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DIALOG

Undisciplining Organizational Studies

A Conversation Across Domains, Methods, and Beliefs

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AUTHOR'S PREAMBLE

I initiated this conversation as a way of making sense of personal and professional dilemmas. I have a Ph.D. in languages and literature and an MBA in finance. I have taught management and management communication in business schools for 11 years; I have also consulted to businesses and government. I have come to realize that some of the most useful training I received for management education and practice comes from my background in languages, linguistics, and literary theory. In essence, this training cultivates the ability to develop interpretations about what is happening—in a conversation, a text, an event, or a situation—with great awareness of and attention to the quality of the process that produces those interpretations.

At the same time, I have had miserable experiences having to do with my degree being in the "wrong" field. These include widespread differences in salary, power, and social treatment. Generally speaking, business schools tend to view management as primarily a quantitative project. Anything—and anyone—in the domain of verbal, interpretive, or qualitative reasoning process is often considered peripheral, remedial, or even vocational. And yet, every day, I work with students who need help in analyzing business cases and field projects; developing arguments; and synthesizing complex information from a variety of sources, both quantitative and qualitative, into coherent interpretations. Recently, I spoke with a senior executive at one of the leading management consulting firms, someone who recruits at the top business schools in the country, who confirmed a continuing need to de-

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velop students' abilities in these areas. These are the thoughts that depress and tire me.

But then I consider my award-winning teaching methods. They come out of a mood of inquiry that is built into the very concept of studying literature—the idea of entering new worlds. I reflect on my most useful and best-received practices for managerial analysis and communication. Those practices have origins in linguistic, rhetorical, and literary theory. For example, the methods I use to teach case analysis derive from techniques of literary analysis (although I do not dare tell anyone this). And it is not much of a leap to go from the analysis of a business case to the analysis of an actual business problem or situation. Thus we quickly enter the domain of management consultation, problem solving, and decision making.

Ultimately, I have found my training to be very helpful for management. It has helped me teach students and practitioners how to develop and support interpretations, to entertain a variety of arguments and think them through, to make sense out of chaos, to observe how entire worlds are constructed and held together, and ultimately how to discover and make meaning.

The business world, including business school faculties and administrators, speaks about its concerns for innovation, diversity, change, and reinvention. I am more and more convinced that if managers need imagination, healthy diversity, and the resourcefulness to work well amid change, the wherewithal to provide and facilitate these lie in an area not commonly valued in a conventional business school.

I invited three esteemed colleagues to help me think this through. Hayden White (1978, 1980, 1987) had made a pivotal move for me by pointing out the extent to which historical accounts (and hence sociological accounts) form narratives and thus include processes of invention, fiction, and poetry. Mayer Zald comes out of a positivist tradition, and he has recently argued for greater attention to the humanistic disciplines. I found him uniquely positioned to sympathize with and discuss the various convergences and divergences between the two orientations. Mary Jo Hatch has an undergraduate degree in English, a doctorate in organizational behavior, and a career of business school teaching and research. She has worked with both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. She has been working on ways of connecting what she calls interpretivist and functionalist lines of thinking (Schultz & Hatch, 1994). Thus, in all three people, I observed these movements toward a bridging of approaches, methods, and beliefs that often seem to be irreconcilably different.

THE DIALOG

Interests That Led Us to the Conversation

Ellen O'Connor: You each know about my personal situation—being a Ph.D. in linguistics and literature while teaching management and management communication in a business school—and my reflections on barriers between the humanistic and the social science disciplines. Especially in light of recent and emerging ideas about social construction, ethnography, and culture, the field of organization studies points to significant contributions that a focus on language can bring to our understanding of organizations. At the same time, it increasingly looks as though organization science has simply reproduced the division of the disciplines within itself and we are forming our separate "camps." This strikes me as counterproductive in many ways. I initiated this discussion to explore the notion of the discipline (or disciplines within the discipline) that we call *organizational studies.* I am interested in reflecting on the borders around and within this field. What are these borders? What do we gain—and give up—by having them? In what ways are they surmountable or insurmountable?

Hayden White: I am concerned with the migration of ideas and models from one field of study to another. The kind of work I do takes place in an institution, such as a professional association, but it is not institutionalized work. It is not work that addresses individuals who are part of corporate structures or who come to me for consulting. On the other hand, you address institutions, which are concerned with practical affairs such as profits and losses. You speak to the difficulties faced by those who work under tremendous pressures to produce and who are desperate for input that would increase the inventiveness and flexibility of institutional forms that tend to rigidify and to fall into routines. Your work constantly mediates between intellectual work of the kind I am familiar with and these more practical, organizational concerns that require you to be engaged in "translation." One idea or model that is proven effective in one field of study, just as it passes out of that field, may be taken up in

another field and applied to a different body of materials with quite a creative effect. Psychoanalysis is a good example. Clinical psychologists now use very little Freudian theory, whereas in literary studies or certain kinds of philosophy, psychoanalysis has a second birth or second life. I am interested in the difficulties of importing ideas and models that appear to be antiquated or superannuated in one domain and the ways in which they take on importance in another domain.

Mary Jo Hatch: One of the problems we confront in organization studies is that what we might refer to as mainstream work has tended to be instrumental in focus and very interested in the technological aspects of the organization and the economic issues that managers confront daily. After years of thinking in that way, there was not much talk about the symbolic aspects of organizing. Those of us who work in the interpretive tradition are trying to establish another model so that we can talk in a way that captures what managers and other organization members experience. Now, we may overbalance the equation and go too far, but there has been much debate—very heated debate at times—about this difference between the two ways of viewing the organization. Of course, what for a while was called *positivistic* or *functionalist* is now occasionally called *modernist* versus *postmodernist*. But introducing postmodernism complicates the debate immensely. My recent work (Schultz & Hatch, 1994) attempts to build a bridge between functionalism and interpretivism. I believe we might in fact use both the traditional, more modernist or functionalist ways of thinking about organizations along with what we are learning when we look at these problems from a symbolic or interpretive perspective (Hatch, 1993a). Consequently, I am interested in issues of ontology and epistemology. Is it possible to talk from or across two different philosophical positions?

Mayer Zald: On the dilemma for Jo and for those of us who lean more toward interpretive approaches, Hayden pointed out the policy/practical side. There is a big difference between introducing interpretive/literary approaches in a history or sociology department and introducing them in a professional school. I am speaking about a key audience of nonacademics. This audience drives the dean and your colleagues to say, "What's the output of this?" The interpretive styles denaturalize everyday life. This is a key issue. Managers and workers do not want to denaturalize their accounting rules. They do not want to denaturalize their machines. Jo has a harder job in a business school, then, than I have in my sociology department. I was discontented with the straight positivist model for sociology. Because I spent most of my life as an organizational theorist within sociology, it is a fairly natural thing to then say, "Wait a minute. The same kinds of issues I'm raising for sociology also apply for organizational theory." So I go back and forth between those two domains, thinking about the connections and uses of science and the humanities. Some things are best handled in an interpretivist/literary style, but I also think that, without connection to philosophy and history, pure literary analysis has some real limits. It has its own reductionist dilemmas.

Different Ways of Describing Our Topic

White: Let me respond to both of you. When one says "literary analysis," one cannot not hear "aesthetic" only. Cutting-edge work in literary studies has subsumed the literary text under the more general category of discourse analysis. Discourse analysis is not coterminous with literary analysis. Literary language is now seen as one "code" among many that extend all the way over to highly technical metalanguages that you find in scientific and mathematical fields. Literary analysis should not be confused with linguistic analysis. Discourse analysis, in its modern or postmodern form, unfolds within the theory of the sign and within the semiotic conception of discourse. This theory sees verbal practice as merely another form of signification, sign making, and sign exchange. What distinguishes the most advanced work of the last 30 to 40 years in what used to be called literature, and what has created so much turmoil in literary studies, is the fact that the category of the *literary* (understood as *aesthetic* or *rhetorical* in the old-fashioned sense of persuasive speech) has been subsumed into a much more ample view of discourse founded on a semiotic approach to the study of communication performance and cultural production. When you say that literary analysis has real limits, I quite agree with you if you mean something like what the New Critics or the Russian formalists performed. If we are trying to say that it is good for organizations to be more literary or to improve their literary sensi-

tivity, then obviously that is just the old canard about businesspeople being uncultivated. That is not what we have in mind.

Hatch: Mayer, there is a very practical side to the application of discourse analysis in organizations if you take a constructionist position. If the world is socially constructed, then organizations are part of that socially constructed world. The ways in which we produce or believe that organizations are paradoxical, contradictory, and so on actually produce the conditions under which people live and work. There is an incredibly important instrumental issue at the heart of this, which usually is not defined in those terms because the instrumentalists are off thinking about other things and the interpretivists do not think about the implications of their work for the functioning of the organization.

Zald: So you are arguing that the type of detailed analysis of rhetoric, say, in fact has instrumental implications. It could reveal practical issues in the lives of working people.

Hatch: Absolutely. As a starting point, it is certainly a diagnostic tool. For instance, in a study of ironic humor (Hatch, 1993b), I was able to isolate what a group of middle managers experienced as contradictory in the everyday life of their organization (e.g., teamwork vs. opportunism or trust vs. authority). But we can go one step further and say that what happens when you shift your focus in this way is that you start to think about processes. The process of constructing organizations in a symbolic fashion becomes apparent when you start to apply some of these methodologies. We see calls for processual understandings of organizations all the time, but we are not making much progress. When I began to work in the interpretive arena, suddenly process was just right in front of my face! I can now at least begin to talk about and describe some of the processes and instrumental issues that people in organizations have been crying out for. There is far more here of practical benefit than people realize at this point.

O'Connor: Until you mentioned that, I had not thought of describing my work as an insight into process, but that is exactly what it is. You studied humor in discourse and found that it shed light on contradictions in an organization. I did a study focusing on discourse in organizational change—specifically, this was a textual analysis (O'Connor, in press) using techniques of literary criticism—and found that these texts represented a very specific idea of change. For example, there were clear indications as to who was involved in change, in what way, to what extent, and so on. So you could say these texts represented a kind of "static" view of change in that particular organization such that if you asked me, "What does this organization view as 'change'?" I could answer with these verbal "snapshots," if you will. But these texts also represented the process of change itself because they were disseminated to various people, including top management, and led to other change "movements" at various sites of the organization. So, these texts themselves show us the process of change at work. And now that you mention it, Jo, I do not know of any other way we *can* get at process, and it seems extremely important that we should be able to do so.

White: Let us call our topic "cultural analysis." I have argued in my university that we should call the division of the humanities the "division of the cultural sciences." The scientists thought it was a good idea because they did not realize you had such things as the human sciences in addition to the social sciences and that there was a long tradition of this. The field of anthropology now is split right down the middle between symbolic anthropology and the older positivist, empirical, structural, and functional school. These so-called humanistic anthropologists or sociologists really have much more in common with people doing a certain kind of work in literature or history than they do with many of their colleagues in the behavioral sciences. And it relates precisely to the issue of process. When we speak about cultural production, we are talking about process here, not structure alone. The real question is how to grasp change, processes, transformation, moments, and so forth. This is the really crucial issue in the analysis of social, psychological, and cultural phenomena. What happens in that moment of change? After all, the word "trope" means "turn." It is a theory of the turns in discourse. Deleuze's (1993) most recent work has to do with how you conceptualize the interval between two moments that are apprehendable as distinct events or actions. Woolf (1941) dealt with this in her last novel, *Between the Acts*. What happens between events? She metaphorizes that with the image of a pageant and with what happens to the audience

between the acts of the pageant. Of course what happens, she thinks, is nothing. But also nothing happens in the "actions" either. Deleuze puts it this way: How do we characterize the effect of the gap between two still frames in a film, which we apprehend and which gives the effect of movement as we watch it—but which we do not register? What is cognitively significant about the necessity of having to have the gap, the interval, between the two frames? What is its cognitive value? For historians, that has always been the great problem—trying to grasp change. You grasp the moment here, you see this moment, you see that moment. Something has happened in between, but in characterizing the two moments as stable structures, you lose the moment of the turn. As far as organizations are concerned with continued growth, invention, and development, the real question for them is less how to peg down reality than how to grasp the sort of thing that you dealt with, Mayer, in one of your papers (Zald, 1994)—mainly, how do you apprehend paradigm shifts? The organization that does not apprehend that a shift of paradigm has occurred in some domain, and that therefore continues to use older techniques, cannot abandon them. It fails to grasp the shift. How do you grasp a shift? The literary text or discourse provides us with the kind of phenomena that we can practice on.

Hatch: It *is* in discourse, you are right! And this is where, Mayer, you probably have the perspective that we need. I have found that when you try to comprehend organizational change and you stick to the level of an individual thinking about that change, you are in big trouble because it is not happening there. It is happening between and among all those people who are interacting, and some of them are realizing one set of things and some another. When we get up to the organizational level of analysis, we can begin to conceptualize how individuals, none of whom can see the entire change process by themselves, somehow together produce that very process without ever really being able to capture it in any significant cognitive way. In that work I shared with you on humor, I found a little tiny piece of it. When I saw the managers interacting in this humorous fashion, I discovered that there is this sort of community of understanding that appears—and you see it in discourse. I was very naive when I did that study. I had just heard about discourse analysis and did not know a thing about it, so I took the term quite literally and said, "Well, I need to look at people who are discoursing. Who's discoursing around here?" I had access to a group of managers to whom I could listen as they were talking among themselves. I jumped in there, wrote down what they said, and called it "discourse."

Discourse as a Locus of Process and Change

O'Connor: And that discourse that you recorded, over time, allowed you to see processes at work—managers very much involved in routine who get new information about something and who then try on new ideas and actions in response to this new information. In essence, you see the processes of cognition, understanding, and learning at work. In the literary disciplines, we always see this process of sense making in operation. A literary text represents that process. A reader interpreting a literary text also represents that process. Although I have not analyzed discourse (as in spoken conversation), I have analyzed texts. And I have found it to be very similar to what you describe, Jo. As I read the accounts of organization change that I mentioned earlier, I was struck at certain points when I could clearly see the authors struggling to make sense out of the phenomenon before them. For example, at one point after the authors have described the results and benefits of continuous quality improvement, they go on to relate how a number of layoffs were coincidental to this effort. The authors say something to the effect that concerns in the organization have now shifted from continuous quality improvement to continuous job employment. It is a little bit of humor, ironic humor of course, with a pun—but you can see so clearly that this little play with language reflects some underlying unsettlement with the whole process called "change." Jo, you said that in your study, humor was a "piece" of the turn that Hayden spoke about. This relates to my work too. What do you think that piece is, exactly, and how does it relate to something bigger?

Hatch: I backed into everything. [Laughter.] I had planned to apply some ethnographic methods to a situation I had access to. When I did the first round of interviews, the managers individually told me that I would notice their sense of humor. I ignored

them. "Nobody is going to tell me what I am doing." But after sitting in on 4 weeks of meetings, I found that they were pretty funny. I could not ignore it. I wrote down everything that was humorous. Then, because I did not know anything about humor, I went back to the literature and research on humor. I discovered the sociology of humor, particularly Mulkay's (1988) *On Humor*. He led me to several other sociologists. I began to look at the interaction among the individuals and started to see it at the group level. Then I thought back on my old days in English literature and how to approach the issue of content. One of my frustrations in doing ethnographic work is that there seems to be a process and then a separate content component. I have always wanted those two to come together. I saw the process going on, and so I decided to go after the content. I looked at what it was they were joking about, and that led to my discovery that I had a little piece of what was problematic for these managers. The stuff they could not deal with directly emerged in humor. They were joking and laughing about whatever was problematic for them and what their existing tools could not easily resolve.

Zald: Could not use *yet*.

Hatch: Yes. You see this in the way they use humor. As they work in a humorous mode, they find ways to deal with problems in a serious way, and then they drift out of the humor—or their humor moves on to tackle other issues.

O'Connor: This example answers Mayer's question about the utility of discourse analysis for a professional school. An outsider might say, "Humor—that's not profit or loss." But here you have found that the humor enlightens serious, pivotal issues in the organization.

Zald: Yes, and I presume that the humor was directed at substantive themes—tensions, people, products—with some subconscious level of tension around it. This is not underground or backstabbing humor but rather is shared humor, which meant they were dealing with a joint issue.

Hatch: Exactly.

O'Connor: And you can see this with other twists and turns of language, not just humor. For example, in my study on accounts of organizational change, I noticed a number of military metaphors. Now, of course, these have been pointed out before, and specifically in organizational contexts (Deetz, 1986). But I had not seen them analyzed or used in quite the way they were in these texts. The term "champion" was used to describe the initiator of the change effort, who most often was a plant production manager. Then the most frequently used metaphor for the change effort was "journey." I went back to the *Oxford English Dictionary* to check on the etymology of both these terms, and it turns out that they both have strong military connotations. The word champion comes from the Latin "campus," meaning site of battle, and the word journey comes from a word meaning "a day's expanse," one particular variation of which is "the time to complete a battle." These connotations helped me see that some aspect of the change effort was, quite literally, an adversarial project—despite the stated nature and objective of the change effort as being inclusive, participatory, and generally empowering of everyone.

Resistance, Openness, and Problems Associated With Interdisciplinarity

Zald: Let me tell you about a book I have been reading, *Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact*, by Ludwik Fleck (1979). Fleck was a Polish doctor, an immunologist. His book tells the story of the Wasserman test, which is now the definitive test for syphilis, and how the test was constructed. This is a marvelous book in the sociology of science first published in the 1930s, but it was unknown in the United States. The only person who ever checked it out of the Harvard library was Thomas Kuhn in 1950. It was finally published in English in 1979 with a foreword by Kuhn. Fleck develops this notion of a collective thought style. He traces the history of syphilis back to the 14th or 15th century. Syphilis was undifferentiated from many other skin diseases and genital disorders. In fact, they did not even know it was a venereal disease in its origins. Fleck traces Wasserman and his "thought collective." It is clear that Wasserman's original theory was wrong. Fleck describes a whole construction out of a community. He is determined that you should not attribute ideas to an individual but rather to a thought collective, a thought style. He says, "The world is not ready for this, but it will come." This emergence of consensus out of a group process is fascinating. It fits with a parallel issue in a company as you are struggling in a thought collective with a problem and not quite sure what you

are doing. I suspect the stories of Xerox and IBM are like this in many ways. It took IBM 30 years to realize that it made a mistake when it handed the software copyright to Microsoft because it feared antitrust action. This is the largest single mistake in IBM's history. It broke IBM's real control over the direction of the industry.

O'Connor: Fleck said, "The world is not yet ready for this," referring to the idea of the thought collective. Isn't that still true today?

Zald: No. The world is ready, but differentially and in specific areas. In some areas of discourse analysis, of course it is! In the literary disciplines, what we are saying is not very important. In the History Department at Michigan, there is a group of old-line historians; a fact is a fact, a chronicle is a chronicle. They do not want to denaturalize the world. They are teaching the truth about America to their undergraduate students. But the rest of the history department is all over the map. I am a little scared that they think history does not exist anymore.

O'Connor: This goes back to Hayden's question as to the difficulties of importing ideas and models from one domain to another. You are pointing out epistemological implications that I find largely unexplored. It is almost as if we cannot denaturalize denaturalizations. Let's talk about these epistemological beliefs that make what we do so threatening.

Zald: What are the resistances, and will they be partially or fully overcome? Which of the social science disciplines have been most open to this? It has been mostly cultural anthropology, which has given up any pretense to be a policy science. It has lost its subject because there are no more primitives, and you can write about that in a literary mode because the subjects do not read your work anyhow. You are not worried about your audience, which is purely academic. On the other hand, it has hardly hit economics at all. You have McCloskey and the rhetoric of economics group. They do not even aspire to colonization of the whole field. McCloskey expects to stay on the margins. It would be a great advance in economics if any of the top ones—Solow, Samuelson—were even aware that GNP was a social construction. It is going to be resisted, but it will spread—although not evenly. In the last paragraphs of my article (Zald, 1993), I address why the business school is such a hard case. We are talking about a model for generals, not for lieutenants. Business school professors are lieutenants. MBAs want to know, "How is this going to help me tomorrow?" At Michigan, the faculty who teach the CEOs, for example, are not the finance professors. Finance professors give out a technique, and you can teach that to any MBA. The top executives need wisdom. They are dealing with imponderables, the big general questions. They want to know how to make an organization develop a culture—even how to just think about culture. They are reflective and open minded. Our executive education program at Michigan is very successful, and it is almost all done by people out of a social psychology background—like Kim Cameron, Bob Quinn, and C. K. Prahalad, who is not a social psychologist but is a very broad visionary on the nature of mission and the changing world. The CEOs are on a quest for a broader understanding of their world.

O'Connor: We can leave business schools aside for a moment. Let me address another audience—specifically, journal reviewers. They often reject interpretive work with the comment that it contains no criteria of validity or reliability in the positivist tradition. In other words, they question the truth of the work and, more importantly, the standards involved in establishing that truth. Yet part of our enterprise is to some extent a turning away from this particular idea of truth. We get back to the epistemological barriers that Jo mentioned earlier. Specifically, we are said to be nihilistic and even destructive.

White: Relativism, nihilism—I run into this all the time. Some think that my work, which is text oriented, denies that events ever happened, denies that there are such things as events, denies all facts as mere constructions, and suggests that "anything goes." What underlies discourse analysis, a constructionist view of social reality at least and semiotics in general, is this impulse to denaturalize. Everything that used to appear as "nature" now appears in brackets. It stresses the mediation between ourselves and our world as some kind of construction. It says that we can only get to the world by way of constructions for which we are responsible. When you say, Mayer, that we denaturalize practices, you reveal what is distinctively postmodern about our operation—namely, antifoundationalism. Postmodernism is characterized precisely by the fact that it throws foundationalism out with idealist metaphysics, and it is nihilistic, in

Nietzsche's sense, that we no longer believe there is a foundation.[1] Now, when these people say to you, "Look, here, I have to meet a payroll," and so forth, let's be realistic. How do I know which interpretation is the right one? There is something we can give CEOs, and it is something they want. I have spoken to lay groups and explained how you narrativize a life. You are not necessarily telling the whole truth about your life. You are providing a story you can live with and that will allow you to respond to the present much more creatively and imaginatively. It does not mean you are telling a lie about yourself. It means you are constructing a self retrospectively, in such a way that the truth is an imaginative truth. It is not a fiction, not a lie. It is an imaginative truth in the way you can say there is some kind of imaginary space as well as a material space. When I present the problem of narrative in this way, it has a therapeutic effect. Now, therapeutic for what? It does not provide wisdom. It does not provide ethics. It provides an opening up of the imagination. I think this relates to what CEOs want. They ask, "How can I keep my firm, and the people who comprise it, imaginative—not locked into some kind of knee-jerk, routinized response to the problems that arise?" If you start doing that, of course, the lieutenants point out the risk involved in saying, "Let me imagine that the situation is this. Let me entertain a number of different interpretations and then choose one or a combination of the versions of reality given." This requires some insight or knowledge about the goals of the firm and the individual. You are trying to destroy that false sense of security that comes with any dogmatic or doctrinaire thinking, as in foundationalism, even the common-sensical foundationalism that says, "There is a real world, facts are facts, facts are given and not constructed, you have to meet a payroll at the end of the day, you add up profit and loss." How to develop a culture for the firm—that is exactly the question. By culture, we mean not only technical efficiency and practicality but also ethical sensibility and imaginative dispositions that foster inventiveness, risk taking, and so forth. That means you are committing yourself to a kind of cultural relativism, to something we might call "virtual nihilism" because it is pragmatic and practical. It is nihilism that is assumed for a moment even though one cannot live a life nihilistically. I think that this is a very crucial issue when you distinguish between the good we can do for generals and our inability perhaps to help those on the firing line. Mayer and I have been in the service. In combat, you cannot afford the luxury of a number of alternative versions all seemingly equal. You have to make a decision. But if you want to make a decision with imagination, the discourse analysis approach opens up a space for imagination, for risk taking. And CEOs who are not trying to cultivate that in their junior executives are leading their firms into trouble.

O'Connor: It is funny you should say that about the imagination. I had not thought of my work this way, but to some extent, when I am working with students on how to develop interpretations about a business case or a business problem, this is an exercise of the imagination. They have a great deal of data, sometimes seemingly random data, and they have to make sense out of them or at least synthesize to some extent. This is the ability to develop abstractions. But there is definitely imagination involved there. Also, just the other day, I was talking to a high-ranking executive at one of the large high-tech companies here in Silicon Valley. He was talking about the company's having arrived at a certain point based on what had worked at the start-up level and how some of these ways of doing business just were not working at the level of maturity the company has now reached. Hayden, you had spoken about grasping shifts. It occurred to me that this company is precisely in an interval—a situation between two states: its past and its future. The "story line" that worked in the beginning is not the story line that will carry this company onward. And then, ultimately, there are the story lines about the story lines. How will these stories be used and reused? How will they be perceived? There are operational consequences to the stories and to the stories of the stories. This is precisely where the imagination comes into play. Now, in the example I just gave, this dilemma is occurring at the topmost levels of this organization; I do not know about other parts of the company. But it seems to me that when you start talking about imagination at lower levels of an organization, this can easily look like anarchy—the bosses are no longer in control, that sort of thing. Management will not want to touch it.

White: It can look like anarchy, yes. But you put imagination always in the context of other practical considerations. The real problem is finding the balance

between attention to detail, literalism, bottom-line thinking, and the kind of risks you have to take. In discourse analysis, we recognize that what appear to be opposed poles of performance, action, postures, ideas, and so on are actually poles of a continuum. For example, there is some irrationalism in the most rigid kinds of rationalism, and vice versa, right? Going back to Weber's insight into the relationship between the rational and the irrational, I think we must face the fact of a lived nihilism in our world, where competition, dog-eat-dog combat, and the harshest kind of practical thinking prevail. One might be where your study of humor comes in, Jo. What is the function of humor in a boardroom? It is therapeutic, and it can be creative. Where it is suppressed, you get very bad interactions. People are afraid to speak and afraid to relax. The theory of humor, from Bergson on, says that when it is spontaneous, it pops up in situations where there is a momentary loss of control—a momentary loss of autonomy and a recognition that we are not always in control.

Hatch: Koestler's (1964) idea of bifurcation comes to mind. I would like to take up your idea of imagination a little bit. I have been introducing just a small bit of postmodernism into my MBA classes on organization theory. I do it in a really simple way. I introduce it basically in terms of self-reflexivity and very little more. The moment I do this, the students do not want to talk about anything else. Suddenly, discourse happens. In a room of 50 or 60 MBAs, I give them a few of these provocative ideas, and then I just stand back. The most incredible arguments occur. Not the kind of arguments that shut down conversation but the kinds that open it up. So I have had a slightly different experience of MBAs than you describe, Mayer, and I am wondering what is going on. Perhaps we have these images of what MBAs are like that suggest that they cannot handle it, that they are there only for pragmatic reasons.

Relationship of Interdisciplinarity to Contemporary Life

Zald: Let me take a whack at that. There is one thing that postmodernism does that addresses student needs better than almost anything else. We are living in a very peculiar period, and it relates to your issue of diversity and multiculturalism. The old sociology of identity—class, race—has become destabilized because it was so rooted in social structure and in power. This is a worldwide phenomenon! I do a lot of work in social movements, and I could not help but clip an article on the Lorena Bobbitt issue. Here is an item in the paper about a women's group in a small town in Latin America threatening to send someone to castrate the judge who rules against Lorena Bobbitt. Now, that speaks to the spread of ideas and the destabilization of identities. A small town in Latin America is interconnected with events in the United States or China! A country may be widely considered to be "underdeveloped," but images and movements are communicated through the media and help reshape local identities and needs. Obviously, some communities would like to go back to the repression of gender differences and the end of the women's movement, but even these communities see it as an identity choice issue that is contentious and up for grabs. All the settled identities are up. I suspect that in your class, postmodernist thought helps raise the identity of everything that is being questioned. Yes, they are going about their daily lives and planning to become managers, but there is so much up for grabs. And postmodernism gives you a handle on thinking about that in a way that no other theory or set of ideas does.

White: Modernism does connote stable identity, persona, self.

Zald: With a linear path as to where it is going.

White: True, and that is gone—certainly gone in my undergraduate students and in most of my graduate students.

Zald: Even while they are trying to shape a traditional one, they know that it is under threat.

O'Connor: And it is ironic that you say postmodernist thought helps with that when a lot of people blame postmodernism for being responsible for that.

Hatch: I say that students are far more ready for this than perhaps we are ready to give it to them.

Zald: What is your experience at Stanford, Ellen?

O'Connor: Very similar to Jo's. I don't know that I would call what I do "postmodern." I certainly have never used the word in class or even outside of class to describe what I do. My teaching focuses heavily on the role of language in organizational life. From linguistics and literary theory (O'Connor,

1993a, 1993b, in press), I develop distinctions among different "moves" that managers make in language—moves in developing an argument (e.g., the distinction between evidence and claims) and moves in coordinating action with co-workers (e.g., the distinction between a request and a proposal). Fundamentally, I am developing students' ability to work with language in a managerial context. I am still surprised how naive even Stanford MBAs are about language. Recently, in a seminar, I spoke about developing an argument. One student asked, "But what if I'm just stating facts and not presenting an argument?" I asked him for an example of such a situation—which, by the way, I interpreted to be a situation that would involve no interpretation whatsoever. He answered, "a strategic plan." And I honestly could not think of any text as value laden or interpretation loaded as a strategic plan—from the selection of a desirable market, to the selection of a desirable means of pursuing that market, to the selection of the appropriate team to launch the enterprise, to the determination of the appropriate levels and sources of financing. Jo spoke about engaging the students. No question, they are engaged. In fact, we start from the premise that they are more engaged in language than they think. What scares me is their idea that they are just manipulating external, material reality and that there is nothing of "them" involved in their activity: "I'm just working with facts; there's no *me* there." This is why I find the epistemological attacks—the comments about nihilism—so disturbing. In my view, what you call foundationalism, Hayden, denies the role of invention in human understanding of the world and in so doing carries its own destructive implications. As far as organizations are concerned, I cannot see how we can deal with issues such as diversity, innovation, and imagination when we fail to acknowledge the extent to which our accounts of the world are our own inventions.

White: I use the postmodernist stuff all the time. Unlike my writing, I try not to use technical terminology from semiotics. My students feel liberated by the simple distinction between reference, signifier, and signified. To get them to think about language semiotically, you do not have to give them Saussure and Lacan undiluted. You can find ordinary language equivalents. I do not have to call it postmodernism. I problematize modernism. We ask ourselves, "What is going on here in the modernist project?" Then I get them to step outside it. And in stepping outside it, they become postmodernist, or countermodernist, or something like that. If you get them thinking about things in these hypothetical terms, they can entertain all sorts of positions that they would not think of embracing if I were there in a missionary mode, saying, "You must be relativist because metaphysics has ended."

Hatch: That is where imagination comes in. The imagination kicks in, and suddenly they are speaking from that space. That is what gets them so excited.

White: It empowers them to speak. Most of my students cannot speak up. Why? They're frightened. They do not want to take up everyone else's time. They're fearful their ideas are banal or wrong. They start to speak and they lose their voice because they forget what they wanted to say. Once you have touched some nerve—and I think the identity issue is precisely the crucial one—once you recognize that identity has been destabilized, you take that as the basis of the discussion. Bang! You have found the place of anxiety.

O'Connor: This relates to management also. There are deep-seated anxieties in organizational life—fear of job loss, fear of losing face, fear of rejection. At the end of one of those accounts of organizational change that I studied, the author made a comment about how the organization needed to encourage an atmosphere of trust so that those involved in the change effort could speak truthfully and candidly. Clearly, risks were associated with expression. Part of this notion of imagination is that our discourse is sufficiently spacious and expansive as to be inclusive. Now, are the generals ready for *that*? In these "empowerment" movements, I hear the call to be a team player, to become involved, to make decisions that were formerly made by higher-ups. All this is done with an underlying and often unarticulated message about limits. Then the real game of interpretation is to determine the appropriate exercise of voice.

White: Like the undergraduate student who says, "What do you want me to do and to say?" Isn't most learning in our classrooms about trying to "psych out" the instructor? You do not have that problem in chemistry or math; you have criteria for determining when a problem has been solved or not. We

are talking here about bricolage, it seems to me—trying to think of ways in which to get people to open up, speak with their own voice, and use their own language rather than sounding like some puppet speaking in routinized, doctrinaire forms of speech.

Zald: Your point about limits in an organization is very real. Some organizations are more serious about that than others. Many years ago, at a conference, the most interesting guy I met was the president of a large chemical firm. He regularly went on retreats with his executives. They would read Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* or John Kenneth Galbraith, and the executives clamored for this. He and his colleagues had set up an atmosphere in which their job was not to just come in with their bottom line but rather to think more about the future of the world and of the firm. It was a very successful firm. A firm that is faced not with a crisis but rather with some slack can think about the world and about new ideas. I cannot imagine Iacocca having done this when Chrysler was in trouble. But now that it is better—in fact, Chrysler did rethink its whole design function with a long-term investment of hundreds of millions of dollars as it was coming out of that crisis. That design would have had to come out of a more reflective way of conceptualizing the company's direction.

O'Connor: So what we are doing is a luxury.

Zald: It may be. Certainly at the crisis point, it is going to be. But back to Jo's comment. I was in a session with an executive vice president of Xerox. He is a Ph.D. in psychology from Michigan, actually, and engineering. He was talking about how managers at Xerox had to rethink some of their internal processes. To get there, they did much more anthropological work at some point. A key issue was whether they leased or sold their machines, and that relates to the issue of machine maintenance. You had to really understand how maintenance workers learned and did things. It turned out that, unbeknownst to the company, a real culture of sharing had developed among the maintenance workers but that some of the company's routines were interfering with that culture of sharing. Because the culture of sharing depended on a lot of loose communication, if you brought in a more rigid communication system purportedly to save time, you might disrupt the communication process. When they looked at this carefully, they said, "Wait a minute. We're interfering with exactly the thing we need to push." They then thought of some mechanisms to get some more control but also to open up the communication. A very close, observational, anthropological experience led them to that. It was a fine-grained, largely interpretive analysis. So I am not sure it is only for moments of slack. There is some play between reflection and getting the job done that is at stake here.

Hatch: That is really important. I keep working with that humor data, and there is a lot of serious data there as well. I run into what appear to be paradoxes (Hatch & Ehrlich, 1993). The managers are constantly dealing with paradox. It is always this "either/or" thing, and they cannot make a trade-off because they need both. They need stability, but they also need change. They want control, but they also want autonomy. They need to think in general terms, but they also have to be specific about what is going on in a certain situation. We have a habit, at least in organization studies, of thinking in either/or terms—either instrumental or interpretive. I have come to think we need more "both/and." Quinn and Cameron (1988) have written extensively on paradox and on either/or versus both/and thinking (see also Westenholz, 1993). Managers realize that it is O.K. to have these contradictions. It is therapeutic for them to realize what is troubling them.

Zald: Quinn and Cameron are colleagues of mine at Michigan. They themselves come out of mainline positivism. This work is not literary at all, and it is not done in a postmodern mode at all. It is usually done in a life-cycle mode of analysis. They see a balance and a flow over time. You have a narrativist perspective, even though they do not talk about narrativists, but it underlies their work. They talk about continual tension and submerging of one value for a moment of time, but then the situation will change depending on the state of the organization, and you will have to raise a different value. Quinn, especially, has that life-cycle narrative. What is interesting is that, although they talk about paradox and life cycle, they are very much tied to an empiricist-quantitative methodology. They have been very successful at selling their ideas to managers, who find them very useful, but I do not think they have had as much impact in the mainline journals.

Resistance Versus Acceptance of Interdisciplinarity Within the Academy

Hatch: That is certainly true, and I have the data to prove it. [Laughter.] This gets back to Ellen's question about criteria. I have been pressured by a number of people to "stick up" for interpretive research by developing a set of criteria that "noninterpretivists" can use to evaluate our work. I think they are asking for a correlate of validity and reliability. When I submit my papers to mainstream journals, I get, "Is this reliable and is this valid?—and, if so, prove it." Hayden, you talk about credibility and coherence, the "capacity to endow real events with meaning" (White, 1987, p. 45). Somehow or other, we have to make it legitimate to use these criteria for judging interpretive research and make people understand that no criteria we will ever come up with will be objective. They will be subjective because our paradigm is a subjective paradigm. And that is really the issue: They are uncomfortable with subjective evaluations.

Zald: Physicists do not really care if sociologists cannot read their journals, right? It is the issue of the thought collective gaining power as a whole that is at stake, to some extent. Fleck talks about what you do in relationship to the members of the thought collective. Then you have external audiences. First, there are other professionals, and then there is popular science. He talks about going back and forth. Someone in another thought collective may come to your work not by reading your journal but rather through popular science. You pick it up on CNN. That is a piece of your problem. In some ways, it is very hard, just as humanists for years dismissed social science and quantitative stuff; but they were not the deans, and so they were not controlling the lives of the sociologists. Think about the spread of social science. Take the more positivist side, sociology during the 1920s. First of all, sociology did not exist in many places. The stronger the university, certainly in the private sector, the slower it was to adopt social science. The Harvards, Yales, and Princetons were captured, rightly so, by classics, in 1850. Even the English departments in their modern form are a creation of 1910-1920 because you did not teach novels before that. The novel was an import from the women's colleges. Women's schools taught novels before the men's schools did, and men talked about novels in discussion groups in Boston and so on—but not at Harvard. It was seen as a low-status thing. Now, it is very hard to get mainline, high-status positivists to read interpretivist work. The issue really is that it is not only that you do not want to just speak to your own group. Until you get power, until the interpretive mode has status, you depend on these other positivist modes and you are always looking for an ally over there. Some senior sociologists, old friends (one in particular), came up to me after I published my first article on this topic (Zald, 1993) and said, "I saw that article you wrote. So, you sold out." That was one response. The second is that my junior faculty at Michigan love it. I am a cover for them. Many of them have already been driven to incorporate cultural studies, interpretive practice, and discourse analysis into their own work, even while some are still trying to deal with straight, old-fashioned sociological issues. Because I am a senior person in the field, for me to say this gives them cover. They are always correcting me at things. I come to this late, and so some of them write little notes, "You really have to read 'X'." And they are absolutely right, and I am delighted. They are out ahead of me in many ways, as they should be. But I represent cover for them. That is O.K., and that is another way this is going to happen, it seems to me.

White: It is very important to stress a word you used—alliance, allies. Latour argues that in order to establish a particular idea, model, hypothesis, or theory, you must be sure that you find allies—not always in the target field, but in some cognate discipline. And that means thinking very carefully about your own discourse, the discourse in which you present your arguments. It has to send out signals of sympathy to professionals working in other cognate fields and has to send them out in a phatic way.

O'Connor: It is a political gesture to incorporate these concerns about validity and reliability. It is crossing a bridge to say, "Yes, we can talk together about this."

Hatch: But there is more than politics to this criteria issue. When I seriously tried to answer this question, I used an ethnographic approach. I asked myself, "How do people make these evaluations?" Then I went to friends who do interpretive research and I said, "Do you know the difference between good and bad interpretive research?" And they said, "Sure, I can read two or three pages and tell you whether it's good or bad."

Zald: Of course.

Hatch: And I felt the same way. I asked, "How are we doing this?" And in each individual instance, it was different. It depended on what you were reading, what you were responding to. But ultimately we came to exactly what you, Hayden, stated: believability, coherence.

O'Connor: And that is subjective.

White: It is a group criterion of value.

Zald: It is subjective, but it is teachable. You may learn it with less consensus.

Hatch: Low interrater reliability.

Zald: The implications of Lowell Hargens's work are a bit debated, but this shows that different disciplines have different acceptance rates. In physics, the craft is taught more unambiguously, and about 90% of articles submitted get accepted. It is not because they are accepting trivia but because the criteria are clear. In sociology, there are higher rejection and revise/resubmit rates. The finished article in a social science journal is reworked many times more than a physics article is. You see the interplay within the editorial community. But the fact of the different levels of craft, consensus, and teachability does not mean there are no standards. I agree with you. I read qualitative and theoretical pieces all the time, and I know what is silly, stupid, poorly argued, and meaningless.

O'Connor: But those unfamiliar with our methods and approaches would still say, "You're not putting your finger on it for me."

Zald: If I told the editors I had not taken an advanced stat course, they would not send me a paper. Editors assume that because your work is written in the English language, they can judge it without training—without having been put through the field, craft, apprenticeship. Qualitative/interpretive methods are not as much a course-taking exercise as a matter of practice. It is a community crafting process as opposed to a formalized training process. Incidentally, Hayden, this is true for the training of historians.

White: That is right.

Zald: You give them one course in historical methodology, but that is not where you learn how to do it. You learn by doing and by reworking. It is the same issue in traditional history. They all knew what was good and bad history. They could tell right away how the sources were received.

White: It is disconcerting to them to point out that what was good history at one time is judged by an equally professionally competent group in a later generation as being bad history. They want to believe that the craft has cumulatively and progressively developed, you see, and that the practitioners of the craft at the current moment have the advantages of all the mistakes made by earlier generations, and that, therefore, they represent the highest point in the development of the field. That is one of those enabling fictions. You could not have craft-based inquiry without that fiction. You have to have the illusion of progressive development even though it is very difficult, as you indicated (Zald, 1994), to specify what has been accumulated, what is progressive, what has been mistakenly junked, and so forth. I am interested in this question very much. I think we are intimidated by the prestige of the quantifiable approach to criteria of validity. We have a problem, I gather, of convincing people who will only accept quantifiable criteria. What would constitute nonquantifiable criteria of validity and reliability—that is the question you asked, correct?

Hatch: Well, what would be the analog to those things?

White: But we are defining it negatively insofar as we are taking for granted that quantifiable criteria do not have to be justified. You say, "Yes, we recognize that those criteria are certainly good, but there may be some data that can't be quantified. There may be some findings that can't be rendered as yet."

Hatch: That always makes them happy.

White: Yes, that is right.

Hatch: There is hope for the future; back off. [Laughter.]

White: And that is theorized in Kuhn's notion of anomalous data. The data are there, but they do not fall under any of the known theories as yet. Or, we have no hypothesis to account for them; we will put them in "reserve" for the moment. But you say that these are craft, professional, or communal methods. There is a consensus on a range of attributes in the material recognized by any professional. Many people think that I am not a trained historian. They think I am a literary scholar. Actually, I am a medievalist. I wrote quite a bit of work on history before I became interested in how to analyze historical discourse. Most historians say, "Yes, it's all right to study Tacitus, but the discourse approach to the writing of contemporary historians is misplaced; it

suggests that it's all made up"—which, of course, is not the suggestion at all. It is the question of how you represent findings for data that are no longer directly observable, that are known only through evidence or traces. We could say, then, that there is a range of attributes that a given community of professional scholars would recognize as the marks of competence. They would presume that when they see those marks, the work was offered in good faith and as inquiry. Some of my critics—for example, Gertrude Himmelfarb, a distinguished historian of ideas at NYU—read my book and say, "Well, practicing historians know that tropes have nothing to do with their work." In fact, she knows that I am a practicing historian; we have been on the same panel at the American Historical Association annual meeting. What is this appeal to the notion of the practical or practicing historian? As against what, the theoretical historian? Or the historian who reflects on the history of writing from another field? Every professional scientist I know claims that Latour, for example, does not really know what is going on in the lab. And that is all he studies, right?—the actual processes of work in the lab, how science is really done. "Bruno Latour is not a scientist," they say, "and therefore he can't know." Wasn't that the argument made against Popper and Lakatos (Lakatos & Musgrave, 1974) in their debate back in the 1970s—having to do with whether you study processes of scientific discovery from the inside or the outside? I do not know how we deal with this. This is, of course, a very old issue—interpretive social science versus what you call functionalist.

Zald: There is another thing going on here that we ought to surface. The appeal to quantification, to validity, is not just an internal professional standard. It is also a cultural *Zeitgeist*. The scientific and quantification rhetoric is a matter of general culture, at least among the educational and policy audiences. By "policy," I do not mean only governmental policy; I mean the instrumental adoption and thinking about policies to change or adopt. The appeal to science—seen as hard, measured, valid, and reliable findings—is broader than a professional issue. The high ground is always on the side of the hard observation.

White: Even though the physical sciences have gone into a constructionist notion of factuality.

Zald: That is right. You cannot go to Congress, the mayor, or your own university president and say you talked to two professors. They will say, "What's the survey base and how representative was your sample?" Obviously, survey research can be done poorly or badly. But for some questions, it would be better to talk to two professors than to talk to a large sample because the two professors might be the ones who are closest to the issue and the sample might obscure your knowledge of it. Let me give you a very practical example. A colleague of mine just became dean at a large university. If you asked the "standard" faculty members there about the extent of sexual harassment on campus, they would say "very little." This new dean was dealing with many sexual harassment cases. Sometimes the person at the point of information flow knows more than the survey would show. In lots of places, things that look like they are social-scientifically derived are in fact bad data for the problem. That is an interesting cross-pressure issue.

White: Because it is *data*. It is quantifiable!

Zald: There are ways to use key informants well or poorly. Any anthropologist, ethnographer, or interpretive researcher would tell you this. But there is this other battle of the larger cultural context that—especially in academia—you are in the position of fighting against. It is interesting to note a move at the forefront of statistics. A very prominent statistician, David Freedman, argues that most of our statistical tests do not meet their underlying assumptions and that therefore the conclusions from many statistical surveys are flawed. There are two responses to that.

Hatch: Robustness to violations of the assumptions.

Zald: That is right, robustness and an attempt to introduce corrections for it, so you create more complicated statistics. One result is a proliferation of statistical tests. But the other is a group of very sophisticated statisticians who say, "Well, let's go the other way. Let's go back to more exploratory modes and not make big claims for what we're finding. Let's do repeated samples and studies and treat data and statistics more as an interpretive device." They do not reify the statistical tests in relationship to the underlying data, the complexity of data, multiple indicators, and multiple readings, which are always fuzzier than the elegant statistical

model. They end up with interpretive statistics. A big community of statisticians does not want to get outside of hard tests, so even though there are these exploratory people—some of the best minds in social statistics—I think they will hurt themselves for a while. They are all tenured, and they are all secure, but they will have an audience problem. There is a big mass of statisticians out there who just do not want to think about this.

Interdisciplinarity Still Further

White: That puts me in mind of another area of practical activity that has been heavily influenced by postmodernist thinking: architecture. Lars Lerup, formerly with the School of Architecture at Berkeley and now dean of architecture at Rice, is a true postmodernist, deconstructionist architect. "Deconstruction" in German is *Abbanen*, or "unbuilding." Derrida translates it into French as *déconstruction*. But Abbanen, or unbuilding, how to unbuild things, is not destruction. Unbuilding is an analytical operation. Lerup builds buildings that are not meant to be lived in. They are hypothetical experiments. He does things like put stair railings on the floor. He has a structure called the "no family house." He claims that domestic architecture has been ruined by the presumption of the stability of the American, middle-class, nuclear family. He supposes that you might begin by ignoring the nuclear family as inhabiting a house. Then, you would not arrange it with certain expectations about where the bedroom is with respect to the living room, kitchen, dining room, and so forth. He puts together a house based on a deconstruction of the family dwelling. He built it right up here in the Santa Cruz mountains a few years back.

Hatch: Does somebody live in this house?

White: No, no. It is an installation, a work of art.

Zald: Does it have walls?

White: Yes, and a ceiling. He has a number of other interesting houses. He has a standard Texas house. People think, "Well, I want a ranch house." He breaks the stereotype. He says that the imagination is hampered by thinking about a specific stereotype of a ranch house. So he does an experimental version of a ranch house in which he reverses all the stereotypes. In space, or I should say in urban planning, you can see that a quantitative approach to the problem of moving automobiles around a city, as in Los Angeles, ends up destroying the city. You may solve the problem by building larger and broader freeways, and all the statistical data will tell you how to do that. But then you completely overlook such things as the context and the desirability or undesirability of saving that context even if you must have more inefficiency. I have found that my students will respond to those kinds of things quite differently from my attempts to get them to rethink the conceptions of their selves, for example. If I say, "The humanistic self is gone, exploded; no one believes it anymore," they say, "Get lost. I believe in honesty and truth telling and my career, and I want meaningful work and a good marriage and a family." So if you take that approach, it obviously is not going to lead to anything. I feel my revisions of historical discourse have been very modest ones in comparison to what Nietzsche attempted—or Foucault, for that matter. It is because I do not believe that you can revolutionize a field, especially a craft field. You cannot effect a revolution in a craft discipline as you can in a scientific one, as Einstein or Galileo could.

O'Connor: You refer to architecture and deconstruction to make a point about images or stereotypes that hamper thought and imagination. I have worked with organizations on change. Organizations hear the message, "Change. You have to change. You're a dinosaur if you don't change. Everybody's changing." They get this idea of what change should look like. Or, after they operationalize this idea, they look at what they have. "Is this what we wanted?" Usually the answer is no, or some say yes and some say no, or some say partly yes and partly no. This goes back to Jo's point about discourse analysis as a means of entry into process. I listen carefully to what people in the organization speak and write. I point out the operational consequences—not yet borne out but very much in process—of their use of language in projects such as change, team building, strategic alliances. For example, there are operational consequences of viewing change as an adversarial project. In this sense, the answer to Hayden's question about what happens in the interval, I would say, is language or conversation. Interestingly, the derivation of the term "conversation" is also "turn," Hayden, as you pointed out about "trope."

SUMMARIZING THE CONVERSATION

O'Connor: Jo's point about processual understanding, and then its direct applicability to these matters that are very much on the minds of people in organizations, shows the value—and even the validity—of linguistic, literary, or discourse approaches. To take some of my own medicine, I see the problems of framing this discussion as one of overcoming barriers or crossing borders. It makes more sense to view our work as a range of points on a continuum or on coordinate axes. We have a number of perspectives and methods to choose from in trying to understand organizations and organizational life.

Hatch: One way I have been trying to bridge across the functionalist and interpretive modes involves looking at them from the perspective of style. Stylistic similarities as well as differences between the two approaches allow me to talk across the barriers to communication.

White: In his last work, and in the interviews he gave when he was in the hospital dying, Foucault (1988) said that "style" was what he had finally decided was the topic of his study. In *Technologies of the Self* and the works on ancient sexual practices, which most people feel are a rather weak turn in his work, he said he was working out a notion of style as an alternative to both ontology and epistemology. One of his first books, the one on Raymond Roussel (Foucault, 1963), was all about the notion of a style. He saw style as that which links the form and content of a discourse or work of art, that which connects them and acts as the movement, as it were, that weaves them together. I called my last book *The Content of the Form* (White, 1987) because I wanted to suggest that the form/content distinction obscures as much as it illuminates. You really have to say that the content has a form and that the form has a content as well.

O'Connor: A useful way, then, of looking at interdisciplinarity is to see it as a mixing of styles of cognition or representation. As you mentioned earlier, Mayer, for some types of research or knowledge, the statistical procedure is not appropriate. We could call that a "style." The literary tradition offers us another "style." It seems to me that if our purpose is to understand organizations and organizational life, and if each style gives us a unique insight into these phenomena, then we can understand and learn more to the extent that we can incorporate various "styles" into that domain we call "organizational studies."

AUTHOR'S POSTSCRIPT

> Men demonstrate their rationality, not by ordering their concepts and beliefs in tidy formal structures, but by their preparedness to respond to novel situations with open minds—acknowledging the shortcomings of their former procedures and moving beyond them. . . . Whenever we have had occasion to sit down in a cool hour, and to reconsider what our present patterns of thought might be and might do for us, the reflective reanalysis of our knowledge has often been a step towards its improvement.
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> —Stephen Toulmin (1972, p. 3)

At the outset, I had hoped for help in "thinking through" the concerns that led me to organize this session, and much of that reflection occurred well after the day of the event. In fact, I said very little during the actual conversation, although I was deeply involved in listening and reacting to what was said. That was enough at the time.

There is no question that the dialog gave me a still greater appreciation for the contribution that a good understanding of language can bring to organizational studies. The point about discourse as a place to study dynamics, relationships, and shifts made a strong impression on me. Because contemporary organizational research aspires to understand complex phenomena such as change, innovation, and learning, any insight into process, including the process of process, surely helps us grasp these phenomena.

I also left with a greater appreciation for the obstacles to incorporating language-based disciplines into organizational studies, especially with respect to business schools. These disciplines bring with them some additional "baggage"—perceived at its worst as erudite theory, hermetically sealed texts, and hopeless relativism, and perceived at its best as a tradition of reflection, creativity, and imagination. There is much work to be done in bringing out what management/organizational studies can accept, and cannot accept, of this tradition and (as Jo would say) in developing the manner (style) in which to offer such contributions to them. In this regard, I observed that the dialog had considerable influence on the way in which I position myself, and my various disciplines, in business

schools (where I have taught now for more than 10 years).

For a long time, I have been aware of a great disparity between what schools ask me to teach (speech, writing) and what I actually teach (argument, interpretation, sense making). This has forced me into a position of communicating one way with administrators and "fellow" teachers (at Stanford, I am on staff; at Berkeley, I am an adjunct) and another way with students. This dialog, and its publication, has brought all that to an end.

As I write these remarks, I am preparing for some job interviews to take place within the next week. The topic of my "job talk" is "The Contribution of Literary Theory to Management Communication and Practice." One institution has advised me to change the title because it implies that I am stepping outside the bounds of my area and going into the territory of those who teach management. For the first time, in the face of such feedback, I have decided not to change the substance of my talk. I am well aware of the diminished chances of an offer, but the momentary prize of an offer is not worth more prolonged periods of spoken and unspoken disapproval, especially in light of all that management, management education, and management theory stand to gain if I can manage to import the best of what my tradition can offer in a way that the management disciplines, schools, and students can accept.

The philosopher George Santayana talks about "piety," meaning loyalty to one's origins. This conversation brought out something along those lines that makes it impossible for me to continue my masquerade. Surely, in this way, I have shown myself the door. Which door remains to be seen.

NOTE

1. Some definitions of nihilism may be helpful. For Angeles (1981), nihilism means "nothing is knowable. All knowledge is illusory, worthless, meaningless, relative, and insignificant" (p. 188). Snyder, translator of Vattimo (1988), an interpreter of Nietzsche, describes "European nihilism" as "chiefly concerned with the resolution and dissolution of truth into value, which takes the form of human belief and opinion" (p. xi). Thus "nihilism aims to dissect and dissolve all of the claims to truth of traditional metaphysical thought, in a process that stops only when it reaches the point where these supposed 'truths'... are revealed to be no less subjective values, and no less 'errors,' than any other human beliefs or opinions" (pp. xi-xii). "The project of nihilism is to unmask all systems of reason as systems of persuasion, and to show that logic—the very basis of rational metaphysical thought—is in fact only a kind of rhetoric. All thought that pretends to discover truth is but an expression of the will to power... of those making truth claims over those who are being addressed by them" (p. xii). These two definitions reveal distinct interpretations of the term; the former is more infused with value judgments, the second less so.

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