decided to participate in the Forum. Although the participants appear to behave in ways that satisfy certain interactional obligations, it is not possible to determine whether actors were satisfied with fulfilling these to conclude their participation in (quasi-)conversations successfully. Moreover, one does not know if their participation in particular interactional relationships satisfied their respective interests and concerns. Even if the former were the case, the participants would not have been indifferent to their interests and concerns. Rather, as the analyses indicated, they were engaged in subtle processes by which they assessed the relevance of utterances in terms of substance and context, creating meaningfulness by reference to their respective interests and concerns.

In order to establish and maintain activities in the Forum, the participants appear to be practicing relatively implicit skills and knowledge. What is most obvious are similarities both in the substances of messages and in ways of denoting their reality. However, as was observed, it appears that behind such obvious similarities, something

non-obvious is created by the participants' abilities not only to discern similarities/dissimilarities between two or more substances and ways of denoting reality but also their ability to obtain a sense of relevance in terms of non-obviousness being generated from experiencing similar, thus seemingly redundant, information.

More importantly, the process by which an actor obtains the sense of relevance appears to implicate a normative quality: the participants appeared to be concerned with being good, even though it is not possible to determine the causal relation between a sense of morality and observable actions. In other words, according to the five criteria of relevance, although assessment of relevance inevitably implicates making a choice between good or bad, rather than seemingly disinterested relevance or irrelevance, it is not possible to determine what outcomes are likely to be generated as a result of which of the criteria of relevance will have been fulfilled. Assessment of relevance always involves both synchronic and diachronic assessment, meaning that relevance is continuously being renewed as assessment of relevance is successively practiced by many actors. As has been demonstrated above, meanings are always created diachronically through diegetic alternation of reading/observing and talking/acting.

In the next chapter, therefore, by applying narrative frameworks systematically the transitions in meaning in the flow of time, the multiple dimension entailed in assessment of relevancy and the fundamental motivations that appear to involve choice between good and bad towards participating in mundane discursive practices will be related. As will be elaborated, what is key in application of narrative frameworks is their capacity to account for actors' abilities to discern and create similarities/dissimilarities between a variety of things, actors, events, phenomena, abstract principles and

assumptions. These accounting capacities can be explained by Ricoeur's (1984/1990) theory of emplotment comprised of three-fold mimesis. In his theory, mimesis is not simple mimicry but involves creative (re-)production of meanings, especially on the part of readers.

Through analyses applying narrative frameworks the source of social orderliness entailed in mundane discursive practices will be investigated. The analysis will focus on how actors obtain a sense of non-obvious relevance that implicates a choice between good and bad. They will not do so in a way that sees normative quality as the fundamental source of social orderliness or collective actions. Instead, they see meanings to be always determined through diegetic successions between the acts of reading and uttering, which are always variably relevant and good to an actor at a particular point in time and space. The source of social orderliness or collective actions are always being produced in the flow of time, thus, should be conceived of and explained processually. As the analyses that applied Weick's (1987) model demonstrated, what is critical is the moment at which actors find their specific but implicit theories to be revealed as they refer to others' denotations of reality. Thus, if we can understand better the mechanisms by which actors' understandings are being renewed through mundane discursive practices, processes of organizing, organizational changes and resistance to them are expected to be explained in ways that take into account each actor's skills and knowledge enacted in mundane discursive practices. Imagination that creates meanings by making connections between discrete realities denoted in utterances is inherently orientated towards particular rules, even if such rules are not definitive.

## CHAPTER 4 CAPTURING THE TRANSITIONS IN MEANING BY PLOT

### 4.1 Three different connections

In this chapter the focus continues to be placed on the transitions in meaning in the flow of time implicated in the five criteria of relevance of Weick's (1987) model. However, in this chapter, what is to be highlighted is the subtle but important distinction between *in situ* and *in retrospect* with regard to sequential orders in which the transitions in meaning take place. Doing so overcomes the weakness of Weick's model arising from the impression that relevance and the five criteria constitute synchronic causal logic. The adoption of Weick's model aims to confirm, primarily, the fact that actors act not only based on reasons retrospectively constructed but also by creating a sense of relevance (typically non-obvious one out of obvious ones) without waiting for rational decisions. Thus, it is important to understand how and why actors' ways of seeing reality are shifting in the course of their assessing relevance of reality in terms of descriptive, goal, operational relevance, timeliness and non-obviousness, such that they may become aware of their implicit and context-specific principles and assumptions and such awareness may or may not be reflected in their subsequent actions.

As was presented in the previous chapters (Chapter 2 and 3), the assessment of relevance can be reduced to the issue of connection or connectedness that actors create with their imaginative capacities between discrete properties, entities, theories and other denoted reality in particular ways. There are two distinct connections: synchronic and diachronic. The synchronic connection refers to categories into which attributes apprehended from the thing-in-itself are to be classified. The diachronic connection refers to a particular sequential order consisting of particular things, actors, events,



phenomena, abstract principles and assumptions. Actors assess the relevance of a variety of encounters by making these two different kinds of connections and also by mediating them into meaningful wholes.

The distinction of sequential orders or diachronic connections between *in situ* and *in retrospect* becomes significant in the process of mediating the two different kinds of connections. The mediation occurs only once thus every process of mediating the connections is unique. What is key is what this mediation accomplishes and how. Simply, each actor creates *in situ* a diachronic connection which is unique while diachronic connections contribute resources for assessment of relevance of similar or comparable events and phenomena. In other words, sequential orders are both created *in situ* and apprehended from already established categories. Hence, they contribute differently to assessment of relevance. Specifically, the *in situ* creation of sequential orders explains processes by which a sense of non-obviousness is obtained. The sequential orders imagined from relatively remote temporal distance allow actors to assess the operational relevance of reality denoted in utterances by explicating connections between concerned actors and entities.

Special attention is paid to the differences in temporal experiences. Different from linear images of time, such as a continuum flowing from the past to the future via the present, an eternal succession of the present, and a flow the lengths of which can be measured by punctuating them with particular beginnings and ends, time is assumed to manifest itself in different temporal experiences of actors, which can be made explicit by closely examining processes entailed in the making of diachronic connections. According to Weick's (1987) model, actors are capable of assessing relevance by

apprehending relevant properties that appear to be causally defined, by distinguishing contextually relevant ways of associating a variety of properties in particular sequential orders, and by creating a sense of relevance by mediating the synchronic causal contingencies and the diachronic sequential contingencies. Thus, it is assumed that different meanings should be made and experienced through these three different processes of assessing relevance.

In the analyses that follow, meanings to be created by making particular sequential orders are differentiated between those in practice and those (re-)produced in retrospect. Meanings are (re-)produced as people practice skills and knowledge with which to make *in situ* diachronic connections as well as to apprehend particular sequential orders that can be found in particular semantic resources comprised chiefly of (but not limited to) linguistic properties, such as words, sentences, stories, theories and schema. Put differently, the sequential orders in the latter terms can be seen as already networked symbolic resources from which actors are capable of identifying particular attributes and classifying them into appropriate categories. In contrast, the diachronic connections which are to be created *in situ* concern practices or how ordinary actors are practicing *ad-lib* their implicit and context-specific principles and assumptions in sequencing things, events and phenomena into particular orders to create a sense of meaningfulness at a particular point in time and space. Therefore, those different meanings produced by sequential orders are experienced by actors with different temporality.

Narrative frameworks were adopted in order to make explicit the different meanings of sequential orders in practice and in retrospective sensemaking (Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld 2005). The analyses in this chapter exemplify the rules that configure texts,

which are entailed in actors' practicing implicit and context-specific principles and assumptions with which to establish and maintain communicative relationships with others.

Of narrative frameworks, Ricoeur's (1984/1990) theory of emplotment that consists of three-fold mimesis and accounts for processes of semantic (re-)production in everyday practice of language use was drawn upon. As mimesis refers to imitation or mimicking of certain actions, his theory of emplotment concerns ways of understanding actions. Thus, texts are seen to instantiate in the form of words the fact that particular actions have been accomplished by particular actors in particular ways and with particular interests and concerns, if not represent the actions in themselves (Ricoeur 1973).

Focusing on what mundane utterances as actions instantiated in words accomplish, the messages posted to the Forum were classified in terms of three distinct plots. The plots refer to particular ways of configuring texts to produce particular meanings. These three plots were named in accordance with the three different mimetic processes of Ricoeur's theory of emplotment: 'Identifying/classifying' plot, 'Acting' plot and 'Mediating' plot respectively.

These plots also represent respectively the different connections to be produced in actors' assessing relevance of reality denoted in particular ways. 'Identifying/classifying' plot corresponds to the relevance to be assessed in terms of the synchronic connections or causal contingencies between particular attributes that can be apprehended so as to be categorized into either being relevant or irrelevant. 'Acting' plot refers to plots that define particular contexts by diachronic connections or particular sequential orders; thus, corresponds to the relevance emergent of actions that unfold in particular sequential

orders. 'Mediating' plot creates a sense of relevance at a particular point in time and space by establishing *in situ* diachronic connections taking into account both relevance in terms of synchronic timeless correspondence between properties and sequential orders of them. As the names of these three plots indicate, they represent particular actions (identifying/classifying, defining contexts/relationships, and mediating). In accordance with these different actions, the plots account for concerned actors and/or actants to whom these actions can be attributed. The analyses demonstrate that meanings produced by mundane utterances can be differentiated not only by different processes by which to make the three different connections but also by who does what with whom and for or against whom.

After reviewing narrative frameworks that are applicable to processes of organizing and Ricoeur's (1984/1990) theory of emplotment, the analysis of the messages posted to the Forum begins by elaborating the methods by which to identify these three distinct plots. The analysis decomposes actors' capacities into those of identifying and classifying similarities/dissimilarities of a variety of attributes, those of defining and complying with particular contexts by sequencing events and phenomena in particular orders, and those of creating a sense of relevance by grasping and mediating things, actors, events, phenomena, abstract principles and assumptions into meaningful wholes. At the same time, however, it will demonstrate that these three different capacities are practiced in a single utterance. In other words, the three different plots co-exist in an utterance. Although it is 'Mediating' plot that creates *in situ* the sense of relevance, it obviously needs what is to be mediated, that is, meanings produced by 'Identifying/classifying' and 'Acting' plots. 'Identifying/classifying' and 'Acting' plots, in turn, deal with already networked symbolic resources, meaning that some mediation must precede

these plots. Thus, no meaning comes out of thin air. Meanings are produced through these three distinct and inter-related actions borne by each individual actor as represented by the three plots.

It becomes impossible to presume the absolute foundation that defines self-other distinctions because each of these plots accomplishes particular actions (i.e., identifying/classifying, defining contexts, and mediating) and these actions are attributed to respective actors at particular points in time and space. An actor is better understood to consist of three different experiences/anticipations of coherence and consistency to be apprehended and created through the three distinct mimetic processes of emplotment.

The lack of the absolute foundation of self-identity translates into the impossibility of attribution of the fundamental motivation for an action (i.e., posting messages to the Forum) to properties belonging exclusively to an individual actor. In a mundane utterance, we can read imaginary interactions as well as three distinct meanings. It is, thus, assumed that intricate transpositions between subjective 'I' and objective others is taking place within each individual actor. This, however, does not mean that interactions are only images produced and projected onto each one's consciousness. On the contrary, the lack of the absolute foundation requires and enhances actual interactions with others. Put differently, each actor naturally requires certain feedbacks from others on her/his interpretation of reality, which is only hypothetical and inferential.

The chapter, therefore, suggests that (1) while the *in situ* creation of meaningfulness is unique for an actor, the uniqueness is less obvious and rarely conceived of as a

constituent part of one's consistent and coherent identity; (2) the *in situ* creation of meaningfulness enables actors to express even seemingly ineffable experiences because of the mutually related mimetic processes of emplotment, which draw on substantive and contextual relevancy. In the next section, narrative frameworks, which can be applied to analyses of processes of organizing, are reviewed and Ricoeur's theory of emplotment and the triad of mimetic processes is elaborated.

#### **4.2 Narrative frameworks as tools for analyzing processes of organizing**

Narrative frameworks have been attracting scholars of management and organization studies as devices with which to make sense of a variety of organizational events and phenomena, from organizational change to identity work. Although narrative principally concerns stories, either verbal or written, narrative frameworks help us understand actions in a manner that provides information regarding how and why certain actions were undertaken by whom (Gubrium and Holstein 2009). Narrative frameworks have capacities to grasp together actions and meanings as well as heterogeneous substances, such as events, characters, goals, motivations, and circumstances. Hence, narrative studies have been providing inclusive and plausible accounts on a variety of organizational events and phenomena, from sensemaking, communication, learning and change, power and politics, to identity (Rhodes and Brown 2005).

The seemingly elusive connection between actions and meanings which narrative frameworks are capable of accounting in a manner that relates one to the other will become more explicit when we relate this connection to the recently increasing interest in different temporalities (Schatzki 2006, Cunliffe, Luhman and Boje 2004), processes of organizing (Hernes 2008, Langley and Tsoukas 2010) and practices (Geiger 2009,

Miettinen, Samra-Fredericks and Yanow 2009) in comparison to conventional entity-based views on organizations. While the latter provides us with maps for going about everyday life (Taylor and Van Every 2000, see also the ‘synoptic view’ in Tsoukas and Chia [2002]), maps cannot (and probably should not) describe how we move. We usually make sense of the map by imagining how we move. As the recourse to processes of organizing indicates, to understand organizational phenomena better and to increase practical relevance of research outcomes, it is important to know how these maps are made sense of by users as well as to improve their quality. With narrative frameworks, messy and often less visible processes by which lay actors make sense of a variety of events and phenomena can be translated into a more accessible form of narrative. Hence, narrative studies on organizational phenomena can better be understood as shifting their focus more onto processes in which meanings are to be produced and re-produced as members of organizations engage in everyday practices, rather than on meanings represented by stories as social products (Gubrium and Holstein 2009). Put differently, narrative frameworks are expected not only to offer a device for interpreting and representing observed events and phenomena but also to explain processes by which plots, scripts, or particular ways of sequencing actions are repetitively enacted to establish interaction order (Atkinson and Delamont 2005, Barley 1986).

### **4.3 Ricoeur’s model of emplotment**

Ricoeur’s theories (1984/1990,1991, 1973) explain processes of semantic (re-)production in ways that relate narrative as a system of semantic (re-)production to the practical action arena by seeing texts as actions enunciated in words. Particularly, his

theory of emplotment indicates his emphasis on the act of configuration embedded in texts.

The theory of emplotment consists of three-fold mimesis. As mimesis refers to mimicking or imitating actions, it presumes capacities on the part of those who see the actions to understand them. When imitating a certain action, it is supposed that an imitator not only manages to capture the exact copy image of it but also *understands* if the copy represents the original as precisely as possible. Simply, even the most precise copy possible is a creation of one who is mimicking. Mimicking is accompanied by *understanding* similarities/dissimilarities between the original and the copy. Mimesis presumes creation of meanings through interactions between actors and observers over meanings of actions.

In the context of narratives, authors present texts intending to convey particular meanings, and readers intend to understand them. Understanding texts requires the capacity to mimic actions denoted in the texts by identifying and classifying similarities/dissimilarities between the original and the copy of it. Meanings can never be particular attributes or *a priori* defined qualities of something but are generated through interactions between authors and readers by means of texts.

Despite this presumption of interactivity between authors and readers, to appreciate fully Ricoeur's theory of emplotment, it is important to understand that texts in themselves, without any intervention from outside, such as reading and interpretation, involve three distinct mimetic processes. His theory of emplotment explains not only creative processes by which actors interact with each other by virtue of texts but also the potential embedded in texts, which enables continuous production of meanings. Texts



produce meanings because the three mimetic processes of emplotment are mutually referencing to each other *within* texts. The seemingly tautological mutual referencing between the three mimetic processes explains the two-sided effects of actions: traces left behind individual's being that can be traced back by following rules of symbolic mediation and opening up the social organizing of meanings. Texts regarded as actions are not a metaphor in which actors are entangled with signs and symbols. Rather, they are empirical evidence that prove that actors are fated to act in a socially organized manner in creating reality, which is denoted by symbols and that leaves behind symbolic resources as denotations of reality, although the origins of symbolic resources may not be located there, as will be explained below (4.4). The following elaborates the three mimetic processes of emplotment embedded in texts.

#### **4.4 The three mimetic processes**

First, as mimesis presumes actors' competence in identifying and classifying similarities/dissimilarities, texts consist of a variety of attributes to be apprehended. But, the seemingly simple apprehension of particular attributes is not enabled in ways that absolutely foundational identities of certain things waiting for being apprehended are established. In other words, a variety of properties comprising texts form networks. That we almost instantaneously distinguish one quality from other qualities demonstrates that there are already networked properties. We normally presuppose the existence of such networked properties to find or rather anticipate the existence of causal relationships between particular attributes as if such relationships manifested and continued to manifest themselves consistently to the degree that they were believed to transcend particular contexts.

Ricoeur (1984/1990) explains such networks as being comprised of actions that are connected with 'who', 'why', 'what', 'how' and 'with/against whom'. When observing actions, it is assumed that there must be particular actors who are responsible for the actions, including their relevant capacities, reason(s), goal(s) and means to achieve them, and concerned actors, including particular effects on them. However, the networks, as Ricoeur defines, are not what enables prediction of particular outcomes of particular actions without regard to contexts but what depends on each actor's presuppositions which naturally involve different cultural backgrounds and different degrees of familiarity with particular areas of knowledge, including certain comparable categories and genres. These networked properties structurally enable mimicry in the sense of understanding similarities/dissimilarities between actions, which is, in practical encounters with texts, recognized as apprehending particular properties as if they were particular meanings of words and sentences in the texts. Because of the implicitly context-dependent nature of the networks of conceptualized actions, another mimetic process is called forth to account for texts' configurations in terms of sequential order to produce meanings in accordance with particular contexts.

Second, Ricoeur points out the significance of symbols that comprise texts. Symbols are understood processually. Symbols become symbols by mediating and being mediated by one another. The networked actions, explained as above, imply that symbols are comprised of already symbolized constituents. This second process of symbolic mediation explains how these constituents are related to one another in ways that define particular contexts and can be understood in particular contexts. In other words, symbols do not produce meanings simply by being symbols as networked signs but

define particular meanings by the ways in which these symbolized constituents are connected into irreversible sequential orders.

In this making of the irreversible sequential orders comprised of the symbolized constituents, the implied rule-governed processes are of particular importance. Apart from cultural, historical and other experiential backgrounds, the rule here concerns more practical technical competencies. It is each actor who relates a variety of symbols to one another either as an author or as a reader. Without assuming particular technical competencies that can be shared between authors and readers, texts could not even be read nor be understood. Symbols, thus, embed immanent rules in them. These immanent rules are, however, to be continuously modified or renewed as actors interact by means of symbols. In the course of the actual application of such rules being modified/renewed, more appropriate rules than others naturally develop in particular contexts. Hence, rules that enable circulation of symbols in our daily lives involve prescriptive and even normative assessment while such prescriptions and norms are obviously context-dependent.

The significance of seeing texts as actions manifests itself again. If texts were seen to consist of inanimate symbols, as if they were mere instrument with which to signify something, the rules embedded in symbols that enable them to keep on circulating in everyday life would also be seen to be stationary instruments by means of which symbolic constituents are connected with one another. Similar to the first structurally enabled mimetic process, seeing symbols as mutually mediating and mediated processes does not provide any universally applicable rule of symbolic mediation. The fact that symbols embed in them certain practical rules enables actors to make assumptions

supported by a sense of relevance not only in terms of logical soundness of connections but also in terms of normative quality taking into account particular contexts. The symbolic mediation is mimetic in the sense that particular connections between symbols are likely to be reproduced repetitively in accordance with the immanent rules. Nonetheless, the whole process is only assumptive to the degree that some modification and renewal are expected. The rules immanent in the symbolic mediation as well as the first mimetic process are unable to guarantee instantiation of actions in the form of texts (or verbal narrative). The third mimetic process is called forth to let texts come into being by marking on them the once-occurring unique present which emerges through mimetic process of temporal experiences.

Third, drawing upon Heidegger's existential analysis of *Being and Time*, Ricoeur explains the temporal experiences embedded in texts in which past, present and future are merging into the present that occurs only once. Put differently, this third mimetic process concerns text's being. With regard to being, there is no difference between texts and other material things in terms of competence in drawing attention to them. What is characteristic of texts are the mimetic processes embedded in texts that involve the aspect of inventive creation as it was presented above. This third mimetic process regarding the texts' being or temporal experiences further clarifies the potential of texts that generate new meanings simply by being present, even before being read or interpreted.

The mimesis in temporal experience is, simply put, creation of the present by mimicking an already elapsed past that can be grasped structurally and a future that the rules of symbolic mediation enable one to anticipate. What is key is the subtle but

distinctive meaning of the once-occurring and unique present or being of texts. The meaning produced by this temporal mimetic process prepares texts to be narrated. Since the once-occurring and unique present can only be made up from already elapsed past actions which can be approached with the assistance of conceptual networks and an anticipated future, which can be constructed with the conceptual networks of actions and the rules immanent in symbolic mediation, it is, as it were, negatively manifested by the past and the future. In other words, a text not only carries with it the limits of the descriptive capacity of language but also connotes resistance to being described. Thus, the meaning of texts' being is sensitive to distinctions between temporal experiences, as Ricoeur suggests by using a rich variety of temporal adverbs and idioms involving time-related words. However, time here is not a continuum in which past, present and future can be represented as different points. What the temporal mimetic process is sensitive about is purity in phenomenological temporality (Boje 2001) or simply one's being. The once-occurring and unique present denotes the purest of phenomenological temporality.

Even more important, however, is the implication of this subtle distinction between past, present and future for the practical action arena in which actors are rarely conscious of purity, in terms of temporal phenomenology, or their being. While texts are capable of referencing beyond something as it is, this capacity is not strength in terms of the extension of representative capacity but a weakness in discourse (Eco 1999). Insofar as texts possibly signify beyond denotation, denoted reality in texts may be fallible. The fallibility of texts or the weakness in discourse requires them to be narrated at a particular point in time, which is the only marker of one's being.

This third mimetic process embedded in texts reminds us that texts are not instruments with which to convey particular information that is to be apprehended on the side of readers. Rather, texts had better be regarded as evidence of one's being at a particular point in time and space. For instance, in the case in which one intentionally conceals particular information about reality, or simply, tells a lie, it is more important for readers to read what has made one denote reality in such a way by reference to literal meanings and contexts (see Gubrium 1988). As such, readers may be able to derive useful information from texts, despite the elusive factual quality, by imagining reality that must have urged authors to express the texts. In other words, by acknowledging the third mimetic processes embedded in texts, we are expected to communicate with others by means of texts by taking account of each other's truths or faithfulness to truths at particular points in time and space. Texts have a capacity to mediate different actors not only by means of literal meanings and contextual relevance but also by allowing both an author and readers to project each one's being at particular points in time and space.

Regardless of the order presented above, these three distinct mimetic processes embedded in texts are nesting and nested by each other. The first mimetic process presumes the existence of reality already narrated and symbolically mediated. The second presumes conceptualized actions consisting of properties ready to be related to each other following the rules of symbolic mediation appropriate in particular contexts. The third actually mediates the structurally graspable conceptualized actions into particular sequential orders for the necessity of the author at a particular point in time and space. For Boje (2008, 2001), these mimetic processes can be seen to form a spiraling structure. However, the spiraling structure nests within it the same three mimetic processes interacting with one another. The structural, the symbolically

mediating and mediated, and the temporal mimetic processes are nesting and nested by one another either at the level of conceptual semantic network of actions, or at the level of symbolic mediation, or at the level of ongoing actions. Since observers'/readers' perspectives are continuously shifting between and within these different levels, what is important is to understand that there are always three different meanings being produced and conveyed by texts in which actions are instantiated in words.

Even more importantly, the nesting and nested structure represents the inevitable lack of symmetrical unity in either the structural conceptual networks of actions, the rules governing symbolic mediation, or the temporal experiences. Despite the lack of symmetrical unity, it enables actors to continue denoting reality in relevant ways in particular contexts. The lack of symmetrical unity explains that texts are always left open-ended and ready to create new meanings by interacting with other texts with respective horizons, which is called the intertextuality of texts (Barry, Carroll and Hansen 2006, O'Connor 1997). We had better accept a worldview that some structures or systems of (re-)production of meanings lacking absolute foundation can be created and sustained by one's subtle but genuinely pure sense of necessity for marking her/his being at the present of present. In such systems of semantic (re-)production, each actor's immediate concerns appear to be only subtly connoted in texts. Despite the subtlety, texts would not come into being without each actor's immediate concerns with her/his being. What is taking place in the practical interactions between actors by means of the intertextuality is that each one makes inference about the existence of unity, which is correct in the sense that many things appear in a relatively stable manner; then, the unity is deduced from evidential resources which should by and large be drawn from events and phenomena already elapsed (Weick 1979).

With this nesting and nested structure comprised of three mimetic processes in mind, the method with which to identify the three distinct plots and to classify mundane utterances by these plots will be elaborated below. By applying the analytical framework comprised of three distinct processes of emplotment, actors' implicit principles and assumptions, on which mundane discursive practices operate, can be made explicit. The following analyses demonstrate that in mundane discursive practices, actors' principles and assumptions and the three mimetic processes embedded in texts collaboratively enable actors to make better sense of reality by obtaining better understandings of substantive attributes, contextually relevant ways of denoting reality, and subjective meaningfulness or a sense of non-obvious relevance.

There appear to be particular rules that organize mundane discursive practices in particular ways. The rules are, however, not only imposed by the three mimetic processes embedded in texts but also enacted and renewed by actors' capabilities to assess the relevance of reality denoted in texts in terms of substance, contexts and non-obviousness. Ricoeur's theory of emplotment points out that the symbolic mediation presumes a normative choice with regard to appropriate ways by which symbols mediate and are mediated by each other by means of irreversible sequential orders. Hence, mundane discursive practices are assumed to entail a source of certain norms with which participants comply. However, as has just been suggested, it is difficult to determine whether the source of such norms at the level of actual interactions between actors can be attributed to the mimetic processes embedded in texts, thus, involuntary compliance on the part of actors, or to actors' capabilities to assess relevance, which involve their creative invention represented by the creation of a sense of relevance in terms of non-obviousness.



As will be presented below, the participants generally do not appear to care about their autonomy against the mimetic processes embedded in texts thanks to which they manage to instantiate their experiences in a rather repetitive fashion. They were, however, occasionally found to attempt to establish particular norms applicable to the Forum and their positive identities, which means that they could never be passive dupes of structuring properties prescribed by virtue of texts but rather active enactors of the triad of mimetic processes for their own ends. The empirical evidence, thus, points to the critical role borne by each one's being which, though implicit, drives the processes of organizing their utterances in particular ways along the logic of the triad of mimetic processes.

At the end of this chapter, therefore, it is hypothesized that the creative invention of a sense of non-obvious relevance is enabled by the combination of the triad of mimetic processes embedded in texts and actors' capabilities to assess relevance. What is key in this hypothesis is not that the source of norms can be found either in the triadic mimeses of texts or in actors' voluntary assessment of relevance. Instead, the key is the fact that messages that conveyed similar meanings in terms of substantive understandings of reality and ways of denoting such reality continued to be posted to the Forum because of the triad of mimetic processes. Put in another way, particular norms observed in the Forum are consequences emergent of the accumulated posts. On the other hand, norms can transcend particular contexts only if they are drawn upon as things, meaning that norms are not just about the contextual rules but they self-reinforce their power because people do not usually see the same or similar denotations to be processes from which anything new is emerging. But rather, people are willing to put weight on what they understand as things because of the simplicity or economy of intellectual labor. When

becoming (quasi-)things, norms are extremely difficult to divert people's attributing reasons for particular actions to such (quasi-)things. We still need to understand better, in the actual interaction arena, the three different meanings of the three different understandings to be established through the triad of mimetic processes.

Things and quasi-things are anticipated to manifest themselves in a stable manner, so that simple and instantaneous apprehension is enabled in an efficient and effective manner. However, the pursuit of seemingly universally applicable things and quasi-things, thus, metaphor, concepts and paradigm, will sooner or later turn out to make us blind to the fact that their capacity to provide us with renewed understandings is diminishing, that repetitive deployment of the seemingly universal facts of things is segmenting extant institutions, and thus, we unknowingly self-impose prescriptions by virtue of apprehending things as they are seen to us (Czarniawska 1999).

We all know that behavioral norms applicable to particular interactions can only become authentic in particular loci through particular practices. However, we rarely become aware that such local rules are still nested in another triad of mimetic processes, meaning that any local rule is necessarily affected by meanings and interpretations made and remade in seemingly indifferent dimensions in terms of space and time from particular loci.

To understand better the three different meanings to be produced by three different plots is, thus, to attempt to recognize the role and the meaning of existence of each one's being. By so doing, the triad of mimetic processes will help us understand how each one's being 'contributes strands to the larger tapestry' (O'Connor 1997: 396) of reality constructed in organization or in society in general (Bruner 1986b). It will also enable

us to imagine clearly ‘a nexus of meaning and interpretation’ and its ‘indexicality’ in relation to ‘the power/rule constitution’ (Clegg 1989: 109). It will help us understand that our pursuit of universal categories/paradigms is significant not only in struggles for power ubiquitous in organizations but also for better understanding how the efforts to accumulate rigorous knowledge in logical scientific terms are important, despite the inevitably diminishing attractiveness and possible complete replacement of knowledge, such as in a paradigm shift (Kuhn 1962).

People appropriate the simplest aspect of (quasi-)things without regard to their rigor only if they perceive the (quasi-)things as being relevant in metaphorical terms; such a sense of relevance about (quasi-)things exerts more power in such a way that can abruptly cancel out local rules along the meaning-interpretation nexus, rather than because of physical material attributes or the falsifiability of propositions about certain synchronic causal logic. These will be examined more systematically in the next chapter. Before delving into the connection between the micro processes of emplotment and the macro level issues concerning norms and power, the mimetic but inventive creation of meanings through the triadic processes of emplotment is elaborated. It begins by presenting a conceptual framework of the triad of mimetic processes, then methods to locate the three different plots in mundane utterances will follow.

#### **4.5 The three mimetic processes in mundane utterances**

Ricoeur’s theory of emplotment comprised of the triad of mimetic processes explains how texts come into being: mimesis enabled by conceptual network of actions, symbolic mediation and mediation of temporal experiences. By following these mimetic processes, mundane utterances can be interpreted in ways that take into account

prescriptive rules emanating from interactions between author, texts and readers. The nesting and nested structure of the triad of mimetic processes enables us to interpret mundane utterances in ways that account for how actors understand reality without absolutely foundational evidence, rule or principle and act in relatively similar ways without knowing in advance shared understandings or norms.

For analytical convenience, in particular, in order to capture the transitions in meanings in the flow of time, each one's experiences are divided into the realms of substances, practices, and self, in each of which the triad of the mimetic processes operates (see figure 4.1 below). It does so by assuming that the same triadic processes of emplotment should produce different meanings between when an actor is pondering their selfhood, when they try to apprehend particular attributes of events and phenomena, and interact with others. In the realm of substances, actors apprehend substantive attributes from a variety of encounters. In the realm of practices, actors identify contextually relevant ways of acting, and in the realm of self, they mediate the apprehended substantive attributes and the contextually relevant ways of acting, casting them into a meaningful whole to achieve a sense of non-obvious relevance.

In other words, these realms respectively represent which of the three mimetic processes of emplotment plays the central role. In the realm of substance, actors make use of the conceptual network of actions to apprehend attributes and identities of a variety of things and quasi-things. In the realm of practice, actors define relationships with other actors with whom they interact by enacting a kind of syntagmatic rules according to which experiences are configured into particular sequential orders (e.g., 'script' in

Barley [1986]). In the realm of self, actors' temporal experiences merge into the once-occurring and unique present through the mimetic mediation of past and future.

As such, the division of the realms of experience also represents three different kinds of understandings that actors obtain through mundane discursive practices: understandings of similarity/dissimilarity between substances denoted in utterances, which also enable actors to obtain better understandings by abstracting/generalizing through substitution/contrasting (Taylor and van Every 2000), understandings of contexts and relevancy of one's actions and thoughts for different contexts, and a sense of subjective meaningfulness. These understandings involve 'a routinized non-subjective way of understanding' (Reckwitz 2002: 255) as well as rational cognitive ones. Non-subjective, not only because these understandings are achieved through methods that are only practically conscious but also because they are achieved through intricate imagination of a plurality of actions and the respective subjects. These different understandings can thus be attributed to different states of consciousness in the different realms of experience.

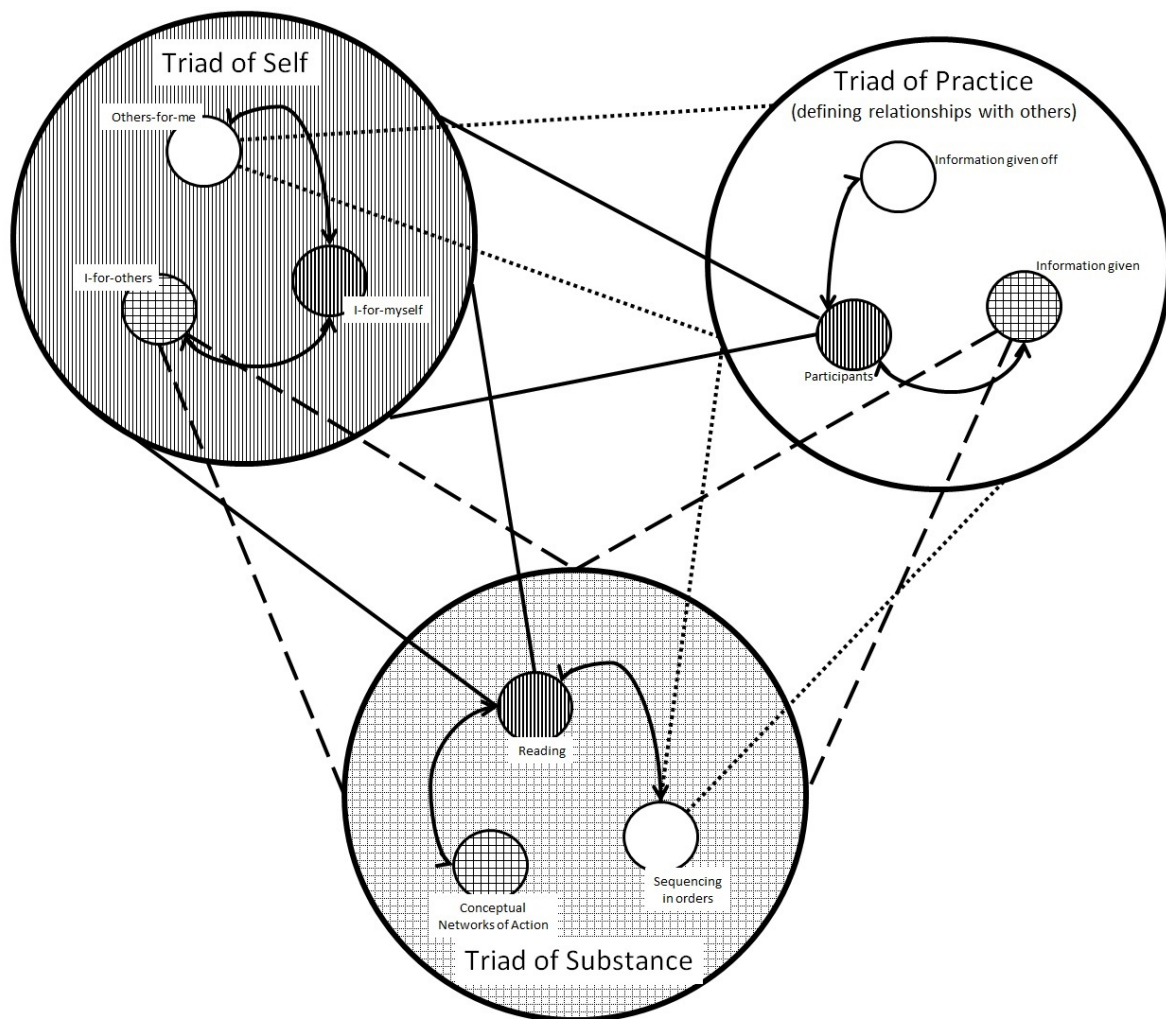
The reason why the temporal mimetic process plays the central role in the realm of self and the intricate imagination of actions and relevant actors entailed in the temporal mimetic process deserve further elaboration. Referring back to the five criteria of relevance, relevance in terms of a sense of non-obviousness is emergent of redundancy of similar accounts. As was demonstrated in Chapter 3, it is liable to be hidden behind more obvious similarities in subject matters denoted and ways of denotation. The emergent and non-obvious sense of relevance can thus be considered to be as transient as the once-occurring and unique present which is beyond the mere chronological

dimension and the capacity of linguistic denotation but can be instantiated only by the act of narration (Ricoeur 1984/1990).

What this existential intricacy of the sense of non-obvious relevance indicates is that actors experience a plurality of subjectivity between descriptions of events and phenomena already elapsed, anticipations of those yet to be materialized, and the act of narrating that mediates the past and the future. As such, the fact that a certain utterance is issued can be understood as evidence of the existence of a sense of meaningfulness felt by a certain actor at a certain point in time and space. However, the very experience of such a sense of meaningfulness cannot be enunciated in words. It remains only in each one's memory. Utterances, thus, concern not only actors' abilities to configure experiences in ways that make them intelligible in relation to other actors but also constitutive of elements of self. As will later be demonstrated, one's self manifests itself when one's ontological reality resists being expressed. Each one's being is thus likened to time. One's being at a particular point in time can be expressed just as the present of the present can be expressed as an excess or deficit of past and future in terms of phenomenological time. In terms of measurable chronological time, one's being occupied, occupies and will occupy particular points in the chronological continuum, thus, it was, is and will be of positive ontological value. Both self and time are obviously present in this world but it is difficult to answer what they are (Ricoeur 1984/1990).

The nesting and nested structure comprised of the three mimetic processes in the three distinct areas of experiences is depicted in Figure 4.1 below.

**Figure 4.1 Nesting and nested structure of the triad of mimetic processes**



In this figure, the patterns (plain, grid and vertical stripe) are purposely assigned to the nodes and the circles in accordance with the triad of the mimetic processes. The plain, or absent, pattern represents the capacity to make assumptions about responses from others by denoting reality in particular sequential orders; the grid pattern represents competencies to understand networks of symbolic resources and the vertical stripe manifests itself as mediating between synchronically identifiable attributes and diachronically established sequential orders.

The larger circles comprise a triad in which the Triad of Self functions as a mediator between the Triad of Practice and the Triad of Substance. These larger circles represent

processes by which different meanings are produced by denoting reality through the triadic processes of emplotment in accordance with different experiences and/or concerns with self, other actors, and (quasi-)things.

The triad comprised of smaller nodes in each of the larger circles also represents the triadic logic of emplotment. Though labeled differently, these triads are operating on the same logic. The nodes filled with a grid pattern refer to relatively less context-dependent ways of establishing understandings. The plain nodes represent the act of assuming others' responses to denotations of reality in particular sequential orders. The nodes filled with vertical stripes are the mediating function between the apprehended substantive attributes and the contextually relevant ways of acting.

Although the depiction of Figure 4.1 looks as if it represents synchronic connections between nodes and circles these connections are purposely made loose in order to represent the lack of symmetrical unity in the triadic logic of emplotment, which enables actors to obtain a sense of relevance without absolutely knowing foundational evidence, principle or rule. For instance, the triads consisting of the smaller nodes do not form a loop but are connected by mediating nodes (vertical stripe). Also, the links between smaller nodes and the larger circles do not represent connections between mutually independent entities but are part-whole relationships. For instance, the 'Others-for-me' in the Triad of Self and the 'Sequencing in orders' in the Triad of Substance constitute the Triad of Practice. In the Triad of Self, an actor is establishing three different kinds of understandings through the triadic processes of emplotment: 'I-for-others', 'Others-for-me', and 'I-for-myself'. The 'Others-for-me' signifies assumptions as to whether or not others will agree the ways by which the actor wishes



others to understand her/his self (Nielsen 2002). Hence, the actor may or may not actually act but at least imagines her/his selfhood in the gaze of others and is likely to make assumptions about responses from such others. Further, such actor's assumptions about her/his selfhood in front of others inadvertently commands actual specific others' orientation to respond when presented in a plausible form. As such, even if one does not take actual action at all, it is difficult to deny all the implications for action arena (Triad of Practice) by confining one's assumptions about her/his selfhood exclusively to the Triad of Self.

The aspect of understanding that involves imaginary actions and others, which should command others' orientation, applies also to the 'Sequencing in orders' in Triad of Substance. Whereas actors establish understandings of the world filled with a variety of things and quasi-things in Triad of Substance, they invoke not only pertinent ways of referencing the surroundings to meanings (denoted as the 'Conceptual network of action') but also contextual relevancy by imagining such identified meanings to be narrated as if they were rehearsed in front of certain audiences ('Sequencing in orders' in Figure 4.1). By so doing, the actors will obtain some sense of contextual relevancy regardless of whether or not they actually narrate it; this sense of contextual relevancy should play a critical role in one's making decisions regarding whether or not to take particular actions. Also, since this aspect of understanding potentially orientates actual specific others toward their turns where they should also go through the triadic processes of employment, even only imaginary narration cannot completely be separated from Triad of Practice.

Now, we move on to Triad of Practice where actors are establishing their relationships with other actors. The reason why the ‘Participants’ here is plural, and thus understood to be collective, is because each participant’s ways of mediation are oriented towards consensual validation for the sake of satisfactory conclusion of their encounters (Goffman 1959/1990); thus, strict distinction among participants becomes less meaningful (Carlsen 2006). Let me elaborate this further.

Carlsen (2006) states that ‘[w]hereas the diversity of human experiences may find moments of singular interpretations in the embodied person, no such locus of the embodied “I-for-itself” exists for organizations’ (133). In his words, ‘[t]he organizational “I” then may be considered a *collectively achieved authoring function* that may or may not be patterned or show repeatable features in some way’ (133, emphasis in original). As a matter of practical reality, a categorically definable ‘I’ is non-existent. A large part of our everyday actions is undertaken without asking who I am.

While the quotes from Carlsen (2006) describe the ‘I’ as ‘a collectively achieved authoring function’, imagination about the collective achievement should be extended beyond actual interventions between different actors (in Figure 4.1, Triad of Practice). Collective achievement is taking place already in each individual actor (Triad of Self). Also, as he indicates, the achieved function had better not be limited to ‘authoring’ in the sense of writing stories, but should be understood to entail messy processes in which to define and re-define identities.

Overall, in practical settings, it is more precise to conceive of actors as practicing three different perspectives through which consistent identities or certain patterns may or may

not be observed (Carlsen 2006). Hence, it is suggested that while actors may be very much concerned with consistency in their respective identities, they do not necessarily act *for* the consistency of their identities. Note, however, that this is not saying that the pursuit of consistent identity is not complete fantasy but that there always exist gaps between discursive consciousness and practical consciousness. These gaps can in part be explained in terms of temporality where consistency is always fabricated in retrospect (cf., Weick 1979), and in part be attributed to cognitive dissonance whereas actors are concerned principally with the contextual relevancy of their acts; they tend to believe they are acting in accord with a logic of rationality that operates in principle on timeless causal contingencies (Sandberg and Tsoukas 2011).

In Triad of Practice, 'Information given' refers to information which each actor assumes is purposely communicated to others by her/his actions and 'Information given off' signifies information emitted from one's appearance. The appearance embodies the assumptions about responses from others to one's purposely presenting information. Each actor knows that others can take advantage of her/his relative unawareness or the uncontrollable aspect of such information known as reflexive subjectivity (Burr 2009, Holmes 2010). Communication is, thus, only made possible by the 'Participants' who mediate between their own and their assumed counterparts' responses in ways that consensually validate one in reference to the other (Goffman 1959/1990). This is why participants in certain communication generally appear as if they behave in accordance with particular norms or shared understandings (cf., Donnellon, Gray and Bougon 1986). However, it is uncertain if they may truly share certain norms as much as actors may pursue consistent identity. Everything is determined in reference to particular contexts through the nesting and nested structure of the triadic logic of emplotment.

#### 4.6 A framework of analysis and the method to identify the plots

A framework with which to analyze mundane utterances was developed based on the conceptual framework elaborated above. The analytical framework consists of three different plots: ‘Identifying/classifying’ plot, ‘Acting’ plot and ‘Mediating’ plot. These plots explain the processes of emplotment that configure texts to make experiences intelligible and communicable. Or, inversely, meaningful representations emerge with support of these plots as a kind of scripted way of non-conscious practicing of three different competencies in front of text or even seemingly non-linguistically-based signs, such as gestures or even material objects. The relationships between actors’ competencies and elements of the three plots are summarized in Table 4.1 below.

**Table 4.1 Plots, competencies and realms of experience**

<b>Plot</b>	<b>Competency</b>	<b>Practice</b>	<b>Substance</b>	<b>Self</b>
<b>‘Acting’</b>	Putting understandings in the gaze of others	Information given off	Information given	Participants in interactions with others
<b>‘Identifying/classifying’</b>	Understanding network of semantic resources	Sequencing of properties in order	Conceptual networks of actions	Reading
<b>‘Mediating’</b>	Seeing encounters as if they were true without absolutely foundational evidence, rule or	Others-for-me	I-for-others	I-for-myself

	principle, by mediating substances and contexts			
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Asking three simple questions can identify the plots: (1) what is the utterance saying or talking about, (2) for whom is it meaningful, and (3) to whom is it talking?

Conventional content analysis and coding can be attempted chiefly to answer the question about the ‘what’ of utterances. However, as the first mimetic process of Ricoeur’s (1984/1990) theory of emplotment explains, those who confront texts are competent in understanding particular properties denoted in them in relation to other properties that comprise their respectively familiar conceptual networks of actions. More specifically, such conceptual networks of actions enable one to understand texts not only in terms of the ‘what’ of the first question but also in terms of ‘who’, ‘how’, ‘why’, ‘with whom’ or ‘for/against whom’. In other words, by answering the first question those encountering textual data will be able to re-construct relevant actors’ experiences which involve contextual information as well as substantive information *within* the texts.

The substantive information cannot be made sense of without referring to a variety of contextual information (Labianca, Gray and Brass 2000). However, the former, which is a constitutive element of relatively stable causal relations between properties, is significant in that it provides some generalized pictures or schema with certain degrees of abstraction. In other words, the answer to the ‘what’ helps readers/observers understand better what the text denotes by discovering categories and/or principles for categorization by identifying substitutable words and concepts. Information to be

obtained by answering this question, normally regarded as objective facts, is usually referred for validation to a variety of information *surrounding* texts known as contexts.

Skipping the second question, answers to the third question will provide information on what ways the utterer understood and intended to define contexts. Utterances are always addressed to somebody, even if imaginary characters. Thus, audiences chosen by an utterer represents the utterer's understandings of relationships with such audiences and vice versa. The understandings of the relationships with others are embodied in the ways of denotation (or outward appearance of the utterance). It is difficult in everyday life to imagine that an utterer acts or issues utterances in ways thought incomprehensible to the imagined audience. Even when an utterer intends to provoke her/his audience, s/he knows that her/his actions may be unacceptable or morally irrelevant so as to provoke the audience. In case an utterer inadvertently evokes rage among audiences, perhaps s/he just mistakenly assumed how audiences would understand these actions (Goffman 1959/1990). To whom an utterer intends to talk is inseparably related to the whole triad of mimetic processes but most significantly to that of the symbolic mediation that requires practical knowledge and skills to sequence a variety of properties into appropriate orders. More importantly however, in answering this question, utterers' concerns are likely emerging as their preferred ways of defining relationships with others. Then, interpreters should be led to ask and answer the second question.

Answering the second question may sometimes appear superfluous or tend to be conflated with answers to the other two questions. However, the method insists on dealing with this second question separately, primarily to avoid dichotomous

worldviews comprised of seemingly inherently substitutive binary opposites (Czarniawska 1999, Taylor and van Every 2000) but, more fundamentally, to enquire into processes by which recursive and orderly conducts are being generated through the triadic processes of emplotment, in particular, through mediating temporal experiences. In other words, researchers are encouraged to follow utterers' reality denoted in their utterances not only in ways that apprehend substantive attributes and figure out contexts surrounding them but also in ways that examine what prompted and enabled the utterers to denote reality in particular ways based on *the analysts'* respective senses of relevance.

As Ricoeur's theory of emplotment posits, actors' competency to see a variety of encounters as if they are true without knowing any absolutely foundational evidence, rule or principle holds a critical stake in the process of semantic (re-)production. Also, as was presented in Chapter 3, actors are capable of creating a sense of non-obvious relevance out of more obvious (often redundant) information. Attempts to answer the question: for whom a certain utterance is meaningful evoke analysts' imaginative capacity to establish their understandings through the triad of mimetic processes in ways that take into account the significance of often less visible concerns at the very moment of making an utterance, the beings of one's self, other actors and things. The mediating function enacted by each actor is indispensable for the continuous, though unpredictable, processes of semantic (re-)production.

The significance of the mediating function deserves further elaboration for better understanding how it happens and how it connects the micro level processes of emplotment, which in principle take place at the individual level, to macro issues, such as power and norms, which are of much relevance for management and organization

studies. First, the mediation occurs with one's poetic move. As has been mentioned earlier, one experiences distinct subjectivity when apprehending certain attributes from particular things or quasi-things, when interacting with other actors, and when mediating the substantive and the contextual understandings. The first and the second subjectivity are largely dependent on already established conceptual networks of actions and syntagmatic rules for sequencing things into particular orders respectively. In contrast, the third, that is, the mediating subject, determines the appropriate way of mediating those relatively stable sources of meaning at the moment of mediation, or at the present of present. This is enabled by one's imaginative capacity with which to see things at the very moment of the mediation. Simply, this involves an adventurous aspect, if in varying degrees (Eco 1999).

Actors' skills and knowledge with which to manage the uncertainty concerning the imaginative adventure will further be examined in the next chapter (Chapter 5) but for the moment it is important to know that the mediation is enabled only by one's creating a horizon anew with particular extension in terms of substantive and contextual relevancy based on determination to transgress the horizons defined by the extant sources of meaning. Because this is a kind of poetic move, one experiences a sense that one's self is purged (Ricoeur 1984/1990) or the purest phenomenological temporality.

Second, therefore, even if the triad of mimetic processes takes place within an individual actor, s/he is allowed to denote reality in virtually unlimited ways, drawing on semantic resources regardless of the micro or the macro levels. As has just been indicated in actors' management of the adventurous aspect of the poetic move, there must be rules to define appropriate horizons of denotation (also to be examined in



Chapter 5). The point I would like to make here is that when dealing with certain values, concepts or names that appear applicable in such a way that transcends multiple contexts, what happens is association of plots (Pentland and Feldman 2007) that appear to produce almost identical meaning, rather than substitution of such values, concepts or names. What this means, taken together with the first point, is that the transcendence of values, concepts or names is actually enabled by association between similar plots created by someone's imaginative capacity, rather than substitution between meanings.

This is important to note because when encountering such context-transcending values, concepts or names, how such transcendence occurred and segmented particular meaning is rarely paid attention to, as if it occurs metaphorically; even narrative scholars tend to conceptualize synchronic connections between multitudes of plots that produce almost identical meaning. As a result, those who are supposed to create their respectively unique plots to understand such values, concepts or names tend to be ignored. Such an inadvertent overlooking of those who create meaning through the triadic processes of emplotment blinds how the 'power/rule constitution' is negotiated and materialized through the 'meaning/interpretation nexus' (Clegg 1989). Every plot is unique and any meaning is produced through emplotment by certain actors' poetic move, that are enabled by substantive and contextual understandings along the lines of the nesting and nested triad of mimetic processes.

This is typically important for researchers who adopt narrative frameworks because seeing particular plots as substitutable for each other is actually the researchers' enactment of imagination used to connect actually independent unique plots in accordance with their own interests and concerns. This is, therefore, not to say that

different plots do not produce substitutable, thus generalizable, meaning but that any meaning is without exception negotiated and fixed through time in particular contexts and between different actors. The issue of making connections between plots will be discussed later in this thesis by relating it to the issues regarding how to utilize narrative frameworks, typically plot, for theorizing processes of organizing (Czarniawska 1999), including implications for ethical practicing of theorizing. What is critical here is the fact that different plots can be connected only by the readers'/analysts' imagination in accordance with their own concerns and interests; thus, connections between plots are never synchronic or linear. More importantly, recursive occurrence of similar plots should be distinguished from recursion in the mathematical logic of the term. Otherwise, the critical and indispensable poetic move and how it is enacted will be neglected and consequently often-important counterpoints in processes of organizing and change will be overlooked.

As such, the three simple questions guide readers/analysts through the triad of mimetic processes embedded in texts and enacted by actors. Obviously, how many times they go around the hermeneutic circle depends on a variety of factors but most significantly depends on readers'/analysts' interests and concerns. Elaborated as above, analyses of a collection of messages posted to the case online forum can be initiated only by analysts' assumptions that these messages should be of relevance for the analysts' interests and concerns. Hence, the arbitrariness of one's interpretation is not at all a problem, or rather should be encouraged. This is simply because the clearer one is about one's investigative concerns, the more rounds of the hermeneutic circle one is likely to engage in. What is important is always not how analysts' interpretation can be precise in terms of representations of objective facts, attributable to an analysts' focus on *'what'* is

denoted *within* texts. Rather, they should focus on how to account for utterers' skills and knowledge that prompt and enable them to denote their reality in particular ways. Texts are usually interpreted in ways that reveal the utterers' implicit and context-specific principles and assumptions.

The triad of mimetic processes thus not only concerns research subjects' ways of plotting their reality but also concerns how to plot analysts' interpretations and eventually their writing. Hence, it will help researchers, in the first place, to understand processes of sensemaking by which actors plot a variety of substances, including relevant actors' identities and roles, in particular contexts at particular points in time and space. Typically, the triad of mimetic processes makes explicit the one who is supposed to accomplish the plotting. Secondly, the triad of mimetic processes offers researchers a method which helps identify and propose better plot(s) which should, in a way, be continuous from the research subjects' emplotment, taking advantage of, rather than being confused with, the nesting and nested structure constituted by the triad of mimetic processes.

The following is one such plot which I produced to exemplify competencies of the research subjects (the participants in the case online forum) in plotting their reality, accomplishments (three different kinds of understandings), and most importantly, the multiplicity of horizons along which their experiences and anticipations are given particular extension. The multiplicity of horizons that stretch in the realms of substance, practice and self (Figure 4.1), and that can be identified through the analyses of the research subjects' utterances, represents the multiple dimensions of their experiences with material reality, a variety of others and selfhood.

At the end of the identification of the three plots, the multiplicity of horizons suggests that the issue of power inherent in organizations is managed *in* and *between* discourses but in ways that understand the meaning and interpretation, which define power relations in such discourses, to be closely related to material reality not only through language use but also through each one's concerns with a variety of things and actors, including one's self. By so doing, the chapter (or my plot) suggests the possibility of analyzing processes of organizing in ways that mimic the triad of mimetic processes underlying research subjects' sensemaking by taking advantage of the nesting and nested structure constituted by the different triads of mimetic processes.

Though it seems complicating, each triad maintains a consistent structure, which consists of the common elements known as the constitutive elements of plot: act, actors, scene, purpose and agency (Czarniawska 1999, Tsoukas and Hatch 2001), so that it is possible to compare, combine or replace one plot with other plots (Czarniawska 1999). By taking advantage of the associability and the substitutability of plot, events and phenomena across different levels of analysis, such as individual, group and organization, and micro and macro, can be accounted for in ways that examine possible connections between mundane utterances, which are each plotted along the triad of mimetic processes, thus, comprised of the common constitutive elements. Typically, the often observed transcending values, laws and concepts circulating in organizations through power (and resistance to it) by means of discourse can be traced along the nesting and nested structure of the triad of mimetic processes.

## **4.7 Identifying the plots**

### ***4.7.1 The nesting and nested plots in utterances***

Before looking at the three distinct plots one by one, the following analysis confirms that these plots can be identified in any utterance by asking the three simple questions as was explained above. In order to demonstrate the ambivalence between the participants' relative appreciation of the Forum and less specific motivations and expectations for it, several utterances were chosen as examples. The point is the fact that the Forum was chosen by relatively similar people on the basis of similar sentiments and enabled them to post messages. Regardless of the less specific purposes, such as information seeking, release of tension and frustration, or caring for others, the Forum enabled them to decide to speak after reading others' messages. It demonstrates that the triad of mimetic processes is nesting and nested to provide both the participants and the analyst with practical understandings of reality denoted in utterances.

The participants frequently mention that they spent some time just reading others' messages before starting posting. The reasons why they decided to post were positive feelings about what others were saying. Some of the examples are: (1) '*I like the [Forum] because it's pulling together that's going to get us thru this mess*' (doc29441, on February 3, 2002); (2) '*[...] I have become comfortable with what all the associates who come here have to say.*' (ewkt3, on February 6, 2002); (3) '*[...], I was so excited to find others dealing with the same frustrations that I had daily.*' (crazykm2001, on March 22, 2002); and (4) '*I am very impressed with this "lounge" board, as I have read so much positive responses, and honest questions and answers. This turned out to be too long, sorry, but just wanted to say, we will survive!*' (becki1950, on Mar 7, 2002).

Based on these excerpts, it is assumed that as they read messages posted to the Forum, they enjoyed issuing messages that affirmed what others said. As the examples above

indicate, what each participant was affirmative about is not very specific. Nonetheless, it is possible at least to speculate that the participants in the case online forum must have understood something ('Identifying/classifying') through reading others' posts before issuing their utterances in ways that were meaningful to them ('Mediating'). It is the rule rather than the exception that we are not very certain about whether or not our understandings are objectively valid and/or generalizable so as to be applied to less familiar contexts. Probably because of such uncertainty, it is observed that their messages involve the aspect of 'Acting' plot which represents the utterers' wishing others to understand the messages as affirmation about what others said in the Forum, irrespective of the different degrees of expectation of actual responses. As such, those excerpts contain the three different kinds of understandings indicated in the conceptual framework. In accordance with the method, the three simple questions enable systematic analyses of them. The analysis begins by identifying to whom those messages were addressed.

All of the examples above, (1) – (4), were addressed to fellow associates. Then, we can find that all of these messages wished fellow associates to understand the messages to be conveying positivity to them. In other words, as the posters made assumptions about their audiences and unwittingly commanded evaluation from such audiences, those messages came to define the immediate context of communication in which the posters rendered psychological support for fellow associates.

Then, what did they understand? As has been mentioned above, in those excerpts what the posters were affirmative about is not very specific. But, it can be inferred that what they understood by reading others' messages is mostly about subjective experiences in

their respective workplaces, characterized by such words with negative connotation as ‘mess’ in (1) and ‘*the same frustrations that I had daily*’ in (3). Their negative experiences can also be inferred from the posters’ appreciation for ‘*positive responses, and honest questions and answers*’ in (4) because there would have been no reason for appreciating such positive attitudes unless they assumed that they shared negative experiences.

Subjective experiences as a substance of understanding make it relatively easy to identify bearer(s) of such experiences or actor(s) to whom such substances of understanding can be attributed. In this case, it is fellow associates who suffered from negative experiences. Putting this substance (negative subjective experiences) in a way that clarifies the actors and the actions they accomplished, the associates experienced negative subjective experiences. This simple sentence induces us to pursue additional information, such as causes and possible consequences of negative experiences, their identities and how negative their experiences might be. The information obtained by readers’/interpreters’ inference may further locate other relevant actors and contextual information. Thus, it is confirmed that identifying and classifying substantive information by answering what utterances talked about is enabled by the nesting and nested structure of the triad of mimetic processes, particularly the structurally enabled mimetic processes by certain conceptual networks of actions and actors who were familiar with it.

The most significant function of substantive understanding is to provide a better sense of reality. Understanding by substitution establishes particular reversible connections between different substances and (quasi-)substances, which distil timelessly contingent

causal relations. In other words, the ‘identifying/classifying’ plot can be understood as processes by which actors obtain schemas, maps or general concepts with which to comprehend a variety of things, events and phenomena in a less context-dependent manner. As such, it is also possible for readers/interpreters to understand that the substances of understanding are necessarily abstracted to the extent that the processes by which to assign more or less generalized meanings are truncated, or rather, contracted, in the example excerpts. As the example excerpts showed, it was not necessary for the utterers to elaborate their own experiences, nor to clarify in what ways their experiences might be similar (or identical) to others’ experiences insofar as they could put each other’s experiences onto their respective schema of ‘similar negative experiences’. Obviously, such contraction of denotation depends on contexts as well as on the utterers’ needs for the generality of substantive understandings. Thus, the processes of semantic production of substantive meanings involve the utterers’ consideration for intelligibility and communicability (the aspect of ‘Acting’ plot).

Moreover, the communicative consideration of the utterers telling each other that they share almost identical experiences is not just about accumulating mutually coherent facts (or interpretation about the facts); rather, it points to the fact that one can observe the utterers collectively authoring narrative that construct a plausible version of their reality, at least within the Forum (Carlsen 2006, da Cunha and Orlikowski 2008). It also represents each utterer coming up with a unique subjective meaningfulness. Simply, it would be nonsense only to repeat the same words without any meaningfulness to each utterer as to the subject. It is, therefore, understood that in the act of making utterances, the utterers transcribed their experiences onto what they read, even though such transcription was rarely observed directly. Put differently, they share an imaginative



capacity to see others' denotation as if as true as their own by mediating the substantive understandings that categorize their experiences into 'similar negative experiences' and contextual understandings which, despite the relative ambiguity, meant that similar negative experiences could be presented in a manner that is plausible and acceptable to their assumed audiences ('fellow associates'). This is an aspect of 'Mediating' plot.

As another aspect of the 'Mediating' plot, the subjective meaningfulness of utterances also tells us who were concerned with the 'negative experiences'. This seems superfluous because, in this specific example, we have already known that there would be no other significant actors concerned than the employees working with the same bankrupted company. However, in the processes of semantic (re-)production comprised of the triad of mimetic processes, one establishes substantive understandings, one makes assumptions about contextually relevant ways of denoting reality, and one creates meaningfulness, all distinguished from one another and all are necessary, as was elaborated earlier. Especially, without locating the last one, interpretive and social constructive views on reality would suffer from the ontological problem.

People interpret reality for the sake of their own selves at the moment of interpreting, regardless of whether or not they are conscious of the act of interpreting. Interpretation of reality can thus be equated to self-interpretation; it can be done in many ways. This means that no interpretation is initiated without pursuing 'good' interpretation but that every interpretation cannot be 'good'. Interpretation demands public criteria to be accepted as good interpretation. The key is awareness of the limits of interpretation. We all know that one day we will die. We have learnt since birth from nature and from other (mostly elder) people that we are living surrounded by a variety of rules from which

phenomena with particular regularity emanate. We are the ones who set limits of interpretation by knowing limited *extensions* of reality comprised of a variety of material objects rather than by knowing limits set by the absolute essence of nature. However, such limits are by no means informed by a natural law of science; thus, negotiations with others are the norm.

It is, therefore, important to follow the processes of semantic (re-)production comprised of the triad of mimetic processes in a way that does not exclude the concern with things, other actors and self by identifying actors for whom a certain utterance is meaningful. In the example excerpts, the fact that the posters understood others' frustrating subjective experiences and positive attitudes in front of such negative experiences simply demonstrates who they are as fellow associates or those willing to be empathetic with the associates. What is to be noted is that the identification of for whom an utterance is meaningful indicates that acquiring their respective subjective meaningfulness both clarified the identity of the posters and blurred boundaries between them. In other words, each of the posters must have created a sense of meaningfulness unique for her/him but, in so doing, identified her/him with a collective category ('fellow associates suffering from similar negative experiences'), either consciously or non-consciously. What this means is that although we are rarely concerned with our being, by interpreting utterances along the triad of mimetic processes, being manifests itself in an indefinite number of possible denotations of reality, which involve one's substantive and contextual understandings and descriptions concerning one's identity, rather than as any specific attribute, role or character. More importantly, being at a particular point in time and space also manifests itself by showing its transiency, as is demonstrated in the example of the merger of self-identity into collective identity.

Overall, the messages are not representations of what the participants must have understood but are alibis in the sense that we can read backward their denotations in ways that relate indefinitely possible meanings to their most immediate and fundamental concerns with things, other actors and self prompting them to post messages. Their ways of denoting reality are emergent but follow the triad of mimetic processes (e.g., behavioral grammar: Iedema [2007], or particular ways of sequencing events and phenomena into particular orders). The three distinct plots: ‘Identifying/classifying’, ‘Acting’ and ‘Mediating’ plots, are nesting and nested by one another to produce and reproduce meanings through the innumerably possible ways of plotting reality. The table below illustrates the meanings produced by plots nesting, and being nested, by one another.

**Table 4.2. Classification of the messages by the plot**

<b>Plot</b>	<b>Theme (Classification by substantive information)</b>	<b>Identification and classification</b>	<b>Subjective meaningfulness</b>	<b>Embodied assumptions about response from others</b>
		<b>Actors as the target of attribution of actions (substantive</b>	<b>For whom the utterance is meaningful?</b>	<b>To whom the utterance is addressed?</b>

		<b>understanding)</b>		
Identifying/ classifying plot	<b>Competency</b>  <i>'It's really very simple....put stuff on the shelves, have enough employees to keep it stocked, face it, find it, and ring it up. [...] Those of us in the stores understand all this'</i>	Substance of the trade, Problems and solution to them	Self-efficacy	Encouraging fellow associates as well as the poster her/himself
		Fellow associates	Fellow associates	Fellow associates
	<b>Commitment/ Loyalty</b>  <i>'[posts to the Forum are] from the heart and soul of those</i>	Job of retailing, historical development of the Company	Attachment/ affection to the trade and the Company, disinterestedness	Encouraging fellow associates as well as the poster her/himself
		Fellow associates	Fellow associates	Fellow associates

<i>who care the most'</i>			
<b>Management as villain</b>	Arrogance, inconsiderateness of management Irrelevance of various programs initiated and imposed by management	Dis-identification with management and its failure	Encouraging fellow associates by inducing sense of belongingness
<i>'[Executives] didn't care whether [the Company] survived so much as how much they could 'line their pockets''</i>	Management of the Company	Fellow associates (positive), Management of the Company (negative)	Fellow associates
<b>Stereotype of retail workers</b>  <i>'We have had to</i>	Lower ranks, disrespectful	Uneasiness arising from gaps between reality of the	Encouraging fellow associates by inducing sense

	<i>fight stereotypes of retail employees for a long time. [The Company's] image is not real positive right now'</i>		Company and images cast by outsiders	of belongingness to the Company and/or to the category of profession
		Outsiders (customers, media, general public)	Fellow associates, Outsiders	Fellow associates
Mediating plot	<b>Positive identity</b> <i>'We're merchants. We sell stuff.'</i>	All of the plots in conventional terms	Positive identity	Admitting positive identities each other
	<i>'Who are we....just the people who know our business and our customers'</i>	Fellow associates, Management of the Company, Outsiders	Fellow associates	Fellow associates
	<b>Antenarrative</b> <i>'I've been sitting here trying to find</i>	Commendable struggles	Ontological reality resisting being expressed	Respecting non-obviousness of others

	<i>the perfect words to express my feelings [...] and I am at a loss to truly articulate them'</i>	Fellow associates	Fellow associates	Fellow associates
Acting plot	<b>Caring for fellow associates</b>  <i>'We are here to listen, support and try to help make people feel better and have a place to vent'</i>	Sufferings of fellow associates	Sense of belongingness, involvement in the problematic situation	Politeness, tolerance with negative words and/or attitudes
		Fellow associates	Fellow associates	Fellow associates, The management of the Company, Outsiders
	<b>Informing reality</b>	Problems and their historical development, Strengths and weaknesses of the Company	Moderating dissatisfaction with dominant narratives	Disinterestedness, positive attitudes towards difficult situations rather than just complaining

			about them
<i>'How can we get the real message to them [the Management]'</i>	Fellow associates, management of the Company, Outsiders	Fellow associates	Outsiders (media, general public), fellow associates
<b>Simple rejoinder</b>	Substantive meaning of other messages	Sense of belongingness, involvement in the problematic situation	Assumptions that the substantive understandings should be correct and accepted
<i>'Three Cheers! Right On! You have said it all'</i>	Fellow associates, management of the Company, Outsiders	Fellow associates	The utterers of the messages s/he rejoins (mostly fellow associates)

#### 4.7.2 'Identifying/Classifying' Plot: Substantive understanding

In the table above, although the essence contains three different kinds of understandings and relevant actors identified through the triad of mimetic processes, the results of the



analysis are presented by classifying them into themes that are almost identical to the substantive understanding, for the sake of presentational convenience. By so doing, the table illustrates that plots always produce the three different meanings. The themes also demonstrate that it is possible for the triad of mimetic processes to frame messages in the same way as conventional coding by focusing on substantive information. The following explains what the three different plots ‘Identifying/classifying’, ‘Acting’ and ‘Mediating’ mean, providing each message with particular extension of denotation by producing the three different meanings.

Under ‘Identifying/classifying’ plot, the themes: ‘Competency’, ‘Commitment/ Loyalty’, ‘the Management as villain’, and ‘Stereotype of retail workers’, can be understood as what the participants understood about facts, attributes or other seemingly objective (or at least indisputable) qualities. At the same time, as has been analyzed earlier, meanings produced by ‘Acting’ and ‘Mediating’ plots can also be identified, which are shown in the columns named ‘Subjective meaningfulness’ and ‘Embodied assumptions’ respectively.

As for ‘Subjective meaningfulness’, as the excerpts in the table show, when talking about their competencies (the theme: ‘Competency’), the posters are considered to obtain a sense of self-efficacy. In the case of the messages categorized under the theme: ‘Commitment/loyalty’, the posters are supposed to be confirming that they have been trying to be disinterested in their private concerns relative to the fulfillment of their professional obligations by showing their commitment and/or loyalty. When criticizing management as villain, the posters at least temporarily succeeded in distancing themselves from the failure of the Company. When complaining about negative

stereotypical images unduly cast towards retail workers, the posters appeared to be feeling uneasy regarding gaps between such negative images and what they have been experiencing as insiders of a bankrupted company.

With regard to the meaning produced by ‘Acting’ plot, that is, ‘Embodied assumptions’, although the participants’ utterances did not completely represent their experiences or understandings, the fact that they posted messages inevitably commands responses from their assumed audiences (‘fellow associates’). In other words, the messages categorized into these themes wish fellow associates to read them as those which intended to encourage fellow associates during the difficult times. In consequence, the messages convey that the posters must have established their understanding of contextual relevancy in terms of acceptability from their assumed audience (fellow associates).

By examining ‘Identifying/classifying’ plots, we will be able to find that identification of things or substantive attributes of them is not similar to registering data into memory in such a way that computers process data. Rather, identification of even relatively stable attributes, which are in practice apprehended almost instantaneously, is produced according to the logic of the triad of mimetic processes. Moreover, ‘Identifying/classifying’ plots tell us that identification of particular substantive attributes ensues classifying such attributes into particular categories to provide actors with renewed understandings through abstraction and generalization, if to varying degrees. Apprehending attributes of things and quasi-things is, thus, one of the effects of de-contextualization. By understanding the effect of de-contextualization along the triad of mimetic processes, it will become manifest that abstraction and de-contextualization involve evaluative preferences (Ricoeur 1990/1992) of those who

apprehend because it tells us that there always exists someone who mediates substantive and contextual information in ways that obtain a sense of meaningfulness at particular points in time and space. Fidelity, loyalty and even moral correctness are already implicated in the moments of ‘Identifying/classifying’. As such, the triad of mimetic processes provides mundane utterances with particular extension that enables analyses of who identified what, for what purposes, how and with/against whom. Of these, the most critical aspect indicated by the moment of ‘Identifying/classifying’ is that the thing-like names, concepts or models can cover all the processes by which to produce them. The significance of this aspect will become clearer if understood together with the repetitive nature of the syntagmatic mimesis to be identified by analyzing the moment of ‘Acting’ of the triad of mimetic processes.

#### ***4.7.3 ‘Acting’ Plot: Defining operational and contextual relevance***

The themes: ‘Caring fellow associates’, ‘Informing reality’ and ‘Simple rejoinders’ in Table 4.2 were also derived from the participants’ substantive understandings in accordance with the framework of the triad of mimetic processes. As so named, these themes refer to what the participants intended to accomplish by posting messages; thus, the acting aspect of the mimetic processes (‘Acting’ plot) plays the central role in semantic production. As was explained earlier, this aspect of emplotment can be identified by style or the ways of denotation, which depends on to whom the messages were addressed. What makes the styles or the ways of denotation characteristic of the messages classified into these themes is the effect of defining the immediate context of communication in the Forum. Thus, the messages categorized into the theme: ‘Caring for fellow associates’ appeared to have established norms by mutually adopting

contextually relevant ways of denotation, such as politeness, tolerance with negative words and/or attitudes. As for those categorized into the theme: 'Informing reality', they appeared to emphasize disinterestedness, positive attitudes towards difficult situations rather than just complaining about them, or simply objectivity and neutrality. The differences between these themes can simply be attributed to the different addressees. While the messages under 'Caring for fellow associates' were mostly addressed to fellow associates, those under 'Informing reality' occasionally talked to or rather debated with those who held critical views on either the Forum, or the employees, or the Company.

By looking at the other two aspects of emplotment we will be able to understand how the triad of mimetic processes as an analytic framework enables analysis of particular extension of mundane utterances from the relatively simple syntagmatic rules to much broader contexts. Specifically, the 'Acting' aspect of emplotment in principle explains syntagmatic rules with which to materialize denotation of reality in contextually relevant ways, simply by observing and mostly mimicking others' denotation. Hence, it tells little about contexts without being supported by the contents of 'Acting' that are the effects of 'Identifying/classifying' emplotment. For instance, the messages classified into the theme: 'Caring fellow associates', which were literally meant to convey encouragement to fellow associates, explicated suffering and negative experiences of fellow associates, such that we understand the participants collectively established a 'support group' in the Forum. They are, in other words, supposed to have obtained a sense of belongingness to the same community of frontline employees of a bankrupted company, or a sense of involvement in the same or similar problematic situations by

posting messages which showed psychological support of each other, which is the aspect of 'Mediating' emplotment.

The messages under 'Informing reality' appeared to have different meaningfulness for the participants from the case of 'Caring for fellow associates', in which frontline employees made assumptions that they mutually needed to support each other psychologically. While those making assumptions about others as sharing supposedly similar experiences and sentiments were less likely to suffer from conflicts between possibly discordant assumptions, some of the messages under 'Informing reality', which were addressed to critics of the Forum or the employees or the Company, presumed confrontation with people who were unsympathetic to the activities in the Forum and/or to the employees and the Company. In order to counter such negative opinions and responses, such messages attempted to justify the activities in the Forum by presenting objective and 'real' information (e.g., specific problems in the stores and their historical development, strengths and weaknesses of the Company, etc.). By so doing, the participants appeared to have managed to moderate dissatisfaction with dominant (mostly either managerial or negative) narratives subscribed or sometimes fabricated by people who were unfamiliar with the store operations, such as the general public, media, the majority of customers and even management of the Company.

Because of this diversity of actors and accordingly diverse interests and concerns, such examples relatively clearly demonstrated that the triad of mimetic processes not only produces the three different meanings but also enables actors to denote reality without confirming their respective assumptions about possible responses from others, which

should in consequence define the immediate context of interactions with others. For instance,

*‘If you had been reading this forum for any amount of time, you will see that there is constant dialogue about how to improve things at store level. **We don’t try to paint a rosy picture.** [...] He (the founder of the Forum)’s not asking us to paint a rosy picture, **just trying to let the rest of the world know what is going on in the stores** and maybe solve some problems.’ (8/2/2002 at 01:53PM by XX4361nj)*

***‘Right now they (fellow associates) need to VENT, CRY, and be able to tell their stories! [...] Right now we are supporting each other and learning.** We might be the next to go (if further more stores need to be closed).’ (2/4/2002 at 04:24PM by ur2blue, All emphases are mine.)*

Both of these excerpts were addressed to those who were critical of the activities taking place in the Forum. The critics saw the participants as disgruntled employees continually making complaints. Hence, these messages were primarily meant to justify activities in the Forum against such criticisms.

By interpreting these messages following the triad of mimetic processes, it is found that the posters must have established their respective understandings of substances (e.g., the fact that the participants have been experiencing frustrations, committed employees trying to improve situations within their capacities, and justifiable reasons for making complaints in the Forum), subjective meaningfulness with regard to these substances

(e.g., effects of releasing tension and venting frustration on the part of the employees of the Company who share similar sentiments of anxiety and uncertainty), and contextual relevancy taking into account the existence of both supporters and opponents to the Forum (e.g., confirming objectives and values of the Forum where expressing negative feelings may be tolerated, if not uncritically forgiven).

As observed in those excerpts, both of the posters managed to denote reality by employing a multiplicity of plot lines to repudiate criticisms of their activities in the Forum. Specifically, they managed to denote reality in ways that informed reality in the stores and, at the same time, cared for fellow associates. The point here is that both of the posters appear to have made assumptions only about relevance for the fellow associates. It is interesting because both of the messages were addressed to the critics. Put differently, the posters assumed that the relevancy of their denotation of reality should be validated by fellow associates rather than by their intended addressees. What is important, therefore, is the fact that they were able to post messages rather than whether or not the assumptions held about the substantive relevancy of their messages could be validated. While this may sound fairly trivial, it is important fully to understand the skills and knowledge enacted in mundane discursive practices along the triad of mimetic processes. The triad of mimetic processes enables actors to act before coming up with absolute evidence, rules and principles that ensure relevance of their actions. The conventional entity-based or linear ways of establishing causal relations between actors, their intentions, motivations, actions, and effects are established in retrospect, observing accumulated actions assumptively undertaken. These examples, therefore, indicate that the definition of contexts proceeds totally on the basis of each

one's assumptions, rather than each message directly defining a certain context in a particular way.

As has repeatedly been stated, the triad of mimetic processes is nesting and nested by each other. Even if the 'Acting' plot plays the central role, mainly to define immediate contexts of communication, it involves a kind of poetic move guided by particular interests and concerns while referring also to substantive and contextual information. This poetic move serves to facilitate actors' creating contextually relevant ways of denotation by pursuing consensual validation with regard to each other's assumptions about each other's preferred ways of defining the contexts. In this respect, the fact that utterers can assume the existence of audiences whom the utterers assume are able to establish consensus, with regard to preferred ways of defining immediate contexts of interaction, is critical. What is more, the assumptions pursuing consensual validation with others with respect to the immediate contexts of the interactions provides extension in terms of morality, which is negotiable with others rather than definitive, as is the case with the 'Identifying/classifying' aspect of emplotment. The triad of mimetic processes as an analytical frame makes visible actors' making sense of reality by pursuing not only the substantive validity of their actions and assumed consequences but also the possibilities of their denotation to be validated consensually by other actors. This is one of the strengths of the triad of mimetic processes. It guides us through all the possibilities that actors may pursue for their interpretation of reality. Specifically, while we already know that meaning is determined not only by substantive qualities but also by contextual appropriateness, the triad of mimetic processes enables analyses of how such relational and contextual meaning and interpretation can be brought about in accordance with actors' different interests and concerns at particular points in time and



space. This ability to make it easy to follow ever-changing perspectives of actors will become more explicit by closely examining the aspect of ‘Mediating’ emplotment.

#### ***4.7.4 ‘Mediating’ Plot: Obtaining a sense of non-obvious relevance***

We now move on to ‘Mediating’ plot to see how it establishes subjective meaningfulness or a sense of non-obvious relevance. As the table above shows (Table 4.2), the messages that expressed more explicitly the utterers’ establishment of identity in positive ways and their struggles with coming up with appropriate ways of denoting reality were classified into ‘Mediating’ plot in order to exemplify the transposition of the subject, even at the individual level. While the previous analysis of the ‘Acting’ plot emphasized the actions as effects of assumptions made between different actors that their preferred ways of defining the contexts of the interactions can be validated consensually, ‘Positive identity’ and ‘Antenarrative’ demonstrate that each individual actor experiences her/his subjectivity in three distinct ways.

As has already been mentioned, the triad of mimetic processes consists of three distinct moments, rather than a series of events. Hence, before the occurrence of these moments, things or thing-like substances remain un-segmented in a certain continuum, similar to a flow or stream of which particular directions guide segmentation in particular ways (Eco 1999). The fact that we have perceived some sense means that the moments of mimesis took place and segmented some grains in the continuum in particular ways. For instance, the ‘Identifying/classifying’ plot provides us with substantive meaning based on certain conceptual networks of actions but what actually happens is that the ‘Acting’ plot provides contextually relevant ways of segmenting such grains; the ‘Mediating’ plot determines the substantive meaning based on subjective meaningfulness at a

particular point in time and space. The triad of mimetic processes is nesting and nested by one another; at the individual level, an actor experiences these three distinct subjectivities even though s/he becomes conscious of that in reference mostly to either substances or other actors. Nonetheless, the most critical moment is obviously that of mediation at which heterogeneous properties are grasped together into a meaningful whole.

Before the moment of uttering, a would-be utterer is allowed to appropriate properties from reality denoted by other actors, such as experiences, opinions, ways of reasoning and denotation, for the purpose of obtaining subjective meaningfulness of experiences exclusively on the part of the would-be utterer or reader. However, when it comes to the moment of uttering and beyond, one needs to ask others for permission for making assumptions because one can never be certain about how such others will understand one's utterances. This is why simple rejoinders and messages stating that the participants spent some time just reading others' messages were posted frequently, as analyzed earlier in 4.7.1. It is not an easy task to make utterances even in such asynchronous and anonymous (or pseudonymous) environments as the Forum (Stommel and Koole 2010) chiefly because we are inevitably concerned about intelligibility of what we have understood in awareness of the others' gaze. Moreover, we can never be certain about others' actual responses (Goffman 1959/1990). Each of us knows that we are in an asymmetrical relationship in interactions with others.

Despite (or probably because of) such highly uncertain conditions, the triad of mimetic processes explains, by the lack of symmetrical unity between the three distinct moments of employment, that mundane discursive practices proceed without absolutely

foundational evidence, rule or principle. Connections between these moments are asymmetrical not only because each of these moments can occur at any time in an unpredictable manner but also because once the moment of mediating occurs, precisely speaking, the mediated substantive and contextual meanings are, if minimally, renewed and the past meanings never reappear, if distinction of meanings between the old and the new is virtually meaningless. Always, some decision point in the triad of mimetic processes determines similarity/dissimilarity. Although these processes take place at the individual level, the relationality with other actors/actants is intrinsically assumed. Hence, the often-simple distinction between similarities/dissimilarities is actually intricately social and negotiable.

The messages categorized into the theme 'Positive identity' are characterized by the relatively explicit transposition of the subject. As already indicated in the preceding analyses of 'Identifying/classifying' and 'Acting' plots, since these plots each involve the moment of 'Mediating' emplotment, some intricate transpositions of the subject were observed. Hence, according to Table 4.2, the processes by which actors established their positive identity can be understood as the mediation between those substances (e.g., 'Competency', 'Loyalty/commitment', 'Management as villain' and 'Stereotype of retail workers') and contextual understandings (e.g., 'Caring for fellow associates' and 'Informing reality'). What is typical of this category is the intricate distinction between sameness (collective identity) and distinctiveness of each actor (individual unique identity), as presented earlier. Thus, the participants are considered to be experiencing three distinct types of subjectivity: that in relation to substances, to other actors who are capable of responding to their denotations, and to themselves.

Another example that exemplifies the transpositions of the subjects is ‘Antenarrative’ as shown below:

**I've been sitting here trying to find the perfect words to express my feelings [...]**  
**and I am at a loss to truly articulate them.** *I LOVE this company but I hate the direction we have gone this past year, [...], countless associates and peers who did not survive the misdirection and now the probability [probability] of nearly 300 store teams losing their jobs tomorrow [tomorrow]. [...] I have watched you accomplish the impossible without the proper tools. The 1000 piece warehouses that have gotten unloaded without the proper help. [...] The phone calls that “company’s coming [for an inspection]”, the cries of “we’ll never be ready” and how proud we were when we got a good visit. [...] The Friday morning Bingos. [...] we got abused for being out of ad merchandise, smiled and went about our day. [...] I apologize for my rambling and **I knew that my words could not do justice to my experience and my feelings for our associates.** Show your pride, hold your head high and realize that YOU did not fail. (9/3/2002 at 05:25AM by wuzsickoXXXX2002, all emphases are mine.)*

In this excerpt, the poster employed several measures with which to define relationship with other participants (the ‘Acting’ aspect). However, expressed in the beginning of the excerpt is the poster’s difficulty to ‘articulate’ his ‘feelings’ by means of which the poster asked readers to understand his words to be just incomplete as no one’s experiences could translate into words. This is Boje’s (2001) antenarrative, which refers to stories yet to be told and/or experiences that resist being told. Especially, the antenarrative in the latter terms deserves attention.

Although stories yet to be told tend to be related to power variably distributed in organizations (Rhodes 2001), actors are often faced with a conundrum as to whether or not to express what they have in mind (Boje 2001). This is simply because each person's experiences are unique and similar. The uniqueness of experiences invites problems of the asymmetrical relationship between the variety of language and that of referents (Tsoukas 1991). Also, we can refer to one of the attributes of narratives that exclude what is not told by telling particular stories in particular ways (Czarniawska 1999). We cannot tell everything if we want to convey meaningful narrative. The more strongly one is prompted to express personal experiences, the more likely one has to struggle with a dilemma with regard to a sense of reality between what is experienced and what one may be able to instantiate in words. Hence, the poster clearly stated that his '*words could not do justice to*' his feelings for fellow associates. This part is also understood as antenarrative. These antenarratives appear to define his message as that which conveys strong support to and empathy with fellow associates in an intricate manner to the extent that the poster wished his assumed audiences (fellow associates) to tolerate possible negative effects of his putting *their* experiences into *his* words. Hence, it is found that these antenarratives involve the poster's concerns with the subtlety between similarity and distinctiveness of each other's experiences. In expressing such concerns, he predicated his concerns on both his and others' experiences (the aspect of 'Mediating' plot).

The triad of mimetic processes further explains the skills and knowledge as well as attributes embedded in antenarrative. While it exemplifies the intricacy of the processes by which the poster's concerns were expressed by imagining the similarity and the uniqueness of each other's experiences, the post also included the rather detailed

episodic descriptions concerning reality in the stores (the aspect of 'Identifying/classifying' emplotment). These episodes demonstrate the overlapping of reality of different actors. Since such an overlap of different reality is a mere product of imagination of the poster, it does not denote the reality of the world either he or his assumed audiences belong to. What is important about this plurality of reality is, thus, that it is the poster's *being* (or concerns) made pluralized, rather than either his or any other's *reality*. Put differently, such imagination about the plurality of reality is better understood as the poster's self-interpretation of his being in such multiple ways. Therefore, in addition to the capacity of capturing the moment of texts' coming into being represented by authors' struggles with narration, antenarrative enables us to understand that the plurality of meaning does not mean the mere co-existence of many meanings but that each such meaning is produced by one's concerns with the being of things, other actors and one's self (here, distinction between different actors/actants is of little meaningfulness for the poster, because those different actors/actants were drawn upon primarily for denoting the poster's being at the moment of posting the message). Even if one imagines a variety of others, such is in principle done for the sake of one's own sense of appropriateness in terms of substantive aspects of reality, contexts or one's unique being at a particular point in time and space. Antenarrative offers a renewed understanding about how it is difficult for one to express one's true being in this world. More importantly, it offers a means to read utterances as utterers' truths most of which are rather cruelly silenced.

Each of us knows that s/he is as a single and unique being. However, when it comes to perceiving, recognizing and understanding one has no other means than expressing it while struggling with similar, thus to a certain degree generalizable, resources for

representation and the limited extension of the generalization as being resisted by a sense of uniqueness. In addition, as the symbolic mediation of the mimetic process embedded in texts indicates, each of us necessarily confronts different intentionality or agencies between her/him, others and texts. In other words, it is unclear whether an actor expresses her/his being because s/he so wishes, or whether s/he responds voluntarily or involuntarily to others' or texts' intentionality implied in reality denoted in particular ways.

Utterances are not mere denotations of reality that are made to make utterers' reality intelligible to assumed audiences. Instead, utterances are understood to be expressing one's being in many different ways by invoking different agencies bestowed on words to speak for one's being. Substances denoted in words speak for substantive relevance by virtue of synchronic connections between particular properties and attributes, ways of denotation or diachronic connections/sequential orders consisting of heterogeneous properties for contextual relevance and the act of denotation (narration) for one's sense of non-obvious subjective meaningfulness by marking one's being at the moment of denotation.

That making utterances is expressing one's being suggests a critical character of actors' skills and knowledge with which to manage the plurality of reality. Since one's being cannot be referred to by any synchronically substitutable signifier, metaphor or ways of denotation, it has to be devised with particular horizons with particular phenomenological temporality in addition to particular beginnings and endings which denote mere sequences of actions, events and phenomena. Hence, if the plurality of reality is denoted by predicating it on particular sense of being, as is the case with the

example message, a multiplicity of horizons exist which, in part, overlap each other and intersect at particular points in time and space. Even if there are actors who belong to the same world in physical terms and interact with each other, they can only communicate with each other by means of the reality they denoted, which may in part overlap and may share particular spaces and moments. Interactions are thus dependent on each other's imagination, and the 'Mediating' moment of emplotment is capable of providing virtually infinite extension of denotation in terms of generality, specificity and creativity. Nevertheless, it is inevitably constrained by substantive and contextual relevancy. So, as we know, the majority of people do not speak in everyday life as if they were poets.

Although we are aware of the importance of everyday practices and skills and knowledge entailed in them, we are still not very clear about what they are. It should not, however, be seen as a bad story which is subject to persistent ambiguity. Rather, it may possibly be unhealthy to believe (or deceive ourselves) to comprehend such a self-interpreting system of our everyday knowledge that keeps on being innovated by creating and taking advantage of the asymmetrical relationship between three different perspectives. Thus, what is important is to know how we are moving around the different realms of experiences (substances, practices and self in Figure 4.1) by appropriating different areas of knowledge (i.e., logical science, metaphor, narrative, and practical syntagmatic knowledge). The triad of mimetic processes serves to inform us typically of the hindsight of relatively visible connections we ourselves construct to go about everyday life.

#### **4.8 Searching for patterned disposition (the limits of interpretation)**



The triad of mimetic processes enables us to act without knowing any absolute foundation of reality. At the individual level, denotations of reality are assumed to inflate by appropriating relevant properties and ways of denoting, creating non-obvious relevance by imagination. It can further be assumed that in interactions between two or more actors, each one's denotations, which are in theory predisposed to inflate, must be converging in particular ways known as symbolic convergence (cf., Brown and Humphreys 2006). Otherwise, no one cares what limitation is imposed from material reality on virtually infinite possible interpretations, which is not likely. The question to be answered in the next chapter should, thus, be whether or not we can find certain patterned dispositions in the ways by which actors collectively perform deduction from each other's inflating denotations? If it is the case, we would be able to explain processes of organizing on the basis of such patterned dispositions, which are acted out by actors without presuming the existence of particular source of social orderliness. Each actor acts by following her/his principles and assumptions along the triad of mimetic processes, assumed to be renewed continually as they take particular actions. Despite such continual renewal, is there any rule or collective preference in actors' setting limits on each other's interpretation?

For such possibly shared ways of interpreting reality among actors, Ricoeur's (1984/1990) theory of emplotment suggests the fundamentally rule-governed character of symbolic mediation and the familiarity with particular conceptual networks of actions, both of which are context-dependent but in tandem provide a sense of reality by bringing about 'actuality and integration' (56) to denoted reality in particular ways. There might be no universally applicable rule. Nonetheless, the analyses in this chapter implied two important characteristics pertaining to the triad of mimetic processes and

the three different realms of experiences: substances, practices and self, in respect of the possible constraining forces bringing about symbolic convergence between innumerable denotations.

First, in spite of all the mediating processes, certain thing-like attributes (substantiveness) that can be classified into particular categories susceptible to the making of synchronic timelessly contingent causal connections, can be attributed to virtually anything, regardless of material objects or abstract concepts, insofar as they are recognized by actors. Therefore, despite the seemingly flexible choices in sequencing heterogeneous properties into particular orders, ways of denoting reality or certain contextually relevant syntagmatic rules are by and large determined by synchronically identifiable connections or patterns comprised of (quasi-)things. In other words, ways of denoting reality (syntagmatic rules) are more often than not mimicked, and as a result, they tend to converge within particular contexts.

Second, another implication is the effect of mediating the substantive and the contextual understandings that enable us to see things, other actors and self as something with particular lengths, durations of time, histories, or horizons, rather than as a collection of discrete snapshots of events and phenomena. What this indicates is that our mundane experiences should be saturated with a virtually indefinite number of discourses in the sense that anything can or ought to be understood in relation to other properties with particular temporal extensions.

These implications, together with the analysis in Chapter 3 of the participants' assessment of the five different relevancies indicate that the key to identify particular dispositions acted out by each individual actor without absolutely foundational evidence,

rules or principles should be to understand how the triad of mimetic processes makes connections between heterogeneous properties with particular sequential orders, even in apprehending attributes of things and quasi-things. Put differently, actors are capable of acting on a hypothetical and inferential basis by utilizing their capacities to make sense of reality by means of story fragments, continua or anything of particular extension delineated by certain irreversible sequential orders as well as synchronically discernible patterns comprised of heterogeneous properties.

Despite the seemingly metaphysical or semiotic processes of making connections, it should be emphasized that the triad of mimetic processes is not about semantics or narrowly defined semiotics that is confined within the realm of language or signs but about practices in which each of us can take actions, believing that doing so is doing good in terms of both substantive and contextual relevance, without absolutely any foundational proof, rule or principle. While it is assumed that actors interpret reality differently in terms of the limits of interpretation between experiences with things, other actors, and self, the limits of interpretation, which are supposed to culminate in particular dispositions, never assume unlimited extensions for anything, including human beings.

The key is the relative invisibility of each one's being or the 'Mediating' plot. As the analyses in this chapter exemplified, the 'Mediating' plot is a sphere in which each actor experiences three distinct kinds of subjectivity: in relation to external objects; in relation to actors who are capable of responding, and in relation to one's self. Considering the complexity of processes entailed in the seemingly simple and mundane act of making utterances, it is unlikely that each one manages to establish identity thereby invoking

exclusively one's faculty of reasoning. Rather, one should draw attention to one's being in the first place. Once made aware of one's being, each actor starts exploring appropriate resources. Put differently, subjectivity or the awareness of one's being is best understood as evoked involuntarily. More critically, only by so understanding, will it become manifest that the limits of interpretation, which appear to be at each one's imaginary-based discretion, are actually imposed by material reality or nature. The reason why our mundane experiences need to be managed by means of certain symbolically mediated media, meaning and interpretation is simply because none of us knows the definitive boundaries, if any, between nature and nurture, innate predispositions and acquired dispositions, or involuntary subjugation to natural laws and voluntary intervention.

In Ricoeur's (1990/1992) terms, our voluntary intention is 'for happiness' (120, fn. 5) in the sense that without exception we pursue the maximum extension of interpretations of reality and contextual relevance by virtue of consensual validation with other actors, both of which involve evaluative preferences and, by implication, moral appropriateness. By taking into account the receptivity of voluntary intention involving the desire for absolute freedom and voluntary sanctions, mundane utterances can be seen to dispose of utterers' struggles with defining their relationships with material reality by necessarily invoking intersubjective checks with other actors. In order to discover certain rules or patterns in such dispositions, the concept of 'ethics as practice', which sees ethics as a form of practice (Clegg, Kornberger and Rhodes 2007), is of particular relevance. Simply, morality and ethics can and ought to be understood as practices rather than as metaphysical concepts (see also Kornberger and Brown 2007).

To do so, taking into account the issue of power is important. As has been pointed out, actors make sense of reality by virtue of diachronic as well as synchronic connections constituted by heterogeneous properties. As the triad of mimetic processes explains, these different types of connections are mediated into particular meaningful wholes, which are devised with particular temporal extensions as well as spatial/geometric/structural configurations. By introducing power into such a spatio-temporal paradigm, everything of relevance for power, from material obstacles, to disciplinary practices, to desire for authorities, to resistance to them, and to concerned agents and agencies, can be understood to be circulating in a ‘chaotic soup of bits and pieces of story fragments’ (Boje 2001: 18), rather than independent entities or constructs. In other words, as those properties relevant to power indicate, ethics as practice can better be understood as a power/rule constitution (Clegg 1989) in which interpretation of many actors about innumerable story fragments, rather than independent properties or concepts, is supposed to dispose of their struggles for fulfillment of their intention for happiness. Particular rules or patterns of dispositions in mundane discursive practices can thus be identified by assuming these to be emerging from each actor’s desires for the maximum extension of interpretation and voluntary constriction on them. Moreover, the power/rule constitution operating on the meaning-interpretation nexus (*ibid*) serves to make visible how the extension of mundane utterances denoted through the individual level micro processes of emplotment can expand in terms of generality and is constrained by globally dominant discourses and/or locally pertinent institutions, including habits and routines.

In the next chapter, two episodes observed in the Forum will be analyzed with the framework consisting of one’s intention for happiness as the nature of one’s being or

the 'Mediating' plot and the power/norm constitution as the means by which one pursues happiness: one is about certain observable norms established in the Forum and the other is about a certain practical proposal to develop a database for improvement of the Company's management, which failed to materialize. The analyses will lead us to re-think what it means to say that mundane discursive practices are a constitutive part of processes of organizing. It will become manifest that it is indeed important for practicing ethics to know better how we move around the three different realms of experiences with the three different areas of skills and knowledge along the logic of the triad of mimetic processes.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **POWER/RULE CONSTITUTION IN MEANING/INTERPRETATION NEXUS**

#### **5.1 Plot and metaphor in management and organization studies**

Since Morgan (1986) an abundance of metaphor is available in management and organization studies. Metaphor substitutes a word that has meaning pertinent to a particular thing, event or phenomenon with another word that has a different meaning deemed relevant to the same thing, event or phenomenon. The reason why such a simple substitution between words offers us better understandings about things, events and phenomena is because the fact that a word can substitute for the other word provides us with senses of both specificity and generality about those referents. The pursuit of universal law or laws applicable to particular specific contexts in conventional scientific terms by falsifying irrelevant events and phenomena is a systematic way of applying this logic of substitution.

What is characteristic about metaphor in management and organization studies is that the substantive objects (a variety of referents of metaphors) mostly involve sets of processes by which particular events and phenomena came about. This is why stories became metaphors frequently employed to theorize organizational events and phenomena. Stories are good at presenting particular sets of processes or procedures by which particular phenomena unfold in particular orders. In addition, they can provide contexts by putting things, events and phenomena in particular sequential orders. Moreover, theories that do not explain such processes' unfolding are of only minimal relevance for practices in organizations and management.

It is, thus, clear that metaphor requires stories that provide particular sequential orders and contexts. As Ricoeur (1984/1990) explains, metaphor and narrative in tandem constitute processes of semantic (re)production. Back in Chapter 2, Weick's (1987) model of theorizing organizational communication, which concerns the practical relevance of theories of organizational communication, can also be understood to consist of the combination between metaphor and narrative. As I pointed out in the beginning of Chapter 4, the five criteria of relevance contain both the substitutive logic and the logic pertinent to narrative. If one focuses on relationships between those criteria of descriptive, goal and operational relevance, timeliness and non-obviousness, and properties of theories, models or other forms of denotation, Weick's model may facilitate understandings of particular events and phenomena in ways that validate relevant properties of the theories and models or falsify irrelevant ones to shape a kind of noiseless core components, rules and principles.

If one follows Weick's model processually in accordance with his narrative, one might be able to understand how theories, models or other denotation of reality becomes relevant by reference to those five criteria. Specifically, descriptive relevance and timeliness provide contextual information at particular points in time and space, operational relevance maps out institutional landscape, including concerned parties and their (in)capacities and together these support assessment of goal relevance of theories, models or other forms of denotation. By examining these four different aspects, one is likely to understand the events and phenomena in ways that reveal implicit and context-specific assumptions and principles; thus, one can experience a sense of non-obviousness of the theories in parallel to one's implicit and context-specific assumptions and principles. One of the strengths of narrative approaches to theorizing



processes of organizing resides in this revealing moment, especially in respect of the practical relevance of theories. In other words, stories are best understood not only as metaphors of organizational events and phenomena, including actors' denotation about organizational reality, but also as device with which to grasp a set of procedures in a processual manner that evokes actors' imagination about similarities/dissimilarities between the stories and the processes/procedures they are experiencing.

The problem concerning the relevance of theories developed by studies on organizing is probably about how they can plot organizational events and phenomena taking into account the characteristics of metaphor, narrative and the combination between them. Organizational actors do not author narrative in proper literary terms but they make sense of reality utilizing both metaphorical and narrative means to understand a variety of encounters better. For theories to become relevant, Weick's (1987) model seems to suggest the importance of researchers' taking account of the existence of organizational actors' assumptions and principles, even if they are implicit and context-specific. Czarniawska (1999) proposes protoplot as a kind of meta-theoretical framework with which to capture organizational stories that are plotted by a variety of organizational actors. Implied by both is the existence of the different protagonist positions (practitioners and theorists) in theories with which to explain organizational events and phenomena (see also Pentland 1999, Tsoukas and Hatch 2001).

Another characteristic aspect of theorizing management and organization practices that may need to be considered is writing or how to present theories as constitutive part of theories. As van Maanen's (1988) seminal work represents, the issue of how to write and its theoretical significance applies to management and organization studies. The

triad of mimetic processes depicts the situation typical of the social research contexts as the nesting and nested structure constituted by different protagonists and their respective narratives derived from a certain common reality. In conventional science, the distinction between researchers/observers and their research subjects is so obvious that few pay attention to the intricacy entailed in the relationships between researchers/observers and their research subjects. Even those who adopt an interpretative approach to social reality often presuppose such a distinction as definitive. Of course, researchers and their research subjects are both ontologically and socially distinct. However, when it comes to interpretation of reality, researchers must be as sensitive as possible about the nature of the subjects and the condition in which one finds them. This is because interpretative researchers observe reality through *their* interpretation of their research subjects' interpretation (see also Giddens 1984).

Such a situation is actually not limited to social research contexts. Each of us interprets others' interpretation but we rarely think so. Rather, we think we see facts about others. In interpretative research, such assumptions significantly skew reality unknowingly. Ignoring the fact that researchers interpret others' interpretation is to ignore such others' mundane skills and methods with which they make sense of reality. Such ignorance or contraction of others' skills and knowledge of interpreting reality is, however, part of the innate and immutable nature of human beings who expand the reach of their imagination by continuously creating new metaphors. Put differently, even stories whose key part is events and phenomena sequenced into particular orders can be appropriated rather flexibly for making better sense of reality by deducing a myriad of stories to obtain more general rules and principles.

Obviously, something is missing or inadvertently discarded from what we normally observe. As was briefly mentioned in Chapter 4, the triad of mimetic processes is capable of making it visible. The realm of substance denotes the world of metaphor; the realm of practice denotes the world of narrative; what tends to be overlooked is the realm of self. In research contexts, researchers normally pursue identifying similarities/dissimilarities in their data sets then classifying them into particular categories, such that they may be able to get better understandings out of data. The same applies to studies on organizing, adopting narrative or other discursive approaches. However, typically for studies that deal with stories as data, one of the main purposes is to understand research subjects' ways of making sense of reality inscribed in stories (Gubrium and Holstein 2009), or of reality through interpretation of research subjects (Pentland 1999). Notwithstanding, even if stories are seen to represent particular sets of procedures of research subjects' interpretation, they are fairly easily bundled up and categorized into particular meaning without regard to how each such story came about.

Without reducing massive data in one way or another, we will not obtain any renewed understanding. The point I am making is the ignorance of the processes by which such reduction of data is implemented and the consequences of such ignorance. The consequences are, fairly counter-intuitively, the scant existence of the sense of engagement on the side of researchers. What we are observing in scientific research in general is fairly cruel reproduction of the extant power relations putting researchers on the top without their so knowing, in a familiar 'power/rule constitution' along the 'meaning-interpretation nexus' (Clegg 1989). Those who are capable of exerting more power discipline particular communities of interpretation, without which any metaphor is impossible. More seriously, metaphor produced chiefly by the more powerful for

their communities with the support of *their* stories prescribes the ways people outside the communities make sense of reality without accounting for how the metaphor came about.

Why and how is such a situation sustained? Is it caused by researchers' lack of sense of engagement? Are researchers not victims of much broader discourses, such as those of the capitalist economy or outcome-based evaluations of academic research? I do not intend to drag my research into such relatively easily accessible antagonistic stories between the powerful and the innocent. The issue needs to be examined more scientifically. Simply, we need to know how metaphor is being created with the support of narrative. The point is the asymmetrical relationship between actor/author and observer/reader.

The asymmetrical relationship between actor/author and observer/reader refers to the impossibility for the former to control how the latter understand the former's actions/denotations of reality. As Goffman (1959/1990) elaborated, one can only assume how others would understand one's actions. However careful one may be about one's appearances, others can take advantage of information that is inevitably given off from one's actions. Similarly, narrative theory explains that once presented, texts can be read by readers in many ways while an author and readers are supposed to subscribe to certain common rules in syntactic, semantic, pragmatic or cultural terms (Ricoeur 1984/1990). The asymmetrical relationship, therefore, explains that two distinct meanings are supposed to be generated between an author and readers. Besides, the asymmetrical relationship indicates that certain collective reality shared between different actors is constructed by each actor's imaginatively assuming each other's ways

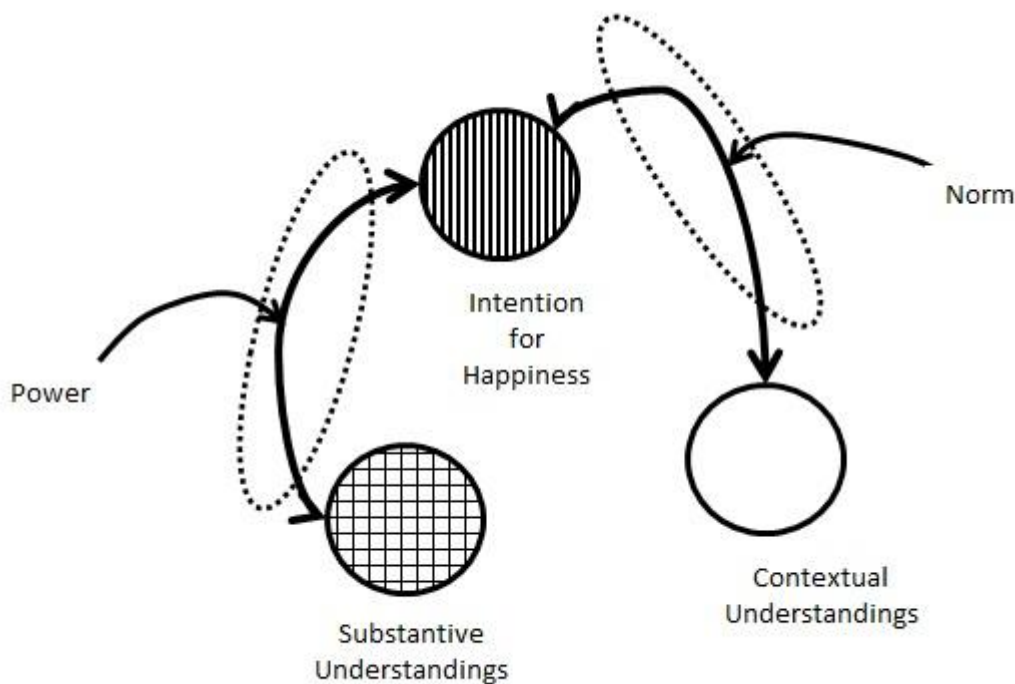
of understanding reality and by such assumptions' being checked through alternate successions between acting/authoring and observing/reading.

Nonetheless, since one normally acts both as actor/author and as observer/reader, it is difficult for one to notice the subtle differences between meanings one produces as an author and as a reader. Moreover, such relative unawareness of the subtly different meanings produced by an author and a reader arises from each one's innate moral concerns. We tend to believe that we ought to attempt, chiefly with the faculty of reasoning, to take the positions of others imaginatively, such that each one's view of interactions with others is liable to assume symmetrical reciprocation, with less regard to the gaps which are filled by readers' imagination. In short, we tend to overestimate each other's moral obligations because of our innate orientation towards being good rather than bad. A simple fact is that, in practical interactions between different actors, no one can prescribe particular ways of understanding one's actions/denotations of reality. Even more important is that social orderliness or particular patterns in collective actions emanate from the asymmetrical relationship between actor/author and observer/reader. It is, thus, critical in analyzing mundane discursive practices to exemplify the asymmetrically succeeding utterances and reading of them.

In order to capture and analyze the subtle but inevitable iterations between acting/authoring and observing/reading that enable mundane interactions, a metaphor is invoked. The metaphor is the triad of mimetic processes depicted in Figure 4.1 in Chapter 4 that includes the realm of experience with self. The metaphor emphasizes that even if there is no such foundational thing as self, each of us keeps on moving forward (never backward) in terms of chronological time without wondering who I am or what

my self is. The metaphor clearly shows the route each of us is following. Based on that figure, I put ‘intention for happiness’ on the position that denotes the mediating function in the triad of mimetic processes; ‘power’ as the arrow linking ‘intention for happiness’ to ‘substantive understandings’ and ‘norm’ as the arrow between ‘intention for happiness’ and ‘contextual understandings’ (Figure 5.1).

**Figure 5.1 Triadic metaphor consisting of ‘intention for happiness’, ‘power’ and ‘norm’**



Two episodes in the case online forum (the Forum) were analyzed by applying this framework. The analyses demonstrate the interrelation between metaphorical and narrative understandings and the power/rule constitution along the triad of mimetic processes, through which the limits of actors’ interpretation in regard to their intention for happiness are determined. As will be elaborated below, the triad of mimetic

processes plays out a critical role in interactions between two or more actors as well as at the individual level. As was presented in Chapter 4, the triad of mimetic processes enables an actor to act without any absolutely foundational evidence, rule or principle by hypothetically establishing interpretation about reality. That each individual actor acts without knowing any absolutely foundational evidence, rule or principle means that the limits of interpretation are always determined by those who see interpretation that has been presented by others hypothetically. Moreover, such hypothetically presented interpretation denotes reality along the triad of mimetic processes, meaning that one both pursues the maximum extension of interpretation by means of metaphorical reasoning and voluntarily constricts it by seeking for consensual validation with others over one's denotation. Hence, the hypothetically established denotation does not represent what one's intention for happiness (or being) is as precisely as possible. In other words, no such denotation can hold anyone accountable for denoted reality. At the end of this chapter, it is clarified why and how it is important to understand precisely the triad of mimetic processes in analyzing organizational events and phenomena. Ethics can only be practiced rather than validated by showing either sincerity for one's intention for happiness, or unfalsifiable truth, or considerateness for others' happiness. Practicing ethics is possible only by knowing as precisely as possible how each one is making sense of reality.

## **5.2 Happiness and the power/rule constitution**

### ***5.2.1 Being and intention for happiness***

Intention for happiness refers to one's most immediate desire. Power denotes the expansive aspect of desire. Norm denotes the constricting aspect of desire. All of these

are metaphors with which to understand better what one's being is, which holds a key to all the semantic production along the triad of mimetic processes. More specifically, one's most immediate desire or 'intention for happiness' mediates substances and contexts by taking advantage of the asymmetrical relationship that is inevitably created in interactions between two or more actors. The metaphor, consisting of 'intention for happiness', 'power' and 'norm', can explain being in a variety of ways (Eco 1999) by taking into account one's crude and immediate desire, which is evoked receptively than proactively (Ricoeur 1990/1992).

Since these desires are crude and immediate in everyday practical settings, one rarely establishes them discursively. For human beings, crude and immediate desire causes a rather perplexing problem. Probably, many people may agree that the desire of human beings is for survival or needs for subsistence (e.g., Maslow's hierarchy of needs). However, this is not as straightforward as might be thought. With regard to survival, species other than human beings do not have desire but are just born and die in their own ways. Probably, some may object that dogs and cats have an intention for survival. I will not deny this. The lack of desire of any other species than human beings for survival is actually the lack of volitional interpretation, specifically through language. No sooner has one said 'desire' than it starts resisting one or threatening one with such a word as '(un)fulfillment'. The same applies to survival and needs for subsistence. The former immediately starts by asking with what means, with what capacities and competencies, can it be secured and the latter would ask how much of what for how long, all of which are not simple questions to answer.



As was mentioned, one rarely establishes desire discursively. Therefore, this is not a problem of language but a problem of human intellectual faculties, involving the perceptive and cognitive systems. It may sound contradictory to what I have just said that human beings' desire is desire for interpretation with language. What I mean by desire for interpretation with language is that language is a consequence of innate and immutable desire and resistance to it, which the anticipation of the next moment(s) forces us to manage by interpreting a variety of encounters and surroundings. Fortunately or unfortunately, human beings anticipate, meaning that they know there will come the next moment(s), rather than this present moment being the end of their lives. Human beings' immediate and crude desire is receptively evoked by the innate and immutable faculty of anticipating.

What this receptivity of desire means is that there exists no such thing as the absolute foundation of self which tends to be seen as the bearer of one's desire, motivation, personality or identity. Self is in a sense a metaphor created for the sake of denotation such that one can set the beginning of her/his stories. It never represents the origin of consciousness or the mind or one's pursuit thereof. Therefore, both self and being are genuinely *flatus vocis* (Eco 1999). This is why it is not feasible to talk of the issues concerning the power/rule constitution in ways that pursue any absolute target of attribution with regard to either source of power or bearers of responsibility; hence, I invoke the metaphor consisting of 'intention for happiness', 'power' and 'norm' as a tentative target of attribution. Moreover, 'intention for happiness' that mediates substantive and contextual meanings by means of 'power' and 'norm' denotes processes by which one sets the limits of interpretation by just paying attention to being or self

that is actually *forced to be said* in the course or as a result of the innate and immutable thus receptively evoked pursuit of happiness.

‘Power’ and ‘norm’ cannot be separated from each other. They are two sides of the same coin. While ‘power’ pursues by means of metaphorical understanding the maximum extension of one’s interpretation about happiness, ‘norm’ constricts it by means of contextual relevance assessed in relation to other actors. The triad of mimetic processes nests and is nested by both metaphorical expansion and contextual constriction. Stories that ‘power’ nests in it seek to confine interpretation within contexts as they define, and thus self-fulfill. In contrast, within ‘norm’ as contextual constriction on interpretation, the metaphorical expansion nested in it further constricts interpretation by means of the globally accepted ways of interpreting such metaphorical understandings. Both ‘power’ and ‘norm’ are predisposed to segment particular ways of interpretation by reinforcing each other (the metaphorical expansion to expand ‘disciplinary matrices’ and the contextual constriction to be furthered by constricting ‘disciplinary practices’ [Clegg 1989]).

Considering the ubiquity of power and norm in organizations and the multiplicity of variance in actors’ interests, concerns, competencies and capabilities, what is happening in organization through the power/rule constitution along the meaning-interpretation nexus needs to be revisited more seriously. Specifically, the totalizing effects of the power/rule constitution on each individual actor are far more severe than one may expect, given certain degrees of freedom in respect of each one’s pursuit of better interpretation of happiness in the interpretive or discursive spaces.

Accordingly, the ubiquitously observed resistance to power needs to be re-interpreted. As some previous studies exemplified, resistance is often observed to appropriate meaning and interpretation from within the same power/norm framework (Brown and Humphreys 2006, da Cunha and Orlikowski 2007). Such intricate processes entailed in the phenomenon of resistance can be interpreted with the framework consisting of ‘intention for happiness’, ‘power’ and ‘norm’, not as effects of language but as processes by which each one’s intention for happiness is being pursued in ways that fulfill both the metaphorically expansive and the contextually constricting interpretation of happiness.

The re-interpretation in this way suggests, on the one hand, that each one’s being can be silenced fairly cruelly in the sense that the sources of power and norm cannot be attributed to any one particular actor or entity. On the other hand, when the same could-be silenced being is observed to be expressed in one way or another, it is possible from such events and phenomena observable in data to account for the mechanisms by which the power/rule constitution operates along the meaning-interpretation nexus. Utterances as particular denotations of reality are, in other words, to be seen as certain patterned dispositions which actors act out based on their respectively obtained sense of relevance, rather than being mere effects of language.

Accounting for the mechanisms by which the power/rule constitution operates along the meaning-interpretation nexus from particular denotations of reality seems to be of critical importance for theorizing better organizing. It is so in the sense that different actors, including analysts/observers, might be able to come up with practically relevant assumptions and principles with which to explain reality denoted in mundane utterances

by accounting for processes by which each one obtains a sense of relevance, rather than by attributing the denoted reality to anyone's reasons or purposes. The sense of relevance that drives the power/rule constitution and that is obtained along the triadic processes as are depicted as the metaphor comprised of 'intention for happiness', 'power' and 'norm' entails sources of social orderliness; or, in other words each one's orientation towards being good in terms of precise understandings of matters/substances, in relation to other actors (contextual relevance), and/or in pursuit of one's evaluative/moral appropriateness.

In order to make explicit the sources of social orderliness embedded in the metaphor comprised of 'intention for happiness', 'power' and 'norm', the triadic processes of interpreting reality will be put into interactions between two or more actors by drawing upon the concept of 'ethics as practice' (Clegg, Kornberger and Rhodes 2007). One's pursuit of appropriate interpretation of happiness by means of 'power' and 'norm' is actually a practice of ethics in which two or more actors each imaginatively construct reality by interpreting each other's denotations of reality. The different relevancies that are obtained through the triadic processes are indeed the key criteria for ethics in everyday practices.

What is to be noted is, however, the fact that presentation and interpretation of reality occur in an alternate and diegetic manner. Ethics is being practiced in ways that each one allows others to understand/interpret one's denotation of reality in their own ways, such that interactions/conversations are kept going, rather than constrained. Mundane practices are ethical to the extent that diverse realities of as many actors as possible are made observable. It is assumed that practically relevant explanations about reality are

likely to be obtained by enriching conversations/interactions between actors who each are oriented towards being good, and by accounting for processes in which each one reads one's evaluative/moral sentiments into others' denotation of reality.

### *5.2.2 Conceptualizing the triad of mimetic processes as a practice of ethics*

The metaphor comprised of 'intention for happiness', 'power' and 'norm', which operates on the logic of the triad of mimetic processes, can be translated into an analytical framework with which to analyze mundane discursive practices as a sphere in which ethics play out through the practical judgments of actors on a variety of structuring properties, including their own and others' capacities to appropriate such structuring properties. Understanding the power/rule constitution along the meaning-interpretation nexus by incorporating the concept of ethics as practice is important, first and foremost, for explicating the linkages between the triad of mimetic processes, which is in principle about interpretation thus easily misunderstood as effects of language, and material reality which is to be made sense of by interpretation along the triad of mimetic processes. Interpretation is social practice that involves 'bodily patterns, routinized mental activities – forms of understanding, know-how (here including grammar and pragmatic rules of use), and motivation – and above all, objects (from sounds to computers) that are linked to each other' (Reckwitz 2002: 255).

According to the concept of ethics as practice, ethics is a form of practice (Clegg et al. 2007), and practice does not provide any universally applicable meaning whether it is ethical and normative or referential and descriptive (Bourdieu 1990). Subscribing firmly to the relational contextuality of practice, it would become theoretically impossible to assume, as given, any abstract concept the ontological predicate of which is yet to be

located, such as the human mind. This is because assuming so violates the relational contextuality of meanings in the realm of social practices. What the mind denotes varies from one actor to another at different points in time and space. Put simply, the human mind also needs to be understood as cumulative consequences of acting: no action, no human mind. As has been presented, the triad of mimetic processes is thus suitable for operationalizing the concept of ethics as practice. It does not assume the existence of the mind, self, being, or any abstract concept as an entity with fixed identity. Rather, it enables analysis of the intricate processes by which actors make sense of reality in accordance with substantive and contextual relevance and create a sense of relevance at a particular point in time and space by mediating these different relevancies.

In addition to the ability to account for practices without presuming any foundational evidence, rule or principle, the analytical framework based on the triadic metaphor has its strength in the involvement of actors' capacity to take advantage of the asymmetrical relationships that are inevitably created as two or more actors interact. As has already been explained in the previous section (5.2.1), communication or interactions between two or more actors are enabled by each one's imaginatively reconstructing reality, including concerned actors' intentions and goals, by reference to other's denotations of reality or actions. Thus, actions or denotations of reality are not necessarily made in order to represent reality as precisely as possible. The triadic metaphor, thus, does not explain how each actor denotes her/his ontological reality as precisely as possible but rather why and how s/he is urged to denote it even if s/he knows that s/he cannot say everything about her/his ontological reality.

It is, therefore, important to understand why and how interpretation of reality cannot deal directly with ontological reality at a particular point in time and space; despite this, how and why can we manage reality with each other's denotation of reality? The weak teleology of the act of denoting reality is the key. The weak teleology refers to the virtual impossibility for an utterer to hold her/himself accountable for her/his own utterances. First, whether or not one proceeds to denoting reality is a chance event, thus, cannot be predicted, even if one's 'intention for happiness' motivates one towards denoting reality by means of 'power' and 'norm'. Second, since an utterer is supposed to make assumptions about how her/his ideas, feelings or subjective reality can be presented to others before uttering, it is difficult to determine whether an utterer utters her/his words according to her/his motivations, reasons and goals or assumed audiences allow or ask her/him to utter them in such a way that is logically coherent, plausible or acceptable (see also Chapter 4). Third, the blurred boundaries in terms of the accountability for each one's utterances indicates that while particular rules to which actors collectively subscribe are necessary for them to issue utterances, compliance with such rules does not, as given, guarantee any common understanding of reality shared between actors. Rather, regardless of words expressed in utterances, it is each actor, as a reader, who makes judgments on relevance of each other's reality. Fourth, the seemingly irresponsible act of denoting a reality that one does not hold oneself accountable for one's denotations enables these to retain linkages with the material world. They are less contaminated or rather less over-purified by utterers' reasons and purposes. It is always audiences/readers who hear/read others' utterances as if they were issued with particular motivations, intentions and/or goals.

Overall, the weak teleology of the act of denoting reality enables checks on denoted reality by reference to a sense of appropriateness of each reader in terms of her/his ontological reality. Such checks are intersubjective in that one cannot directly see one's own act of denoting reality but can only know some aspects of it from others' responses. Besides, the intersubjective checks not only associate mutually independent denotation of reality with one another but also culminate in particular rules or patterns of denotation based on each one's skills and knowledge to (re)construct reality imaginatively by reference to others' denotation of reality.

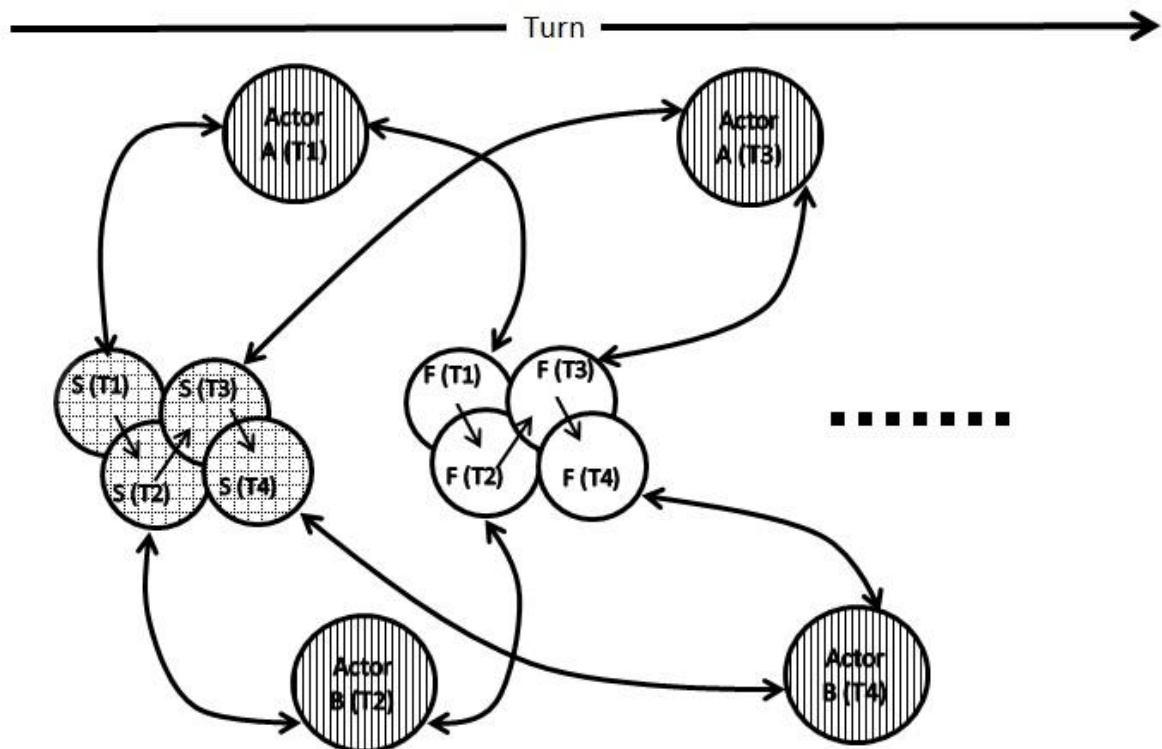
A critical feature that we tend to overlook is the significance of turns we make and take (Boden 1994). Actors are engaged with mutually independent activities. The triad of mimetic processes and its nesting and nested structure explain that the processes of organizing are not self-contained continuous processes but are punctuated by turns in which each one imaginatively constructs continuous processes by mediating the substantive and the contextual understandings into meaningful wholes. In other words, there are no such continuous processes of organizing. When we believe we are observing processes of organizing, we are actually mediating mutually independent processes into meaningful wholes, taking into account the substances denoted in and the contexts connoted by observed events and phenomena. Reality is captured as if it were a series of snapshots of events and phenomena while it is actually *constructed* in a diegetic manner (Cunliffe, Luhman and Boje 2004).

Figure 5.2 below illustrates diegetic processes of organizing between two actors (Actor A and Actor B) by which social practices, meanings/interpretation, and self are given shape. T1 to T4 denotes turns taken by the actors at different points in time, where each



actor engages with the triadic processes comprised of Actor (mediating function), S (substantive understanding), and F (Form: embodied assumptions about responses from others). The triadic processes may take place either in the realm of Practice, Substance or Self as shown in Figure 4.1 in Chapter 4 and the site may be different between these actors, or between the turns they take. Specifically, while the Actor A in the turn T1 may be interested in presenting herself in front of Actor B, Actor B in turn T2 may wish to figure out what is going on, to ponder about her selfhood, or to come up with appropriate responses to Actor A. Hence, these actors are only loosely coupled with their respective substantive understandings and each other's embodied assumptions about each other's responses. This looseness, in turn, suggests that interactions are possible irrespective of geographical or historical proximity between actors.

**Figure 5.2 Model of diegetic organizing (dyad)**



Since every turn brings about changes, albeit that they may be trivial, S (T1) to S (T4) and F (T1) to F (T4) are all different between the actors and also between the turns. They are, however, overlapping because we rarely invent meanings of substances and forms of presentation from scratch; thus, these may or may not constitute diegeses depending on whether or not actors taking subsequent turns imaginatively associate the preceding turn(s) with one another when finding them to be of relevance at particular points in time and space. When we recognize some collective actions and/or shared values between two or more actors, we are looking at these forms (F [T1] to F [T4]) and substantive meanings (S [T1] to S [T4]) by grouping them, with our capacity of imagination, mostly being unaware of their diegetic accumulation.

Each of the turns in Figure 5.2 denotes the triad of mimetic processes by which three different meanings are produced and reality plotted by each individual actor. As was mentioned in Chapter 4, every plot is unique. Thus, even if one observes similar or mostly identical plots to recur and either produce similar substantive meanings or to present similar ways of denotation, we should not ignore the existence of one who mediates such similar substances or ways of denotation into particular meaningful wholes in ways that are deemed appropriate to one at a particular point in time and space. As has been presented thus far, utterances are not issued aiming at denoting reality as precisely as possible. Rather, they are consequences of one's enacting the triad of mimetic processes, which enables one to present hypotheses largely grounded in what others might agree about reality, both in terms of substance and context. It is, however, important to understand that despite such reliance on what and how others might see reality, making utterances is motivated, even if the teleology is weak, by each one's 'intention for happiness' or awareness of one's being in particular surroundings.

Accordingly, ethics as practice can be understood in a triadic manner. Remember that communication or interactions between two or more actors are enabled by each one's imaginative reconstruction of reality by reference to others' actions or denotations of reality. In so doing, each one refers to the substantive aspects of reality and varying contexts, and mediates these into particular meaningful wholes. We each pursue the maximum extension of our interpretation of reality and voluntarily constrict it by pursuing consensual validation with others. In addition, each person is supposed to experience a sense of evaluative appropriateness at a particular point in time and space even if it is rarely established discursively. Furthermore, those triadic ways of making sense of reality are practiced in interaction settings. Ethics being practiced can be seen as a more subtly nuanced reciprocation of mutual obligations.

The ethics that each actor as an utterer is practicing is about how one accounts for one's truth in ways that induce readers' engaged ways of reading it. This seemingly self-interested attitude towards one's utterances is actually considerateness to others because reading others' (utterers') truths enrich readers' ways of constructing reality (see also Chapter 4). In other words, the act of issuing an utterance is full of the utterer's sense of moral correctness *in relation to other actors*, rather than self-interested desire for satisfying her/his 'intention for happiness'. Social reality is thus managed through each *believing* that their denotation of reality is true to the extent that it contributes to enriching *others'* ways of (re)constructing reality on an assumption that they could see one's denotation to be relevant to the extent that their truths could be read into it.

In turn, what readers do is to reconstruct reality. Why do readers need to reconstruct reality for whom? Simply, readers are commanded to do so for better understanding

readers' own reality by reference to others' denoted reality. Since readers reconstruct reality by reading their realities into reality that is denoted by others, readers are commanded to read, precisely speaking, by words, rather than by utterers. In other words, from the moment of uttering and onward, an utterer entrusts words for speaking her/his truth in ways that command others to read her/his truth. The *act* of issuing utterances, rather than the contents of utterances, is ethical because utterers accept others' reading uttered words in *their* own ways, such that readers are expected to denote subsequently their realities in ways that induce their audiences' engaged reading. This chain of telling truth, not respective actors' truths, can be understood as *parrhesia* (Foucault 1999). The key is not whether or not a certain chain of utterances is true or ethical but to understand that utterances are checked intersubjectively while each one's interpretation is inevitably affected by the fact that one normally acts as both an utterer and a reader: rational readers who, if in varying ways, assume one another's rationality rarely think of the impossibility of imposing such rational assumptions on their audiences when they act as utterers.

By applying the triad of mimetic processes and the alternate and diegetic successions between reading and uttering, it becomes manifest that ethics as practice is structured by a norm of answerability in Bakhtin's terms (1993, also Burr 2009, Holmes 2010, Nielsen 2002). Honesty or sincerity, either to one's immediate feelings or denotation is indeed illusion or, at best, retrospectively fabricated reasons for actions because one can only know of aspects of one's own act of uttering from others' responses that one cannot control. It is impossible to fulfill moral obligations for one's act of uttering no matter how rationally one may believe oneself to be acting. Positive ethical quality

embedded in mundane discursive practices resides in utterers' (and accordingly readers') readiness for any unintended consequences.

Considering such an intricate relationship between readers and authors that define ethics as is practiced through the alternate successions between reading and uttering, the power of words that can be understood in a triadic manner is typically significant in terms of the mediating function. As quasi-substances or resources, words enable actors to obtain, if temporarily, a sense of permanence by defining the world with mutually non-contradictory identities. A simple fact that one manages to denote reality in a certain way is evidence that one exercised power, even if inadvertently, by freezing time to derive certain laws or principles that can be valid regardless of temporal contingencies. At the same time, however, one must have pursued contextual relevance of one's denotation, meaning that words enable one to imagine one's denotation in the flow of time by their being associated into particular sequential orders. As such, words provide contextual information with the surplus of denotation provided by particular ways of denotation or appearances/styles. As the surplus of denotation indicates, words enunciated in particular ways are capable of commanding others' reading, and it is readers who interpret substantive and contextual information by reading their experiences, including sense of evaluative/moral appropriateness, into the enunciated words. Thus, words actually mediate authors and readers by providing a kind of open space in which respective experiences are projected including a sense of evaluative/moral appropriateness. As was indicated by the *parrhesiastic* chain of the acts of telling truth and the norm of answerability that guide ethics as practice, those distinct agencies that words bestow need to be appreciated in order to understand ethics as practice by examining mundane discursive practices.

By appreciating those agencies of words in a triadic manner, words can be analyzed as both quasi-substances and stories. The mediating function of words exemplifies, according to the triadic processes, how mundane discursive practices define and redefine relationships by allowing actors to make use of the distinct predispositions between utterances as things ('power') and those as stories ('norm') in terms of orientations for deducing the manifold of possible interpretation about reality. The former is more oriented toward generality and universality; the latter toward successful completion of interactions with others. To obtain a sense of universality and generality, what is important is to find out substitutable things, events, phenomena, qualities and words regardless of varying contexts. In contrast, to conclude interactions with others successfully, one usually needs to rely on richer descriptions chiefly with words, i.e., stories. Hence, it is important to see utterances (as data) to enfold the triad of mimetic processes in a nesting and nested manner. Utterances are not mere effects of language but particular dispositions acted out by particular actors who establish actionable hypotheses along the triad of mimetic processes.

By dealing with text data as both quasi-substances (synchrony) and stories or story fragments (diachrony), power relations that are embedded in discourses can be identified and analyzed in a systematic manner. The former enables analysis of extant power structures by means of actors' usages of words whose meanings have broader extensions, thus, interpretation of which are relatively stable between different actors. The latter is only possible by analysts' identifying proper protagonist(s) of data who associate(s) heterogeneous properties into particular meaningful wholes. This seemingly arbitrary imagination of analysts is actually critical to address the irremediable power imbalances not only because it engages analysts with their subjects' reality but also

because it offers the subjects possible alternative ways of reconstructing their realities. Since power imbalances are irremediable, it is more important to appreciate them than to pretend they were solvable problems.

To appreciate such insoluble problems as power imbalances is, nonetheless, neither better nor worse than to identify and solve many other solvable problems. It is about confronting difficult moral choices, which conventional science or even ordinary people appear to presume in positive terms, thus, rarely tackle. As has been suggested above and will be substantiated below, people are concerned with evaluative/moral appropriateness, regardless of whether they focus more on relationships with substances or with other actors (contexts). Exercising power in pursuit of a sense of permanence is no less ethical than voluntarily constraining oneself and/or others for consensual validation. As the alternate successions between reading and uttering explain, denotation of reality or actions in general are read by readers in ways that read *readers'* experiences into them. Confronting difficult moral choices is, thus, not becoming reflective of and accounting for one's evaluative/moral appropriateness, which is virtually impossible, but rather offering each other opportunities to read and possibly express something about one's experiences in some ways based on one's evaluative/moral sentiments.

The following analyses will present (1) how to deal with text data as both synchrony and diachrony and its applicability to mundane discursive practices and effectiveness in examination of the power/rule constitution along the meaning-interpretation nexus; (2) the significance of the empowering capacity of reading in ways that imaginatively nurture, rather than eliminate, ambiguity and uncertainty, which inevitably lie behind

each mundane examination of evaluative/moral appropriateness; and (3) how analysts can confront such difficult moral choices as power imbalances to increase the practical relevance of theories produced through analyses of organizations. It is necessary to pay attention to each one's mundane evaluative/moral sentiments. However, it is more important to deal with them as they are practiced in interactions between two or more actors. Since power is exercised by everyone, the problems of irremediable power imbalances do not concern a variety of resources and endowments that will never be distributed evenly or even in a fair manner but concern varying degrees of thickness in experiences of power, experiences that are diluted if we invoke the conventional scientific methods for causations. Social analyses that interpret others' interpretation need to prepare alternative ways of contributing to both social welfare and individual wellbeing, rather than solving particular problems, by orienting them to more difficult or virtually unresolvable questions, such as which society is fairer, how a more equitable society can be materialized, or how moral one can or ought to be?

### **5.3 Plot and metaphor: two stories**

#### ***5.3.1 A patterned disposition: Practicing ethics***

As presented in Chapter 4, it was observed in the Forum that the participants attempted to establish their positive identity through participation. Since it was positive, the messages carried the participants' evaluative preferences and/or normative appropriateness. The contexts to which such evaluative preferences and normative appropriateness can be applied are at times empirically confined to the Forum and, at other times are outside the Forum, i.e., the participants' real world workplaces and general environment surrounding the Company. Such positive identity by reference to



the different contexts was established through the messages posted to the Forum (although such reading is mine).

The following analyses explicate how I read the messages as observable dispositions that the participants acted out to establish positive identity and particular norms established through participation in the Forum. Specifically, the presentation of the data focuses on the participants' substantive and contextual understandings generated from each going through the triad of mimetic processes. Underlying these observable dispositions is each participant's attempt to make sense of reality, in principle, by means of metaphorical understandings of things, events and phenomena. Hence, even if the participants appeared to be collectively concerned with other participants (caring for fellow associates) and/or themselves (their own identity), their denotation of reality was in principle stabilizing substantive understandings of their negative experiences arising from the bankruptcy. In other words, the messages were issued when the participants found things, events and phenomena problematic, including subjective mental experiences and some other stories denoted in the messages, by means of which each one could make better sense of reality by identifying similarity/dissimilarity and, thus, a certain degree of generality.

Despite the significance of metaphor or substitutable stories, the participants also paid attention to whom they were talking to, primarily for concluding interactions with others satisfactorily (see also Chapter 3). Out of concerns with successful interactions with others emerge norms that were in principle applicable to the Forum. The norms so established could, however, be utilized for appealing to the positive identity toward people outside the Forum and/or the Company. As such, the participants'

understandings of reality in terms of substance and context appear to be related to each other and it is difficult to separate them. These two distinct kinds of understandings nest and are nested by each other. The analyses that follow exemplify such ways in which the triad of mimetic processes nest and are nested by one another in observable norms. By so doing, they aim to show (1) how each actor is practicing ethics by mediating substantive coherence and contextual appropriateness and, (2) how analysts can read processes by which certain norms are emerging by understanding that the utterances they observe are dispositions acted out by their research subjects along the triad of mimetic processes. What is to be noted is that the triad of mimetic processes, metaphorically denoted as ‘intention for happiness’, ‘power’ and ‘norm’, helps analysts supplement information that is not present by that which is presented to them.

The presentation begins with the participants’ emotional states, especially excitement in terms of both delight and resentment, as one of the patterned dispositions, which the participants thought similar to others’ experiences and thus somehow generalizable. The participants’ emotional states were chosen for analysis because sensemaking is supposed to be motivated by emotions as well as by rational goal-seeking motivations (Fineman 1996, Hatch 1997, Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld 2005). It is also assumed that the emotional aspects found in the participants’ disposition tell us more vividly about the participants’ desire to manage their anxieties arising from the bankruptcy and the subsequent reorganization. In other words, showing particular emotional dispositions involves the participants’ evaluative preferences and normative appropriateness. Specifically, in the Forum, excitement in terms of delight appeared to outweigh that in terms of resentment.

For instance, by remembering past memories with the Company, contrasting them with the ongoing hardships, the participants appeared somewhat joyful and became even positive as shown in the conversation in the table below. They appeared somewhat cheerful about past memories in which they had to engage in absurdly overwhelming workloads chiefly attributable to the technologies available then that are, no doubt, outdated in the present context. Following the first poster who remembered that ‘*We had to price all ad items*’ without ‘*use[ing] UPC<sup>1</sup> codes*’, the next one said that ‘*yeah we USED to have FUN!*’, and the third one even went on to state that ‘*It was a good time, the store was well run, I'm glad I worked there It was good training*’.

### **Table 5.1 Appreciation of the past experiences**

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*Oh my gosh! Forgot about pin ticketing! [...] How they used to build up on that pin ticket! We had to price all ad items. Imagine doing that now! There have been a lot of improvements over the years. We didn't even use UPC codes!* (14/2/2002 at 03:20PM by buick15)

*I remember those things, [...] yeah we USED to have FUN!* (14/2/2002 at 03:22PM by km21881)

*It was a good time, the store was well run, I'm glad I worked there It was good training.* (14/2/2002 at 04:48PM by belaire17)

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In expressing their happiness by remembering the past, some effects on a more substantive aspect, such as their positive identity, also appear to be involved. The messages above indicate that the posters appreciate their experiences as frontline retail

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<sup>1</sup> Universal Product Code

workers with the Company, as implied especially in the third one. Also the third comment appears to show the poster's emotional attachment to and appreciation for the Company's ways of management in the past that he believed made competent retail workers as implied in the last sentence: '*It was good training*'. Hence, in addition to somehow venting frustration by talking about something cheerful, all of the posters appeared to assume that they shared memories and the present frustration with one another. The example above thus connotes the posters' evaluative appropriateness based on the substantive understandings about their respective past experiences as well as denoting their emotional states positively.

As such, the evaluative preferences or normative appropriateness with regard to the presentation of their emotional states appeared to influence the participants' rational judgments on substantive issues. Specifically, excitement in either positive or negative terms carry the participants' respectively established assumptions about both substantive and contextual understandings; when such assumptions were considered to be corroborated through activities in the Forum, such as reading others' messages or receiving responses more or less directly addressed to one's preceding messages, further excitement in positive terms was presented. In this way, emotional dispositions and rational judgments in tandem constituted a particular normative appropriateness in the Forum.

The interrelation between the substantive and the contextual understandings in respect of the establishment of particular norms is important because it represents actors' competences in making sense of reality not only by establishing the substantive and the contextual understandings of reality but also by taking into consideration normative

appropriateness. The significance of the normative consideration becomes more explicit when they presented their resentment, thus negative emotional dispositions.

**Table 5.2 Examples of emotional dispositions**

---

*Our customers will never understand the obstacles that we have faced over the years as we tried to deliver the best possible shopping experience to them without the proper tools, [...]. It is our senior management's responsibility to address the needs of our stores and how we can best serve our customers. [...] we MUST stop treating our associates as an expense and realize that they are an ASSET. [...] I apologize for my sarcasm, it is how I translate my passion for this company and the anger that I feel as I watch our executives destroy us from within. [...]*

10/3/2002, at 10:03PM, by wuzsickoXXXXXX2002

*Three Cheers!*

*Right On! You have said it all.*

10/03/02, at 10:26PM, by inforapenny1

*Thank you, wuz. You hit the nail right on the head.*

*[...] Thanks.*

10/3/2002, at 10:18PM, by crazyXX2001

*So please I ask of you (a poster who seemed to be a customer pointing out some problems in his shopping experiences at one of the stores of the Company) to think of all the reasons that something might not being done and not always assume that we are lazy and careless and don't want to do things the correct way.*

10/3/2002, at 03:39PM, by purple\_unicorn\_4

*I agree totally. [...] We can't run on smiles and sorry's for long!*

The examples of emotional dispositions shown in Table 5.2 illustrate more explicitly than the previous examples that these posters are carrying substantive assumptions about experiences sharable with each other, even in the short affirmative rejoinders. Those rejoinders showed that the posters happened to come across messages that they believed confirmed in the affirmative their assumptions about the negative experiences with customers that they thought was caused by the ways by which the Company was managed. As for the first quasi-conversation, the initial post elaborated the situation where *'associates [were treated] as an expense'* while they *'tried to deliver the best possible shopping experience to them (customers) without the proper tools'*. This poster's *'passion for this company and the anger that I feel as I watch our executives destroy us from within'* appeared to corroborate the subsequent posters' emotional states as well as their substantive understandings about the ways in which the Company had been managed in the recent past.

As for the second quasi-conversation, the second poster's rejoinder to the initial poster's plea for *'not always assum[ing] that we are lazy and careless and don't want to do things the correct way'* indicates that they shared the sentiments that customers or the general public might project negative images toward them and/or the Company without knowing *'all the reasons that something might not being done'* nor the employees' *'run[ning] on smiles'* to deliver appropriate customer service. These posters thus mutually enabled each other to denote the negative emotional states grounded in their substantive understandings that store-level employees committed themselves to delivering best customer services. As such, substantive assumptions held by the posters,

which are in principle outcomes of mutually independent actors' attempts at making sense of reality, were confirmed mutually and such confirmation, at the same time, even allowed them to present negative emotional dispositions.

As observed in the two quasi-conversations, their assumptions about ethical judgments are again nesting and nested by one another. Specifically, since the posters were unlikely to doubt if their affirmation of others' reality might be wrongly assumed, or in some cases, they might understand that they were rendering each other psychological support, their beliefs that they must be doing something good to each other appeared to be reinforcing. As such, the posters' substantive and contextual understandings are interrelated to each other, with particular normative appropriateness established in ways that each reinforced the other's sense of evaluative appropriateness in terms of the substantive understandings (similar thus generalizable experiences and the ways of making sense of substantive aspects of reality) and the contextual relevancy represented by their showing considerateness to each other.

Notwithstanding the examples in which the participants' beliefs in normative appropriateness appeared to be reinforcing by means of the mutually confirmed substantive understandings of reality, with regard to the relationships with customers or the general public, the participants' considerations for expressing emotional states appeared intricate. In the Forum, a variety of episodes with customers in which the posters seemed to be frustrated chiefly by the customers' insensitive behaviors was presented, such as coughing in the cashier's face, their ways of handing money at the check-out register, requests for re-counting after the completion of check-out, messing up shopping bags instead of having them packed by the cashier, and so on. While

sometimes showing resentment directly about such experiences with customers as presented in the previous examples, the participants in the Forum also occasionally made fun of these behaviors by customers rather satirically. It seems that the customer relations are filled with tensions possibly caused by the closeness of retail workers to their customers. Jobs in retailing, at least at its front stage, are visible to customers because going shopping is almost an essential part of everyone's daily life. Hence, the participants as retail workers appeared sensible about their customers as people who could relatively easily make assumptions about retail workers (as was shown in the examples above) as well as being the primary source of income for the industry. Hence, one of the participants said that:

*'My pet peeve is the inability to provide the personal attention every customer wants, expects, needs and deserves when they walk through the doors of our store'* (7/2/2002 at 04:28AM by yardngardn), and, another stated that:

*'We have to take a lot from the customers on a daily basis, for things that we can't control. We are the ones who have to deal with that angry customer on a daily basis. [...] We have had to fight stereotypes of retail employees for a long time. [The Company]'s image is not real positive right now, and we as employees don't want to be associated with low lifes who just want to cause trouble'* (8/2/2002 by XX4361nj).

As such, the participants who were confronted by anxiety and uncertainty methodically attempted to strike the balance between generalizable substantive understandings of their day-to-day experiences and appropriate ways of denoting their reality by paying attention even to those who might not share their sentiments, experiences and, in



general, reality of the Company, such as customers and the general public. It is apparent that the existence of interlocutors that the participants assumed could share each other's experiences made it easier for them to manage to denote reality and post messages to the Forum. Nonetheless, what is more important is the ways in which the participants paid attention to both the substantive and the contextual issues *by reading others' messages*. In other words, they never uncritically intended to expand their interpretation of reality only based on their individually established assumptions about the substitutability of each other's similar experiences but often each voluntarily constricted their interpretation, which were disposed to be expanding, by reference to what other participants said. Their assumptions were checked intersubjectively, meaning that they each were practicing ethics.

The next example shows that the participants became concerned about possible disruptions to their communications because of the inevitably negative influences of presenting their non-positive experiences. In the Forum, negative messages were not rejected simply because of the negativity but generally accepted as a measure through which to vent their frustrations. However, the participants occasionally became aware that exchanges of negative messages could potentially turn out to be *'insults and petty vituperations'* (5/2/2002 by Englishteacher33). In other words, the participants each managed to understand reality in ways that were preferable to them and that insured appropriateness of their ways of presenting experiences that they believed were true, chiefly by reading others' messages. To confirm such diegetic ways of establishing particular norms as well as making sense of substantive aspects of reality, a thread of messages will be presented below.

**Table 5.3 Ethics being practiced**

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From: thill68

Date: Tue, 22 Jan 2002 15:05:40

Subject: HR

*I am going to vent a little here.*

*I don't get what the animosity is about toward the HR in the stores. Everyone keeps saying that the HR managers do not get "down and dirty" with associates on the floor.*

*[...] I know that I was hired for my HR education and experience. To be perfectly honest, my retail experience is limited. [...] I don't see HR professionals or office workers going out on the factory floors. I don't see how this is any different.*

---

From: moviestuff69

Date: Wed, 23 Jan 2002 15:18:16

*Our HR does work at the service desk, checkout and layaway, but she bitches about it all the time. We were told that with the "layoffs" everyone would have to pitch in and help. She had no HR experience or training when she took the position. She was hired from within. [...] I believe that a very important prerequisite for the Human Resources position is to be "human". [...]*

*I don't know any of you here on this board, so I wouldn't want anyone to take this personally, as I am glad to FINALLY have an outlet for some of my frustrations, [...] I'm a little tired of people thinking an office position is any better than any*

---

*other position. We are told daily that [...] we work for [the Company]. There is no I in teamwork! WHEW! Sorry for that outburst, I feel a little better now.*

---

From: cust\_rulz

Date: Wed, 23 Jan 2002 15:56:51

*No one is saying the[y're] any better than anyone. Just stating that there is a lot that goes on behind the scenes. [...] That's [...] because it's a lot of confidential things they don't want everybody involved in.*

From: elwhoppo99

Date: Wed, 23 Jan 2002 16:15:50

*Unfortunately, the statement about not working for one department is sort'a true, [...]. I hear your frustrations though and that's a major part of what's wrong with the way [the Company] have been run in the past. 1 person doing the work of 2 or 3, for 1 person's wage. [...] Bare Bones Staffing! Whatever the ramifications are for the current situation, it is still somewhat confined to those above store [...]. If [the Company] is to recover, the "Employee Relations" issues must be addressed. [...] it is worth hanging in there to see if any of it is going to be Employee Oriented. [...]. I loved my job at [the Company], [...] (Happy Employee = Happy Customer). That is and should be the (New) "Bottom Line"!!*

From: inquizitiv2002

Date: Wed, 23 Jan 2002 19:07:10

*Outbursts happen...better here than at work. It's easy to make assumptions about each other since we do know one another. But it would be unwise for anyone to assume that because we complain on the board, we do nothing but complain at work. On the contrary, sometimes after spending the day doing precisely what we are all encouraging each other to do - sometimes in the face of incredible negativity, hostility or seemingly insurmountable demands - we need to be able to relax our smile-stiffened faces, exhale and get it out of our systems. That is sometimes what enables us to stay strong for others being weak when we're alone. Point in case-I had a wee bit of a rough day myself today. Can you tell? My turn to say I'm sorry.*

From: inforapenny1

Date: Thu, 24 Jan 2002 12:56:33

*We have had some excellent HR people in the past though that worked everywhere within the store as well as doing their own job and doing it well!*

*I like that...There is no I in teamwork. :)*

From: jarmccoy1970

Date: Sun, 27 Jan 2002 12:46:09

*I agree. [...] I am in management but let me just say, if a team is behind, I grab a stack and pitch in. It does me no good to know people are behind (if they are). It does me good to know I helped where I could and everybody*

*did all they could even if we couldn't get everything done [w]hat needed to be.*

The thread starts with a complaint from the point of view of Human Relations' (HR) position regarding criticisms of HR or other office positions that are frequently posted to the Forum. Despite the varying concerns and interests among these posters, one of the themes running through this thread is that there should be ethical behavior reaching out, supporting others, regardless of formally assigned obligations.

In addition to this central ethical theme, what deserves attention is their considerateness for the possible influences of their words on others in the Forum. As a matter of normal practices in communication, it can be said that each one of these posters were fulfilling, either consciously or only practically consciously, requirements and obligations to define and actualize their interactions with others in order to conclude them satisfactorily, just as conversation analysts would explain. Besides such fulfillment of communicative obligations, in part due to the nature of the theme running through this thread, they demonstrated additional sensibility to the influences of their words on others by reference to more substantive issues in their respective ways. The third one attributed the general indifference of employees at the office positions to '*a lot of confidential things they don't want everybody involved in*' especially before announcing the company-wide reorganization, the fourth one related it to '*[the lack of] employee oriented*' HR policies. The sixth one appeared to be trying to moderate negative comments on HR and/or office people by saying that they used to have '*some excellent HR people in the past*', and the last one presented his personal value as one who was '*in management*' that would not allow him '*[not] to [extend assistance while] know[ing] people are behind [the schedule of their duties]*'.

The second post demonstrates that the poster paid attention carefully to the possible negative impacts that his words would bring about because he knew he was venting frustration and his words were specifically addressed to a certain category of people (HR and/or office positions). On the one hand, the poster expressed his gratitude for the Forum for it giving him a place to vent his frustration. In his words, *'I am glad to FINALLY have an outlet for some of my frustrations'*. This means that for him the Forum was the place where he could speak out what he thought he could not say in other places. On the other hand, he did not appear to believe that even in the Forum expressing his personal negative feelings was anything permissible without paying attention to the influences of his words on others as indicated in his excuses (*'Sorry for that outburst, I feel a little better now'*). He also stated that *'I don't know any of you here on this board, so I wouldn't want anyone to take this (his complaint about the attitudes of those who held office positions) personally'*. The post appears to indicate that (1) the poster considered that the Forum was beneficial for it allowed him to be more honest in his emotional outbursts, especially negative ones; thus, (2) he understood that the Forum would have to be managed carefully for it to be sustained.

In turn, the fifth poster (inquizitiv2002) talked almost exclusively about attitudes or norms to be subscribed to if they wanted to vent frustrations in the Forum. Starting with her acceptance for the second poster's excuse for venting frustration (*'Outbursts happen...better here than at work'*), the post posited in what ways she considered the participants were supposed to talk in the Forum. Noteworthy in this post is the co-existence of assumptions regarding both interactional obligations and the substantive issues concerning real world experiences.

The former concerns how the participants in the Forum mostly inadvertently made assumptions about their interlocutors. Since the majority of the participants were from the same company and experiencing more or less similar situations at their respective workplaces, it is possible for them to believe that they could relatively easily establish shared understandings through the communications in the Forum despite the fact that they did not know each other face-to-face. This non-conscious practice of assuming that others should be someone they mutually knew was considered to enhance their discursive interactions since they did not have to worry about possible misinterpretations about each other's utterances.

In the case of this example, the poster appeared to have become aware of the risk entailed in the assumption-laden communications, most likely reminded by the second poster's ways of discursively defining his words and possible influences for other participants. Specifically, her caution, '*to make assumptions about each other*', appears to indicate that communications, especially in such anonymous (or pseudonymous) contexts as the Forum, inevitably require carefulness about each participant's imagination, ways of reasoning, analogy, and so forth, for them to be concluded without unnecessary conflicts. In other words, she seemed to have understood that the relatively similar experiences or other background factors supposedly shared among the participants in the Forum would not automatically translate into mutual understandings. Rather, too much reliance on such assumptions that were made less carefully might invite conflicts; thus, making the Forum an unattractive place. The manner in which she justified on what grounds the participants, including herself, were supposed to be allowed to express their negative emotional outbursts seems to reflect her carefulness in this respect.

Despite such carefulness with regard to assumptions, it is more interesting to see that she herself left some assumptions unchecked about some substantive issues, such as the ‘*negativity*’ or ‘*hostility*’ she perceived directed at her and her colleagues from customers or the general public; what the participants were really doing in the Forum (‘*encouraging each other*’); acceptance of her ideas that venting frustrations were supposed to be allowed if not too negative; having a place and people where and by whom such outpourings could be heard was supposed to ‘*enable[s] us to stay strong*’. In other words, the poster managed to issue the message without having confirmed whether or not other participants, customers or the general public, could validate these substantive assumptions.

As we have already seen, the other posters appearing in this thread demonstrated varying interests in the substantive issues (the value of working beyond the formal boundaries of assignments and HR and/or office staffs’ indifference). Despite such variance, the substantive understandings appeared to be treated as being substitutable with each other less critically or left undebated so that these could be sequenced into stories in accordance with the posters’ respective sense of contextual relevancy. Thus, as the fifth post aptly represents, the example thread as a whole indicates that the posters rather independently made assumptions about both the substantive and the contextual relevance in ways that appropriate rather arbitrarily what others said. Hence, in this example, it seems that the posters’ attention to contextual relevance with regard to the ways of communicating with each other in the Forum was relatively smoothly materialized by dealing with stories or snippets of stories (others’ messages) interchangeably between substantive elements constituting stories and the context-defining devices. As a result, those messages that denoted reality independently appear



to have culminated in particular collective norms in the Forum. In other words, it appeared as if they could establish norm and subscribe to them collectively by independently reading others' denotation as being appropriate in terms of both substantive and contextual understandings.

Indeed, the diegetic relationship between posting and reading cannot be overemphasized. As we have seen, the posters demonstrated their ethical concerns as well as substantive and contextual relevancy. The co-existence of multiple dimensions of one's sense of evaluative appropriateness and the flexibly interchangeable treatments of others' words as substances and as a context-defining device seem to indicate that the poster's intentions for ethical conduct should be nothing like a synchronic application of particular criteria of ethicality to the two different kinds of understandings between substances and contexts. Rather, it is speculated that the posters each assumed a kind of unity read into others' messages. Such an assumption about the existence of certain unity remains unchecked unless they become aware of some implications for material reality alerted by their respective sense, which is unlikely to be predictable in any systematic way. For instance, although the fifth poster became aware of some of the assumptions that she and the other participants made, other assumptions remained unchecked. Despite the incompleteness with regard to her ethical considerations, especially in relation to customers and the general public, she managed to post the message. Thus, the poster's awareness of some assumptions observed in her message cannot explain why she proceeded to act (post messages), attributing it to her ethical considerations. Even if she was understood to intend to maintain the Forum as a kind of 'discursive refuge', the message cannot be seen as a representational device with which

to put her reality into words. One's reality may or may not be read by others in ways that one wishes.

The messages are actually not representation of the participants' reality even if it must have motivated them to post messages. No one can be sure whether a post was motivated by compassion for fellow associates, or by one who wished to mark awareness of the present by the act of issuing messages for existential reasons (see 'antenarrative' in Chapter 4). It is speculated that the posters managed to post messages as far as they could establish hypothetical inference about one's reality by reference to others' messages. In so doing, one attempts to apprehend substantive aspects of reality, such as utterers' states of mind, identity, competencies and purposes, and to obtain contextual information, such as where and to whom they are going to talk, and other possible audiences. By mediating these in reference to one's own sense of appropriateness, one will be able to establish some story-like wholes. Even if only hypothetical, as far as such wholes appear to be meaningful to the extent that they form a unity adequately, one can any time act out one's hypotheses.

Considering the unpredictability of when and why one proceeds to act and the significance of the hypothetical unity, it is speculated that the substantive understandings (things or quasi-things) matter. Substantive understandings provide actors with substantive resources without which one cannot author a story. These understandings are rather arbitrarily appropriated, as observed in the examples above. Moreover, one tends to ascribe one's faithfulness to one's substantive understandings. Although such faithfulness is less obvious in the examples above, the participants who were observed to be establishing their positive identity demonstrated more vividly how

the participants' sense of evaluative appropriateness projected their substantive understandings as significant in establishing the hypothetical unity, as below.

As already presented in the previous chapter, the participants in the Forum identified themselves as competent retail workers through participation in the Forum. For instance, some participants stated that they ' [...] *kn[e]w first hand what many of the problems are*' (8/2/2002 by XX4361nj). Others did so by contrasting their commitment to and knowledgeability of retailing with management's indifference as below.

*We're merchants. We sell stuff. Sales are what produce the profits, not some "slash and burn" executive. It's really very simple....put stuff on the shelves, have enough employees to keep it stocked, face it, find it, and ring it up. Keep the aisles uncluttered, the floor swept, and all the lights burning to create a pleasant appearance and the people will come, buy, and make everybody happy. Those of us in the stores understand all this. The folks in [the HQ] do not and that's why we're in the fix we're in. [...]* (17/2/2002 at 05:46AM by ecc1521)

*I loved my job at [the Company], it didn't pay worth a crap, but my areas of responsibility were always in the best of condition, (A personal goal). [...]* *But, the "Koonta Kinta" Management techniques, made it just about the most demoralizing job I have ever had in my life.* (24/1/2002 at 00:15AM by elwhoppo99)

Both of these excerpts exemplify the gap between what the participants as committed and competent retail workers believed they ought to do for the Company's benefits and what the Company's management had been doing. More specifically, these posts

illustrate that the denoted substantive understandings of the posters, together with their sense of moral correctness, distanced the posters from the Company's failure. The first poster's substantive understandings appear, even to those who are not very familiar with retailing, difficult to be denied, such as *'Sales are what produce the profits'* and *'to create a pleasant appearance and the people will come, buy, and make everybody happy'*. The second one expressed clearly his sense of moral correctness by stating that *'I loved my job at [the Company], it didn't pay worth a crap, but my areas of responsibility were always in the best of condition'*. By so doing, these appear to have succeeded in justifying themselves not only toward management but also toward those outside the Company, such as customers or the general public.

What is to be noted is the entwinement of the multiple different meanings that are required for the posters' establishing their positive identity: substantive, contextual and moral appropriateness. When applying the metaphor consisting of 'intention for happiness', 'power' and 'norm', their desire for the maximum extension of interpretation about reality surrounding the bankruptcy ('intention for happiness') was materialized by denoting substantive aspects of reality ('power') in ways that were plausible not only to the fellow associates who were supposed to be sharing similar experiences and sentiments but also to customers and the general public ('norm'). Among these different meanings entailed in the posters' identity construction, substantive aspects of reality denoted in the messages deserve attention because they explain how power is exercised along the meaning-interpretation nexus. Even if the posters were powerless relative to management, they were involved in maintenance of such a power relation in the Company simply by denoting reality with words whose extensions could transcend the Forum. In other words, the triadic model comprised of

‘intention for happiness’, ‘power’ and ‘norm’ reveals that power is being exercised by everyone by denoting reality, typically the substantive aspects of it.

As has been illustrated, the posters needed to obtain senses of appropriateness in both substantive and moral terms in order to identify them as competent and committed retail employees. To do so, the posters generalized their knowledgeability/competency as retail workers. While the second poster more explicitly appealed his fulfilling moral obligations in terms of both commitment to his vocation and loyalty to the Company, the generalized features of retailing in the first excerpt also indicates the poster’s pursuit of moral appropriateness. Generalized accounts are possible only by assuming that they are not only plausible but also acceptable, thus, pertinent to the moral concerns of generalized others. Taking into consideration the triadic processes of sensemaking in which one refers to both substantive and contextual aspects of reality and mediates these into certain meaningful wholes, any single word is supposed to be deployed by reference not only to definitive dictionary meanings but also to contextual and moral appropriateness. In other words, reality cannot be denoted in ways that are relevant to broader audiences without exercising ‘power’ while constricting it in one way or another. Thus, power can be defined as abstraction or generalization of reality; and configuration and re-figuration of power relations are understood to be practiced through and analyzed by the simple fact that reality has been denoted in certain ways.

What is to be noted in such a way of understanding and analyzing power relations are the alternate and diegetic successions between reading and authoring as were explained in 5.2.2. Because of the processes of communication/interaction that are punctuated by turns, once denoted, words need to be understood to exert three different kinds of

agency: denoting/identifying, commanding others to read and offering spaces for mediation. In other words, the fact that one can generalize reality in particular ways does not mean that one can expect even those who see such denotation to be relevant to the extent that they share understandings of the denoted reality only because of its generality. This subtle difference over meanings of the same words is critical to understand how the powerful and the powerless are being defined along the meaning-interpretation nexus.

As has just been stated, everyone exerts power simply by denoting reality in certain ways. Hence, power in itself has no such force or direction (vector) as physics defines. Rather, power is about one's abilities to denote reality in particular ways, typically generalizing substantive aspects of reality. Power relations are defined and redefined through the alternate and diegetic successions between presenting and interpreting reality in the form of actions/denotations of reality. The negotiations over meanings/interpretation of particular actions/denotations of reality proceed asymmetrically. Thus, the fact that an actor manages to denote reality by generalizing some aspects of it with a certain word allows many others to construct and reconstruct *their* realities. In other words, a certain term that is of a broader extension provides concerned actors with a kind of open space in which they each construct respective realities. In practical organization settings, actors with variable endowments are interacting with each other in hierarchically stratified structures in which material and institutional resources are unevenly distributed. The open space provided by certain general terms tends to reflect different actors' different endowments and extant institutions/structures; thus, 'power' exercised by the less powerful has only limited effects on a variety of inherent imbalances. Because of the limited effects on the

inherent power imbalances, it is important to imagine different actors' different interests and concerns behind certain generalized reality, rather than to be merely satisfied with apprehending certain socially meaningful constructs, such as the participants' positive identity, nor to expect them to redefine extant power relations in any radical way.

Imagining the existence of different actors' different interests and concerns behind reality generalized in particular ways is important because generalized reality allows people with variable endowments, typically those better endowed, to read their respective interests and concerns into it by taking advantage of the broader extension of the denotation. As such, innate imbalances between actors persist rather than being negotiated in ways that reduce gaps between the powerful and the powerless. This is so because people generally prefer tidy and organized reality to divergent and unpredictable ones. What happens is that as actors interact with each other, despite the variably endowed resources and competencies among actors, everyone appears to be orientated towards reducing the varieties of words and ways of presenting them, as the posters of the excerpts managed to establish their positive identity together with moral appropriateness that could appeal even to the general public. Despite the seemingly positive effects of their making sense of the difficult situations, they reflexively segmented the extant power relations because of the generalized competencies and moral appropriateness they denoted. More seriously, the posters who were considered to be vulnerable to the bankruptcy and the subsequent reorganization appeared to be ignorant of their possibly having generalized realities of even more vulnerable others.

Although such inadvertent ignorance of the existence of more vulnerable others than the posters is nothing to be blamed for, it is important to acknowledge that words which are

of broader extensions not only allow the more powerful to take advantage of them but also exclude those who cannot manage to read their reality into even such general terms. The power of words is, thus, significant not because they enable emancipation through negotiations but because words create a kind of open space in which one can pursue one's evaluative/moral appropriateness by reading one's reality, both the substantive aspects and contexts, into them. As the innate imbalances are hardly easily changeable and people generally pursue coherent and consistent reality along the rational scientific logic, including the unwavering moralistic model of ethics, even fairer, if not purely equal, society cannot materialize only by pointing out the excluding nature of the substitutive or rational scientific logic. Rather, it is important to know better how we can utilize the open spaces that words create.

In reading each one's reality into certain words, one is making judgments on one's evaluative/moral appropriateness. In so doing, one's self-identity is being constructed. More critical, however, is that making evaluative/moral judgments is the only opportunity to confront difficult or rather insolvable questions, such as in what society one is willing to live, what types of person one wishes to become, and what happiness is to whom. Pondering about such heavily philosophical questions is practically unfeasible even for those better endowed. Thus, ethics as practice should be understood as enabling others to project their experiences onto the open spaces created by words, rather than critical reflection on one's deeds, thoughts or feelings.

Remember that the ethics underlying our mundane interactions with others are being practiced asymmetrically: any action is subject to others' reading in their own ways, chiefly mediated by words. However, since ordinary human imaginative capacities are



usually guided by their innate orientation towards being good, rather than bad, they do not stop pursuing being good by rationally imagining the symmetrical reciprocation between one and others. The faculty of reasoning is thus predisposed to expand virtually infinitely, which is nothing to be constricted. What is important is, rather, to subscribe more strictly to ethics as practice or the ethics that keeps conversations going through the asymmetrical successions between acting/authoring and observing/reading.

Since interactions/communications between two or more actors proceed in an alternate and diegetic manner between reading and authoring, and whether or not an actor proceeds to the act of uttering/authoring cannot be predicted, what is accounted for is *readers'* imaginative reconstruction of reality; even more importantly, how such imaginative interpretation of reality of others can be legitimated, if not validated, needs to be examined. Over-purifying with the faculty of reasoning is not a good strategy not only because denotations of reality become less and less grounded in material reality but also because our ways of denoting reality become less and less diverse in terms of both contents and styles. The diversity of possible alternative ways of denoting reality is considered to be better not only because innovative/creative inventions with regard to establishment of particular rules and principles along which to manage complex social reality can be expected but also because one's experiences of power that are fated to be diluted through the dominant rational scientific discourse will be enriched with the diversified ways of denoting reality, even if extant power relations might not radically be redefined.

To maintain and hopefully increase the diversity of possible alternative ways of denoting reality, concrete procedures along which to read actions/denotation of reality

need to be exemplified. The next section presents an episode derived from the Forum as follows: (1) To illustrate the episode, concerning a failed attempt to develop a database that was meant to solve a variety of store-level problems, in ways that elucidate meaningfulness of the episode from the point of view of a researcher (me), that is, the triadic manner of entwinement of different evaluative/moral concerns that accompany the concerns with substantive and contextual relevancies; and (2) To demonstrate that the triad of mimetic processes is common logic that underlies mundane discursive practices, thus, is shared between different actors. It will do so by elaborating the entwinement of those different evaluative/moral concerns and the concerns with substantive and contextual aspects of reality by applying the framework of the alternate and diegetic successions between reading and authoring (Figure 5.2), in which each actor's 'intention for happiness' is pursued by means of 'power' and 'norm'. The analysis exemplifies the necessities and expected effects of encouraging analysts to create, by their imagination, as diverse alternative plots as possible. It also shows an alternative way of understanding the legitimacy of such seemingly groundless and arbitrary imagination of external observers as mediators of the irremediable power imbalances.

### ***5.3.2 Another patterned disposition: Struggles with difficult moral choices***

In the Forum, there is an episode that demonstrates that the participants attempted to make use of the Forum to solve practical problems they were encountering in their workplaces. In other words, the active participants in this episode intended, at least when they took part in it, to define the Forum as a place where their communications should be re-defining their day-to-day material settings in ways that would bring about

improvement to their day-to-day operations. Therefore, this episode offers an example about how the participants managed the different contexts between the Forum and their real world workplaces, and how the messages posted on the Forum reflected their ways of managing reality across these different contexts.

The episode started with a proposal to establish a database that should be able to feature, as easily as possible, problems to be addressed for improvement of the performance of the Company and employees' suggestions to solve such problems. The idea was, according to the proponent, *'to generate a list of ideas sorted by how good people think they [the listed ideas] are. Hopefully, this list would be useful to management'*. The idea was welcomed by another participant (bcrose1) who worked at the headquarters of the Company stating that *'I love the database! It saves me a lot of time especially by prioritizing the issues. [...] I've been promoting a system that takes in problems such as the ones in the database, assigns them to the proper corporate entities, then tracks and reports the progress of each issue until resolved'*. This indicates that the poster (bcrose1) was actually making efforts at his workplace (a department at the headquarters in charge of training, according to him) to introduce and establish a new system that *'can solve store problems faster and more effectively than ever before'*.

Notwithstanding, after a few posts trying to solve one of the prevailing problems at the store level, that is, inventory imbalances, between posters from different stores, the proponent of the database later evaluated that the project *'hasn't been very successful'*. He appeared realistic enough to admit that *'the idea of individual [...] stores listing what they have in excess and what they need and then trading between themselves to correct the inventory imbalances is too ambitious'*. This indicates that despite the good

idea, it turned out that the project required a good deal of work outside the Forum. To actualize the expected outcomes, the proponent of the project needed to provide rather detailed specifics, such as, how to input data, expected qualities of data (e.g., efficiency, feasibility), how to deal with user IDs, and different capacities to edit/modify data. Such specifications necessarily conveyed information that commanded readers' understandings in a way that should make them follow his messages, as if an instruction manual. In other words, the proponent's messages regarding the project were likely to be read as intending to command others' actions at their respective workplaces, which require re-figurations, if marginal, of their material settings. As the actions that bcrose1 undertook at his workplace illustrate, responding to messages that can be understood to be commanding re-figuration of readers' respective material settings is almost the same as committing to actual actions which not all of the participants who might see the idea of the database favorably could or ought to undertake at their workplaces because of varying positions and locations among them.

In fact, despite the fewer numbers of postings in regard to this project, it was later found that many participants appreciated the idea, such as, *'how helpful it would be [for management] to actually listen to the store level employees'*, *'It does sound like a good idea to open up respectful communication between the stores and [the headquarters]'*, and *'I know for a fact that you (bcrose1) have done so much for the associates and I'm sure it is appreciated, even for all that you have done that they [management] are not aware of.'* Ironically though, these appreciations for bcrose1's efforts to translate the proposed database into a formalized system which was aimed to facilitate communications between stores and the headquarters regarding the store-level problems were expressed when he reported to the Forum his demotion and going out of the

Company after *'new organization was announced'* at his department. Hence, these appreciations were expressed primarily to encourage him since he was planning to leave the Company, seeking a better position outside the Company. What is important, however, is not the irony the episode presented but the ways in which facts, events, and the participants' subjective experiences were provided sequential order by their messages, to the point at which the participants and external observers alike are likely to find the story ironic.

Regardless of the ambiguity concerning why many of them did not directly take part in the proposed database, what is evident is that they did not post messages in this regard until they heard of brosel's demotion. According to other messages posted to the Forum, problems they were facing seemed to be commonly shared (e.g., understaffing, imbalances in inventory, meaninglessly frequent price changes and inspections, unreliable contractors appointed by the headquarters, etc.). They also appeared to perceive invariably that the distance between stores and the headquarters had gone well beyond that which could be tolerated as a necessary evil for maintenance of mutual autonomy. Thus, the database aiming at solving those problems could hardly be irrelevant for the interests of the majority of the participants in the Forum.

This episode, therefore, demonstrates the intricacy of the processes by which the participants in the Forum assessed relevance of what they encountered. Specifically, it proves that the goal relevancy of the five criteria for relevance in Weick's (1987) model (see Chapter 2) is not sufficient to determine subsequent alternative actions. Even just making simple rejoinders, if they were meant to reply to messages that the participants understood, asked for readers' re-figuration of their material settings, or simply for

actual actions in their material settings, they needed to assess operational relevancy of the database. As was explained earlier, the operational relevancy concerns contexts, such as particular institutional settings, roles and capacities of concerned actors. Hence, the participants were supposed to have attempted to understand the contexts in which they were situated. Moreover, even if one could make sense of the idea and objectives of the database in reference to problems s/he had been encountering, thus, could manage to transcribe her/his experiences into what s/he read, *expressing* how s/he understood about the project is another story. Imagine that if you were the proponent of the database and found a message appreciating your project but no indication regarding how the respondents would contribute, such as disseminating the project, or providing the database with relevant data. Such messages would make little sense to you.

In other words, the assessment of relevancy in terms of both substance (goal) and context is observed in the ways by which messages were posted as well as in messages in themselves. The fact that only few messages were posted demonstrated that the participants collectively assessed the proposed project as being less feasible. Also, judging from the many messages that appreciated the attempts at developing the database, the project can be understood by the participants to be of goal relevance. Moreover, it can further be inferred by focusing on the participants' sense of evaluative and normative appropriateness that they should have managed these different relevancies in rather intricate ways. Specifically, the fact that the participants stayed away from directly intervening in the project of the database indicated the multiple dimensions of their sense of moral correctness: that in the Forum and that in their respective material real world. In the Forum, they showed considerateness to interlocutors in the Forum. Those who did not directly contribute to the proposed

project must have considered it to be inappropriate to post messages which did not respond in ways that the proponent wished. As for the context outside the Forum, judgments on the feasibility of the project by reference to respective workplaces appears to be supported by members' faithfulness or commitment to the trade of retailing. Put differently, they did not allow themselves to talk about the problems that were actually of much relevance for them in ways that appeared unrealistic to them.

These different normative considerations of the participants culminated in the patterned ways of posting messages, i.e., the fewer messages that directly contributed to the database project but expressed appreciation for it in response to bcrose1's demotion, as well as the similar contents of their messages. More importantly, despite that those normative considerations appeared collective, they came about through each one's diegetic enactments of the triad of mimetic processes. The triad of mimetic processes can account for the processes by which the proposed project failed to be materialized in ways that take into consideration each one's senses of evaluative/moral appropriateness. The following analysis examines the responses to bcrose1's message reporting his demotion by applying the alternate and diegetic manner of practicing ethics along the triad of mimetic processes.

(1) *But, back to bcrose. I was soooo thrilled to find out that someone from [the headquarters] was here [in the Forum] that was actually listening and trying to do something for the hourly employees. I was so excited. I couldn't quit talking about it at work. Someone was actually listening to us. [...], working outside the system to try to serve the customer. Here was a person who actually cared, who had an "in" in this system*

*that doesn't work so well, and was using his power to try and change things. Boy was I excited. And then I heard you got demoted. My heart bled for you (22/2/2002 at 11:14AM by crazyXX2001);*

(2) *I don't know if they [the management of the Company] think we come here just to whine and complain about made up problems or what their [the management's] problem is up there [at the headquarters], but the problems are real and you took the time to acknowledge that (22/2/2002 at 04:06AM by bluelightbluebelle);*

(3) *Big change will get around to them [the management of the Company] maybe later than sooner but it will come. We are soo frustrated in the trenches with the way they chose to do things. UGH!! They would have to do a Miracle 180 degree change fast to save us (22/2/2002 at 06:21PM by dopey1456560);*

(4) *[...] you have given us a voice to [the headquarters], even though they still choose not to listen even with the support from you. I think [the Company] is about to feel the pinch of losing many great associates who had many contributions to give. We do have to now focus on the associates who will remain and hope and pray they will be able to make a difference if someone up top will let them. (22/2/2002 at 03:12AM by ewkt3)*

All of the excerpts shown above took bcrosel's demotion to represent management's negative attitude toward people who try to address fundamental problems and suggest solutions to such problems for making a successful turnaround from the bankruptcy. In these excerpts, management was established as villain who '*still choose not to listen*'



and are *'losing many great associates who had many contributions to give'*. By so doing, problems they had been facing and the failure of the Company were categorized as management's failure, and the participants were establishing their identities positively by dis-identifying themselves with management.

At the same time, they appeared aware that by so doing, they might be seen *'just to whine and complain about made up problems or what their [management's] problem is up there [at the headquarters]'*. Thus, they were concerned with how others outside the Forum or the Company might see them when their (mostly negative) experiences were expressed in the Forum. What is important here is that their primary interests were how they could express that *'the problems are real'* (excerpt [2]). Although the reality in this context is no less subjective, it is not a complete fantasy. If we take it to be a fantasy, we had better refer to a more nuanced definition of it.

According to Gabriel (1995), quoted in Brown and Humphreys (2006: 247), *'fantasy can offer a third way to the individual, which amounts to neither conformity nor rebellion, but to a symbolic refashioning of official organizational practices in the interest of pleasure, allowing a temporary supremacy of emotion over rationality and of uncontrol over control'*. As this definition of fantasy indicates, the implicit dichotomy is one in which *'rationality'* and *'control'* appear to be given a dominant status, so that even a fantasy retains, in a fairly intricate manner, linkages with the supposedly dominant version of reality.

Worthwhile careful examination is thus the way in which the participants in the Forum constructed (and probably experienced) their version of intricate fantasy (*'intention for happiness'* by means of *'power'* and *'norm'*) while retaining linkages with the dominant

discourses in particular ways. As the excerpts demonstrate, while the posters' utterances appear to show 'symbolic convergence' (Bormann 1983 quoted in Brown and Humphreys 2006: 247) on management as villain, and on difficulties in taking actions to '*make a differences*', none of them was directly communicated with one another, as was observed in Chapter 3. So, what do we, as external observers, see to be converging? Simply, our act of reading is connecting those materially discrete utterances. Hence, some may see them as disgruntled employees releasing tension by participating in the Forum and others may be willing to identify '*real*' problems implicated in their utterances. Then, are mundane utterances irrelevant to analyses of reality construction because nothing is conclusive and anything goes? The answer is clearly no.

The assumption that reality should exist as it is out there and such reality is supposed to be represented in utterances need to be obliterated. Rather, we had better assume that reality exists in a manner that is mediated symbolically; then, the symbolic convergence emerged as the posters pursued better ways of expressing that they had been suffering from '*real*' problems in a manner that was refashioning the already mediated symbolic resources which could be appropriated from dominant discourses. In other words, while their ways of constructing reality may look like a fantasy to the extent that they can be likened to fictitious narrative, it is not because the substances of their messages were saturated with their subjective experiences, which were prone to be associated with imagination less grounded in objective and empirical facts but because the processes by which to come up with the utterances were identical to authoring and understanding either fictive or non-fictive narratives (the triad of mimetic processes), which always involves actors' imagination. In short, when analyzing social reality through mundane utterances, what is to be noted is that regardless of variable perspectives, reality,

including acts of making sense of reality, interpreting and presenting one's ideas, understandings, feelings and self, is managed by means of symbolically mediated media, that is, language. Put differently, ontological reality is managed through the acts of mediating (refashioning) it symbolically; thus, dispositions of the acts of symbolic mediation, i.e., the act of reading and uttering, should be seen to retain connections with ontological reality by means of language or other sign systems.

Since symbolic mediation is supposed to proceed along the triad of mimetic processes, the important points are that: (1) the particular patterned dispositions (symbolic convergence) were symbolically mediated but the mediation was symbolic not because the participants self-interestedly pursued illusory emancipation to be fabricated by invoking discursive and interpretive freedom but because they each attempted to denote reality in ways that were plausible even to people outside the Forum, such as management or the general public as well as to other participants; and (2) the patterned dispositions were emergent of the turn-by-turn occurrence of mutually independent efforts at coming up with such denotation.

This second point is particularly important when analyzing mundane utterances because utterances can be issued only on an assumptive basis. No single utterance defines either substantive or contextual meanings. Meanings are always created on the side of readers who are predisposed to understand them by constructing coherent and consistent wholes. Even more importantly, because of such an assumptive presentation and an orientated reading, the processes of meaning making are supposed to build on innumerable failed attempts. The fact that utterances do not represent anyone's ontological reality means not only that each individual actor's ontological reality is ineffable and is skewed by

actors' pursuit of consensual validation with others but also that even when actors succeeded in enunciating their respective reality in words, the enunciation possibly fails to be so recognized by others if they do not find anything relevant in the enunciation, i.e., certain patterned dispositions or particular forms of expression shared between the actors and others.

What is important is that regardless of whether or not read by others in such a way that an utterer wished, the fact that messages were posted to the Forum is evidence that participants did *experience* their respective ontological reality. They each assessed the relevance of their reality as they were mediating it through reading others' messages. Put differently, each one's sense of relevancy of reality could be achieved as one's reality refashions and is refashioned by others' denoted reality. The processes by which one mediates the substantive and the contextual understandings are indeed diegetic even at the individual level. So understanding is important to identify reality underlying the messages. Utterances are not issued to represent each one's ontological reality but we can know of some aspects of reality by means of such partial, perspectival and contracted dispositions produced by actors' interpretation.

Taking into account the diegetic alternate successions between uttering and reading, the symbolic convergence among the messages are better understood as coming into being by means of (1) weak teleology in the sense that the utterer's interests and concerns may or may not be read by readers/audiences as if to be motivated by the utterer and (2) particular irreversible sequential orders that are consensually validated between the utterer and readers/audiences. The participants' ways of denotation appear to be converging on particular themes as were observed in Chapter 4, such as 'Informing

reality’, ‘Encouraging fellow associates’, ‘Positive identity’, ‘Competency’, and ‘Commitment/ loyalty’ (Table 4.2). However, all of these themes should be understood as cumulative consequences of the mutually independent messages that were means by which to stabilize meanings in particular ways and requested readers/assumed interlocutors to confirm the validity of such meanings in terms of both substance and context.

Despite each person’s desire for coherent and consistent meanings of encounters and surroundings, since the realm of practice is premised on actions which could conclude ongoing interactions satisfactorily, messages posted to the Forum were not so much means to represent each other’s reality so much as to convey meanings efficiently and effectively in respect of consensual validation. In the realm of actual interactions between two or more actors, the practicing of the triad of mimetic processes proceeds through successive acts of reading and uttering. Neither uttering without subsequent reading nor reading without inducing subsequent uttering can produce meaning. For making utterances, we have to read. Without others’ utterances, reading never happens. An utterance has to be uttered before being read (cf., Weick 1979). The key is that the linkage between reading and uttering are always made diegetically or in a temporally contingent manner. No one can act on a unique and once occurring utterance at one moment on both of the acts of reading and uttering. While each actor experiences by her/his imagination the transpositions of the subject between a reader, an utterer and a mediator, in the realm of practical interactions between two or more actors, the acts of uttering and reading have to be distinguished strictly, for these each produces different meanings over one single utterance.

The participants were concerned with both the syntagmatic rules for consensual validation with other participants and the substitutability or generality of their substantive understandings of reality surrounding the Company, such as the ways of management, problems thereof, and possible solutions to them. Put in interactions with others, as was observed in 5.3.1, individual actors who are concerned with both the substantive and contextual relevancy utilize others' utterances rather flexibly between substances and context-defining devices. The nesting and nested structure comprised of the triad of mimetic processes is indeed virtually infinitely entailing the substitutive reasoning ('power'), the associative skills and knowledge ('norm') and the mediation between them based on the sense of appropriateness at particular points in time and space ('intention for happiness').

The management of social reality by means of symbolically mediated media actually involves actors' intricate ways of appropriating extant discourses, others' denotation of reality and their skills and knowledge with which to validate, in a consensual manner, particular ways of presenting their understandings, actions and self. The key to identify and examine some aspects of reality behind enunciated words, such as the extant power relations and the processes by which they are being sustained through actors' interactions by means of mundane utterances, is to know the fact that, even if playing a critical role in one's establishing understandings, narrative or associative reasoning or one's plotting heterogeneous properties cannot be captured in a processual manner (Bruner 1986a). What this means is that regardless of whether stories (others' denotations) are utilized as generalizable events (substances) or models of denotation (context-defining devices), once recognized as expression devised with particular forms, these are dealt with as objects of which properties can be rather flexibly appropriated.

Rich descriptive information entailed in stories need to be so read. The role of readers is critical in this respect. If readers or those who encounter others' particular denotation of reality do not assume the existence of such others' ontological reality behind the denoted reality, such others' realities will be brutally silenced virtually forever.

Apart from such a humanistic concern about the silencing of someone's reality, conceiving of social reality as a mere collections of substances, events or phenomena possibly prevents us from knowing how particular social orderliness emerges out of a flux of irregularity and inconsistency and how such emergent orderliness is being sustained in such an ever changing environment. It is for this reason that the triad of mimetic processes is invoked for investigating mundane discursive practices from which processes of organizing are emerging. The inclusion of processes of symbolic mediation in the triad of mimetic processes, in particular in the second mimetic process, which concerns syntagmatic rules with which to sequence heterogeneous properties into particular irreversible orders (Chapter 4), enables readers to interpret what is not enunciated in words from what is enunciated.

A critical assumption is that signs, or management of material reality with signs, builds upon innumerable failed attempts simply because signs consist of information which denotes and does not denote what the material reality is. It is also important to assume that despite such innumerable failed attempts, signs are likely to sustain by formulating particular patterns and rules by means of diegetic and intersubjective checks in interactions. The triad of mimetic processes thus functions as logic along which we will be able to know how particular patterns and rules are emerging out of even fairly arbitrary ways of individual actors' plotting a variety of properties. It becomes possible

to interpret in systematic ways what is not enunciated in words from what is enunciated. Behind the conspicuous symbolic convergence observed in the excerpts above, we will be able to read the power/rule constitution along the triad of mimetic processes. It is similar to mimicking the participants' ways of interpreting reality along the triad of mimetic processes.

The intricate intertwining of the dominant discourses and those in the Forum was typically observed in the participants' ways of defining the activities in the Forum, their concerns and interests, and their real world experiences. The participants were observed to manage methodically the complexly intertwining different horizons or the meaning-interpretation nexus by taking advantage of interactional relationships with others with whom to interact on a hypothetical and inferential basis. The participants clearly appreciated bcrosel's efforts at '*working outside the system to try to serve the customer*', and '*using his power to try and change things*'. These views reflect not only the posters' sentiments for bcrosel's demotion but also their own beliefs that they themselves shared the value for customer service and the attitude to change things for the better, which were supported by the posters' sense of moral correctness or even faithfulness to the Company's potentials and the trade of retailing. These substantive understandings are actually accompanied by the sense of moral appropriateness.

As for the contexts related to their real world workplaces, they indicated difficulties to bring about changes as '***Big change will get around to them*** [management of the Company] *maybe later than sooner*', '***a Miracle 180 degree change***', and '***hope and pray they*** (remaining associates) *will be able to make a difference if someone up top will let them*' (all emphases added). These clearly attribute the difficulties in bringing



about changes to management. What deserves attention is these posters' positive but conditional speculations about business continuity grounded in their experiences at their respective locales. Positive, because they appear to believe that their company has capacities, including competent and committed employees, to make a successful turnaround from the bankruptcy. Conditional, because they assumed that the successful turnaround would not be materialized without fundamental changes in policies and decisions made by the management of the Company. These thus imply that the posters were ready to execute proper measures to make a successful turnaround from the bankruptcy but not in ways that took action to establish the proposed database, as is indicated by the fact that only few posts were posted in regard to the development of the database.

Behind such reading of the weak but positive teleology of the posters, the unintended effects of the same excerpts can also be read. Specifically, these messages can be understood to represent that most of the participants in the Forum failed to find appropriate ways of denoting reality that concerned the intricate relations between the obviously relevant problems that could be addressed by the database, the extant institutional setups and what they could possibly contribute. These excerpts, in other words, set the limits on their interpretation of reality by demonstrating that it was possible for them to speak of both a variety of store-level problems that were of relevance for them and their sentiments for bcrose1's demotion only by attributing all the problematics to management. Simply put, the posters said they had thus far failed to come up with any possible action other than keeping on serving the Company and their tasks as competent and committed retail workers. The excerpts above explain the ways in which the posters unwittingly defined the context of the Forum as that in which the

majority of the participants took part in the Forum not expecting that their activities in it would directly translate into tangible results in the real world workplaces or changes in the entire Company.

As was indicated by the number of posts that conveyed gratitude and encouragement for bcrose1, it appeared natural and straightforward to show considerateness for others' undeserved misfortune. Also, it would offer the posters a sense of empathy as those who shared with bcrose1 the sentiments about the unrewarded wishes to serve for the betterment of the Company. Nonetheless, it is also inevitable to segment the extant power relations only by expressing particular sentiments in natural ways, seemingly as if they were not at all concerned with the extant power relations in which they were involved.

Power is actually circulating along the meaning-interpretation nexus. However, this does not mean that power has no indication for material reality. On the contrary, in order to analyze social reality, meanings and negotiations over interpretation of them need to be understood to arise from something that exists in the material world and that motivates actors to make sense of it. The reason why the posters' simple expression of their sentiments for the demoted colleague serves to segment the extant power relations and why this is inevitable are because, in our normal consciousness, everything, even simple perception, is already symbolically mediated. Because of the symbolic mediation, each of us is necessitated to manage material reality by means of information that does not directly refer to the material reality being denoted as well as that which denotes it, such that, regardless of whether intended or not, one's efforts at making sense of material reality inevitably generates the surplus of denotation which can be read by

others (or even by oneself) in virtually infinite ways. More importantly, despite the obvious unpredictability about how the surplus of denotation will be read and interpreted, readers/interpreters always carry with them their respective limits of interpretation. Denotation of reality by means of symbolically mediated media is without exception an intersubjective phenomenon predicated on each subject's material reality. No sign floats completely apart from material real things.

The fact that we use signs, thus, has profound indications for our ways of both being (ontology) and knowing (epistemology). Symbolically mediated being can be denoted in any way with signs. However, any denotation is interpreted by the knowing subject who never believes they have unlimited extension of interpretation simply because of a variety of limitations chiefly imposed by nature, such as unknowable but fated death, naturally originated regularity and materiality. While it is possible to create signs without knowing that the signs set particular limits in their extension, thus, without being concerned about the limitation of denotation, it is inevitable that someone becomes aware of signs or symbolically mediated denotation and starts interpreting these by reference to her/his sense of reality that will set the limits of her/his interpretation. As far as human beings cannot but be motivated by innumerable things, events, and phenomena, including fairly vague sensations, to make better sense of these, it is impossible even to pretend as if to respond only to material real things as they are, i.e., something not mediated symbolically at all. Denying the indication of meanings and interpretation for material reality is, thus, a false assumption that we can access the absolutely foundational reality by means of other methods than those symbolically mediated.

The key is the fact that utterances are not representational devices but emergent outcomes of each poster's assessment of relevancy in terms of their substantive and contextual understandings and how to present these at a particular point in time and space. More importantly, utterances become meaningful when issued and paid attention to by two or more actors. In these diegetic and interactional processes, each actor pursues and examines as appropriate interpretation about reality as possible in terms of one's desire for the maximum extension ('power') and the consensual validation with others in respect of the syntagmatic rules ('norm'). By so understanding, the conspicuously converging ways of denoting the difficulties to bring about a successful turnaround from the bankruptcy as were observed in the excerpts above can be situated in the extant power relations. The symbolically converging denotations not only defined the purposes and *raison d'être* of the Forum but also served to sustain and thus demonstrate the ways by which the participants in the Forum were involved in the power/rule constitution along the meaning-interpretation nexus.

Mundane discursive practices entwine actors' skills and knowledge to make sense of reality, their senses of evaluative/moral appropriateness, experiences of power and the power/rule constitution through interactions between two or more actors. The analysis above, therefore, not only elaborated micro-processes in which the participants in the Forum made sense of their difficult situations caused by the bankruptcy and the subsequent reorganization but also elucidated why the power imbalances were irremediable and how the participants contributed to them through mundane discursive practices. The intricately intertwining power and each one's ways of making sense of reality, involving one's pursuit of evaluative/moral appropriateness, thus, have the

critical implications for analyses of social processes in both substantive and methodological terms.

First, the descriptions above are all my creation along the framework comprised of the alternate and diegetic successions between reading and authoring in which each actor enacts the triad of mimetic processes (Figure 5.2). The framework represents my ways of making sense of the participants' ways of making sense of their reality. It is, thus, obvious that the framework is not meant for proving that particular reality existed in either the Forum or the Company but for offering a method with which to unravel the entanglement of power and norm that constitutes processes of organizing.

Second, starting by questioning the precedence of reasons to actions and based on the analyses in the preceding chapters, it was found that the triad of mimetic processes could be utilized as a tentative target of attribution for one's understandings and actions. Typically, the triadic processes allow us to understand that we can act without any foundational evidence, rule or principle. Accordingly, it became manifest that there would be no foundational entity or kernel to which actions or reasons for them could be attributed. The awareness of one's being or 'intention for happiness' is receptively evoked. Each one's sense of evaluative/moral appropriateness can never be conclusive. What each of us is doing is continuously examining relevance of one's encounters by reference to substantive and contextual aspects of reality on an inferential and hypothetical basis. In so doing, what is critical is the ethics as practice that keeps conversations going and that depends on the pure chance events of actions. Each actor normally is full of ambiguities and uncertainties that are inevitably left behind in our mundane examinations about the different relevancies.

What all those above mean is that when enquiring into social processes in which two or more actors interact with each other by means of each one's interpretation of reality, we should focus on particular relationships that are defined by actors who can never directly see their own actions and being but only know aspects of these by reference to others' responses to them. In other words, what is important is how to account for each one's capacities to (re)construct one's ambiguous and uncertain reality by reference to others' actions/denotation of reality. Considering the situated relationality of each one's imaginative capacities that are enacted in an alternate and diegetic manner, while operating in ontological reality, imagination that (re)constructs reality is not something that is possessed by any individual actor. Rather, it should be accounted for as a shared platform onto which each one's reality can be projected. By so understanding, social analyses possibly reinforce it in ways that enable as diverse realities as possible to be projected, such that each one's imaginative capacities can be developed in ways that nurture, rather than eliminate, the inevitable ambiguity and uncertainty accompanying one's pursuit of sense of evaluative/moral appropriateness.

Third, since imagination had better be conceived of as a socially shared platform, analysts are encouraged to reinforce it by pursuing better ways of associating properties and attributes, which they identify from data with rigorous scientific methods, with one another in respect of how to materialize engaged ways of reading of their assumed audiences. To do so, they need to be more conspicuous about their own investigative interests and concerns. Imagination is not as free and emancipating as is normally believed especially for social scientists who deal with the intricately intertwined interests and concerns of a diversity of actors. The alternate and diegetic model along the triad of mimetic processes is able to engage analysts with their subjects by means of

their investigative interests and concerns as well as rigorous methods. Researchers' imaginative capacities are the key to produce narratives that could guide readers through in ways that reveal their implicit and context specific assumptions and principles.

Fourth, by focusing on the significance of researchers' imaginative capacities, social analyses can be assigned an alternative task that contributes to providing thickness to each one's experiences of power premised on the irremediableness of power imbalances, rather than attempts to identify particular causal logic by abstracting each one's experiences into variables as if power imbalances are problems that could be solved by applying particular causation. For instance, the following questions that are of relevance for management and organization studies can be asked in ways that provide thickness to each one's experiences of power by taking into account the fact that each one is experiencing power and contributing to the power/rule constitution through mundane practices: Whether or not is it possible for a company to manage employees' satisfaction by offering appropriate discursive spaces; with what institutions can a company devolve or concentrate authorities properly in respect of performances of both employees and the company; or what should happier lives in organizations be, typically for employees who are competent and readily committed like the participants in the Forum? More critically, since social reality entails virtually inexhaustible degrees of thickness with regard to each one's everyday experiences of power through mundane practices, social analyses should pay more attention to how better and more legitimately reality can be abstracted in respect of materialization of fairer society, definitions of which inevitably encourage researchers to confront the fact that power imbalances are irremediable and each actor as an innately moral being is practicing ethics struggling with her/his 'intention for happiness' by means of 'power' and 'norm'.

#### **5.4 Plot and metaphor: Mimicking the triad of mimetic processes**

The analyses in this chapter confirmed that the participants' sense of appropriateness appeared to be obtained by dealing with others' denotation of reality both as substances and context-defining stories. The first episode, focused on the establishment of particular norms in the Forum, demonstrated that the availability of stories both as substances and the contextually relevant ways of denotation facilitated the process by which certain norms were established. Since most of the posters in this episode were observed to be concerned with appropriate ways of talking to other participants, the posters' sense of moral correctness with regard to the contextual relevance appeared to culminate in particular norms, i.e., being positive, to be collectively subscribed to in the Forum.

The practical knowledge and skills with which to manage the world of heterogeneous properties were more intricate than management of simple linear causation between the participants' motivations and goals in terms of their participation in the Forum. The skills and knowledge are enacted in pursuit of not only belongingness to particular categories in terms of either substantive or contextual relevancies but also evaluative/moral appropriateness. Pursuit of evaluative/moral appropriateness, on the one hand, brings about positive collective effects, e.g., positive identity, caring for others and behaving in a positive manner. On the other hand, one's ascription to particular values that emanate from appropriating others' reality has broader extensions; these can relatively easily be generalized, such as the participants' knowledgeability of the fundamentals of retailing and the virtue of employees' commitment and loyalty to organizations they belong to. These contribute to sustaining extant power relations, i.e.,



the Company's organizational structures, typically so when such general and broadly acceptable reality remains unchecked intersubjectively but is dealt with as if it could be validated against certain values or principles by reference to broadly applicable meanings.

Mundane utterances as reality denoted in words *can be dealt with* as both quasi-substances whose properties and attributes can be apprehended and context-defining stories only when someone finds stories in them by reading her/his reality into them. In other words, as the alternate and diegetic model comprised of the triad of mimetic processes exemplified, the power/rule constitution along the meaning-interpretation nexus depends on how a kind of open space, which words create and into which different readers are allowed to read their respective realities, is utilized by concerned actors. Besides, whose realities can or cannot be read into particular denotations of reality can be imagined virtually infinitely according to interests and concerns of those who encounter the denotation. As such, by following the triadic ways of mundane examinations about the relevancies and their appropriateness, our understandings of the power/rule constitution can be extended even so far as to imagining realities that fail to be enunciated in words.

The second episode, concerning the unrealized project of database development and the demotion of the key person at the headquarters, illustrated that the limits of interpretation were set by each person's moral correctness rather than by objectively validated evidence or acceptability of the participants' subjective sentiments. What is to be noted in particular is that although at first sight the participants appeared to be motivated by their respective subjective sentiments, such as concerns for fellow

associates, such sentiments were actually intersubjectively checked for them to be expressed in the Forum by reference to both substantive and contextual relevancies.

More interesting is that the participants' sense of moral correctness which was projected toward their substantive understandings as shown in their loyalty to retailing and the Company made it difficult for them to talk about problems which appeared to be of relevance for them because of the unavailability of appropriate stories with which to denote the relevant problems. As a result, the appropriateness of their substantive understandings appeared more effective for segmenting the power relations established in the Company than for changing them in such a way that employee voices could at least be heard by management.

**Table 5.4 Summary of stories**

<b>Episode</b>	<b>Stories as substance</b>  (Pursuing the maximum extension of interpretation of reality in positive terms)	<b>Stories as a device with which to define contexts</b>  (Intersubjectively validated moral correctness)
<b>Establishing norms in the Forum</b>	Past memories (as sharable negative experiences)	Past memories (making the negative experiences presentable putting them into positive emotional state)
	Episodes with customers (as sharable negative emotional state)	Episodes with customers (making the negative experiences presentable)

	Etiquettes, manners, norms in the Forum	Etiquettes, manners, norms in the Forum
	Positive identity (knowledgeability about and commitment to retailing)	Positive identity (appealing to people outside the Company)
<b>Failed project of development of a database</b>	Development of a database	N. A. (the participants' limits of interpretation about the feasibility of the database)
	Problems to be addressed (e.g., inventory imbalance, communication between the HQ and stores)	N. A. (the participants could not manage to express the relevant problems, and the inability to talk set the limits of interpretation of the reality)
	Demotion of an employee at the HQ (management as villain)	Demotion of an employee at the HQ (gratitude, encouragement)

These analyses combined together tell us that mundane utterances may or may not be checked intersubjectively and diegetically with respect to the appropriateness in contextual, substantive and/or evaluative/moral terms. Specifically, while context transcending power can be observed in words that have meanings applicable to broader contexts in terms of either generality or moral correctness, the ways in which messages were posted also reflect the extant power relations by means of what the participants could or could not say in the Forum. However, while each may attempt to understand the extant power relations along the triad of mimetic processes and sets the limits of

their interpretation about reality, due to the asymmetrical relationship between readers and an author, no one can control how to read one's utterances with whatever efficient, effective or virtuous reasons.

Power relations are understood to be defined and redefined depending on such elusive ways in which utterances are dealt with. Considering such indeterminacy and unpredictability entailed in interactions with mundane discursive practice, it is considered important to acknowledge both the limits of our faculty of reasoning that enables us to examine relevancies in reference to particular criteria and our innate predisposition towards being good, represented by our pursuit of evaluative/moral appropriateness. It follows that, as the analyses of the two episodes indicated, the power of words should be appreciated as it provides everyone with open spaces into which her/his realities can be read for making better sense of them. Insofar as the power of words is conceived of instrumentally, such as strengthening the powerless by increasing opportunities to speak up, we will not be able to address the persistent problem that has long been pointed out concerning inequality: no one knows whether inequality can be attributed to nature and heredity or to human deliberate interventions.

Despite the indeterminacy between nature and nurture, we should know that the inevitably and inherently unequally distributed resources determine substantial part of the power/rule constitution. First, the inevitable and persistent problems of inequality should be understood as consequences of our mundane practices of language use, which entail the ethics that keeps conversations going. Second, it is important to acknowledge that the inherent power imbalances are irremediable despite the seemingly emancipating effects of increasing discursive spaces like the Forum because words, especially those

which have broader extensions, allow anyone to read her/his reality into them, such that mere increase of opportunities to exercise power by speaking up is liable to reflect, rather than mediate, inherently varying endowments between actors.

Since the inherent power imbalances are irremediable and power is exercised by everyone through mundane discursive practices that already involve ethical considerations, the power imbalances are not to be solved but to be appreciated as they are. To appreciate the irremediable power imbalances, it is necessary not only to understand how the imbalances are sustained but also to offer concrete measures to encourage, rather than prescribe, the ethics that keeps conversations going, and thus, to increase chances for each one's implicit assumptions and principles to be revealed. This is so typically when many people's allusion to sense of permanence has come to entrench their everyday sensemaking and actions such that many people have come to believe that reality can better be managed along the rational scientific logic and objectivist/empiricist view on reality.

Note, however, that neither the rational scientific logic nor objectivist/empiricist view on reality needs to be undermined. These are actually superior in identifying particular principles and laws along which a variety of technologies can be developed to bring about material wellbeing. What is to be addressed are ethical implications that accompany them. Those squarely contradict the ethics that keeps conversations going. Ironically enough, because of orientations towards being good, one is predisposed to sanction one's and others' sensemaking and actions along the unwavering moralistic model of ethics. One does so believing that one can and ought to establish relationships with others by providing others with relevant information in terms of factual precision,

normative/institutional requirements and individual concerns/interests, although such relevancies always leave behind more or less ambiguity and uncertainty. Simply put, one is liable to over-evaluate one's faculty of reasoning and impose more or less excessive moral obligations on self and others. In effect, we continue to overlook the fact that innumerable realities, typically those of the less powerful, are passing by without being accounted for or even being paid attention to. Besides such moral implications entailed in the rational scientific logic or the objectivist/empiricist view on reality, we also collectively reduce chances to come across emergent and innovative laws and principles that are possibly derived from seemingly meaningless/irrational events and phenomena (Alvesson and Spicer 2012, Hatch 1997, Weick 1974).

Analyzing mundane discursive practices is important insofar as each utterance retains the processes by which two or more actors have interacted with each other's pursuit of happiness by means of 'power' and 'norm'. Utterances are, in other words, evidence that actors acted out particular dispositions along the triad of mimetic processes. Hence, from mundane utterances we can speculate that actors share capacities to understand actions in relation to other properties, such as actors, goals, competencies and circumstances, such that they can associate such a variety of properties to organize them into particular sequential orders in more or less plausible ways to others. Moreover, these shared capacities enable actors to act hypothetically; thus, actors can act without any absolutely foundational evidence, rule or principle while certain evidence, rules and principles are continually being pursued by actors for the sake of their going about a variety of surroundings and encounters in as coherent and consistent ways as possible. Mundane utterances are emergent of the acts of interpretation of two or more actors,

each of whom dispose and interpret each other's hypothetical interpretations in anticipation of the existence of certain unity in each other's reality.

The framework comprised of the alternate and diegetic successions between reading and authoring along each one's enactment of the triad of mimetic processes is capable of analyzing mundane discursive practices in ways that draw our attention even to the existence of reality that fails to be denoted in utterances. It enables this by seeing mundane utterances as both discrete data constituted by words, whose meanings can be defined in a more or less non-contradictory manner, and stories or story fragments that can provide us with the surplus of denotation by particular irreversible sequential orders. The key is how to identify proper protagonist(s) of such stories or story fragments. Simply, discrete data can be translated into stories in accordance with the constitutive elements as they are defined by theory of plot: acts, actors, scenes, goals and agencies, and it is (a) certain protagonist(s) as (a) mediator(s) who associate(s) discrete data with one another in accordance with these constitutive elements of plot (Kenneth Burke quoted in Czarniawska [1999], see also the semantic network of action in Ricoeur [1984/1990]). In other words, with this framework, one can not only understand one's imagination as the triadic processes operating on the weak teleology in interaction settings but also simulate alternative realities in the manner of prototyping in accordance with the constitutive elements of plot, which I call protoplotting after Czarniawska (1999). Protoplotting serves as a meta-theory that explains how particular causal relations can be understood as both synchrony (variance) and diachrony (process).

The next chapter will conclude this thesis by elaborating how to operationalize protoplotting by analyzing mundane discursive practices in order to understand

processes of organizing better. Based on the preceding analyses and findings concerning the hypothetical and inferential ways of emergence of reasons and meanings that guide the power/rule constitution through mundane discursive practices, the idea of protoplotting in tandem with the triad of mimetic processes will contribute to materializing 'ethics as practice' by diversifying repertoires of plot for both organization scholars and practitioners.

For scholars, the meaning of their theorizing will be particularly emphasized, that is, to provide theories or narratives that could reveal practitioners' implicit and context-specific assumptions and principles. It is practically difficult for practitioners to be aware of their own theories and methods with which to plot the heterogeneous properties they encounter into appropriate sequential orders. Nor are they likely to become aware of how and why the practice of employment necessarily involves issues concerning power and ethics. Theories are, thus, expected to serve to reveal practitioners' ways of making sense of reality in ways that could enable practitioners to reconstruct their realities along theorists' narratives.

As Weick's (1987) five criteria of relevance succinctly explain, for theories to become relevant to practitioners, theorists are advised to take into account the non-obvious relevance as well as descriptive, goal and operational relevance and timeliness. Specifically, theorists are encouraged to expand their imagination to as far as what is not obvious by reference to what are obvious from their subjects, such as rational decision making, formal procedures, rules and regulations, including formally assigned capacities/authorities in accordance with particular organizational structures. In other words, protoplotting is expected to supplement theories or models that provide



particular rules or principles by abstracting reality with conventional methods by taking into account each one's imaginative capacities to (re)construct reality.

Protoplotting aims to not only encourage but also legitimate researchers' imagination to account for what is not obvious. Legitimacy of researchers' imaginatively accounting for what is not obvious resides in the fact that processes of organizing operate on chance events (Cohen, March and Olsen 1972, Czarniawska 1999). As the weak teleology of the act of uttering explains, whether or not an actor takes a particular action is not predictable. Also, meanings or interpretations of actions are defined and re-defined in an alternate and diegetic manner between actors' embodying assumptions that are made hypothetically and observers'/readers' reading their realities into the embodied assumptions; thus, social reality is imaginative construction of different actors. More critically, it is the weak teleology that enables the ethics that keeps conversations going from which particular social orderliness emerges. We, as readers/observers, should appreciatively understand actions/denotations of reality as actors'/authors' acceptance that their actions/denotations could be read and understood by others in their own ways. By so understanding, it becomes manifest that reasons, purposes or motivations of certain actions/denotations are mediated between observers/readers and actors/authors. Ethics as we each practice it in everyday life is indeed a collaborative project between two or more actors.

What is more, in practicing ethics, each one's actions/denotations of reality leave behind more or less ambiguity and uncertainty about one's sense of evaluative/moral appropriateness that drives one's pursuit of 'intention for happiness' by means of 'power' and 'norm'. Despite (or probably because of) such remnant ambiguity and

uncertainty, and as we each play the roles of both reader/observer and author/actor, we are liable to assume that we each fulfill moral obligations for successful interactions in ways that we each take responsibility for accounting for each one's reasons, goals and motivations for actions. As such, one's innate pursuit of particular rules and principles necessarily draws one's attention more to what is obvious, thus easy to be accounted for, in actions/denotation of reality in terms of both substance and appearance, i.e., forms and styles, than to each one's evaluative/moral concerns, which is non-obvious.

What is critical about such almost inadvertent allusion to particular rules and principles is that such rules and principles are dealt with as the targets of attribution of one's evaluative/moral appropriateness. Simply put, one comes to show faithfulness or loyalty to particular rules and principles. In effect, it would get more and more difficult for actors to interact with each other by means of each other's evaluative/moral concerns which are supposed to retain rich and immediate information about each other's reality, even if ambiguous and inconclusive. Thus, the roles of researchers are important as mediators who account for the processes of each one's imaginative mediation by reference to actions/denotations of reality. Rather than by pursuing particular rules and principles that can be applied to research subjects, researchers' imagination can be legitimated by appreciating the weak teleology entailed in mundane discursive practices, which should culminate in the ethics that keeps conversations going. Researchers' imagination for each one's evaluative/moral concerns could contribute to 'theorizing as engaged practice' (Zundel and Kokkalis 2010) by offering as diverse plots as possible along which their subjects follow researcher's narratives into which the subjects' realities could be read. Analyses of mundane discursive practices will become a collaborative project between researchers and their subjects in ways that strengthen each

other's capacity to nurture, rather than eliminate, the uncertainties and ambiguities that are inevitably left behind in our mundane examinations of reality by reference to substantive, contextual, and evaluative/moral relevancies.

## **CHAPTER 6 PROTOPLOTTING THE FUTURE**

### **6.1 Relevance of the Plot for Studies on Organizing**

Based on the hypothesis that mundane utterances can be seen as lay actors' implicit and context-specific theories that denote their reality, this thesis has examined in detail processes by which actors are engaged with mundane discursive practices. Different from the conventional assumption that communication proceeds by exchanges of information between concerned actors, it assumes that communication is possible because each actor supplements, with her/his capacity of imagination, information that does not necessarily appear in either her/his own or others' denotations of reality. Mundane utterances are regarded as lay actors' theories to the extent that they guide their imagination in ways that enable them to manage to communicate with others.

Drawing upon Weick's (1987) model for the practically relevant theorizing of organizational communication, this thesis found that actors created their respective sense of relevance by imagining particular meaningful wholes out of others' denotations of reality. More specifically, Weick's model offers five criteria of relevance: descriptive, goal and operational relevance, timeliness and non-obviousness. Even though his model is primarily meant for theorizing of organizational communication, the model was found to be applicable to address the problem arising from the differences between the conventional scientific validity and the practical relevance of theories in management and organization studies (Sandberg and Tsoukas 2011, Zundel and Kokkalis 2010) by taking into account the significance of the contextual and temporal transitions of relevance by reference to those five criteria.

Moreover, it was found that Weick's model peculiarly resonated with narrative frameworks, which provide frames with which to theorize processes of mundane discursive practices. The resonance appears to reside in the attention of both Weick's model and narrative frameworks to the implicit but critical function expected of formal theories in contrast with lay actors' theories, that is, the revealing moment. This is, in narrative frameworks, represented as one of the functions of plot. As we follow stories, plot not only guides us through events sequenced in particular orders but also, in doing so, reveals in front of us particular consequences or changes in circumstances and/or characters' fates unfolding (Boje 2001). This unfolding in time is of particular importance in actors' making better sense of theories by reference to their reality. In Weick's model, the effects of time in everyday human experiences can be accounted for by the five criteria of relevance. Moreover, both the five criteria of relevance and plot are capable of explaining how the non-obvious relevance or the revealing moment is enabled by actors' practical skills and knowledge, enacted in their making sense of reality.

As are often likened to models, theories become effective when actors acknowledge similarities/dissimilarities between the reality denoted in theories and their experiences. Hence, theories and models work better based on metaphorical or substitutive logic (Czarniawska 1999). Both of them also explain that such metaphorical functioning of theories is enabled by a variety of contextual information, i.e., descriptive and operational relevance and timeliness, which can be provided narratively. Hence, theories are not mere metaphors but are always accompanied by descriptive accounts in words as well as propositional accounts in words, equations, charts or other graphic devices. The non-obvious relevance is particularly important in that practitioners, when

offered a certain theory, should be enabled to make comparisons between reality denoted in the theory and that being experienced in ways that reveal the practitioners' implicit and context-specific assumptions and principles, which can be regarded as lay actors' everyday methods and theories. Weick's model typically explains that theories as particular denotations of reality are likely to become more relevant when they are imagined in ways that a certain set of procedures are held together within a particular period of time punctuated by a particular beginning and an ending. Time we are experiencing, therefore, appears to be predicated more on time created by particular ways of plotting a variety of events into particular sequential orders, which reading offers to us as so-called narrative temporality (Cunliffe, Luhman and Boje 2004) rather than as inorganic chronological time.

The processes by which actors experience narrative temporalities are of particular relevance for theories with which to understand mundane discursive practices, consisting of lay actors' denotations of reality. As the analyses in the preceding chapters demonstrated, mundane discursive practices proceed through the alternate and diegetic successions of denotations of reality and reading others' denotations, which are given particular styles/forms through actors' establishing the three distinct understandings along the triad of mimetic processes, that is, substantive; contextual, and meaningfulness at a particular point in time and space. Through the diegetic successions of the triadic processes in mundane discursive practices, actors make sense of reality because the diegetic successions enable actors to provide their feelings and thoughts with particular intelligible forms/styles and utterances serving as symbolic resources, both as substitutable episodic events and as examples of possible ways of denoting reality. More importantly, mundane discursive practices are of significance for offering

actors opportunities to establish the sense of non-obvious relevance by mediating appropriate symbolic resources in terms of both the substantive and the syntagmatic relevance. This process of mediation contributes to actors' making better sense of reality by experiencing narrative temporality in the same way as formal theories. The triad of mimetic processes is thus capable of exemplifying the common logic along which particular denotations of reality become relevant even if when, for whom, for what purposes and with what capacities, are all dependent on virtually infinitely variable contexts.

The triad of mimetic processes, which is derived from Ricoeur's (1984/1990) theory of emplotment, is further found to be capable of accounting for the power/rule constitution along the meaning-interpretation nexus (Clegg 1989) because of the intrinsic normative quality entailed in the processes of emplotment. Hence, plot is found to be a powerful framework with which to explicate the less visible processes of imagination enacted by each individual actor to make sense of reality by providing rather ambiguous and ephemeral feelings and thoughts with particular intelligible, and hopefully, plausible forms/styles by reference to both substantive and contextual relevance.

With regard to the relevance for studies on organizing, the triadic model of emplotment is capable of enhancing analyses of mundane discursive practices as constituent part of processes of organizing. It will do so based on an assumption that human ways of knowing should be hypothetical and inferential. Starting from the question about the precedence of reasons for actions, this study elaborated processes by which reasons appear to take precedence over actions despite the fact that the order is vice versa. As the intricate transitions of the sense of relevance are accounted for, people are actually

muddling through the uncertain future with their imagination, which can be traced by reference to the five criteria of relevance. They do so by paying attention to the substantive and the contextual aspects of reality to establish hypotheses that are as reliable as possible. What is the most critical is the existence of one who mediates all the information into particular meaningful wholes. This represents the human critical ability to imagine one's self in ways that can be moved around in relation to a variety of others (Vygotsky 1978). Without this ability to divide things into subjects and objects, human beings could not have developed such complex sign systems as language. Hence, it is important to confirm that reason and language are enabled by human ways of being in the world in which simple and reflexive actions already involve judgments about relevance or appropriateness of actions, caused by the innate and immutable character of making sense of reality by means of substitution/contrasting (Taylor and van Every 2000).

Ricoeur's theory of emplotment comprised of the three-fold mimesis explains the involvement of judgments at the practical level of mundane language use. The simple skills and knowledge with which to establish connections between relevant properties in appropriate ways, which are indispensable to establish understandings by means of symbolically mediated media, already involve a normative quality. Even if starting from simple skills and knowledge to make syntagmatic connections, insofar as presuming interactions with others, particular rules develop and concerned actors come to put certain values on their compliance with such rules backed by a positive sense about their successes in communications with others. As such, human ways of simply being in the world inevitably generate and continuously renew a variety of institutions none of which is value-neutral or *a priori* defined.



What is important in examining processes of organizing is, however, the aspect of such self-generating institutions that enables the hypothetical inferences with which actors take actions. Rather than pursuing *a priori* coherent and consistent rules and regulations, actors act as long as they can establish actionable hypotheses. Such hypotheses are actually invaluable because without them further sophistication of institutions through innovation and invention is difficult to be expected. As established by the evolutionary views on social development, diversity increases the chances of adaptive change (Weick 1979). More crucially, rules and regulations that organize behavior or social orderliness can never be conclusive but are continuously being negotiated. Thus, diversifying hypotheses and continuously sophisticating institutions are crucial to organizing individuals' thoughts and actions and a variety of social entities and associations.

In order to counter the foreseeable difficulties in or resistance to the diversification of actors' seemingly unreliable hypothetical inferences, it is necessary for actors to devise practical methods. The triad of mimetic processes is one such method, which makes visible how feelings and thoughts change by paying attention to the substantive and the contextual aspects of reality in reference to our own sense of relevancy. The triad exemplifies the nesting and nested relationship between conventional scientific reasoning and practical syntagmatic reasoning, both of which are inevitably affected by the seemingly irrational and illogical sense of appropriateness felt by each actor at a particular point in time and space.

Since the triad of mimetic processes is only capable of illustrating processes that are being practiced on a day-to-day or rather a moment-by-moment basis, it is actually difficult to become meaningful on its own in the practical settings. In Weick's terms,

the triad of mimetic processes is ‘obvious’ rather than ‘non-obvious’. To supplement certain values of everyday practices a framework comprised of certain substantive properties is needed. Narrative frameworks provide five constitutive elements of plot in this regard: acts, actors, scenes, purposes and agencies (Czarniawska 1999, quoting Kenneth Burke). It is expected that actors will be empowered in terms of the capacities of plotting a variety of properties by reference to the five constitutive elements of plot and the triadic processes of emplotment. For instance, goal setting, which is practiced ordinarily in organizations, can be done along either rational scientific or contextual associative logic by reference to the triadic model. The former will be enabled or constrained by concerned actors’ competencies (agencies) and/or varying choice opportunities (scenes) while justified by the seemingly value-neutral and relatively accurate methods with which to obtain particular goals by identifying rules or principles as universally applicable as possible along the logic of substitution. In contrast, the latter should pursue contextual relevance, which is inevitably inconclusive and arbitrary but possible to be inclusive if as many patterns between the five constitutive elements of plot as possible are taken into consideration by carefully examining concerned actors’ competencies, including locally available context-specific knowledge and even seemingly irrational emotive capacities, and a variety of institutions and cultures, including informal norms and habits.

In what follows, the chapter elaborates why and how it is important to empower capacities of plotting a variety of properties even if all of the plots so established cannot be materialized. It starts by exemplifying the intricate linkages between the human ways of being in the material real world, time and words. To understand the linkages, it is necessary to address the persistent problem, probably impossible to eliminate, of

inequality. Because it is inevitable and it concerns the intrinsic morality of human beings, inequality needs to be countered by practically feasible and sustainable strategies. The goal to be pursued by such practically feasible and sustainable strategies is to increase the number of plot as many as possible. Strengthening the capacity of emplotment primarily sifts the flux of information by reading, rather than by prescribing particular ways of plotting reality. If we become confident in our abilities to read, we will not have to be worried too much about flooding denotations of reality. What is important is to acknowledge that as far as certain denotations take particular shapes, someone's efforts at making better sense of reality must be behind them and such efforts cannot or ought not to be dismissed as if non-existent. Denotations of reality should not be seen as representation of anyone's reality (Lorino, Tricard and Clot 2011) but as evidence of someone's being in this world.

The chapter concludes by discussing possible contributions of plot to establish a disciplinary identity of management and organization studies as a genre (Czarniawska 1999), which studies people's everyday practices in the variably but intensively interwoven textures of institutions in organizations. Writing reports on organizational events and phenomena is an important means with which to examine reality by mediating science and humanity into meaningful wholes in light of materializing ethical practices. The reports so produced will serve as resources for subsequent examinations of life of a broader spectrum of audiences, i.e., those who work with organizations, than academics and/or managers.

To do so, what is critical is to enable conversations even between seemingly mutually less relevant reports. The framework consisting of the triadic processes of emplotment

and the five constitutive elements of plot serves as a guideline for both how to read others' reports and how to develop researchers' investigative strategies, including how to write reports. The theories about plot and emplotment draw our attention to the remarkable ability of human imagination that appropriates both mimetic and diegetic patterns, which are available in the form of symbolic resources, in ways that occasionally transcend physical or conceptual boundaries and hierarchical orders. Such transcendence occurs in actors' attempts to make better sense of reality while they are aware of their finitude but also of infinite possibilities toward it. Insofar as no one can be sure of any definitive boundaries between either physical or conceptual constructs, it is rather detrimental to presume *a priori* some (unknown) absolutely foundational rules, principles or evidence. It is important to enrich the diversity of plot, rather than to discipline and prescribe how to plot, with which to produce as many actionable hypotheses as possible, such that the hypotheses will later be refined with either substitutive or syntagmatic logic. Imagining as many possible futures as possible by suspending disbelief will certainly contribute to better ways of managing the uncertain future in terms of both fulfillment of intentions for happiness and somewhat improved predictability.

As far as time is created by human actors' paying attention to things and/or some ineffable but perceptible substances, prediction cannot only concern obtaining accurate results by calculation as per some universal causal laws but also gives particular shape to vague and ambiguous feelings or perceptions. Giving some intelligible shape to reality or enabling ourselves to acknowledge the existence of something ineffable but perceptible is certainly critical for us to identify/classify particular variables.

Predictability in conventional terms will also be increased by devising as enriched varieties of plot as possible.

## **6.2 Being, time and words: Everyone's deserved dignity**

The triadic model of emplotment with which I analyzed mundane discursive practices that took place in an Internet discussion forum is primarily meant for examining the processes of sensemaking. The analyses exemplified what actors did in reading and issuing mundane utterances to manage uncertainty and anxiety about the future caused by the bankruptcy. The model is, however, powerful enough to transcend the specific local context of the case online forum. An implication was presented as to the model's applicability to the analysis of the power/rule constitution along the meaning-interpretation nexus, which is ubiquitously observed in organization settings.

What I discuss below continues, from the previous chapter, concerning 'ethics as practice'. The triadic model of emplotment serves to make visible processes of sensemaking in ways that relate the less visible processes of imagination to the 'intention for happiness', which is pursued by means of 'power' and 'norm'. In order to emphasize further the model's strength of accounting for the less visible processes of imagination, I elaborate below the intricate linkages between human ways of being in the material world, time and words, which can be explained by grounding these in the processes of symbolic mediation. Although the triadic model is meant for analyses of mundane discursive practices, it entails the nesting and nested structure of mediation that is possible to trace back as far as the origin of consciousness, the isomorphic and fractal development of a variety of organic substances. It is probably this way that particular physical laws emerge out of seemingly random chaos, if we follow the

process of abductive inferences persistently, which can be understood to entail already an interpretative aspect<sup>2</sup>. Those who are concerned with predicting the future need to pay attention to processes in which particular rules and laws are emerging without *a priori* foundational rules and principles in order to appreciate the significance of the capacities of abductive inference especially in rapidly changing environments.

For the purpose of addressing one of the critical problems concerning social ontology, that is, inequality or unevenly distributed resources, the following deliberations are limited to the level of practical language use by means of which ordinary people manage a variety of material and immaterial resources. I argue below that in order to address inevitable inequality, we need to understand that we are self-interpreting beings whose conducts can never be exempted from segmenting extant variable resource endowments regardless of our good (or bad) intentions. Put simply, if one is better endowed with particular resources, her/his conducts inevitably bring about effects that appear as if s/he took advantage of her/his better endowments than others' because s/he cannot take any action without exerting power that is enabled by their capacities of utilizing symbolic resources, and more critically because s/he never knows what the absolute truth is, how definitive boundaries between either physical or conceptual

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<sup>2</sup> The processes appear interpretative simply because nature is saturated with innumerable substances. In such a realm saturated with innumerable substances, particular events and phenomena take place more or less often than others. Such purely probabilistic emergence of patterns naturally organizes innumerable existing substances into different levels of patterns, meaning that other substances that are not directly involved in particular events and phenomena constituting certain patterns can also appear to constitute certain other patterns. As such, a world saturated with innumerable substances is actually saturated with innumerable patterns that are more or less closely related to one another.

The point is the fact that in such a world saturated with patterns there exist some substances that receive continuously same information transmitted from particular patterns. Hence, such substances are capable of identifying some aspects of patterns, including identities of substances constituting patterns. This allows us to call the processes of the naturally emerging patterns interpretative.

constructs can be drawn, thus, the inability to know her/his own finitude, definitive capabilities or choice opportunities. The self-interpreting being thus refers to one who constitutes processes of symbolic mediation by which a variety of resources is defined, mobilized and (re)distributed and, at the same time, who is struggling with making better sense of reality in front of unknown finitude and infinite possibilities. To understand the processes of symbolic mediation and human beings participating in the processes better, I start by explaining the differences between time that are used as one of the resources being managed as if it is a material substance; time created as human beings make sense of reality by sequencing heterogeneous properties into particular orders.

Time is, as we observe, one of the critical resources to be managed in organizations. However, there is no such thing as time in an ontologically objective world. Time is being produced by human beings' paying attention to a variety of things, events and phenomena. When time is dealt with as a quasi-material resource, we do not usually understand that time involves any intervention on our part. This is closely related to the prevailing rational scientific ways of seeing reality. According to the triad of mimetic processes, the rational scientific way of reasoning plays the central role in the realm of substances. The rational scientific way of reasoning serves to find out a certain generally applicable rule or principle by attempting to identify things, events and phenomena with non-contradictory identities along the substitutive or metaphorical logic. As was explained in the preceding chapters, since the triad of mimetic processes constitutes the nesting and nested structure, the apprehension of conspicuous attributes of certain objects is not possible without conceptual networks in which relevant properties are related to one another in particular ways. However, because in the realm

of substances, actors are concerned with the substantive aspect of reality, the existence and the critical function of such conceptual networks are rarely recognized. In the realm of substances, actors are liable to pay less attention to the fact that accumulated experiences over time are indispensable for and necessarily affect their apprehension of what they are encountering. In consequence, the realm of substances necessarily becomes a timeless world consisting of substitutable things, events and phenomena, including human beings.

In the realm of substances, a situation emerges in which time becomes a quasi-substance which can be measured by clock or other means. Put differently, everything in the realm of substances is given a non-contradictory identity that makes everything substitutable so that it comes to serve as a certain variable to be counted and measured to *discover* a certain causal logic. There is no such thing as time in an ontologically objective world, of course: time is always created by human beings' imagining things, events and phenomena in particular contexts. By imagining these in particular contexts, a sense of temporality emerges because one puts these into particular sequential orders in ways that are meaningful. Time one *experiences* is in principle narrative time but it has now become common that time is dealt with as composed of substances.

What this situation indicates is that narrative time can be abstracted in order to give certain feelings, which constitute and are constituted by the sense of temporality, a particular name. This is simply because one must be feeling something when encountering particular things, events and phenomena and associating these with one another into particular sequential orders. Such feelings are probably concerned with a variety of changes and transitions that occasionally draw actors' attention. Simply



because the world consists of both relatively stable and unstable things, such a term as 'time' that enables denotations about changes and differences in speeds, durations and intervals is demanded and useful to communicate a variety of changes and transitions in reality to other actors.

The critical but subtle difference between narrative and abstracted time can best be understood by relating to differences between processes and variances. The former is advantageous in describing transitions of events and phenomena in ways that provide particular contextual information. The latter contributes to identifying/classifying a variety of movements at a particular point in time and space. It even enables analyses of time-series data by putting discrete data into chronological orders. Narrative time is created by referring to a variety of events and phenomena already elapsed. Abstract time, by contrast, is demanded for management of either immediate or distant futures, which requires certain rules and principles with which to make as accurate predictions as possible, albeit that such rules and principles build upon one's skills and knowledge to make appropriate connections between heterogeneous properties.

In addition to the dichotomous contrast between abstract and narrative time, it should be noted that there must exist one's being at a particular point in time and space, without which there would be nothing, no time or whatever, to which a particular form/style needs to be given by means of words or other forms of signs. What is the most critical about the proliferation of abstract time is the relatively lesser visibility of one's being in it as well as the different temporal orientations mentioned above between narrative and abstract time. In order to take into account the existence of one's being at a particular point in time and space, narrative time can be understood to be abstracted along the triad

of mimetic processes, meaning that it originates in certain feelings or stimuli an actor receives from nature at a particular point in time and space. In such stimuli, certain accumulated experiences over time with regard to variable regularities/irregularities, such as movements of celestial bodies and climatic changes, must hold a critical part (Ricoeur 1984/1990). The triad of mimetic processes is, therefore, mimetic in the sense that human beings are capable of mediating a variety of stimuli they are receiving from nature in terms of both discrete and continuous data into particular ways of denotation, such as abstract and narrative time.

These processes of symbolic mediation occur around the production of different meanings by means of the term 'time', which consists of intricate combinations between processes and variances, or diegeses and mimeses. Human beings are capable of perceiving both transitions/changes over time and synchronic patterns. More importantly, they are capable of making sense of these by mediating them into particular meaningful wholes. What is to be noted in the processes of symbolic mediation is that because one's being, who plays key part in mediating processes and variances into particular meaningful wholes by means of certain symbolically mediated media, belongs to the material real world and receives a flux of information concerning it, it happens that when acting, one necessarily brings about changes in material settings, and such changes to material settings necessarily affect subsequent symbolic mediation. More critically, these inevitable connections between one's material reality and symbolic mediation are necessarily blinded by the act of denotation by means of symbolically mediated media.

Here, we need to pay attention to the fact that human ways of being in the world, time and words are related in peculiar ways. While time is one of the words that denote virtually nothing specific, it is created by practical demands for managing ever changing but in some ways stable and patterned reality. Human beings become involved in symbolic mediation as they denote, by using the term ‘time’, aspects of reality consisting of a variety of substances, other actors, events and phenomena, including subjective feelings and perceptions, all of which are of both more or less invariant structures/shapes/attributes and more or less regular/irregular changes/movements in terms of either quality or frequency. The term ‘time’ actually has even more significant effects than the efficient and effective management of a variety of resources by utilizing the term in the sense that it can, in an extreme manner, abstract out a vast amount of information, typically that concerning processes, to the extent that all the ineffable senses can completely be canceled out, chiefly for the sake of obtaining non-contradictory identities for measurement and identification of some universal causal laws. The fact that we use the term ‘time’, thus, appears as if the term contains all the processes by which human beings became able to utilize a variety of symbolic resources as we are presently experiencing.

Time actually represents a significant role in making us self-interpreting beings, as well as in denoting reality without knowing what it exactly is. The fact that we use the term ‘time’ without knowing what it is exactly suggests that words, not only limited to the term ‘time’, are an emergent property of human beings’ efforts to make better sense of reality. Hence, words are best understood as dispositions acted out by actors on a hypothetical and inferential basis, in particular ways for particular purposes, in particular contexts, rather than being instruments with which to represent aspects of

reality and/or to communicate particular information to others. It is difficult to assume that one can at any time manage to use words in ways that satisfy one's *a priori* defined interests and purposes by denoting reality correctly in terms of pragmatic rules of use, other contextual (normative) relevance and the logical coherence and consistency between attributes of innumerable substances being denoted. At the individual level, one can denote reality in any way by means of words. The limits of denotation are set by each individual's senses. In interaction settings, insofar as it is making sense to two or more actors, any denotation can be sustained. The limits are set by each one's referring to the substantive and the contextual aspects of reality and one's sense of meaningfulness (interests and concerns). The act of denoting reality by means of words is not actually structured by any other means than the triad of mimetic processes. As was explained in Chapter 4, therefore, the act of denoting (narrating) reality is of critical meaning on its own. In the act of denoting reality, what is most critical is the fact that one manages to denote reality in any way. The processes by which to denote reality by setting certain limits are more important than particular denotations as outcomes, i.e., meanings and styles/forms. Teleology in terms of the act of denoting reality is actually weak; in other words, by one's own act of denoting reality one blurs one's reality, mostly not purposely. Words can even tell lies without any vicious intention (see also p.85).

Furthermore, words could be abstracted in varying degrees in terms of the diegetic connections from the past. Abstracted words sound strange because words are normally understood as a tool with which to abstract reality in particular ways. The abstracted words refer to words that pay little or no attention to the diegetic accumulation of experiences, history and knowledge without which words would not appear with

particular forms and styles as well as meanings. They are understood ‘correctly’ only if every reader is educated/trained properly in accordance with universally applicable rules that can be established along rational scientific lines or through a substitutive logic and method. Because of the orientation towards a mechanistic view of words as implied above, we should take seriously the abstraction of words, which is one of the effects of the act of denoting reality. Once denoted in particular ways, words can be read by readers in virtually infinite ways.

Two pitfalls are perceived, which seem to entrap us, to divert our attention from different agencies bestowed on words and ourselves. One concerns the actually floating problem of the attribution of the moral obligations over use of words; the other appears to be arising from the substantiveness of words, particularly of written texts. Despite weak teleology, considering the intrinsic normative quality in simple syntagmatic rules, those who manage to denote reality in particular ways are supposed to believe that they comply with particular rules in terms of pragmatic rules of use of language and/or norms and socio-cultural values relevant in particular contexts. Nonetheless, their denotations will possibly be read otherwise. Hence, it should be understood that neither authors nor readers are able to hold themselves accountable for fulfilling moral obligations for particular denotations, grounding them in either the contents or the manner of the denotations. While it is obvious that how to read is invisible, unless readers explain it in their words; authors would say that they denoted in ways that were intelligible to readers such that authors can hold themselves accountable only for their *faithfulness* to their denotations rather than their denotations *in themselves*. Whether or not readers understand denotations and how depends on how they read. Communications between actors, in other words, depend on acceptance of each other’s

assumptions that each should be communicating in accordance with each one's faith in purposes, competencies and worthiness of the reality being communicated. Denotations in words convey particular information but also they mediate, rather than directly engage, authors' and readers' respective senses of appropriateness in ethical terms.

Communications by means of denoted reality involve, in a subtle way, negotiations over ethical appropriateness as well as exchange of information between actors. Despite the critical role of mediation between authors' and readers' senses of ethical appropriateness, insofar as words have their substantiveness, they are inevitably conceived of as quasi-substances. When conceived of as substances, words should be apprehended based on a variety of attributes and appearances, such as spelling, dictionary-meanings of terms, grammatical correctness/mistakes and logical coherence of and between sentences. When one is concerned with the substantive aspect of reality, understandings are oriented toward non-contradictory identities of a variety of properties, such that one will become able to obtain a positive sense that things belong to particular appropriate categories (Ricoeur 1984/1990). Apart from the positive sense arising from the identification/categorization, according to the triad of mimetic processes, even if implicit, actor's attention is supposed to be paid between the substantive aspects and the contextual aspects of reality, and more or less affected by each actor's judgments on or beliefs in the appropriateness of the rational scientific methods and reasoning along the substitutive and metaphorical logic. As has been repeated, human beings make decisions based not on discrete data but on data networked in particular ways along the triad of mimetic processes (see also Whittle and Mueller 2012).

Because of the implied evaluative appropriateness in the processes by which to understand the substantive aspect of reality, making sense of denoted reality focusing on its substantive properties, i.e., dictionary-meanings, grammatical correctness/mistakes and coherence in and between sentences, requires careful examination. Specifically, the substantive understandings or apprehension of seemingly conspicuous attributes of simple material objects always require certain targets of attribution. This is simply because human beings are not capable of identifying things with discrete data but only capable of doing so by relating relevant data to other data. Such is the case with substantive aspects of denotations in words. Thus, the intricate relationship between the floating attribution of moral obligations explained as the first pitfall and the targets of attribution required for one's substantive understandings deserves careful attention.

In the latter attribution, people pursue targets *in* coherence of denotations in terms of such substantive aspects as assuming certain meaningful wholes in denotations. As was discussed in Chapter 3 and 5, such an assumption about coherence (or absence of it) is actually created on the part of readers by imagination. Hence, if readers focus exclusively on the substantive aspects of denotations to make sense of them, they are fated to overlook the fact that they are actually negotiating with author(s) by means of each other's assumptions about each other's responses, thus, each other's preferred ways of presenting themselves. Missing out the contextual and situated relationality of communication by means of denoted reality has a serious implication for ethical practicing as well as mutual understandings (see Lorino, Tricard and Clot 2011). It actually under-evaluates both their own and authors' imaginative capacities. Too much focus on the substantiveness of denotations in words also implies problems concerning ethical practicing of communication by means of words.

As for the floating attribution of each actor's sense of moral obligations, the triad of mimetic processes needs to be referred to again. According to it, one's focus on the substantive or the contextual aspects is supposed to be affected by certain dominant discourses, institutions and socio-cultural values, which are constituting and constituted by one's experiences. In other words, if one focuses more on the substantive aspect than the contextual aspect, there must exist many others who do so. Otherwise, one's preference for the substitutive logic and the world of substances with non-contradictory identities would not culminate in her/his dispositions or habits through repetition. What is to be noted in the interactions between an actor and certain dominant forces is the fact that each actor's experiences are always involved even if how they mediate the substantive and the contextual aspects by what focus cannot be predicted. Put differently, in order for one to show a certain disposition, certain 'success stories' must be continuously supplied to one's experiences. These need to be 'success stories' in terms of material and moral consequences. They will not become success only with material consequences but also with positive evaluative values. Stories always connote certain morally ideal types as well as contexts that are provided by events and phenomena sequenced into particular orders (Ricoeur 1984/1990).

Despite the necessity of morally appropriate stories, when many people allude to the substantive aspect of reality, what concerns them most is predictability in terms of material consequences backed by tangible empirical evidence. This is first and foremost because we are fated to suffer from the unknown future. Despite the fact that predictability in terms of material consequences will not solve completely the problems arising from the unknown future, it certainly relieves people, not only by increased predictability but also by actually improved security and wellbeing in material terms.



Hence, people's allusion to the rational scientific or substitutive logic that identifies things with non-contradictory identities and, in consequence, certain definitive causal laws, is much more irresistible than that of possible discretionary power to define the future narratively. In short, without actual positive material consequences, people may not like to believe the substitutive logic. Or rather, success stories necessary for sustaining people's allusion to rational scientific logic can be substituted by certain material consequences only if these contribute to actual material wellbeing. Put differently, rational scientific logic has a kind of self-reinforcing aspect in the sense that, insofar as material positive consequences continue to be brought about, such material consequences are capable of representing people's evaluative preferences and thus, by implication, their senses of moral correctness. It is not unusual to find us feeling loyal to particular things (Ricoeur 1990/1992).

What this indicates is that when people remain in the realm of substances in which the substitutive logic plays the central role, they are likely to be exempted from the burdens that they would have to bear to establish and maintain their own senses of evaluative appropriateness. Such are burdens because evaluative appropriateness is actually situational and relational, meaning that each one needs to negotiate with others on a case-by-case basis by reference to the substantive and the contextual aspects of reality.

The significance of the rational scientific logic should, therefore, be re-examined. It is actually capable of making substitutable not only things by giving them non-contradictory identities but also quasi-things, such as time, words, stories and a variety of abstract concepts, all of which actually consist of irreversible sequential orders. What is the most critical about the allusion to the rational scientific logic for people's

everyday practices is not the validity of the rational scientific or substitutive logic *per se* in terms of accurate predictions about material consequences but the fact that it has now become difficult for people to find any other appropriate plot than the rational scientific logic with which to plot a variety of stimuli they are continuously receiving in everyday life.

According to theories about plot, plot can be seen to consist of five constitutive elements: acts, actors, scenes, purposes and agencies (Czarniawska 1999 quoting Kenneth Burke). The significance of the rational scientific logic with regard to the effects that constrain people's ways of plotting a variety of properties of reality can better be understood by putting it onto the framework comprised of the five constitutive elements. As has already been explained, the substitutive logic does not start working without already networked data in particular ways at the level of practical language use. Thus, it works in connection with heterogeneous properties.

Considering the self-reinforcing aspect of the rational scientific logic that is conditioned by positive material consequences, it is assumed that when certain consequences are paid attention to, the rational scientific logic should immediately associate the five constitutive elements with one another so that it can rationalize the processes by which to make sense of such consequences. More specifically, people's desire for predicting the future is so strong that insofar as certain consequences are and appear to continue to be positive, such consequences immediately become purposes of the five constitutive elements with less regard to the other elements, i.e., actors, acts, scenes and agencies. In consequence, the positive material consequences start telling stories, rather than an author labors to associate those elements with one another to make sense of the

consequences and/or how these have come about. Put differently, in the realm of substances, moral sentiments are liable to be concealed behind tangible material consequences, despite the fact that apprehending the substantive aspects of such consequences is not possible without stories driven by and thus supposed to connote people's moral sentiments.

What is to be noted in particular is that moral sentiments or motivations are critical in making better sense of reality even if the processes by which to construct evaluative appropriateness by means of plot are rationalized in significant ways when the rational scientific logic is preferred; thus, people focus more on the substantive tangible aspect of reality. This is of critical relevance for diminishing trust in science as observed in the anti-vaccination movement. Although some continue to approach the increasing distrust in or diminishing legitimacy of science as one of problems that arise from insufficient understandings of the general public about scientific knowledge, it actually represents ways by which people attempt to make better sense of reality, in which science constitutes only one of the three realms of people's experiences. In other words, the diminishing legitimacy of science needs to be addressed in ways that take into account the intricate relationships between actors' experiences in the realms of substances, practices and self, as are denoted in the triad of mimetic processes. These pitfalls together indicate that the act of denoting reality in words entails, in intricate ways, problems concerning the intrinsic human sense of morality or ethics and the attribution of moral obligations. Since the act of denoting reality generally proceeds in interaction settings not only between actors but also between actors and denotations, it is necessary, in understanding the intricacy, to examine the different agencies bestowed on words and human beings in ways that relate these to one another.

From the analyses above, words appear to have three distinct agencies: denotation, commanding and mediation. Denotation refers to words' capacity to represent authors' efforts at identifying/classifying a variety of substances and quasi-substances. Commanding can be understood as words' capacity to command others' reading them by presenting particular forms/styles that embody authors' assumptions about responses from others. Because of this embedded interactivity as well as visibility (substantiveness), the words' agency of commanding is supposed to operate bilaterally between words and actors. Mediation signifies words' capacities that create and offer actors a kind of open space where actors see their own and/or others' substantive and contextual understandings to become meaningful by reference to their respective interests and concerns. This agency of words represents the fact that meanings of words can change in any way through interventions from actors who each attempt to make better sense of the world, being and selfhood along the triad of mimetic processes, which alternately succeeds between authoring and reading.

As the three distinct agencies of words above suggest, these are almost identical to the agencies normally bestowed on human actors. Specifically, according to the triad of mimetic processes, actors are capable of identifying/classifying objects external to them, establishing assumptions about how others might be seeing them and thinking about in various ways who (or what) they are. Words are, thus, not completely separated from actors both as utterers/authors and readers. Reading others' words necessarily reflects one's attitudes not only towards the words s/he is reading and/or the authors/utterers of the words but also towards one's self, simply because of the third agency of mediation of words. The open space created by the mediating capacity of words enables actors' substantive and contextual understandings to be mediated into certain meaningful

wholes and such wholes already mediated symbolically can further be projected onto the same word since it is a virtually open space, rather than a rigid frame of meaning. Put simply, this is so-called self-referencing of words by means of which actors' selves that emerge only as a result of mediating their substantive and contextual understandings can be denoted in words.

What is important in this intricate relationship between words and actors is that both words and actors' selves are only emergent symbolic beings that can be denoted in any way. Words can thus be understood to belong to both everyone and no one in the sense of the term of modern private ownership. By any means, human beings need to be related to, or entrust something with sufficient substantiveness, to speak for their beings. Words are such substantive predicates of human beings who want words to denote their beings in infinite ways. Because human beings can never stop anticipating the future while they are only aware of their finitude confronted by infinite possibilities, words endlessly build and dismantle ways of denoting reality. Words will never be able to be defined by any other logic than the triad of mimetic processes or the abductive inferential logic (see Boje 2001). Words are belated images of human beings about whom they can only assert that they are existent rather than non-existent.

**Table 6.1 Agencies of words and human beings**

<b>Words</b>		<b>Human beings</b>	<b>In the triadic model</b>	<b>Temporal orientation</b>
Denotation	←	Identifying/classifying	The realm of substances	Future
Commanding	↔	Assuming responses from others	The realm of practices	Present
Mediation	→	Imagining one's self	The realm of self	Past

The fact that we can denote reality in infinite ways indicates the weakness in discourse (see also Chapter 4), meaning that the infinite possible ways of denotation do not mean that human beings have infinite capacities or extensions. On the contrary, obviously inconclusive meanings and interpretation necessarily require negotiations; thus, the power/rule constitution by means of meanings and interpretation in which limits are set by each one's sense obtained along the triad of mimetic processes. In the power/rule constitution, vagueness of meaning occasionally exerts more power in terms of commanding others' reading than do definitive ones. Ethical negotiation cannot be materialized only by invoking (or prescribing) the rational scientific logic with which one's sense of limitation might be described as precisely as possible. In regard to the ethical negotiation over power, it is possible to state that any assertion that pretends to define reality in a conclusive manner is ethically dubious even if logically true because, as has just been stated, everyone is inevitably struggling with the unknowability of the finiteness and the infinite possibilities. Suppose that one who can never be sure of what the absolute truth about equitable resource distribution is talks about means by which to distribute resources in such a conclusive manner as if her/his denotation could realize equitable society: this cannot be understood as ethical practicing.

It is, thus, important to admit that each of us is a self-interpreting being who is fated to confront problems regarding how her/his intention for happiness should be pursued by means of power and norms in front of perceived finitude and infinite possibilities towards it. To do so, everyone more or less agrees to interact with others by means of words or other symbolically mediated media by enacting the simplest skills and knowledge to establish syntagmatic connections between innumerable properties in appropriate ways. So understanding is important to address inevitable inequality.

Especially those who are relatively better endowed need to acknowledge the practical impossibility of denying any possibility that these skills and knowledge may have been enacted by taking advantage of a variety of imbalances in terms of innate and inherent competencies or other material resources. No one can be sure which part of skills and competencies is innate predispositions and which is acquired dispositions. It is simple and straightforward to state that we ought to overcome a variety of problems by developing our skills and knowledge, typically those concerning the rational scientific reasoning. However, saying so may turn out to be complacency about one's abilities to understand reality correctly, for instance in terms of rational science, without regard to one's material and other endowments. The only solution to this ethical dilemma arising from the impossibility of distinguishing categorically between nature and nurture is to denote reality by inducing everyone's reading in a positive or associative manner, rather than in a substitutive or reductionist manner. Otherwise, we continue competing in an ethical landscape that is inevitably diminishing because of our own efforts to establish as definitive ethical standards as possible, despite our intention with respect to ethical conducts. Each one sets limits of extension by reference to each one's sense of reality at a particular point in time and space while being forced to stand on such a fragile ground as that on which one has to manage the uncertain future without knowing even what is needed for one's subsistence.

The problem is how one can denote reality in ways that induce others' positive reading. In this respect, I propose to utilize the triad of mimetic processes and the five constitutive elements of plot with which to investigate a variety of practices in organizations in ways that induce as wide a range of readers as possible to enrich the diverse variety of plots by suspending often rather hasty disbelief. Rather ambitiously, I

assume that management and organization studies will be able to establish a kind of disciplinary identity that studies people's everyday practices in the sphere where a variety of institutions is intersecting variably but intensively, that is, organizations. Probably, one of the important contributions of studies on practices in organizations or organizing will be to enable continuing conversations by means of study reports that are capable of inducing imagination about as many possible realities as possible by appreciating human knowledge in conventional sciences and humanities as they accumulate over time. History matters in the sense that it reveals to us what practicing ethics in everyday life should be and how. Studying everyday practices by focusing on the processes by which actors are plotting a variety of properties in particular ways should enhance our understandings of how we are and how we know, while entwined in the processes of symbolic mediation from which a variety of institutions emanates. The next section elaborates one possible strategy by organization scholars to denote reality in ways that induce conversations between different actors by means of plot.

### **6.3 How to plot to open up as many possible futures as possible**

As the focus has now shifted to 'theorizing as engaged practice' (Zundel and Kokkalis 2010), what follows is a proposal on how theories of processes of organizing can address inevitable inequality by utilizing theories about plot or emplotment. The key are the unavoidable chance events that tend to be left out in conventional formal theorizing. As we act on a hypothetical and inferential basis, it will not be reasonable to expect that our mundane sense of ambiguity and uncertainty can be eliminated by any rational, political/ethical, aesthetic or theological method. The acknowledgement and acceptance of chance events should, however, be directed toward certain sustainable and



practicable methods, rather than uncritical allusion to reflective diligence or mindfulness (Lynch 2000).

Drawing upon narrative frameworks, specifically Kenneth Burke's five constitutive elements of plot: acts, actors, scenes, purposes and agencies, three points of reference are suggested: purposes, scenes as choice opportunities and agencies (Czarniawska 1999). On top of these, with a particular aim to address inevitable inequality and significance of chance events in tackling inequality, three meanings are proposed: namely, everyone's deserved dignity, situated and relational definitions of desires, and innumerable failed attempts to sensemaking and/or acting. These additional meanings aim to orient researchers' attention more towards difficult moral choices in front of the irremediable problem of inequality than towards discovery of particular causal laws to solve inequality. Since the three points of reference and the additional meanings constitute plot or the nesting and nested processes of emplotment, in combination they enable actors to protoplot heterogeneous properties in such a manner as prototyping.

On the part of theorists, the difficult moral choices concern the fact that they need to theorize reality by saying something in advance as if they make predictions, even if they do not know whether or not their predictions can be correct. Saying something about reality in advance is, to put it differently, abstracting the narrative time experienced by other actors (practitioners) in particular sequential orders. Abstracting others' narrative time implicates abstracting others' being by denotation because, in narrative time, different from chronological time, each actor's being at a particular point in time and space is woven into particular sequential orders. Thus, opportunities for appropriate negotiations with such others should be created for their beings to be paid attention to in

an ethically engaged manner. The virtue of abstraction in advance resides in how it enables others' emplotment by revealing their implicit and context-specific assumptions and principles.

Nonetheless, since the act of plotting occurs to an actor at a particular point in time and space, it is virtually impossible to predict or reproduce it, even if the processes of emplotment can be explicated as in this study. The countermeasure that I propose for theorists is to imagine the 'non-obvious' from the 'obvious', in Weick's terms (1987, 1974). Based on the three reference points and the three additional meanings above, it is possible to direct theorists' attention to what is not present by reference to what they observe.

Specifically, by taking into account everyone's deserved dignity in reference to the scenes as one of the reference points, theorists' attention can be directed at certain seemingly irrational or illogical decisions (the 'non-obvious') as well as rational choices (the 'obvious'). No one is born human either by choice or by knowing where to be born, with what resource endowments, including physical and intellectual competencies. Besides, no one can be sure of her/his own or others' finitude while knowing virtually infinite possibilities toward its accomplishment. It is, therefore, important not to assume that one should always act for rationally chosen objectives in ways that are plausible to either researchers or generalized others. By theorists' protoplotting themselves with assistance of the triad of mimetic processes and the five constitutive elements of plot, certain seemingly irrational and illogical decisions of their research subjects can be read in ways that mimic as precisely as possible the ways by which the subjects' reality is being plotted in particular choice opportunities as well as reasons and competencies. By

so doing, analysts are expected to take into account what is not present to them by reference to what they observe.

As for purposes as a constitutive element of plot, the additional meaning, ‘situated and relational definition of desires’, can be associated such that theorists will be able to imagine alternatives to certain goals which their research subjects appear to pursue. By so doing, theorists may become able at least to encourage their subjects to see alternative possible reality by suspending disbelief in seemingly unfeasible goals, such an example as the improvement of company-wide operations by developing a database as was observed in the case online forum of this study (even if it failed to be materialized).

As for the agencies, theorists may direct their attention to the additional meaning, ‘innumerable failed attempts of sensemaking and/or acting’, by reference to repetitively observed actions, such as routines and habits. By assuming failed (or failing) attempts behind certain repetitively observed actions, theorists may be able to plot what they observe in ways that exploit their research subjects’ inventive and serendipitous creativity. In effect, processes in which ostensive and performative aspects constitute particular routines and habits in a rather creative manner (Dionysiou and Tsoukas 2013, Pentland and Feldman 2005) can be accounted for. The triad of mimetic processes should, in this respect, serve as logic along which theorists follow what they observe by imagining their subjects’ interacting with each other by each enacting their capacities of emplotment on the hypothetical and inferential basis.

**Table 6.2 Protoplotting by enhanced imagination (Turn ‘obvious’ into ‘non-obvious’)**

<b>Elements of plot</b>	<b>Additional meanings of ethics</b>	<b>Points of reference in practice</b>	<b>Diversification of plot</b>
Scenes	Everyone's deserved dignity	Irrational and illogical choices	Transcendence across physical and/or conceptual boundaries by imagination
Purposes	Situated and relational definition of desires	Disbeliefs (e.g., goals that appear unfeasible to particular groups of people)	Encouraging imagination about possible plural reality by suspending disbeliefs
Agencies	Innumerable failed attempts	Repetitions, habits, routines	Exploiting inventive and serendipitous creativity

The framework first and foremost contributes methods with which to establish as many alternative plots as possible. By so doing, it will help theorists and actors alike to suspend disbelief and imagine a different possible reality in a positive manner. As design thinking emphasizes the importance of prototyping, to have as many possible plots as possible empowers actors' creative and inventive capacities. Even if such empowered creativity and inventiveness is naturally constrained by a variety of conditions, it is important to have methods with which to give particular styles or forms to one's rather ambiguous thoughts and feelings.

First, one's ambiguous thoughts and feelings constitute reality. Hence, it is important to make them visible and easier to be managed (following Cohen, March and Olsen 1972). While it is apparent that visibility would not solve all the problems concerning the management of complex reality or rather would make it more complicated, it is expected that since writing and reading are co-related (Czarniawska 1998), the anticipated increased complexity due to the increasing variety of denoted reality can be overcome by the strengthened capacities of reading that sift through a flux of information. Subtly but more importantly, expressing one's seemingly ineffable feelings and sensations in words should have a significant implication for one's wellbeing considering the intricate relationships between the human ways of being in the world, time and words as were discussed above. Protoplotting may thus bring about a more engaged manner of treating words and the power of them by imagining the virtually identical agencies bestowed on human beings and words.

Second, by understanding that desires are motivated by a variety of others and being defined socially, it is possible that particular goals first be proposed and later be negotiated with relevant others by reference to other elements of plot. Apart from the diversification of possible plots, such a way of proposing and negotiating a multitude of goals must have a positive moral implication. Instead of attributing one's or others' moral appropriateness as well as precision in empirical and logical terms to what they each denote, it should be much healthier and more constructive to entrust each other's words to mediate each other's moral concerns.

Third, protoplotting encourages innovative and even adventurous inferences. Repetitions and habits are important in this respect. Even if each actor is capable of

creating rather arbitrarily particular meaningful wholes, the processes of emplotment are mimetic since s/he acts on a hypothetical and inferential basis without any absolutely foundational evidence, rule or principle. Put differently, hypothetical inferences are enabled by mimetic processes that take advantage of massive data in which particular sets of events and phenomena naturally occur more or less often than others. Such processes of pattern-generation occurring without any human volitional intervention are mimetic as well as probabilistic to the extent that particular events and phenomena repetitively occur; thus from the point of view of an interpreter, some of them appear as if they were mimicking themselves to formulate particular patterns.

Quantity matters: this is in the sense of the same event happening many times, although, when it does so it is rather frequently threatened by varying qualities (and vice versa). Moreover, because of our inability to identify/classify innumerable substances only by observation, we compensate by constructing narrative identities, which allow us to go about everyday encounters in hypothetical and inferential ways while creating a sense of permanence in the narrative time (Ricoeur 1990/1992). Our remarkable ability to recognize a variety of patterns in terms of both process and variance, or mimesis and diegesis is enabled by the ability to associate relevant information with one another out of innumerable sense data. Such networked information may be called schema or cognitive type. However, I prefer to call it story fragments (after Boje [2001]) in that the narrative time we are experiencing changes and transitions in time can be connoted.

In order to induce innovation or to capture subtler improvisation, we need to know processes by which stories or story fragments are rather quickly formulated to create a sense of permanence without which we could not even obtain sense that we apprehend

certain conspicuous attributes of certain simple material objects. This is of relevance for studies on affordance (Gibson 1978), materiality of a variety of material artifacts and technologies (Barad 2003, Iedema 2007, Leonardi 2011, Leonardi and Barley 2008, Orlikowski 2007) as well. As has been mentioned earlier, things tell stories in accordance with varying contexts in which such things and human beings are situated. Without appropriating such stories or story fragments by imagination, theorists would not be able to account for their research subjects' innovative and inventive ways of pattern recognition and the often unpredictable effects of them.

Fourth, protoplotting possibly exemplifies the intricate relationship between the natural purely probabilistic processes of pattern-generation and the human imaginative appropriation of patterns, something that is felicitous. By understanding this relationship better, it is expected that our imaginative capacities based on hypothetical inference can be more intently exploited at the level of everyday language use. Even if, with our normal cognitive capacities, it seems difficult to discern the processes by which innumerable sense data are related to one another in particular ways (Schechner 1986), it is considered to be possible to attempt, in virtually infinite ways, to give what we are continuously receiving from nature and generating inside us, i.e., perception and feelings, particular forms/styles by means of words. As has been pointed out, both natural pattern-generation and human hypothetical inferences are mimetic. Hence, it is possible by enhancing protoplotting to read and eventually account for the virtually unpredictable emergence of patterns and rules, which should culminate in particular orderliness in terms of both nature and human society, by focusing on the creative aspect of mimetic processes.

These four points guide how to operationalize the proposed framework, which builds upon an ontology that sees both human beings and words to be self-interpreting and hypothetical and inferential ways of knowing. What holds the critical key is, however, to acknowledge the peculiar relationships between human beings, time and words. In particular, the three distinct agencies bestowed on words, which are identical to those of human beings, deserve special attention. As was explained earlier (in 6.2), the words' capacity of mediation that allows self-referencing, which is generally understood to be troubling from the point of view of logically coherent denotations of reality, should be understood to play a significant role in mediating different actors' hypothetical assumptions in both ethical and substantive terms. Ethics is being practiced in a *parrhesiastic* manner along a norm of answerability (see p. 164 in Chapter 5). So understanding is expected to enhance development of innovative and effective methodologies in terms of production of practically relevant theories of processes of organizing, which are capable of renewing understandings and ways of utilizing the power of words, eventually bringing about both individual and organizational wellbeing in ways that address inevitable power imbalances.

#### **6.4 Concluding remark**

Delving into mundane discursive practices, this study has confirmed that processes of organizing can be accounted for as interactions between actors by means of everyday language use. It found that interactions were made possible by each actor's enacting her/his capacities of making sense of reality by reference to the substantive and the contextual aspects of reality and by mediating these into particular meaningful wholes. While this might seem individualistic for attributing source of social orderliness to



individual actors' capacities it reminds us that human beings are inherently social beings who are privileged to have feedback from others on their assumptions about a variety of events and phenomena, including subjective mental ones. By focusing on individual processes, the significance of one's capacity of imagination for sensemaking can be elaborated in ways that predicate the invisible processes of imagination on what is enunciated in words. Another notable finding from the analysis of individual micro-processes is that norms and ethics emanate from rather simple rules that enable us to use a variety of symbolic resources. Thus, mundane discursive practices are constitutive of processes of organizing to the extent that they can account for the power/rule constitution by means of each actor's everyday language use.

Narrative frameworks, particularly Ricoeur's (1984/1990) theory of emplotment, contribute to exemplifying the processes entailed in mundane discursive practices, including each actor's imaginative interactions with others, and accordingly, her/his nearly innate orientations towards ethical conducts. Typically, this study demonstrated that narrative frameworks were not a mere metaphor borrowed from literary studies to analyze organizational events and phenomena but a more powerful and effective accounting device, one that is capable of literally narrating what actors are doing in mundane language use and what effects are to be brought about for both individuals and organizations in such ways that particular consequences unfold and allow readers to experience particular causalities virtually. Plot is, as Ricoeur's theory elaborates, not simply about how to structure stories but about collaboration between authors and readers. It is thus powerful and relevant to theorizing in that the sense of non-obviousness (Weick 1987, 1974) is more likely to be induced by following particular plot in comparison to propositional accounts.

Since narrative deals with language, or more specifically, stories, the actions that narrative frameworks account for as a theoretical/analytical frame are acts of narrating/writing, hearing/reading understanding and interpreting. Among these, this study found particular importance and relevance of reading for theorizing processes of organizing, following previous scholars' efforts at drawing attention to writing organizations and management (Czarniawska 1999, Rhodes 2001, see also van Maanen 1988). As they pointed out, writing and reading are inseparable from each other (Czarniawska 1998). Even if the capacities required are almost identical between writing and reading, considering the existence of innumerable sentiments which remain untold (Boje 2001) and inevitable power imbalances implicated, it is necessary to pay more attention to how we can read organizations effectively.

Reading effectively is of particular relevance for the increasingly accelerating world. Things are continuously flowing into our daily lives. More critically, quasi-things, especially words and concepts become fairly easily commoditized or made simple, striking and appealing slogans. People show their fidelity, loyalty, and moral appropriateness toward such things and quasi-things. The same applies to stories. We do not author narrative in our everyday lives in proper literary terms. Nor, is it practically feasible to see our ways of speaking or establishing understandings as if to tell stories. To read effectively, we need to devise better plots, as diverse as possible, and enhanced skills and knowledge about how we plot a variety of properties that we encounter day by day. Theories about plot and emplotment tell us that we make sense of reality on the hypothetical and inferential basis that is necessarily affected significantly by chance events.

In the processes of making sense of reality by means of hypothetical inference, there have been accumulating innumerable failed attempts to give appropriate forms/styles to one's ambiguous thoughts and feelings. Patterns that can strengthen the hypothetical inferences emerge out of such innumerable failures as well as logically coherent patterns that can be confirmed by conventional scientific methods after the fact. In the world of hypothetical inferences, even if once turning out to be a failure, the same or similar kinds of failure, when accumulated innumerable, may contribute resources for successful denotations of reality in the future. It has been confirmed, at least anecdotally, in practical settings that theories are first accepted and then understood better at a later stage (Weick 1987, 1979). Human beings abduct particular patterns even from denotations that appear irrelevant according to the internal unity of any extant theory or conceptual network or logical coherence between extant conceptual networks. Human serendipity often transcends internal hierarchical orders in particular conceptual networks.

Hopefully, by reading better in the sense that innately hypothetical and inferential ways of knowing are fully taken account of, people extend their imaginative capacities to questions about what happiness is, what better lives are, and what work means as a means to materialize a happy life. People spend substantial part of time of their lives working for work organizations. These questions are neither too romantic nor philosophical questions, I believe, but of considerable practical import.

Narratives that have been and will be produced by studying organizations potentially provide opportunities to reveal people's implicit and context-specific assumptions and principles. It is considered worth examining such potentials among researchers with

existing and forthcoming literature. Typically, such an attempt will make researchers confront their moral sentiments that rarely appear or are paid attention to in their reports. Rather than simply critiquing methodological rigor and/or relevance of studies, confronting each other's moral choices over research questions and investigative strategies and accompanying sentiments will serve to re-define researchers' roles and possible contributions of their research. In addition to provide solutions to particular problems, management and organization studies can address the intricate intertwinement of institutional/structural forces and human ways of conceiving of and managing these in front of a variety of encounters, which appears more often than not difficult to be structured in neat and tidy ways. Even if hardly visible, innate evaluative/moral concerns need to be paid attention to, if not to be accounted for. Researchers deal with human knowledge for betterment of human beings who are innately evaluative/moral beings (Sayer 2011).

To pay attention to each other's evaluative/moral sentiments is possible by understanding them in interactions between two or more actors. Insofar as no one can see directly one's actions, what one can do best is to allow or rather ask others to speak *their* truths as frankly as possible. Even though no one knows what one's truth is, imagining that others might tell *their* truths is the best strategy if one wishes to be faithful to one's truth. Reviewing each other's moral sentiments should, thus, serve to showcase how such a *parrhesiastic* chain of communication can be materialized by means of research reports that contain organizational reality identified and denoted with scientifically rigorous methods. It is hoped, in so doing, that researchers' narrative can be developed by taking into account the triadic agencies of words and creatively arranging different temporality: synchrony and diachrony to reproduce as verisimilar

reality as possible so as to people's implicit assumptions and principles might be revealed.

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